



St Bernadette's Roman Catholic Primary School

Live the Gospel and when necessary use words

Our mission as a Roman Catholic primary school is to provide a catholic education that puts the word of God at the centre of our school. Our purpose is the happiness of all of our community through the pursuit of school-wide excellence; with success measured on our ability to sustain and enhance our position as a thriving example of Christ-centred education.

Governors Impact Statement July 2021

Who are we and what is our role?

The Governing Body of St Bernadette's is comprised of a group of dedicated volunteers whose key aim is to ensure that all within the school, children and adults alike, are supported to achieve their very best. Our role is to work with school leaders to preserve and develop the Catholic ethos of the school and to promote and maintain high standards of educational achievement. Each governor invests a significant amount of good will, hard work and time for the sole purpose of helping the school to fully embed the school's vision, to achieve its aims, provide quality education for all children and to be the best that it can be. It is both our responsibility and privilege to work closely with the head teacher and staff to contribute to shaping the strategic direction of the school and to regularly provide the right amount of support and challenge as a 'critical friend' to evaluate progress.

As a Governing Body we are measured by 3 core statutory functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding the Head Teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils;
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure the money is spent well.

We strive to meet the demanding statutory requirements set nationally by the government for school governing bodies. External inspection reports from reviews held in recent years by Ofsted and the Diocese said of the Governing Body:

Ofsted summer 2017

Governors have strong systems in place to check the quality of safeguarding... Governors regularly survey and hold discussions with pupils to gain their insights...Governors provide strong support. They have a good understanding of how well the school is performing and know where to focus their challenge...They check first hand the impact of leaders' work.

Diocesan inspection summer 2019

Governors make a significant contribution to the Catholic Life of the school, are passionate about the school's vision and actively support and challenge the leadership team to ensure it remains a high priority... They are extremely supportive but also confident in their ability to challenge and guide where necessary."

More recently, in June 2021 our external School Improvement Partner, who visits the school once each term to provide objective validation of school self evaluation judgements, said:

"Governors continue to carry out their role effectively, ensuring that the school fulfils its statutory duties."

While delighted with such positive feedback, we do not 'rest upon our laurels' and continue to regularly review and seek to improve our own performance as a governing body as well as that of the school. To support this, we carry out an annual National Governors Association skills audit of all governors which covers the whole range of skills deemed necessary for a Governing Body to perform successfully. This year's audit showed that, although one or two individual governors indicated that they lack confidence in a small number of areas, overall our level of skill and experience for each skill described in the audit is at least adequate, with many areas indicating particular strength and extensive expertise. Individual governors have access to online training modules via Local Authority Governor Services, the National Governors Association and the Catholic Education Service through which they can sharpen their skills and knowledge in any areas they feel necessary. We also occasionally receive focussed training from school staff, for example regarding safeguarding and Child Protection. The impact of this is that the Governing Body are kept abreast of their responsibilities regarding requirements and expectations of the role.

How do we operate?

All governors attend at least 3 full Governing Body meetings each year. In addition, each governor is asked to join one of the following 3 sub- committees-

Children, Families and Community

This committee is responsible for overseeing:

The school's contribution to pupil well-being, including the extent to which they feel safe, parental and community engagement, behaviour and safety of pupils, promotion of healthy lifestyles and contribution to the wider community;

The policies and provision relating to school/home links and community cohesion;

The school's plans and activities to project its vision, values and achievements to parents and carers, the wider community and local opinion shapers.

Standards and Curriculum

This committee is responsible for overseeing:

Pupil's achievement, ensuring the school provides a high quality learning experience and delivers a broad and balanced curriculum in keeping with the school's aims, all pupil needs and legal requirements;

The provision of teaching and learning to ensure that all pupils, regardless of ability, have the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential;

The range and breadth of the curriculum, pupil participation and achievement across all areas.

Resource Management

This committee is responsible for overseeing:

The school's finances ensuring that the school operates within the financial regulations of the Local Authority and comply with any DfE and School Financial Value Standards (SFVS) requirements, responding to any issues arising from the audit of the school's accounts or SFVS review and ensuring value for money;

The maintenance and development of the school site and premises;

The adoption and implementation of staffing policies and procedures ensuring that all principles of good and fair employment practices are adhered to, that staff and trade unions are consulted and legal requirements fulfilled eg Teachers Appraisal Policy, Pay Policy.

Governors are matched to the most appropriate committee which reflects their own particular skill set and experience. The full Governing Body meets once each term, usually towards the end of term. This enables each sub-committee to meet earlier in the term and gather information within their own specific areas in order to feed back to the full Governing Body. Each committee oversees and monitors their own areas of responsibility following detailed terms of reference across the year. Our committees structure means that each term more focussed time can be spent exploring in depth and scrutinising each key area.

Members of staff with key areas of responsibility are often asked to attend the relevant committee meeting to provide a detailed overview of their area and to answer questions from Governors. Minutes from committee meetings are shared with all governors and an update from each committee is provided at the next Full Governing Body meeting. The impact of this is that by the end of each term and by the end of the academic year all governors can have a clear overall view of progress within each key aspect of the school and can ask any further questions they feel necessary.

This year, because of Covid-19, all meetings have had to be held remotely via Zoom. This has been both interesting and challenging, to say the least!

In addition to attending meetings, governors will often visit the school on an individual basis in order to participate in a particular activity such as staff recruitment, or to join in with curriculum monitoring activities alongside leaders linked to current priorities for school improvement. Governors with statutory areas of responsibility such as Child Protection, Pupil Premium, Special Educational Needs or Health and Safety, will also visit the school, usually on an annual basis, to meet with their linked staff member and gather relevant information to share with full Governing Body. Again, due to Covid, visits have been kept to a minimum this year, however visits pertaining to statutory functions have continued. We hope in the coming academic year to be able to return to our normal cycle of visits.

How do we contribute to planning for School Improvement and monitor progress?

Each year we work closely with school leaders to evaluate the school's progress made in the previous year towards school improvement priorities, establish the school's current position and set priorities for the coming year. This process includes an annual Head Teacher performance review where appointed governors (usually the Chair and Vice-Chair) work with the Head Teacher and the school's external School Improvement Partner to review the

previous year and set performance targets for the coming year which are incorporated into the full School Improvement Plan. Each committee takes ownership of the priorities within the overall School Improvement Plan that relate to their area of responsibility and these form part of their own termly agendas. Through committees and full Governing Body meetings, along with additional school visits to enable meetings between key governors and staff, the Governing Body are kept fully informed on a termly basis of progress towards priorities, particular successes and any barriers or issues arising. We have also, in normal times, visited classrooms, held focussed discussion with groups of pupils such as the Junior Leadership Team, participated in 'Book Looks' alongside school leaders and attended whole school liturgy. However, other than essential visits to ensure statutory compliance in specific areas, this has not happened since the initial Covid outbreak in 2020. We hope to return to our normal level of activity next academic year.

The following priorities were identified at the start of the academic year for 2020/21:

Priority 1: Ethos and Catholic identity

- *To ensure the secure implementation of the school's curriculum, deep rooted in the school's vision statement, so that all pupils throughout school achieve well as a result of the education they achieve*

Priority 2: Quality of Education and Curriculum

- *To develop a whole school approach to reading that supports pupils to read widely and often, with fluency and comprehension so that pupils make better progress in the different curriculum subjects, because they can read more proficiently*

Priority 3: Behaviour and attitudes

- *To ensure the curriculum is designed in an ambitious, creative way which motivates pupils and provides them with authentic opportunities to work collaboratively, show respect for others and continue to make a highly positive contribution to the life of the school and the wider community*

Priority 4: Personal Development

- *To explore ways of providing rich, authentic experiences in a coherently planned way which considerably strengthens the school's offer for developing pupils personally, spiritually, morally and emotionally in a Covid secure setting*

Priority 5: Leadership and Management

- *To build leadership capacity across the school, in all areas of curriculum and in governance*

Priority 6: Early Years Foundation Stage

- *Use the new development matters framework to ensure the EYFS curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced*

What is the current picture?

Good progress has been made in most priority areas, particularly in the Autumn term, considering the year the school has experienced. Indeed, this has been an extraordinary and difficult year and as a result the focus on some priorities has had to be reduced to allow the school to tackle other priorities that have emerged due to the COVID pandemic. Because of this, some priorities will continue into the next academic year. The Governing Body continues to be responsible for providing support and oversight during these challenging times. The Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors have provided regular contact with

the Head Teacher (as well as specialist link Governors, such as safeguarding and Health and Safety when appropriate) and have taken a primary role in ensuring the Governors remain up to date with key information related to the school's response to the pandemic. Regular contact has also been important to ensure there have been sufficient opportunities for support and discussion with the senior leadership team around the School's response to the crisis. In particular, Governors have been kept informed on the School's Covid safety plans and have had oversight and input into the emerging key priorities, including:

- Health & safety provisions in response to the pandemic, including approval of the School's risk assessment;
- Overview of additional safeguarding procedures, taking into account remote working and the particular impact on vulnerable families;
- Mental health and wellbeing of Head Teacher, staff and pupils;
- Ensuring continuity of provision and children's learning during 'lockdowns', staff absences, and periods of individual or 'bubble' isolation;
- Overview of the remote learning offer and engagement of families.
- Ensuring school maintains contact with all families during periods of lockdown, identifying and responding to difficulties that have arisen in families that have led to vulnerability;
- Additional support for disadvantaged children, children deemed SEND and any children causing concern.

In addition to the above, the Governing Body have supported the school in the last year with its transition to Academy status following the decision by the Diocese in 2019 that all of its schools will become part of a new Catholic Academy Trust, planned to be completed by 2022. To this end, the Chair and Vice Chair have attended Diocesan Leadership meetings and Governor briefings, the full Governing Body have held extra Governing Body meetings and a consultation with all stakeholders has been carried out and responded to.

Next steps for Governing Body Development 2021/22

- **Priority 1:** Re-establish our team as a new Local Governing Board within the new school status as a member of the Bishop Berwick Catholic Education Trust, familiarising ourselves with the requirements of a local governing board and strengthening working relationships within the team
- **Priority 2:** Ensure all governors access appropriate training in order to be up-skilled and build confidence in relation to areas where they feel they lack expertise or experience, and any full Governing Body training deemed necessary to support governor development
- **Priority 3:** Work with the head teacher to establish a clear plan of activities to be carried out by governors through school visits across the year to reflect set priorities within the school development plan and to support governor development

Finally, this year more than any other, we have been incredibly impressed by the resilience, the dedication and adaptability of the staff at St. Bernadette's, and in particular the Head Teacher and senior leaders who have guided the school through incredibly challenging times and continue to provide fantastic levels of support to the pupils, their families and the wider community. We are also very grateful to parents and carers who have supported the school

during these unprecedented and extremely difficult times, and last but not least we would like to thank our wonderful, amazing, incredible children who have been exceptional throughout. As a school, we certainly are blessed.

Kath Mullen
Chair of Governors