

CASTLE NEWNHAM FEDERATION GOVERNING BODY

GOVERNOR ACTIVITY 2016-2017

1. The three functions for which we are held responsible are:
 - o Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
 - o Holding the Federation Principal to account for the educational performance of the schools and its pupils and the performance management of staff; and
 - o Overseeing the financial performance of the school, making sure its money is well spent.

Vision and strategic direction

2. Over the past year governors have successfully completed the recruitment of a federation-wide senior leadership team. Governors revisited the primary structure, adjusted it and successfully recruited a new Head of Primary ensuring a seamless transition. The process has strengthened primary leadership by successfully recruiting an experienced Head as well as by the addition of a second Assistant Head from September 2017.
3. The foundations for our secondary provision were secured through the successful appointment to key posts during 2016/17. Governors were involved in interview panels that appointed two Vice Principal posts, the Assistant Principal as well as Heads of Modern Foreign Languages, Science and English.
4. Retention and recruitment of staff continue to demonstrate the attraction of Castle Newnham as a place of employment. Recruitment is progressing smoothly and efficiently at all levels and the success of the school's participation in Schools Direct is paying dividends in its contribution to recruitment.
5. At an awayday held in July 2018 we identified a need to refresh the vision statement which had been drafted when the two schools first set out their intention to federate in 2015. This will be addressed over the next year.

Accountability and educational performance

6. Governors have fulfilled their role of holding the federation principal to account through meetings of the governing body and its Curriculum & Standards and Resource Management committees as well as through governor visits.
7. Throughout the year there have been 13 meetings of which five have been full governing body meetings. The average for governors' attendance at meetings has been 80%. Following our awayday in July we have adjusted our committee cycle next year with Curriculum and Standards alternating its focus between primary and secondary which will enable greater scrutiny and accountability.
8. As governor visits form a key part of the role of governance a programme of school visits was established in January 2017. Eight governor visits were carried out by seven governors between January 2017 and the end of the school year focussing on key priorities for the development of our school i.e. school phases (early years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2) as well as homework, safeguarding, behaviour and school lunches. Next year governor visits will include secondary curriculum development, pupil premium and SEND.

9. Our School Improvement Partner has visited on three occasions during the year and governors were significantly involved in all of them. In the most recent visit to both sites in May the focus was on the quality of teaching, leadership and management. He was very complimentary about the progress made since his first visit, noted the strength of the achievement data, emphasised the importance of consistent teaching practise across the school and commented that while there will continue to be challenges for the schools' leaders in developing a "unique thoroughbred ... everything about the federation looks very solid because it has been well thought through." Our school improvement partner left us with two thoughts:
- how best to support and develop federation leadership; and
 - with regard to teaching: the school's approach to mixed ability teaching.

Financial performance

10. Considerable governor time was taken up, alongside significant input from the Federation Principal and Business Manager, in lengthy discussions with Bedford Borough Council and the re-drafting of a three-year budget. Agreement was eventually reached in December 2016 for a licensed deficit enabling the school to fully develop its provision for a reception to year 11 all-through school. Governor monitoring of expenditure provides reassurance that the school will fully recover the agreed deficit by 2020.
11. Following the pooling of the two school's budgets upon federation, the local authority carried out an audit in November 2016. It concluded a judgement of "limited assurance" while acknowledging the significant challenge of bringing together two different systems in the context of the wider educational changes. An action plan was agreed with the Borough's auditors and governors have been monitoring progress via the Resource Management Committee. The action plan is on target with outstanding actions due for completion in early Autumn in time for the auditor's follow-up visit.
12. Having previously submitted our building requirements to the Borough Council to enable the development of our all through school we were pleased that planning permission was granted in the Spring of 2017 enabling construction to start on the Castle Newnham North site as planned at the beginning of the 2017 summer holiday. Governors and the school have been involved in a number of meetings with the Borough's project management team and the contractors. Three phases of building work, fully funded by the Borough Council will be carried out through to the end of 2017, complementing our timetable for expanding our age range. The development of our school will also facilitate the opening of Bedford's music hub which will occupy space vacated by the school on completion of the building work in 2018.
13. During the year, Governors gave consideration to the need to improve the security of the Castle Newnham South site, continuing the work of the former Castle Lower School governing body. Governors agreed to the schools entire capital allocation for 2017/18 being dedicated to the site security works, and have worked closely with the new Head of Primary to ensure new fencing and access arrangements will be in place for Autumn 2017.

Self -effectiveness and accountability

14. Good use has been made of Bedford Borough's training courses where 7 governors have attended and benefitted from 10 courses, in addition to which the Clerk to the Governors has attended two training courses. The work of governors and our clerk was recognised during the year by Bedford Borough Council with two governors awarded certificates for strategic

excellence in promoting school improvement and strategic excellence in supporting change. Our Clerk also received recognition for excellence in clerking. In addition, our Vice Chair has successfully become a Bedford Leader of Governance.

15. The governing body held an awayday in July to review its effectiveness, as well as consider the draft improvement and self-evaluation plan. The former involved self-review with external input from a Bedford Leader of Governance through the application of the Bedford Borough's self-evaluation toolkit. Our skills audit has identified financial planning, procurement, premises, links with local business/local economy, and working with SEN as the areas where we would benefit from additional expertise.
16. Over the course of 2016/17 two governor vacancies were filled in October and December 2016 so ensuring we had our full complement for the remainder of the school year.
17. Parent engagement groups have been established as a way of improving communication with parents, complementing termly staffing newsletters introduced in December 2016. The parent engagement groups comprise parents, governors and school leaders, are meeting approximately every half term and have been helpful in improving communication.
18. In conclusion, the 2016/17 school year has been a busy one for Castle Newnham governors who have demonstrated their commitment through contributions to meetings and training as well as significant engagement in a variety of other tasks. A huge amount of action has been effectively completed, though on reflection, the additional workload of federating has had an impact. For example, in endeavouring to ensure a thorough response to our summer 2016 pupil, parent and staff surveys we did take longer than desirable. We are also mindful of the need to not be distracted from ensuring the provision of an outstanding all-through school and, following our awayday discussion, have ensured greater scrutiny of education provision in 2017/18.

David Wood
Chair of Governors
July 2017