

Annual Governing Body Report for Great Totham Primary School

Academic year ending: July 2022

In accordance with the Government's requirement for all governing bodies, the 3 core strategic functions of Great Totham Primary School's Governing Body are:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction to set stretching aspirations for the all-round development and attainment of the pupils at the school;
2. Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils;
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

How the school is governed

Great Totham Primary School is a Foundation School, which means that, while it is funded via the Local Authority, it is not directly under Local Authority control; rather the Governing Body has significant responsibilities for admissions, employment of staff and management of the premises. The Governing Body of Great Totham Primary School is made up of 12 Governors and the Head Teacher as an ex-officio member (13 in all). The 12 Governor positions are allocated as follows: 1 Staff Governor (elected by the staff), 2 elected Parent Governors, 2 Partnership Governors, 1 Local Authority Governor and 6 Co-opted Governors. Partnership and Co-opted Governors are appointed by the Governing Body and are people who, in the opinion of the governing body, have the skills required to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school. The co-opted Governors bring skills such as: Finance, HR and Premises Management. Of the Governing Body of 13, 8 are parents of current or former pupils at the school (there are 2 vacancies).

In normal circumstances, the full Governing Body meets twice each term. During the Covid pandemic the meetings were held online and the sub-committee structure was suspended. With that experience we have decided that it is more efficient to disband the Resources and Curriculum Committees and undertake their work via online reviews and governing body discussions facilitated by Lead Governors for Resources and Curriculum overview. As projects or specific circumstances arise that require focused and dedicated attention and skills, specific project groups will be formed. The Pay and Performance Committee has been retained. We also have committees that meet, if required, to consider pupil discipline and staffing matters. No meetings of these latter committees have been required this year.

Attendance record of Governors

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic and personal work commitments, Governors have generally had an excellent attendance at meetings; we have never cancelled a meeting because it was not "quorate" (the number of Governors needed to ensure that legal decisions can be made).

This year's work in brief

With the "end" of the pandemic, we have reviewed the lessons learned during the period to implement a more effective and less disruptive approach to providing an effective overview of the school's performance and strategy. We have moved to a meeting model that alternates between online and in person meetings to transact the Governing Body's business and ensure that Governors have the opportunity to meet in the school and thereby get an "on the ground" feel for the school's operation to augment the Head Teacher's formal reports. In addition, specific training sessions are held for issues such Ofsted deep dive reviews, curriculum subject overviews and safeguarding. We

make full use of the shared document storage systems to ensure governors have effective oversight through shared information.

With the coronavirus restrictions over, we have moved to bring the rolling maintenance and improvement programme back on track, replacing and upgrading toilet facilities for both staff and pupils, bringing a much more modern and bright feel, as well as being clean and attractive.

Outdoor facilities now include a Multi-Use Games Area with an all-weather surface, a major project that took longer than planned due to the complexities of the planning requirements. This represents a significant improvement in provision for physical education.

We are delighted that we are back to a full complement of parent governors with the election of 2 new governors. However, we now have two vacancies for appointed governors - a Partnership governor and a Co-opted Governor. We have advertised the roles looking for candidates with finance and accounting skills to replace those of Jane Little and Bambi Harrison, whose contribution over a number of years has been greatly valued. We hope to have these roles filled during the forthcoming academic year. Notwithstanding that the Governing Body is well-served with financial management skills from existing experienced governors.

The Governing Body undertakes an annual review of the skills and experience of the governors to ensure that we can support the school in its mission, as well as an annual review of its own ways of working to ensure that our approach is best practice.

Safeguarding continues to be a central focus for all staff and governors and the designated safeguarding governor undertakes regular review of the school's central records to ensure that appropriate checks are being made and recorded. Similarly, the Chair and the Head undertake an audit and review of safeguarding procedures and systems each year.

We also take inclusion very seriously and, within the constraints of the premises and the site generally, try to ensure that we continue the strong tradition of provision for children meeting SEND criteria with a dedicated SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator), who is also an experienced senior teacher, integrating this work with our family support team, which provides a lot of very welcome support to pupils and families during the school year. We have a significant number of children across all the year groups who require focused support as the availability of places in special schools and funding for EHCPs continues to increasingly challenging. While this places a strain on school resources and challenges reported achievement through the standard public reporting frameworks, we are determined that the school remains a place of welcome and a safe and supportive environment for all.

Early in the summer term, the Governing Body approved the 2022/23 budget plan for the school. Notwithstanding the pressures caused by the pandemic, the school continues to be in a healthy position financially, through careful and properly focused cost management to preserve funds available for teaching and learning and the learning environment. The financial performance of the school is reviewed by the Governing Body at least 6 times a year in accordance with Government requirements. The Parents', Teachers' and Friends' Association has done outstanding work in fundraising for the school for special projects. This year has seen this curtailed a bit, but the longstanding and productive partnership between the school, the Governing Body and the PTFA is a key strength that we value immensely and are thankful to all the volunteers who give up their time to organise an ever-expanding range of activities.

Results

Across the country, results for children sitting the SATs for the first time since the pandemic have unsurprisingly fallen back. I am pleased to report that, while we have seen a small reduction in the overall “pass” rates, the catch-up programme and quality-first teaching approach of the school has meant that for children at Great Totham, this has been relatively small, especially when taking into account the increased numbers of children with learning challenges in the school. Great Totham Primary School’s performance continues significantly to exceed national and regional averages. We try to ensure that there are none left behind and that whatever the academic outcome, children leave us confident in their own abilities and worth as they go forward to the next stage of their education.

We could not have done any of this without the dedication and professionalism of all the staff team – the events of the last year have really shown how their commitment to the ethos and values of the school is lived out in practice.

Future plans

The Government has announced that children are to be in school for at least 32 ½ hours per week. This is going to challenge the phased start and finish times that we introduced during the Covid pandemic and has been a major contributor to reducing traffic congestion around the school.

On the major projects front, we are going to tackle the longstanding issue of the changing facilities for swimming and other activities to make them fit for a 21st Century school.

How you can contact the governing body

We always welcome suggestions, feedback and ideas from parents – please contact the Chair of Governors, Mr. Gilbert, via the school office. You can see the full list of Governors and more information about what we do, on the Governors’ page of the school website