

Annual Governing Body Report for Great Totham Primary School

Academic year ending: July 2020

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, 9 are parents of current or former pupils at the school (there is one vacancy).

In normal circumstances, the full Governing Body meets twice each term, and has 3 principal committees to consider different aspects of the school in detail. These are a Resources Committee, which focuses on finance, premises and some personnel matters; a Curriculum and Standards committee, which also covers Admissions, and a Pay and Performance Committee. 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

Governors have excellent attendance at meetings and 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

This year has been significantly impacted by the changes needed to provide continuity through the coronavirus pandemic. While the Autumn term began as normal, with the lockdown from March, Governing Body meetings have moved online to Zoom and we have reduced the number of meetings to free up the Senior Team to focus on managing the school through the crisis. We have therefore moved to having a single governing body meeting (with no sub-committees) each half term, making full use of the shared document storage systems to ensure governors have effective oversight through shared information.

The coronavirus cut back some of the rolling programme of premises maintenance, but through careful financial management by the Head and oversight and support from the Resources leads, this has continued within existing budgets. We upgraded the broadband links, moving to a new provider, not without some challenges as we lost all email connectivity in the week before the lockdown, but

got it back in time for the main school closure. However, as we fix one issue, it reveals another and we are going to undertake a complete re-cabling of the school's IT network to bring it up to modern standards, build resilience for the future and provide improved contingency.

Thanks to the hard work, resilience and ingenuity of the staff and leadership, we were able to provide on-site schooling for priority workers children and learning materials for all children throughout the lock-down. We were delighted that Essex County Council approved the replacement of the ageing boiler and then extended this to a complete replacement of the heating system, which was planned for the summer holidays.

We have been running with a vacancy for an elected parent governor for the year as we did not receive any nominations by the deadline in the Autumn term to hold an election. We have decided to leave the position open, as the procedural requirements for holding an election would compromise the safety of the staff and parents and the work would be a distraction from the additional controls needed for pupil safety during the pandemic. Given the parental experience around the governing body table and after due consultation on the governance issues, we are comfortable that there are adequate channels for the parental perspective to be included.

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 has been very visible on parents evenings and provides a lot of very welcome support to pupils and families during the school year. A key challenge is funding for this area of activity. The funding regime has changed, and the County Council is also changing its support structures. We hosted a consultation meeting for local schools in October. We remain determined to ensure that all children have the best possible start and opportunities.

Early in the summer term, the Resources Committee approved the 2020/21 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 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.

Future plans

The whole focus of the Governing Body and staff of the school is helping all our children grow in confidence, character, knowledge and capability to give them the best possible start to their lifelong learning path – for them to have a fun and exciting time while they are doing it. This year and next

will be coloured by the coronavirus challenges, but we remain committed to ensuring that the school is a safe space for children to develop, that they become resilient and confident, ready to take whatever challenges life throws at them. It has been great to see how calm and “business as usual” they all are as the school went back to its wider opening from September. Our decision to deepen our understanding, focus and expertise in Perceived Trauma Practice, seems almost prescient in the circumstances.

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.

We also will be ensuring that our infrastructure, especially the ICT provision remains fit for purpose – an increasingly challenging task given the increasing reliance on IT for supporting learning.

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