Chair of Governors Report to Members July 2025

Introduction

The two terms since my report the Senior Leadership team have made impressive progress addressing the many development “challenges” they inherited from the previous leadership team. Most of this work is covered in Rox’s report, so I won’t repeat that here, but simply highlight a few key issues.

Teaching and Leaning

Work to drive up teaching standards and improve pupil progress and attainment have continued over the past two terms. This has been covered in more detail in Rox’s report. Progress is reviewed at the Standards and Curriculum committee meetings as well as by subject link Governors.

The data shows that generally good progress is being made lower down the school, but KS2 remains a challenging cohort, especially year 6, who were a very weak group last year as year 5. I know that from looking at the maths data with the subject lead, that very good progress has been made, but in many cases from a low baseline and this may be reflected in the SATs results when they become available in the next few days.

There are two key points I would highlight...

- The work to improve teaching standards is going well, and teachers are now aware of the standards expected. The new staff plot for next year shows further strengthening, as one or two teachers who found the standards expected beyond their ability or motivation have left and been replaced with new and promising recruits.
- There has been good work completed standardising assessment of pupils’ attainment, allowing progress to be better tracked, and gaps in learning for pupils to be better identified and addressed.

A new area of focus for next academic year will be to look at maximising the contribution of Teaching Assistants (or Learning Support Assistants). They are an expensive resource, and we need to look at their ongoing development to make sure they can deliver the maximum impact.

Finance and Audit

Rox and Andy, supported by SBM, have continued to manage the budget very tightly, and have continued to deliver savings (for example streamlining kitchen and admin staff).

The budget outturn for this year is on track to be broadly balanced (predicted £2k surplus). This is particularly impressive given this includes about £90k contribution to the CIF bids, which will be spent from this year’s budget.

There is now a staff plot agreed for next year, which was reviewed by the last FPA&R committee. The future budgets for non-staff elements such as estates, ICT, admin services etc have also been finalised.

The BFR for next year and the subsequent two years shows the following…

Year	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Surplus/(Deficit)	£6,287	£(100,572)	£(167,192)

This simply reflects the relative increases in staff pay and academy income (ie GAG, Pupil premium). The budget figures for years 2 and 3 assume that pay increases 1% faster than income per year. This illustrates how critical these increases are and are largely out of our control. The advice from SBM was to submit the budget on this assumption to make the point to DfE that any shortfall in future funding increases is likely to have a serious impact.

The catering provision and wrap around care are both making excellent net revenue, helping significantly with our budget position. From the start of next year, the wrap around care is being outsourced, which will provide more certainty on the income and reduce our administrative workload (for example chasing bad debts!).

There are a couple of other finance and personnel related issues to flag….

- **Admissions**. For the first time for a while, as I write this, reception class for next year is not full. The original figure was 55 out of 60 places filled. This has now improved to 59 filled, and we are hopeful that reception will be full. This flagged a red risk in our risk register, and there was a discussion at the last finance committee about how to address this. Rox and her team have done good work promoting the school to local nurseries and some other ideas were also considered. We must recognise that demographics are moving against us, and we will need to do more work to see how we manage this risk for future years.
- **Absence**. The current rate of staff absence is still well above national averages for similar schools. Some of this has been skewed by long term sickness and maternity absence, most of which have now been resolved. The SLT are continuing to work to bring the underlying rate down and this is an issue that will be kept under review.

SEND

Rox has covered this in her report, but I wanted to outline the considerable developments in this area. It became obvious towards the end of last year that all was not well in this area, especially problems with EHCP paperwork and several complaints from parents.

Rox commissioned an external consultant to do an audit of our SEND provision. The report did not make for good reading, revealing multiple issues that needed to be addressed. The current SENDCo was on long term sick and subsequently resigned. Rox brought in Kate White on (paid) loan from Exning Primary school, who has covered the role over the past two terms. The permanent SENDCo role has now been taken on by Lucy Blackford (nee Brown) returning from maternity leave. As Rox has said in her report Kate and Lucy are working to resolve the issues flagged in the SEND audit, and this will significantly improve our SEND support capability.

Once positive outcome has been a recognition that while our previous SENDCo was good at extracting high needs tariff funding from the local authority, a lack of clearly documented evidence of need was limiting the funding we could access. The advice from Exning was that with comprehensive evidence we could get a significant uplift in high needs funding, and this work is underway. This should help significantly reduce the £130k annual loss made on SEND provision.

The problem of the LA forcing us to take SEND students for whom we could not meet need has continued. The problem stems from a lack of suitable specialist places. Rox did approach the LA to see if they would support us setting up a specialist unit on site to increase the number of specialist places available to the LA. This would be relatively straightforward for us as we have the expertise and a suitable location in the Eco Centre. So far, the LA have refused as they want to concentrate on establishing specialist provision units in LA schools. We will keep this issue under review as the current situation is unsatisfactory, in that the LA are causing us a problem, but are refusing our offer to provide part of the solution!

Estates and ICT

The DfE have (finally) completed their condition survey, which confirms that most of the estate is in good condition, and we have a costed plan in place for the on-going estate maintenance.

Much to our surprise both our CIF bids (heating system refurbishment and security upgrades) were successful. Work is now underway to implement both over the summer break and finishing in the Autum term.

I feel that the CIF process is rigid and bureaucratic process which delivers poor value for the taxpayer. In our case the plan B developed by Andy was a better solution. This would have involved a limited upgrade to the existing boilers and heating, and the installation of air-to-air source heating for the Arc. This would have reduced the load on the main heating system, delivered cooling in the summer and started a move to “green tech”. This could have been a start of a phased introduction of “green tech” as suitable technology became available. But the CIF process excludes heat pump solutions and is very much a one-time opportunity. Given the scope of work needed on the heating system and plant room (including asbestos removal) we felt that despite the negatives, we could not afford to reject the CIF funding.

Other points were covered in Rox’s reports. But it’s good to see that the Solar panels have been installed and are doing great work turning sun into money (about £2k since February).

In the longer term I would like to see the school invest in cooling. Andy is looking at an initial installation in the Arc and also bringing the ac in the main hall back into service.

Governors

I am sorry to say that we have lost three over the past two terms. One left at the end of their term, one left because they could not manage the workload and the other resigned when their misconduct came to light, unfortunately resulting in negative consequences for a member of staff.

Two people have expressed an interest in becoming Governors, so I’m hoping that we might be able to bring the team back up to full strength.

The reduced schedule of meetings seems to be working well, whilst reducing the workload for Governors and staff alike.

The subject link Governor roles are continuing to develop and will be an area for continued embedding next academic year.

SBM have just conducted a governance audit, with the report due in about 3 weeks' time.

I am pleased to report that our existing Governance Clerk, Helen Stacey, has joined us as an employee covering all our meetings from the start of next year. This will produce some savings compared to contracting through Schools Choice and will provide a degree of continuity that will prove helpful,

Future Issues

There are a couple of strategic issues to report on…

- **MAT**. The MAT working group has not met this year. This is by design, as I feel that the moment the need is for stability and continuity and to allow the SLT time to work on school improvement. The direction of travel from the Government on MAT is also unclear right now and I feel we should wait for clarity before proceeding.
- **Nursery**. The option for the Academy to develop a nursery provision has been under discussion for a while. There are several advantages, including developing a cohort of children better prepared to move into mainstream school, and the potential for revenue generation. Given the financial situation facing schools and the nation's finances generally, a degree of financial income would be helpful, and possibly essential. The main hurdles are financing suitable accommodation and making sure we have a solid business case.

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