

Darlinghurst Academy – Impact Statement 2015-2016

Introduction

This report summarises what the governors have been doing over the academic year 2014-2015 and how we have played a role in our pupils' education. It is also part of how we evaluate our own performance to ensure that we are making a positive difference.

The priority for Darlinghurst's governors is to ensure that all pupils progress well in their education and that coming to this school adds value to their prospects. We understand that for this to be achieved pupils must be supported by a well-managed, inspiring and motivated staff who work together in a safe, supportive and stimulating environment to ensure that the school's vision of a 'happy learning community where everyone works hard, plays well and achieves their best' continues.

To do this, we work with the Principal and Senior Leadership team (SLT) to develop the strategic direction of the school, as set out in our Academy Improvement Plan (AIP) and hold them to account for its delivery.

We ask for and receive high-quality pupil progress information from the SLT, and form our own view on the quality of provision by visiting the school and talking with staff, pupils, parents and carers. We also get involved in key recruitment, resource and financial decisions to make sure that investment in the school helps it to develop appropriately to support our local community and pupils, and ensure that our committed and talented staff can raise standards and excel.

Each governor has an area of school life to focus on, led by Ofsted and school priorities:

Effectiveness of leadership and management.

Behaviour, personal development and welfare.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Outcomes for pupils.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Safeguarding.

The SLT reports on these areas and the governors challenge and seek to test and discuss the school performance information in the role of a 'critical friend'. This helps to hold their decisions and actions to account and drives continuous improvement.

Junior Governors

The junior governors are annually elected by their peers in class and are one boy and one girl from each Key Stage (KS) 2 class in school. They also represent KS1 classes under a 'buddy system', so each KS1 class is linked with a KS2 junior governor. The children have discussed many issues over the past year including healthy eating, which led to the reintroduction of the popular salad bar. They also worked on a new menu with the school chef. They have asked for 'Music Fridays' to come back, providing fun and dancing for all pupils to enjoy on Friday lunchtimes. The junior governors have discussed homework with their classes too and have suggested that they prefer project-based homework. After a visit to Little Havens Children's hospice, the junior governors decided to support this as our charity for the year.

The junior governors meet every two weeks at lunchtime and all of them have attended most of the meetings. Given that the meetings are at lunchtime, if any of them is unable to attend their classmate governor will help them to catch up on what they have missed.

Most of the junior governors have at some point this year been involved with appointing new staff including the Principal. They have explored different types of questions to ask and why they might ask them. Their views are taken very seriously and are carefully considered as part of the interview process.

The junior governors also attended a Pupil Voice Summit at Milton Hall Primary School in Southend, representing our school and sharing new ideas.

School performance planning

Governors work with the SLT to write our AIP. This plan incorporates the school's self-evaluation and sets our goals and outcomes to aim for, for the benefit of our pupil's academic progress and enjoyment of learning. It is set and measured against Ofsted

expectations and national and in-school benchmarks to enable us to check that pupils are making the appropriate progress.

The AIP is monitored monthly at each full Governing Body meeting and our Annual Cycle of School Review helps us to ask the right questions at the right time and as key stage performance information is published. Our current goals are:

To improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school so that practice is consistently good with significant elements of outstanding practice developing, ensuring any remaining Requires Improvement practice is eliminated (Quality of teaching, learning and assessment).

To improve the impact of the SLT ensuring that their capacity is fully utilised and focused tightly on driving up standards and improving outcomes for all of our pupils (Effectiveness of Leadership and Management).

To develop a curriculum that is broad, balanced and progressive, supports mastery and takes account of the differing needs of groups such as boys, Special Educational Needs (SEN), Pupil Premium and pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) (Effectiveness of Leadership and Management).

To embed a rigorous and robust pupil tracking system following the removal of National Curriculum levels (Effectiveness of Leadership and Management / Quality of teaching, learning and assessment).

To improve standards in writing across the school so that pupil achievement is in line with the standards achieved in reading and maths (Outcomes of Pupils).

To increase the proportion of children passing the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 so that outcomes are above National (Outcomes of Pupils).

To ensure that Pupil Premium funding is spent effectively in order to continue to improve the attainment of disadvantaged children (Effectiveness of Leadership and Management / Outcomes of Pupils).

To ensure that a higher proportion of children go on to achieve the highest levels of attainment in all subjects (Outcomes of Pupils).

To raise expectations of children with SEN so that they make good progress and achieve well relative to their starting points (Outcomes of Pupils).

To review the provision for children with EAL to improve the acquisition of language skills and increase progress and attainment for this group (Outcomes of Pupils).

To review behaviour policy and ensure consistent application of expectations by all staff so that behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding across the school (Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare).

To continue to improve attendance for all groups of pupils so that it is at least in line with the national average (Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare).

To ensure that the school can:

- Further develop governors' understanding of the school's performance.
- Collaborate with the Legra Academy Trust (Legra)¹ to share ideas and teaching expertise.

Governor visits

The governors visit the school to meet staff and pupils and find out what is happening on the ground. The focus of governor visits is almost entirely driven by priorities and areas of interest arising from school reporting and the AIP. Each governor will follow up on their dedicated area to cross-check the information they have been given and to verify that what should be happening is indeed the case and that positive progress is being made.

Visits are recorded in a registration book and governors completed feedback forms to capture key notes and any observations relevant to the AIP of other priority areas of interest. Governors also regularly attended school events such as the Open Day, Sports Day and other school activities where we could show our support for the children and talk to parents and staff.

The visits, and other governor enquiries, lead to a greater understanding of how the school is doing against what we said we wanted to do across the provision.

For example, these activities have led to:

¹ A multi-academy trust set up to provide high impact education for children in the local community, comprising collaboration between Cecil Jones Academy, Belfairs Academy and Darlington Academy.

A more rigorous and coordinated approach to addressing attendance, contributing to a 1% decrease in absence.

Introduction of the French lunchtime club.

Idea-sharing and feedback to the SLT about appraisal objectives, staff coaching and other professional development activities.

Clearer objective-setting for non-teaching staff for 2015-2016 in alignment with school priorities.

A renewed focus on school catering to give children a greater voice in choosing the menu and communication between staff and children.

Supporting an improvement plan with the modern foreign languages lead to decide how best to use resources and support teacher confidence in delivering French.

Visits in 2015-2016 will continue on a planned basis around portfolio lead areas and priorities from the AIP.

Analysis and understanding the school's performance

Crucial to the effectiveness of the Governing Body is being able to understand the school's performance as measured by external and internal benchmarks. We work hard to understand what story the school's internal reporting and Ofsted's published information is telling us so that we can ask the right questions of our SLT and make relevant suggestions.

The SLT explains the school's performance information to the governors in regular question and answer sessions to explore what might not be working, what is working well and can be expanded on, and new ideas. RAISEonline (Ofsted's school performance database) information training is planned for October 2015 to update new and existing governors.

Examples of what our understanding of school performance information has enabled us to do are:

A 2015-2016 staff profile that reflects strength required across the different year groups to continue to improve progress.

Support for the introduction of Maths Mastery, Talk for Writing and Philosophy for Children (with Maths Mastery in particular having a positive impact; Talk for Writing will now be delivered alongside wider writing strategies to improve attainment in this area).

Focused teaching by KS1 teachers over the summer to ensure pupils' phonics screening success.

An effective pupil premium strategy to build on our success to date in making sure that there is parity between the achievements of our pupil premium and non-pupil premium children.

Support for a refreshed writing strategy to boost attainment across all year groups.

We pay particular attention to any groups that might not be progressing as well as they ought to and how we spend our pupil premium funding. We have recently appointed a pupil premium link governor and we'll be looking more closely in the coming year at progress for our EAL and SEN groups.

School policies

Governors review all policies each year to ensure that we are complying with the Department for Education (DfE) and following best practice.

For example, last year we substantially updated our social media policy to ensure the continued safeguarding of our children by updating parents, carers and children on internet safety and their responsibilities.

The mandatory governor safeguarding audit and Legra due diligence process completed last term confirmed that our safeguarding procedures robustly meet statutory requirements and we returned our Local Authority annual audit.

Staff and leaders' knowledge of safeguarding issues is maintained through top up training and governors monitor safeguarding through the reporting of the appointed Safeguarding Officer.

Financial management

The Governing Body completed bespoke school financial accounts training in 2015.

The Governing Body discusses and approves the school budget, with financial updates being discussed at each Governing Body meeting and with recommendations being made to the Legra Board of Directors. School investment decisions are made together with the Governing Body. Most of our governors have corporate management and legal experience and we are able to add value to the decision-making processes and appropriately scrutinise allocation of funds.

Examples of key investment decisions that the Governing Body took during 2014-2015 include:

Building works to grow the school's capacity.

Redevelopment of the pond area to ensure health and safety and provide a new area for outdoor learning.

Focused investment of our pupil premium budget, with results showing positive impact on attendance and learning behaviour.

The strategic decision to join Legra to drive improvement in pupil outcomes in Darlington and across the trust.

Investment in the services of a recruitment specialist to help us recruit an experienced and 'appropriate fit' interim principal and subsequently our new principal, Mrs Patrick, who brings relevant experience and energy to our school.

Recruitment and staffing

Two governors were trained in 'Safer Recruitment' in 2014. The new chair and named safeguarding governor will also receive this training in the first term of 2015-2016.

Some governors are involved in the recruitment and selection of senior staff. The principal updates the governors on all staff appointments, which are made in alignment with our AIP priorities.

At the end of 2014, the Governing Body led the recruitment and selection of our new principal. We decided to invest in the support of a senior education recruitment specialist because it was essential that we recruited within the correct timeframes and attracted the talent we needed for the school. All governors, including junior governors, were fully involved in developing and running the recruitment process and attended subsequent candidate interviews and assessment centre days.

Governor meeting attendance

During 2014-2015 we met as a full Governing Body twice every term. The focus of meetings is primarily progress against our AIP plus a review of any statutory, financial or administrative matters that require attention as part of our planned cycle of activities.

We normally have a question and answer session with the principal and SLT based on updates circulated in advance.

Our meeting attendance levels show no issues regarding the availability and commitment of governors and occasional apologies for not attending on reasonable grounds have been accepted.

Governor Development Plan

During 2014-2015 the following training and knowledge-sharing was completed:

Two governors attended training with Southend Education Trust on the role and responsibilities of governors which included an overview of school information dashboards; one governor attended RAISEonline training; two governors attended Safer Recruitment

training; one governor attended a pupil behaviour management session; all governors received bespoke financial accounts training; and all governors received their required safeguarding refresher training as a whole group. Two governors have also completed e-modules on understanding school information on the Fischer Family Trust² website.

Moving into 2015-2016, we will be using a governing body development plan to ensure that our school skills coverage is balanced and aligned specifically with AIP priorities.

Summary and the future

The Governing Body at Darlington has been on a journey of self-evaluation and improvement that continues in earnest as we move into 2015-2016, with the additional exciting opportunity for collaboration with our Legra colleagues. Together we are focused on driving improvement at Darlington and across the trust.

We are proud at Darlington that our children make progress relative to their starting points, regardless of their background. This report has shown some examples of where we have made a positive impact so far and we are clear on what we need to do next to further improve outcomes for all our pupils.

Looking ahead, we want more children to progress at or above age-related expectations and demonstrate that the school adds value to its pupil's prospects. We believe that our Governing Body can lead this ambition and that its on-going work reflects our school's capacity for improvement.

² The Fischer Family Trust is a non-profit company providing school performance information to schools and local authorities.