Chair of Governors Report to Members July 2026

Introduction

Since the last report to Members in July, the Academy has continued to make progress across all areas of its development plan. Most of this is covered in Rox's report to Members, but I will cover one or two additional areas and add some observations.

Teaching and Learning

This last period has seen continued improvements in our standards of teaching. The data shows that Key Stage 1 pupils are achieving a good level of attainment, setting a firm base for their future progression to Key Stage 2.

We have not yet received the attainment data for the end of this term. However, it is likely that attainment will remain below national levels because of historic gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Where pupils begin a year with significant gaps, it is difficult to close those gaps while also teaching the full curriculum for that year. This challenge is particularly acute in subjects where knowledge builds cumulatively over time.

Progress and attainment have been reviewed regularly through the Standards and Curriculum Committee and by subject link Governors for individual subjects. This oversight demonstrates that the SLT and teachers have a clear understanding of pupils' progress and attainment, and that appropriate targeted interventions are being put in place.

The process for development and performance management of teachers is now becoming well embedded, and this is and will continue to drive improvements to the standards of teaching.

There has been a focus on improving the effectiveness of the teaching assistants. This will remain a priority next year following the restructuring of the TA cohort, as set out later in this report.

Finance and Budget

The current budget is broadly on track, and budget prediction is showing an end of year reserve of £427k or 16% of total income. This is towards the top end of the DfE recommended range of 5% to 20% and is the result very efficient budgetary control by the SLT. This has allowed financial headroom to invest in three significant infrastructure upgrades…

- Upgrade of the Fire Doors (£14k contribution to a successful CIF bid of £71k)
- Remodelling of the EYS Outside Area (£65k)
- Fitting of air conditioning to the Key Stage 2 classrooms (11k)

The SLT, supported by the SBM, reviewed the three-year budget position in detail earlier this year. The key uncertainty in forecasting remains the relationship between staff pay increases and annual income increases. Recent DfE funding settlements have effectively required schools to absorb part of the cost of pay awards through so-called efficiency savings (1%). Given that more than 80% of expenditure relates to fixed staffing costs, any shortfall must be found from the remaining non-staff budget. This is not sustainable on a continuing year-by-year basis, particularly as the SLT is already managing the budget very tightly.

The further financial challenge is declining pupil numbers. Although our numbers have held up well to date, the budget must make provision for a reduced number of pupils in future years.

As a result, future budget forecasts showed the school moving into deficit, with reserves likely to be exhausted within about three years. In response, the only viable option was to reduce staffing levels. A difficult decision was therefore taken to reduce and restructure the Teaching Assistant cohort. This required a redundancy programme, which has now been completed and resulted in a reduction of five Teaching Assistant posts. Pleasingly, all but one of the redundancies were voluntary, with only one compulsory redundancy. The programme has resulted in a charge of £117k to this year's budget for severance payments and pension strain.

The receipt of high needs tariff funding should also be noted, with a predicted outturn of £196k against a budgeted £126k. This reflects very effective work by the SLT, particularly the SENDCO, in securing additional high needs funding. The application process is complex, bureaucratic and time-consuming, and the SLT should be commended for its success. However, this funding still does not fully compensate the school for the cost of supporting SEND pupils.

The budget for next year predicts a surplus of just under £100k, although this is due to decline in future years as a result of the predicted drop in pupil numbers arsing from the changing demographics.

Estates and ICT

During this period, we have continued to invest in the school estate. Andy has secured a third successful CIF bid, this time to upgrade fire doors that required significant remedial work. The project will cost £71k, with a school contribution of £14k.

This means that, over the past two years, we have secured three successful CIF bids: heating system replacement, security upgrade and fire doors upgrade. This is a significant achievement. Andrew Berry, CEO of the Tilian Trust, recently visited the school and noted that his Trust has not had any successful CIF bids across any of its 12 schools.

The combined income from the DfE towards our capital improvement through these three CIF bids is approaching £500k. These monies are essential to allow major infrastructure upgrade or replacements as these become due, as the income through the General Annual Grant simply does not provide sufficient monies to fund these major projects.

Several other infrastructure projects have been completed, these include...

- **Whiteboards**. New electronic whiteboards have now been installed in all classrooms. This has provided a consistent standard across all the classrooms replaced several units that were not working.

- **Air Conditioning**. Air conditioning has been fitted to all the Key Stage 2 classrooms. The recent period of very high temperatures has really illustrated the need for AC, and as a result the fitting of AC to Key Stage 1 and EYS classrooms is being expedited and should be installed by the start of next term.
- **Upgrade to the Early Years garden**. The planned upgrade to the EYs outside area has now been completed. This provides a much better and safer environment for our new pupils. It will also help "market" the school to new parents looking for a school for their children and will help with the need to fill Early Years places.

The DfE mandated condition survey has now been completed, and the results are now being assessed. The survey results indicate that the following expenditure is required to keep the fabric of the Academy in A1 condition.

Year	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Expenditure	£313k	£45k	£219k

As expected, the main area requiring further investment is the roofing, especially the many flat roofed areas of the school. Andy is preparing a CIF bid to cover the roofing requirements. In parallel he will be looking at a plan B should the CIF bid not be successful. The costs quoted in the survey report are somewhat inflated, and we should be able to do the required the work at lower cost, but even so the work will need to be undertaken in an incremental fashion, with the highest priority areas tackled first.

The parking restrictions outside the school, which were agreed last year in conjunction with Lance Stanbury, have still not been implemented. Andy will follow this up with the newly elected Reform councillor to try and progress this long-standing safety issue.

Paul Collen our IT Manager recently completed a cyber security audit, which I am just reviewing. The overall status is good, with one or two issues that might require action.

Governors

The capacity of the Governing Board remains a concern. The demands placed on Governors continue to increase, while many Governors have limited time available to undertake the role.

During the past six months we have two new Governors appointed by Members and a second parent Governor has been nominated. One issue that came from the Governnace audit last year was that we needed to have a formally documented on-boarding process for new Governors (which in the past has been done on a more ad-hoc basis). Governors are now no longer formally appointed until they have completed the required on-boarding actions. As the date of writing this only one Governor has completed the on-boarding process, the other two (including our second parent Governor) are still working through the process. I have been keeping in touch with them, and they are still engaged but have yet to complete all the necessary tasks!

At the moment we are just about able to cover all the Governor roles and duties, but we are thin on the ground, both in terms of the number of Governors and the time they can devote to the role.

One other issue raised in the Governance audit was that we needed to have a succession plan, which is something that will be developed next year.

The subject link Governors are working reasonably well, but more work is needed to fully develop these roles.

Multi-Academy Trust and Partnerships

The MAT issue has remained on the back burner, and at the moment there is no immediate urgency to move forward with this. We have continued to work with the SLIN network and the Suffolk Partnership Model, although the latter doesn't seem to be delivering very much.

We have also been talking with the Tilian MAT, and Andrew Berry (CEO) recently visited the school. Their MAT "model" is very decentralised and may be a good fit for St Mary's. In the short term Rox is exploring sharing expertise between St Mary's and one or more of the Tilian schools.

Revenue Generation

The plan to develop nursery provision has been discussed further, and it has been decided for now not to proceed with this. The main reason is that nurseries need to operate on a full time basis, which would be challenging as most of our staff contracts are based around 195 days per year of term time working.

The catering and wraparound care services continue to generate a healthy surplus, despite competitive pricing. The wraparound care provision has now been outsourced.

Julian Campbell
Chair of Governors
St Mary's Church of England Academy
July 2026