

# Burton Bradstock CE Primary School Governing Body

## Report for year 2015-6

### Governing Body Membership and Operation:

There have been two changes in the governing body during the year following the compulsory re-constitution from September 2015. Revd Canon Stephen Batty, who came to the Village as the new rector in April 2015, joined the governing body as a co-opted governor. Ashley Harrow, a qualified accountant and parent of a pupil at the School, having joined the Finance, Pay and Premises Committee earlier, was also co-opted as a full governor. Attendance at governing body meetings have continued to be excellent which, in view of the many commitments of the individuals involved, demonstrates the high level of commitment and growing expertise. Julian Piper was elected as chair for a third year and Pat Lewis-Badgett was elected as vice chair for a second term of office. There were no vacancies on the governing body.

The governing body met on 5 occasions during the year with a combined meeting with the other 4 schools involved in the Minerva Learning Trust to confirm agreement to go forward as a Multi-Academy Trust on 24<sup>th</sup> February. The number of committees supporting the governing body was reduced to 3 in order to increase efficiency and reduce the amount of staff time and duplication to service those committees and the Full Governing Body.

- Finance, Pay and Premises Committee (FPPC)
- Curriculum and Improvement Committee (CIC)
- Chaplaincy Committee

FPPC and CIC were scheduled to meet each half term – the former to ensure budgetary matters were secure and adequately monitored, the latter timed to monitor pupil progress after each of the half-termly pupil progress meetings between staff and the headteacher and to check progress with the Single Action Plan following the Ofsted inspection. The Chaplaincy Committee has met termly and its role has been substantially to monitor and promote the Christian character of the School along the guidelines set by the toolkit for the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) and to find ways of increasing the links between the Church, the School and the local community.

### Key Priorities:

Following positive discussions with the staff and governors at the first of the Professional Training Days on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015, the following key strategic priorities were agreed:

- Improving staff morale
- Improving overall standards of attainment across the School
- Increasing collaboration with other schools
- Increasing numbers on roll
- Improving parental engagement with their children's learning

The agenda for each of the meetings during the year has been driven by these key priorities which has further promoted a joint commitment by both staff and governors.

### Staff Morale:

Following the budgetary difficulties caused by reducing numbers on roll, redundancies and reductions in hours for teaching assistants had been implemented in 2014-5. Naturally, this had a negative impact on staff morale and, at the meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> September, all agreed that it was important to focus on this in order to both care for staff (a key priority in a faith school) and to ensure that children would be taught by adults who were best placed to support their progress. The staff governor has been asked to provide information about this strategic priority throughout the year and this has developed from a retrospective view to one which anticipates potential stress points and considers actions that could be put in place ahead of any difficulties. This has been welcomed by staff and governors alike and is one of the aspects of governance that has received the most positive comments in the review of governance conducted at the end of the year. The School requested the Health and Safety Executive stress questionnaire to be

administered by the County (a service to which the School has subscribed) with the results fed back in the spring. This identified a generally positive picture with one or two areas to which the headteacher has been asked to focus over time.

It has been a particularly stressful year for all staff resulting from the change in curriculum, with significantly higher expectations on the standards to be reached, and the new testing regime which has been highly controversial. Governors have sought to reassure staff in this uncertain period that their track record and professionalism has been highly rated and led to confidence that the required outcomes would be realised when the results were published. This has been endorsed by the excellent results achieved at all levels at the end of the year.

### **Improving Standards:**

As mentioned above, the overall results at the end of the year have been particularly pleasing. This has been achieved by a tremendous amount of hard work by the staff but also by the pupils (and their parents/carers). Ofsted identified writing as a key issue and governors have been pleased to note a considerable focus on this during the year with improvements resulting in promising results through SATs. This has been an area of concern in other schools, too, and it has been pleasing to note how ideas have been shared, particularly across the Minerva Learning Trust Schools. In addition, the appointment of Miss Varndell as a moderator for writing for the County has given the staff access to ideas and information from a wide variety of other schools and has also provided confidence that the levels of teacher assessment are sound. It has been agreed for Miss Varndell to make a presentation to governors at the first meeting of the autumn term in order to increase their understanding of the issues and what is involved for pupils in achieving age related expectations.

Maths has remained a key priority and Miss Sanderson and Mrs Wardle have been involved in staff development which has enabled them to visit other schools and glean new ideas to support this area of the curriculum. Governors have been keen to support this wider involvement of staff in order to reduce isolation and provide access to new ideas. In addition, staff have often returned with renewed confidence about their own standards and practice.

Governors have continued to support various classes by visiting regularly and supporting work with English and Maths with individuals or small groups. The Curriculum and Improvement Committee has received reports at each meeting on pupil progress but also on the employment of interventions and their effectiveness in targeting pupils' needs.

Governors commissioned Jo Hicks as the Self Evaluation Partner for the year and her work in providing triangulation of evidence of standards and assessments for governors and the headteacher has been invaluable along with her guidance during the headteacher's performance review.

### **Increasing Collaboration with Other Schools:**

This year has seen one of the most significant changes for the School for many years in the formal constitution of the Minerva Learning Trust which was agreed by the governors of all four schools:

- The Sir John Colfox Academy
- St Mary's CE Primary School
- Bridport Primary School
- Burton Bradstock CE Primary School

The Trust came formally into existence on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 following a resolution by each of the governing bodies (and the Sir John Colfox Academy Trust) on 24<sup>th</sup> February. The business of developing this collaboration started in September 2013 and has proceeded carefully under the support and guidance of the Diocese and Sarah Taylor (Taylor Culshaw Solicitors) and through the work of the steering committee primarily made up of the chairs of the 4 governing bodies. It is still the Memorandum of Understanding which was agreed during 2015 which guides the work of the Trust although other local schools originally signed up to the MoU decided not to join the Trust during that year. Although in its early days, the increased collaboration amongst the schools and, particularly amongst the headteachers, guided by Executive Principal, Kay Taylor, is already showing promise in terms of proposed projects to support improvement and effective transition between primary and secondary education. Julian Piper, along with the other chairs, serves on the Trust Board which also includes a number of new trustees with a particularly high

calibre of experience and skill. Work with the local pyramid of schools also continues, although in a slightly different context, and yields new ideas (eg the new scheme for Christian Assemblies) and support. A key priority for governors, now as a Local Governing Body responsible to the Trust, is to develop efficient and effective ways of working which minimise any duplication of reporting by the headteacher and Executive Principal.

### **Increasing Numbers on Roll**

Unfortunately, in spite of this strategic priority, numbers on roll have continued to fall. Although governors and the headteacher have endeavoured to explore the reasons for this (including a detailed analysis of the destinations of pupils leaving before the end of Y6), no clear pattern or rationale has emerged. The School exists in a highly competitive environment where there are surplus places in the Bridport area and 'convenience' for parents or carers scores highly in their priorities for choosing a school for their children. The lack of sufficient local children in Burton, Shipton or Chilcombe means that parents from outside the catchment area have to make a conscious decision to enrol their children in a school other than their local provision. Governors and staff focus on the benefits of attending a small school, particularly one which focuses on each child's needs, in order to attract recruits. However, a number of developments are under discussion including:

- provision of a breakfast club
- reliable provision of after school clubs/activities
- utilising the opportunities presented by low numbers in Sails class to work with younger children and their parent or carers

Governors asked the headteacher to compile a promotional leaflet for the School which went to press during the summer of 2016 which can be used at local events, the information centre and pre-schools to promote the excellent opportunities offered by the School. Governors are very conscious of the direct relationship between numbers on roll and income to the School.

### **Increasing Parental Engagement:**

Success in this priority has been varied over the course of the year. Attendance at parent consultations remains high. Providing attractive opportunities to talk with parents or carers about their children's learning when home life is so busy remains an area to be addressed. Attempts have been made more recently to improve the website, in particular, providing links to information or examples of the new curriculum and ways in which parents/carers can support their children's learning. For example, direct links to the leaflets provided by Family Action in conjunction with teacher unions entitled 'Ready to Learn' are now readily available via the website. The Parent Forum, begun during the year, has engaged some parents in discussions about ways of making the website more attractive and useful.

National Governors Association and PTA-UK have recently produced reports about successful methods of engaging parents/carers and it is clear that it will remain an important priority going forward. Other schools in the Trust have also been working on this priority and it is to be hoped that schools can learn together about the most successful methods of enabling parents/carers to support their children's learning. Governors are keen to achieve a new homework policy that reduces the stress at home created between parents/carers and their children whilst finding ways of encouraging a fun and enjoyable approach to learning together – the target for this is the beginning of the new academic year. The weekly home learning tasks, which governors have been keen to promote, might provide the basis for future developments.

### **Future Developments:**

The operation and responsibilities of the Local Governing Body in relation to the Minerva Learning Trust provides challenges and opportunities. For this reason, the Governing Body has conducted a review of its practice at the end of the year which has highlighted areas which governors feel have been successful but also provides information about the expected challenges for the future in its new role. These include:

- sharing more widely the requirements of the SIAMS inspection with staff, parents/carers and the Church
- continuing to monitor provision for more able pupils to ensure that they are encouraged to excel
- promoting the excellent opportunities that the School offers to all its pupils (benefits of a small school)

- developing even greater cohesion between governors and staff (building on achievements in recent years)
- continuing development of governor skills and experience (through training and learning walks)

Although all governors have started a new 4-year term from 1<sup>st</sup> April, it has been understood that governors may wish to resign at their originally proposed end of office date. A number of governors commenced their terms in 2012 and may therefore choose to resign during 2016-7, but there has, so far, been no difficulty in recruiting either elected governors or co-opted positions. Succession planning remains a priority for the governing body as is the continuing development of skills – hence the decision to retain subscriptions to NGA and Dorset Governor Services.

## APPENDIX: Minerva Learning Trust: Burton Bradstock CE Primary School

### Local Governing Body Review July 2016

Governors were asked to comment on two features of governance which they felt had been successful and two which could be improved.

#### Areas to Celebrate:

There was widespread agreement that the strategic focus on staff well-being had made a difference (6 respondents) and having a member of the governing body with a responsibility to feedback issues affecting staff morale has demonstrated a practical concern for staff welfare. This concern was described by one governor as 'sensitive and appropriate'.

Encouraging and supporting collaboration between schools, including the transition to the Minerva Learning Trust but also staff visiting other schools, joining research projects and sharing good practice was also highlighted as a strength.

Several governors felt that they were now more skilled in understanding reports ('clear and detailed') and therefore were more able to ask challenging questions and thereby drive the raising of standards, and governors also felt that the balance between challenge and support had been the right one. 'Understanding the stories behind a cohort's data' was also highlighted as a strength. The work done by staff (esp CS and MB) was particularly noted.

There was less agreement on the success of the strategic priority to engage parents more actively. Two governors felt that information flow had been improved and the creation of a Parents' Forum had been a positive move. However, this also appears in the areas for improvement.

The regular involvement of governors in the life of the School was mentioned in several responses – attending joint training sessions, helping with activities and in classrooms, 'reacting proactively and quickly'.

Other successful areas included strong support and leadership, governor induction, establishment of key strategic priorities and focus on outcomes required by the Ofsted report.

#### Areas for improvement:

Many governors commented that they found it difficult to think of areas for improvement since they felt the Governing Body worked well to fulfil its functions. However, there were useful ideas/comments:

Some governors felt that, on the basis of past practice, processes for governor induction could be improved (but others felt this was a strength).

Governors reflected on the continual need to improve their own skills and/or to recruit people with skills lacking in other governors (esp finance). There was felt to be a need to understand the way in which the faith element of the School is embedded in the life of pupils and staff (sharing the SIAMS toolkit). It was also felt that governors need to be more proactive in promoting recruitment of pupils to the School.

There was concern about governors' lack of understanding of the ways in which able pupils are stretched and encouraged to excel (there was a particular mention of homework differentiation).

With the incorporation of the School into the Minerva Learning Trust, governors pointed to the uncertainty of the mechanism of governance in the future – especially streamlining the workflow and avoiding duplication

Some governors felt that they and the School could do more to engage parents ('customer service/client model') and particular mention was made of the possibility of 'exit interviews' for parents. It was hoped that this would result in more parents understanding the role of governors.

One respondent felt that the governing body should work to create 'a more cohesive unit' - with *all* staff and governors.

Thanks to all those who responded and for their helpful comments

*Julian Piper (chair) July 2016*