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**Review of Governance held at Meadow Vale Primary School
on Thursday 26th May 2016**

Context

Meadow Vale has been expanding over the past few years to include an additional form of entry. Ofsted deemed it to be a good school in May 2011 and a recent inspection in March 2016 confirmed that this judgement remains. A couple of areas were identified where planning could be more specifically targeted and where governors could be more challenging and both leadership and the Board are keen that these are addressed. Since September the Headteacher and senior leadership team have changed; all postholders have been internal appointments so there is significant continuity although changes in approach.

Board of Governors

Meadow Vale has a Governing Board of 18; all governors are either staff or parents with more than half being parents and even governors from outside the school having been staff or parents in the past. A discussion with the Chair and vice-Chair concluded that this was not ideal and that they needed more of an external perspective on the school's work. They will consider reconstitution with fewer elected parents and then try and recruit governors with little or no direct connection with the school.

There is one vacancy, only three of the governors were unable to attend; the session was attended by the Senior Leadership Team.

How well do governors ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction?

The school's leadership, including governors, has been very conscious that the vision for the school was out of date but have been waiting for a visit from Ofsted so that they would know they were putting in place aims and objectives really focusing on the right things. The Senior Leadership Team know very well what they want to achieve but there has, as yet, been little input from the Board; there is a session planned at the September INSET day to bring together the views of stakeholders so that a clear, shared vision can be articulated to which all have contributed.

Leadership are keen to take the school to Outstanding but this needs to be more clearly articulated and governors need to understand what this would entail.

How well governors contribute to the school's self-evaluation and understand its strengths and weaknesses, including the impact of their own work

Governors receive a lot of information but it was acknowledged that the school could share more detailed and specific information enabling governors to understand more precisely where there needs to be improvement. During this school year, the new SLT have been building a trusting, working relationship with the Board meaning that staff are now willing to share more detailed information.

The SE report is updated termly and the Headteacher intends to bring in a Primary consultant to help them become confident in their judgements. Governors will need to understand what process is in place and become more challenging, and need to plan visits in order to find their own evidence to support the school's judgements. They are already aware of this and have already scheduled 'Governor Open Days' when they will be accompanying members of the SLT as they carry out learning walks.

The Board operates two main committees; one deals with finance, health and safety and premises and the other deals with standards and personnel issues. It was suggested that the personnel management responsibilities within School and Standards might be better considered within Finance and Facilities as there is such a significant link with the finances, and that School and Standards could then concentrate on the quality of teaching and provision against the quality of progress being made by the children, and on other curriculum based issues. Agendas for committees have historically been set by the Headteacher but responsibility is now being taken by governors for their own work.

Governors know they are lacking in financial expertise but a recent invitation for nominees with these skills appears to have deterred parents from applying to join the Board.

Governors do know the school and what is in place for the children but need to challenge more robustly when outcomes are not good enough.

How well governors support and strengthen school leadership, including by developing their own skills

The Headteacher was appointed in September 2015 and has been well supported with a mentor, training, and regular meetings with the Chair of Governors. A review of the staffing structure resulted in two strong middle leaders being promoted to deputy headship and their management time has been increased. They have also appointed a SENDCO to the SLT and the team has a weekly management meeting. Governors have supported the leadership through these developments.

Governors, as said above, know what skills they are lacking and are working to resolve this. They do need to broaden their skills in other areas too so that they are not too dependent on one or two governors for certain skills as has happened with finance. A governor needs to take on the role of Development Governor as this is currently undertaken by the Chair; training needs to be targeted at governors in order to build a broad skills base.

The school has a very strong identity and wishes to maintain this but is starting to look around to identify other schools with which it would like to collaborate in the future; some Chairs of Governors are also starting to work more closely together. Although the relationship could improve, there are links with the local secondary through past pupils and there are transition projects linked to Music and Maths. The school funds a holiday club and a transition summer camp for those children going to secondary.

There is a risk that the school will be adversely affected by local developments but governors are fully apprised of this.

How well governors provide challenge and hold the Headteacher and other senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and pupils' behaviour and safety using the data dashboard and progress data

Governors do challenge the school but it is not always in the areas of most importance or about the right issues. In discussion it became clear that some of the information given to governors could be more detailed eg class by class data rather than information by year group. This will enable governors to identify whether there is an issue within years and monitor the impact as the school is addressing it.

A particularly successful aspect of provision at Meadow Vale is its behaviour and care for especially the more vulnerable through its Nurture Room and groups. The delivery of SMSC is very well developed and is evidenced through assemblies, meeters and greeters, displays and cultural events and children attracting Pupil Premium have recently visited Wentworth Golf Club. There is a wide cultural mix in the school and this needs to be addressed through greater involvement of, and communication with some parents in the school; parent workshops are planned. Some aspects of the anti-radicalisation and British values agenda need to be further developed particularly with Year 6 as they prepare to move to secondary school.

Governors carry out planned visits where they are linked to some areas of the school's work but formal visits to monitor progress against the priorities in the School Development Plan have been sporadic. Ofsted were not impressed by the plan in place and much work has been done to rectify this; it will be important that governors understand the priorities going forward and ensure that these monitoring visits take place.

There has also been some confusion about what hat governors are wearing when in the school; neither they nor the staff have been sure what role they are in. This is partly exacerbated by the large number of parents on the Board but it is important

that governors are clear about why they are in school, what role they are in, be it parent, governor or helper and that staff understand why governors sometimes need to visit classes.

How well governors use performance management systems, including the performance management of the Headteacher, to improve teaching, leadership and management

Governors understand how quality of teaching is judged in the school but need more information about when there is underperformance. Where there is cause for concern in performance of staff this is not currently reported but will be, anonymised, in the future. It is unclear how well governors understand the performance management process that is in place in the school but the leadership is happy to share so that governors can be accountable.

All training needs should be identified through the PM process but staff currently choose training and the CPD budget is overspent. Governors do not currently monitor whether training is value for money or whether it improves performance.

Three governors appraise the Headteacher and report back to governors; a review of the Pay Policy is required as there was some uncertainty about its content and rigour.

How well governors ensure solvency and probity and that financial resources made available to the school are managed effectively

The finances are understood by few governors who depend on a long standing Chair of Finance; governors know that there is a need for further development or recruitment of these skills. A new School Business manager manages the finances in school and the Chair of Finance meets regularly with her. The governors understanding of value for money has to be questioned as they have little knowledge of underperformance within the staff, their most expensive resource, or of delivery and impact of CPD so this needs to be addressed. There is a costed maintenance plan and governors and leadership are confident that, going forward, the staffing model is sustainable.

How well governors operate so that statutory duties are met and priorities are approved

Some aspects of the Board's administration need attention; policies need to be reviewed as there is little consistency of presentation and no record or cycle of review; a newly appointed, experienced clerk will be helping governors to address this. She will be attending the Bracknell Forest Council briefings for clerks in order to keep up to date with developments.

The school website has been updated but the governor information needs to be presented on a single webpage rather than on several different pages.

There needs to be some work done on succession planning for roles such as Child Protection, Health and Safety and Performance Management.

How well governors engage with key stakeholders

Governors regularly have stands at parents' evenings and attend the evening for the parents of the new intake. There is a Parent Partnership group representing each year group and a governor also attends those meetings. This needs to be recorded in minutes so that governors have evidence of what they are doing.

Governors know most of the staff but have not carried out any survey to meet their responsibility for the staff's wellbeing. The Headteacher agreed that it would now be a good time to do this as changes have been in place for some time and are now embedded. It is not clear whether all staff know who the governors are so it was mooted that governors' photographs could be put up in the foyer alongside those of the staff.

Governors do take the opportunity to speak to the children when they visit the school. Formal annual surveys of parents, staff and pupils would give better evidence of governors' engagement with these key stakeholders.

How well governors use the Pupil Premium Grant and other resources to overcome barriers to learning including in reading, writing and mathematics

Governors have a good knowledge of the needs of the children in school as the Family Support Adviser is a member of the Board; there is also a governor linked to monitoring the impact of Pupil Premium funding on those children who attract it. She has been in to witness the Nurture Group and some of the therapies being used and how the provision is recorded for each individual pupil, and she will be visiting again to see what the impact has been and how that will be reported.

The impact of work with these children is reported regularly, how interventions are delivered and the variety of interventions; it is tightly controlled now and governors need to understand how effectively it is working. The school knows its children very well and works closely with other agencies.

Conclusion

This Governing Board knows its school well but needs to recognise what issues they should be focussing on from a more strategic perspective. The make-up of the Board, of members almost all with a personal interest in the school, results in a viewpoint which is perhaps too close and not sufficiently objective. The recruitment of governors from outside the school will provide a more detached and challenging approach, something the school and Board both need. I am attaching some actions which the Board may wish to consider.

Action Plan

Governors to consider reconstitution to result in a Board with more members with an external perspective on the school to ensure more effective, objective challenge

Governors to ensure publication of a vision shared and understood by all stakeholders that articulates clearly where the school wants to be and what it wants to achieve

Governors to consider a review of the committee structure to move personnel management issues to Finance and Facilities, or 'Resources' so that Standards can concentrate on quality of teaching and learning and curriculum issues; this will also link the staffing structure and its quality to finance and value for money

Governors to appoint a Development Governor to design a training plan for governors in order to broaden their expertise and build capacity

Governors to ensure that information received is timely, specific, class based data to enable them to challenge outcomes more rigorously

Governors to plan a series of formal monitoring visits to enable them to gather their own evidence to support the school's judgements and reports

Governors to receive reports on any collaborations the school has and to widen their own understanding of the benefits of working with others

Governors to ensure that staff understand the Board's roles and responsibilities and that they understand what role governors are in when visiting the school

Governors to receive more regular, anonymised, detailed reports on quality of teaching especially where there is any underperformance, so that they are able to monitor improvement

Governors to monitor that staff training meets needs identified through performance management and to ensure value for money

Governors to review the Pay Policy to ensure they have clearly articulated the level of performance required in order to merit a pay award for both staff and leadership

Governors to draw up a cycle of review for all policies and delegate responsibility for review to relevant committees

Review and resolve governor information on the website and prepare governor photo board

Governors to undertake regular, planned surveys of stakeholders