

St Clement's Church of England Primary School

External review of governance

Janet Myers





National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is an independent charity representing and supporting governors, trustees and clerks in maintained schools and academies in England. The NGA's goal is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. It does this by providing information, guidance, research, advice and training. It also works closely with, and lobbies, UK government and educational bodies, and is the leading campaigning national membership organisation for school governors and trustees.

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School	St Clement’s Church of England Primary School
Key contact and email	Eleanor Ward, e.ward@st-clements.manchester.sch.uk
Chair of governing body	Eleanor Ward
Chair’s email	e.ward@st-clements.manchester.sch.uk
Headteacher	Jane Parker, head@st.clements.manchester.sch.uk
Ofsted status and date	Requires Improvement, March 2018
Local authority	Manchester
Membership details	
Reason for commissioning the review	
<p>Ofsted judged the school to require improvement in March 2018. Although Ofsted did not require an external review of governance, the governing body would like confirmation of their strengths and areas for development and to be more self-reflective.</p>	
Background information	
<p>St Clement’s is a one form entry Church of England primary school. 60.6% of children are eligible for pupil premium funding, 30.9% of children have English as an additional language, 49% are boys and 0.4% have an education, health and care plan.</p> <p>The head teacher has been in post for five years and was previously the deputy head teacher.</p> <p>The Department for Education Performance Tables show that, in 2018, attainment and progress were in line with national averages, but in 2017, progress in reading and maths were well below average and 23% of children achieved the expected level in reading, writing and maths.</p> <p>Headteacher performance management is undertaken by three governors, advised by an independent advisor.</p> <p>The school’s 2019/20 budget shows an in-year deficit, using part of a substantial surplus, which is in excess of the surplus permitted by the local authority. Five-year forecasts show the school in a significant deficit.</p>	
The governance framework	
<p>The governing body consists of ten governors. This includes two parent governors, and the headteacher.</p> <p>Information published on Get Information about Schools does not match the information on the school website.</p> <p>Attendance information is shown on the school website and shows reasonable attendance. A register of interests is included. It appears to be a work in progress and includes notes that are not for publication.</p>	



The full governing body currently meets six times per year, and also has a resources committee. The committee has terms of reference, which are reviewed annually. The full governing body is planning to meet eleven times in 2019/20 as meetings are currently too long.

The chair of governors has been a governor at the school for six years and the chair for four years.

The governing body is clerked by Second2None. The current clerk has been with the school since September 2018.

The external review process

A scoping meeting was held on 15th March 2019 with the chair of governors, headteacher, a parent governor, and the clerk. The consultant completed a full review of paperwork, including agendas, minutes and documentation for the last academic year. Governors completed the NGA's online board appraisal. Eight out of a possible 11 people completed the appraisal. The results of the appraisal were presented to the board and discussed in the workshop.

The consultant held a three-hour workshop at the school. Nine board members attended, including the chair and vice chairs, parent governors, a staff governor, two foundation governors and the headteacher.

Key message

This is an enthusiastic, reflective governing body with motivated governors and a proactive chair. They are very engaged with the school, and are very visible within the school community, but they have focussed on the wrong issues in the past and have been too involved in operational matters. The chair is currently undertaking the DfE funded Leading Governance Development for Chairs programme and, following discussions with her cohort, has led some well-chosen changes to streamline board business so that it focuses properly on the three core governance functions. The aim is to make the governing body more strategic, such as working on a vision and strategic plan, and reducing the number of policies that the board reviews. Through the external review, governors have identified operational tasks that they can delegate to senior leaders, and higher-level information that they should scrutinise.

The board has also identified that it needs to introduce a culture of "safe challenge", where senior leaders welcome question and challenge and governors feel confident to provide it in a supportive way. The inclusion of the assistant headteachers in meetings will help to ensure that all of that challenge is not targeted at the headteacher. All governors will need to play an active part in making these changes, and the headteacher and chair of governors will need to make sure that they delegate appropriately to allow this.

The board is aware of its financial responsibilities and diligent about undertaking them.

If it can make the agreed changes, the governing body will be well placed to ensure the school provides a good education for its pupils.

Findings

Findings are organised with reference to the three core governance functions and NGA's eight elements of effective governance.

The three core governance functions

1) Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

- a) The school's mission statement is, "Growing together to let our light shine."
- b) The operational school improvement plan has improved significantly since the last Ofsted visit and now includes clear success criteria, interim milestones and concrete dates.



- c) The governing board is currently working with staff, pupils and parents to create a vision or strategy for the school. This will produce a more succinct and strategic document for governors to use to monitor progress.
- d) Governors review policies based on their annual policy review schedule.
- 2) Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff**
 - a) Headteacher performance management is undertaken by three governors, advised by an independent advisor.
 - b) Staff pay decisions are approved by the pay committee based on anonymised data. In the workshop, governors felt that it was difficult to make informed decisions without the full information, and that having staff names would help them to consider the full picture.
 - c) The headteacher provides the governing body with an anonymised report on the operation of the performance management policy.
- 3) Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent**
 - a) Meeting paperwork and minutes evidence the governing body considering budgets and spending, five-year forecasts, financial benchmarking, Schools Financial Value Standard, and projections of pupil numbers.
 - b) The governing body has also discussed the staffing structure and staff recruitment.
 - c) The school business manager provides a very detailed finance report. Governors should consider if it meets their requirements and if they need this level of detail. Minutes seem to cut and paste sections of the report, and governors reported that the report has previously been read out in the meeting. They have now moved to taking questions about the report, which can be attached to the minutes.
 - d) Minutes show that governors have sometimes discussed items in unnecessary detail, e.g. the detail surrounding the installation of a new telephone system.
 - e) Minutes also show governors approving every temporary contract extension, every SLA extension, and the writing off of small dinner money debts. Governors should agree a policy about these matters and delegate the actual individual decisions to the senior leadership team.
 - f) The chair of the Resources & Finance committee is a finance professional and a member of the Manchester Schools Forum.
 - g) The board is aware that their 2019/20 budget shows an in-year deficit and that five-year forecasts show a significant deficit. They are currently balancing the need to set a balanced budget with the threat of budget clawback by the local authority, are continuing to keep the situation under review, and will take appropriate action to reduce expenditure if necessary.

NGA's eight elements of effective governance

- 1) The right people round the table**
 - a) Governors have served on the governing body for between less than one year and six years.
 - b) The governing body has completed a skills audit, which they have used for recruitment. The board has recently increased its external education experience, and now includes an SEN teaching assistant and the headteacher of a Pupil Referral Unit.
 - c) The board has attempted to increase its diversity by working with the BAME governors' association.
 - d) The governing body has a governance expenses policy.
 - e) Potential governors are interviewed by the headteacher and chair.
 - f) A number of governors have resigned before the end of their term of office, and it was felt that exit interviews might help to ascertain the reason for this and if any action needs to be taken as a result.
 - g) Information published on Get Information about Schools does not match the information on the school website.



2) Understanding the role and responsibilities

- a) Responses to the online board appraisal indicated that governors were very concerned about how to ensure that they remain strategic. This was a key focus of the workshop.
- b) The chair of governors is the training governor and the school has a governor training budget. The board generally prefers face to face training, and holds an annual away day, which has included training on data and Ofsted preparation. They also subscribe to Modern Governor and there is a clear expectation that they will complete online training. However, there is still an appetite for more, targeted, face to face training. A training governor (other than the chair) should be appointed to work with the board to determine their requirements and the best way to meet them.
- c) Governors are self-reflective and have assessed themselves against the 20 Questions and produced a governing body action plan.
- d) New governors meet with the chair of governors and headteacher to discuss expectations. Governors are offered induction training through One Education. They also receive an induction pack and a copy of Welcome to Governance. The chair is currently overhauling the induction pack. Governors felt that new governors might benefit from a mentor.
- e) Governors have access to the NGA website, The Key and Modern Governor. The school is also a member of the Manchester Governors' Association and governors attend the local authority chairs' briefing. However, the online board appraisal shows that some governors still have concerns about the board making use of best practice from across the country. It was suggested in the workshop that this might be because of ongoing concerns about understanding data and concerns about the next Ofsted inspection. It was felt by governors that the preparation of a list of questions and answers for Ofsted with input from all governors might help with this lack of confidence.
- f) In the scoping meeting, governors reported that meetings were too long. This appears to be due to a combination of factors:
 - i) Although it was reported that documents are circulated a week in advance of meetings, they appear to be summarised by staff to the governing body. This should not be necessary. Governors have resolved to read documents in advance of the meeting, and going forward, the agenda item will solely consist of governors clarifying and providing challenge. This will also be the case for committee minutes.
 - ii) In the scoping meeting, governors felt that policies occupied a significant amount of meeting time. The minutes reflect that governors are considering non-statutory policies, e.g. the school dinners' policy and the clear desk policy, however they have now resolved to only review statutory policies and delegate non-statutory policies to the senior leadership team.
 - iii) Evidence from reports suggests that governors may sometimes become involved in operational matters, e.g. helping to implement the anti-bullying policy and conducting health and safety checks. The difference between strategic and operational was a key focus of the workshop.
 - iv) The large number of verbal reports about governor visits can take a lot of meeting time. Governors have resolved that in future these will be reported in writing, circulated to governors and questions taken in the meeting.

3) A good chair

- a) The chair of governors has been a governor at the school for six years and the chair for four years.
- b) The board noted that their chair is very proactive.
- c) The chair is currently completing the Development for Chairs programme. She has undertaken 360-degree feedback as part of this programme.
- d) Nominations for chair and vice chair are requested in advance of the meeting. Candidates were appointed uncontested, but it would still be good practice for them to leave the room to ensure that governors are able to choose not to appoint the only candidate. This should also be the case for committee chairs although appointment of committee chairs (by the chair) according to skills should be considered. The chair and the vice chair are appointed for a one year term.



- e) The board does not yet undertake annual reviews for governors, but the chair is planning to do this later in the year.
- f) The chair and the headteacher have a half-termly formal one to one, which is conducted off site. They also have less formal meetings and correspond by email.
- g) The chair has a strong relationship with the headteacher and feels able to support and challenge her in their one to ones.
- h) Responses to the online governing body survey suggest that there is some concern about succession planning, and the board should consider begin to consider how they will address this.

4) Professional clerking

- a) Clerking is provided for all meetings by Second2None.
- b) It was advised at the scoping meeting that papers are always issued a week before the meeting.
- c) Governance business is planned using a standard planner provided by Second2None.
- d) Meetings are appropriately minuted with questions and answers clearly indicated.
- e) The chair has been involved in the clerk's performance management.
- f) Agendas and minutes are divided into Part 1 and Part 2.

5) Good relationships based on trust

- a) At the scoping meeting, it was stated that the school has particularly strong engagement with parents and carers, including excellent attendance at social events, a family support team that helps families with debt and housing issues, close links with the local church, and working with a number of agencies. The school has recently been awarded the Leading Parent Partnership quality mark for the third time. The school also has strong working relationships with a neighbouring primary school.
- b) As a result of concerns about staff wellbeing, governors have set up a wellbeing committee and conducted a number of focus groups with small groups of teachers to understand the issues. The consultant advised that this may be too operational, and the chair advised that she is unsure if the meetings have been productive, and that feedback to the board had been challenging. The consultant advised that the board should consider carefully before becoming involved in operational matters, and that generally it is better to commission a report from an external expert than for the board to complete work, even if it falls into their sphere of expertise.
- c) Governors have attended joint training with staff about Prevent and FGM, and staff have attended the annual away day.
- d) Governors worked well together at the workshop. All governors contributed to discussions.
- e) The governing body has adopted a code of conduct.
- f) The school's website includes a governance statement.
- g) In the online governing board survey responses, governors felt that they could improve their communication with parents.
- h) The school conducts parent, pupil and staff surveys and results are presented to governors.

6) Knowing the school

- a) Minutes evidence that governors have been involved in quality assurance meetings with an external advisor. Minutes also evidence governors receiving reports from external advisors and asking questions about them.
- b) Members of the staff other than the headteacher have attended governor meetings to provide information, however the assistant headteachers do not generally attend meetings, meaning that the headteacher provides most of the information and is the focus for most of the challenge.
- c) There has been a reluctance amongst senior leaders to provide governors with information about the quality of teaching and learning due to concerns about staff confidentiality, however this information is required for governors to make decisions about the school and to provide effective challenge. Governors should be provided with information about the strengths and development



areas of teaching in each key stage. This should not be in order to make a judgement, but so that governors can understand what is being done to share strengths and address development areas and monitor the impact of these actions.

- d) The governing body has appointed link governors, e.g. SEND, safeguarding, and curriculum links, class governors and subject link governors. Minutes evidence a significant number of governor visits into school, some of which seem to be linked to the school development plan. Most of the visits seem to be completed by the same governors. It was reported in the scoping meeting that some governors visit the school as much as once per week. These visits result in verbal reports to the governing body. Some governors also produce written reports, but this does not seem to be universal. Those reports that are completed are done so to a high standard. Other visits are to governors' link classes. These appear to be less focussed and there are examples of them straying into operational matters, e.g. the effectiveness of teaching assistants with individual children. Governors should be clear about their strategic plan and appoint link governors in line with this. They should consider the strategic value of school visits and ensure that they are short, focussed on the school development plan, and only as frequent as required to fulfil their strategic responsibilities, e.g. 30 mins to an hour per term. It may help to clarify these expectations in a role description for link governors.
- h) The headteacher's report is lengthy and includes annotated extracts from the Ofsted inspection handbook, details of building alterations, and lists of school trips and visitors to school. The governing body should consider if it is in line with their vision and strategy for the school and if it meets their needs. Minutes seem to cut and paste sections of the report, which should not be required as the report can be attached to the minutes.
- e) The head teacher's report includes attainment and progress data for all groups of children in reading, writing and maths and there was evidence of challenge relating to data in the minutes.

7) Committed to asking challenging questions

- a) More recent minutes suggest that the board has improved its ability to question and challenge, however, there still remains some concern amongst governors and senior leaders. Some governors report that they lack confidence and are not sure what to question and some meetings become anecdotal. Conversely, the board reported incidents where the tone of the questioning has led to this being less well received by senior leaders. This may be because governors have become too involved with operational matters. There were discussions in the workshop about creating a safe culture of question and challenge, and it would benefit governors to return to this discussion to ensure that governors feel safe questioning and senior leaders feel safe being challenged in this way.
- b) Despite training, not all governors feel equipped to question and challenge on progress and attainment. Governors were unclear how to increase their confidence in this area. An opportunity to talk to a partner or in small groups about the data before asking questions might help governors to check their understanding and share the responsibility for questions.

8) Confident to have courageous conversations

- a) The governing body has had to engage in courageous conversations since the last Ofsted, but the points above about challenge probably also apply to their courageous conversations.

Summary recommendations

Recommendations are made based on the findings of the review.

1. Governance structure and practice

The board should tighten up on procedures around governor retention and chair and vice chair appointment and should ensure succession planning.



2. Vision, ethos and strategic direction

The governing body should continue its work to create a vision and strategic plan for the school. It should avoid becoming involved in operational matters.

3. Monitoring and holding to account

The governing body should ensure that it receives the information that it requires with regards to pay decisions and teaching and learning. It should continue to improve support and challenge for the headteacher. It should ensure that governor visits to school are focussed and prepare for the next Ofsted visit.

4. Financial oversight

The board should consider their requirements for a finance report and should stop making operational financial decisions.

Detailed actions to be undertaken

Issue	Action	By whom	By when
1) Governance structure			
a) Published information	1) Update information on Get Information about Schools 2) Update the published register of interests	Clerk	July 2019
a) Governor retention	1) Hold exit interviews with governors who resign	Chair	July 2019
c) Governor training	1) Provide a mentor for new governors. 2) Appoint a training governor who is not the chair. 3) Work with the board to determine their training requirements and the best way to meet them.	Newly appointed training governor	Oct 2019
d) Governor appointments	1) Ensure that the chair, vice chair, and committee chairs leave the room when their appointment is being discussed. 2) Consider succession planning. See guidance on refreshing the board	Clerk to arrange	Sept 2019
2) Vision, ethos and strategy			
a) Vision & strategy	Continue the work to create a vision and strategic plan for the school and use this to monitor school improvement.	Governing body	Dec 2019
b) The governing body has repeatedly, with the best of	Consider very carefully before becoming involved in operational matters, generally commissioning	Governing body	Immediately



intentions, become involved in operational matters.	reports from external advisors if a concern arises. The NGA Delegation planner might be a useful tool.		
3) Holding to account			
a) Communication with parents and the local community	Consider appropriate communication with parents and the local community for example through the school website or newsletter.	Governing Body	Nov 2019
b) The pay panel makes decisions about staff pay based on anonymised data.	Provide the pay panel only with staff names when making pay decisions.	Head teacher	Oct 2019
c) There is concern about giving and receiving challenge within the governing body.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Return to discussion about creating a safe culture of challenge. 2) Invite assistant headteachers to attend meetings so that the headteacher is not always the focus of challenge. 	Governing Body	July 2019
c) Not all governors feel prepared for the next Ofsted visit.	Prepare a list of questions and answers for Ofsted. Ensure that all governors input to this and that the output is shared with all governors.	Governing Body	Oct 2019
d) The number, length and focus of governor visits is onerous and has resulted in some visits becoming operational.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3) Consider the strategic value of school visits and ensure that they are short, focussed on the school development plan, and only as frequent as required to fulfil strategic responsibilities. NGA Guidance on school visits might be useful 4) Clarify these expectations in a role description for link governors. 	Governing Body	Sept 2019
c) Information about teaching and learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Provide governors with information about the strengths and development areas of teaching in each key stage. 2) Understand what is being done to share strengths and address development areas in teaching and learning and monitor the impact of these actions. 	HT/ Governing Body	Sept 2019



d) Data	1) Consider giving governors a chance to discuss data in pairs or small groups to check their understanding and agree questions.	Chair	Sept 2019
1) Financial oversight			
a) The finance report for governors is very long and detailed	Consider the content and level of detail in finance reports to ensure that it meets governors' requirements.	Governing Body	Sept 2019
b) Governors approve every temporary contract extension, every SLA extension, and the writing off of small dinner money debts.	Agree a policy about these matters and delegate the actual individual decisions to the senior leadership team.	Governing Body	July 2019
Ongoing support			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Once this review is finalised the school will have free access to the NGA advice lines for three months. The membership team, membership@nga.org.uk, will be in touch with you shortly to arrange this. ❖ NGA is able to provide professional development for all kinds of governing boards. There are sessions for new governors and trustees, for chairs, for clerks, and for the governing board. Details can be found on the NGA website or contact consultancy@nga.org.uk for more details. ❖ For further consultancy support, including external advisors for headteacher performance management, contact consultancy@nga.org.uk 			
Acknowledgments			
<p>The clerk provided paperwork and information in advance of the review and the headteacher and chair organised the workshop. The headteacher, staff and board members were welcoming at the scoping meeting and during the workshop. The consultant enjoyed working with them and wishes them success with their improvement.</p>			
NGA sign off		25/06/2019	