



GATEWAY
PRIMARY SCHOOL
Lifelong love of learning

Headteacher: Kayleigh Anstee
Chair of Governors: Kevin Moyes

Governor Annual Community Report

To: All members of the community

From: Governing Board

Date: 13th July 2021



Overview

As part of our commitment to openness and transparency, we have prepared a 2021 report about Governance at Gateway Primary School; we hope that you will find this summary both informative and interesting as parents and members of the wider community.

It would probably not be overdramatic to say that in the history of Gateway Primary School, the last year or two have been unique in the challenges we have faced, and our values have come into their own. Together with a terrific team effort between staff, parents, governors and not least, the children, these values mean that the school has emerged with greater resilience and strength as a community, with well-founded aspirations for the future.

The 2020 autumn term commenced with eager anticipation tempered with caution. We had in place our interim leadership. Their combined experience, enthusiasm, creativity, sheer hard work and above all, a passion for the welfare and education of the children was very evident in all they did. We were raring to go, especially after the pandemic induced lockdowns of the previous six months. However, we were cautious about the future as well. All the spring term was spent in lockdown with teaching being conducted virtually, and it was only in the summer that we were able to welcome the children en masse into the classroom fully. We also appointed Mrs Anstee as our permanent Headteacher and Mrs Gardner as Deputy Head in the summer term. Both appointments received much positive feedback from the community. They brought some long-awaited and much-needed stability to the school and confidence that we now had the right structure to achieve our ambitious aims for the pupils.

The extended lockdown introduced us all to new experiences, and it is a credit to the whole school community that we have emerged from this in a stronger, more resilient position. Perhaps the Governing Board had the easier ride, its meetings having to be conducted online, which despite the occasional technical issue and forgetting to unmute microphones, did not prevent it from thoroughly undertaking its responsibilities effectively. More challenging was the prolonged inability for governors to visit the school in person, which meant the duty of monitoring school activities had to be conducted virtually. During the 2020-21 school term, governors conducted 17 governor monitoring visits, covering areas such as Safeguarding, Inclusion, Teaching and Learning, Leadership and Management, Finance and Health and Safety. In addition, the Governing Board had oversight of the monitoring reports from external visits, including the Local Authority School Improvement Team. These monitoring visits enabled insightful reports to be produced, thereby enabling the full Governing Board to hold the Headteacher and the leadership team to account for the achievement of our School Development Plan and pupil's progress.



During this period, far greater demands were placed on the teaching and support staff in delivering the curriculum, at times online and at times in the classroom, and often in both venues simultaneously. Teaching virtually is no easy matter as the individual needs of the children, many at different levels of attainment, still need to be catered for whilst setting the highest standards and expectations generally. Staff had to master new skills, and the intensity of lesson planning reached new heights. We are incredibly fortunate to have such a dedicated and professional teaching team – classroom teachers and teaching assistants together – at Gateway. It is mainly due to their efforts; so many children made progress despite the challenging context.

I can also confidently say that never again will parents and carers throughout the country doubt the skills required to be an effective teacher. Parents and carers everywhere were thrown into the now-familiar home teaching experience, and Gateway parents and carers met the challenge head-on. Everyone at the school is immensely grateful for all that parents and carers did to support the lead given by teachers and helping their children to continue to thrive in their learning. We are, of course, very aware that the pandemic has set overall progress back for all schools. Still, thanks to the efforts of all involved, not least the children who proved to be adaptable, cheerful, and enthusiastic, we can start the next academic year in a far stronger position than might have been the case.

When we welcomed the children back into the classroom, a 'covid secure' environment was essential. The Headteacher worked long and hard to produce a plan that would keep children and staff safe. This included all the previously unheard-of techniques such as bubbles, social distancing, and sanitising. Never have so many little hands been so furiously scrubbed with soap and water. A heartfelt thanks must go to the School Business Manager Gill Locke and her team for overseeing many of these arrangements. Sadly, the precautions have prevented us from having our superb team of volunteers in the school to support the children in their reading and other areas; we are looking forward to welcoming you back soon!

Despite the restrictions, every endeavour has been made to provide some normality whenever possible. The children have enjoyed many learning events; it is also most encouraging that attendance remains high at just under 97%, above the Local Authority and national averages.



Governors

Governors at Gateway School provide strategic leadership and accountability. Amongst many other things, we hold the primary responsibility for the outcomes for the pupils and areas such as finance, where we work with Mrs Anstee to make the right decisions for the pupils. Each governor is a Governing Board member, which is established in law as a corporate body. We cannot act independently; decisions are the joint responsibility of the Governing Board, and it should be remembered that both Headteacher and one staff member are also governors. For details of your school governors and the work we do, please visit the [governor section](#) of the school website.

The role of the Governing Board is a strategic one; its key functions are to:

- Set the aims and objectives for the school.
- Set the policies and targets for achieving those aims and objectives.
- Monitor and evaluate the progress the school is making towards the achievement of its aims and objectives.
- Be a source of challenge and support to the Headteacher, as a critical friend.

Two key documents help guide the governors in holding the school leadership team to account for school improvement. These are the school Self-Evaluation Form, which defines the current state of the school in terms of strengths and areas for improvement; and the school Development Plan, which sets out the actions to be taken to ensure that these areas for improvements are tackled. The Headteacher prepare both documents, which are scrutinised, and agreed upon by the governors and then used as the yardstick by which the leadership can be held to account. These are living documents and so updated frequently as the context in the school evolves. Several techniques are deployed to ensure accountability, and these include challenging the Headteacher at governor meetings, conducting monitoring visits of the school when teachers can be questioned. Children's work seen to gather evidence that objectives are being met.



The areas that governors have been focusing on are varied and numerous, but our 2020-21 School Development Plan targets (which governors have held the school leadership team to account for) were:

- Improve the quality of leadership, management, and Governance.
- Implement the new whole-school curriculum effectively.
- Improve the use of whole-school assessment.

In addition, governors had the following 2020-21 objectives:

- Ensure Governance is impactful, robust, and sustainable.
- Ensure the Full Governing Board contributes towards rapid school improvement.
- Improve community engagement and ensure the community are aware of the work of governors.
- Prompt and grow our school.

Our school improvement strategy takes a holistic approach recognising that it is a combination of quality of teaching, inspiring curriculum, accurate assessment of pupil progress, reflective learning by children, professional development of teaching staff, and effective leadership by Headteacher and senior staff that will achieve our aspirations. In short, our vision is that we are to be a 'learning school' where all members of our community seek opportunities to learn and improve, whatever our level of experience and expertise, to never rest on our laurels.

Despite the pandemic, all governors' work has continued but just in a different way, and much has been achieved. The whole school curriculum has been reviewed and reconstructed so that there is continuity through the year groups, where learning is reinforced through the step-by-step building of concepts and knowledge. Coaching and professional development of teaching skills have been provided by the Headteacher and by outside consultants. We are delighted to observe that senior teachers are increasingly taking on this role. The SEND provision (Special Educational Needs) has been completely overhauled under the leadership of Mrs Gardner, and, as part of our strategy, SEND is embedded at the heart of our teaching rather than as a bolt-on. Such as the pandemic has allowed, we have re-appraised methods, skills, and assessment approaches so that we have an accurate and reliable basis for understanding where children are now and assessing their progress in the future. The teaching of phonics has been reviewed, and steps are taken to ensure there continues to be an effective delivery in the earlier years. Finally, a new middle leadership team has been set up, including Mrs Gardner's recruitment as Deputy Headteacher to fulfil our aim of having a more distributive Leadership Culture, with a clear focus on quantifiable improvement of Teaching and Learning. Again, this is not an exhaustive list but is intended to give an idea of our direction of travel.



Despite all the challenges this year, we have achieved rapid school improvement against our objectives and have significantly improved the provision for our children. The Local Authority has validated this, including following a recent external school review.

These are essential and worthy matters, but the governors must also consider practical affairs that underpins the school's activities. This includes finance. We faced the year with the prospect of running the school at a deficit, a consequence of falling government income directly related to a drop in the school roll when these calculations are made in the autumn term. However, with prudent management by the leadership team and Mrs Locke, our School Business Manager, strong oversight by governors, we will end the academic year with a small surplus. This achievement is a tribute to the efforts of the whole school community. However, the key to our future success in improving our budget will be to increase pupil numbers. The leadership team and governors will have a concerted effort to publicise and promote our school, including the new promotional video recently created. We would also ask you to help with this endeavour.

In our last meeting of the school, year governors conducted a self-review of the effectiveness of Governance at Gateway School. The result is that there has been a massive improvement in the overall effectiveness of Governance, and governors can demonstrate holding the school leadership team to account in a challenging but supportive way. The impact this had on rapid school improvement.

Looking to the future

We are optimistic that the worst of the pandemic is behind us and that come September, we can be enjoying much higher levels of engagement in person within the school buildings. There is a buoyant mood about the school and a keenness to put into action all that we have been working on over the last year without the diversion of bubbles, masks and even worse, lockdowns. We are particularly excited that a growing interest in Gateway School has rewarded the efforts of all of us. We know that the pandemic has set us back and that not all children are where we would like them to be; however, after the well-deserved rest of the summer holidays, the whole team – governors, leadership, staff and above all – you, our parents and carers, and your children – will be raring to go!

Next year, in addition to the School Development Objectives, statutory and best practice governance areas, governors will be focussed on:

- Ensure Governance is impactful, robust, and sustainable. (With a focus on succession planning)
- Ensure the Full Governing Board contributes towards rapid school improvement.
- Improve community engagement and ensure the community are aware of the work of governors. (With a focus on reviewing and setting the school vision, ethos and values with the whole school community)
- Prompt and grow our school.



Conclusion

The Governing Board of Gateway Primary School has fulfilled all its statutory and best practice duties, despite the challenges. The Governing Board has made excellent progress in overseeing the school development plan's implementation and has vigorously held the school leadership team to account to achieve rapid improvement for the children we serve. Governance at the school is now robust and will continue to strengthen next year. As the Chair of Governors, it has been a real privilege to lead the work of Governors this year in a school that is a unique and special place; it is a joy to work with such an energetic set of teachers, parents, children, and a matter of great fulfilment for what is a voluntary role.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish our year six pupils the best of luck in their new schools, and we hope they will keep in touch and let us know how they are getting on.

We do have a parent governor vacancy on the board for a governor, and if you would like to learn more or apply for the position, then you can find out more [here](#) or email me: kmoyes@gateway.oxon.sch.uk

I hope you all have a lovely summer, and we look forward to seeing you all in September!

Best wishes,



Kevin Moyes
Chair of Governors

