

Annual Report on Governance 2019/2020

The Context

The unprecedented impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has presented huge challenges to all schools. As governors we are acutely aware of the pressures on staff to respond to ever changing scenarios.

School Leaders have been required to prepare Risk Assessments, manage day to day organisation, set up systems for remote learning, sustain links with pupils, promote essential regular communication with Parents & Carers, ensure the safety of all pupils and plan for an uncertain future.

Governors have overseen the school's response, keeping abreast of the constant updates on government guidance and sharing best practice through regular webinars involving colleagues from across the country.

We are immensely proud of the highly competent and creative response of the Team at Wellgate and further reference to this will be included in this report.

Board Membership

We have welcomed two new governors this year and now have our full complement of twelve, along with one Associate Governor. Mrs Andrea Laws has joined us as a Parent Governor and Mrs Christine Barlow as a Co-opted Governor. Both bring valuable skills from their work experience and are currently undergoing a detailed Induction Process to enable them to participate fully in governance.

Our core of experienced colleagues continues to support all aspects of our work and this has allowed us to activate our succession plan for leadership. Our Chair, Mrs Sandra James, stood down in February 2020 and is now serving as Vice Chair, whilst Mrs Carol Stringer was appointed Chair of Governors. Another governor colleague is currently working towards a leadership role and this represents a significant milestone in our strategy to secure strong governance for the future.

Core Functions

Covid-19 has brought challenges to our work to fulfil the three core functions of governance ie.

1. Ensure the school's clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.
2. Hold the Head Teacher to account for the educational performance of the school.
3. Oversee the school's financial performance.

Careful use of technology has enabled us to conduct and participate in Virtual Meetings to ensure the continued oversight of these core functions.

Vision & Strategic Direction

Recent developments have further confirmed our strong belief that a successful education in 'learning for life' must be grounded in far more than test performance. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the essence of our vision, bringing into focus those vital priorities which, whilst difficult to measure, are nonetheless essential to a full and rounded education.

The 'new' focus on the need to foster positive mental health and qualities such as personal resilience, independence, confidence, collaborative attitudes, empathy and social responsibility has long been central to our vision for Wellgate and underpins every aspect of the school's curriculum.

The annual review of our 3-year Strategic Plan has required some adjustment to targets set in vastly different circumstances and an interim 1-year plan has been agreed. This takes account of shifts in priorities due to Covid-19 and will be reviewed in February 2021.

Educational Performance

Our School Improvement Strategy Group has continued to meet virtually to monitor developments and the Head Teacher is to be commended for providing detailed information on which to base our judgements.

The Autumn Term saw significant progress in the teaching of Reading and Phonics due to an ambitious staff training programme conducted in collaboration with a local English Hub and our Academy Trust. The Spring closure clearly disrupted this process and consequently we expect an intense focus on this from September.

Work was also underway to reshape the delivery of the wider curriculum, which will also now be carried forward to the new academic year.

Our continued involvement via Virtual Meetings has enabled us to receive regular updates on learning both within school and via the on-line provision. Evidence shows that remote learning has been managed well and feedback from Parents and Carers has been highly positive.

As governors we have been impressed by the energy and commitment of staff to make remote learning as productive and engaging as possible. Systems have been in place to sustain contacts with pupils and to offer insights into changes of classrooms and teachers to help smooth pupils' transition to the next stage.

Pupil Performance

Our responsibility for holding the school to account is ongoing. However, it has not been possible to gather the assessment data routinely used for this purpose. Consequently, our questions have been around the crucial Health & Safety implications for the learning environment and their impact on children, along with the take up of on-line learning and its monitoring. Pupil and Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health has been central to our discussions and will be an ongoing priority for the coming year.

Our oversight of the school's response to the needs of vulnerable pupils and their families has continued. Safeguarding Governors have been kept informed of close contacts with some families and our Parent Support Advisers have undertaken regular home visits where appropriate. In some cases, collaboration with external agencies has been an important part of the school's duty to keep pupils safe.

We are aware that vulnerable pupils are generally less likely to have accessed on-line learning regularly and detailed plans for all pupils to 'catch up' on missed learning will be implemented from September.

Financial Oversight

The Finance Committee has met virtually, in line with the usual monitoring dates. The onset of Covid-19 has led to increased expenditure on resources for Health & Safety. Due to prudent forward planning by the Business Manager and Senior Leaders, this has not impacted greatly on our finances. However, it was decided that a small price increase in the cost of a school meal from September would be necessary. A 3-year Budget Forecast has now been agreed. Benchmarking has been used to compare financial performance with other settings.

Governors have monitored spending to ensure it is in line with Improvement priorities, such as the recent investment in provision for Reading.

Care has been taken to improve the evaluation and the effectiveness of Pupil Premium Spending.

Extra Covid-19 funding from the DfE will be used in a variety of ways to help pupils 'catch up' on lost learning and governors will be required to monitor how this is allocated.

Stakeholder Engagement

Increasing the engagement of Parents and Carers remains important. However, the difficulties of providing access to the building and contact with staff have led to the cancellation of some planned 'drop-in' events and we will be considering how to keep this on track for the future.

Governor Training

Our annual Skills Audit in the Autumn Term will determine training priorities for this year and enable us to make any organisational adjustments needed to build capacity in our team.

Our 'in-house' governor development sessions for this year were dedicated to '**The Performance Appraisal Process**' and '**Analysis of the Ofsted Inspection Data Summary Report**'. Both were well attended and served to enhance governors' knowledge and skills.

Some colleagues have also attended external training to update their knowledge and skills in specific areas. A list of courses attended this year can be found in the appendix to this report.

Central to our strategy is our aim to provide 'outstanding' governance at Wellgate. Hence our new Chair of Governors is accessing the same Governor Space training programme made available to the previous Chair. Following a detailed evaluation of our current practice, the new Action Plan for the forthcoming academic year will be implemented.

Ofsted Inspection

Wellgate was subject to a category 5 Ofsted Inspection in the Spring Term. The school was judged to be 'good' and there was high praise for many aspects of the school's work. Areas for further improvement were identified.

The quality of teaching in the wider curriculum had already been identified as a priority in the School Improvement Plan and this will be taken forward in the new academic year.

Governors were asked to consider the introduction of a mechanism for the monitoring of staff workload. This is regularly included in conversations with the Staff, but it was suggested that a more formal procedure would yield better results. We expect to develop this over the Autumn Term.

Thank you Team Wellgate!

Finally, we must express our heartfelt thanks to all those at Wellgate who have selflessly dedicated themselves to serving the needs of our children throughout the pandemic. The staff response to such unprecedented demands has been utterly amazing and their energy, resilience, enthusiasm, hard work and commitment has shone through. The mutual support and shared responsibility characteristic of our team has been much in evidence and the quality of care offered to our pupils has been extraordinary.

Ever changing circumstances have presented enormous challenges to school leaders and we wish to acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe them for their unceasing work to keep the school accessible for pupils in need and for the well planned procedures which led to successful home learning for many pupils. They have been well supported by our Trust and thanks should go to the CEO and her team.

Our thanks must also go to Mr Slater and his team of cleaners who have worked tirelessly to ensure that the premises have been continuously deep cleaned and well prepared to accept staff and children safely throughout the crisis.

As ever, the school's work has been inspired by Mrs Egginton's skilful and creative leadership. We feel privileged to work with a Head Teacher who welcomes governor oversight and who shares the wealth of information needed for us to properly fulfil our responsibilities. Her continued commitment to the school and our children is deeply appreciated.

Sandra James – Vice Chair of Governors (from February 2020)

Carol Stringer – Chair of Governors (from February 2020)

September 2020