

Annual Governance Statement: September 2021

What does the governing body do?

The three core strategic functions of the Wolverdene Special School Governing Body are:

- **Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos, values and strategic direction;**
- **Holding the Head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils;**
- **Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.**

How is it made up?

The constitution of the governing body is:

Four Parent Governors, two Staff Governors (to include the Headteacher), one LEA Governor and nine Co-Opted Governors.

All governors serve 4 year terms and may be re-elected after that time.

If you would be interested in becoming a Governor at this dynamic special school, please get in touch with the Chair of Governors through the School Office. In particular, we would very much welcome applications from Parent Governors (this also includes carers).

How does it work?

The Full Governing Body meets twice each term, once in each half. We also have three committees to consider different aspects of the school in detail, which also meet twice a term. These committees are:

Curriculum Committee: The Curriculum Committee work with the senior management team to oversee the school curriculum and how this meets the

needs of learners across the school. The Curriculum Committee also oversees pupil progress, both academically and emotionally each term.

Resources Committee: The Resources Committee is responsible for overseeing the financial and personnel aspects of the school. It scrutinises and recommends the school budget to the full governing body, and also works with the senior management team to construct strategic financial plans, as well as ensuring expenditure by the school is best value, efficient and effective and that systems of internal financial control are appropriate. It looks at staffing issues within the school including performance management, staff wellbeing and staffing structure.

Lodge Committee: The Lodge is our small residential unit. The Lodge committee is responsible for providing a range of support, including help and advice on management, staffing and maintenance, checking records and, most importantly, visiting the Lodge before and after school so that we get to know the children and what goes on there.

All committees have terms of reference which are reviewed regularly. We also have governors with specific responsibility for Safeguarding (including Looked After, and Previously Looked After, Children) and members of the Resources Committee conduct termly Health & Safety inspections of both the school and the Lodge.

What has the Governing Body achieved in the last year?

The year 2020-2021 remained another year of Covid disruption.

In September, we welcomed our interim head, Jarlath O'Brien, who remained with us until April. During this time, he found himself managing the school through a constantly fast-changing landscape of school closures, brought by Government and by staff and pupils needing to isolate due to vulnerability or contact. Through a system of rolling closures, "bubbles" and careful management of the school site and working day, Wolverdene managed to remain open throughout, albeit in a reduced format.

Governors were not able to visit the school for long periods, but meetings and monitoring visits continued via Teams, although we were all aware that this format is not as effective as being physically present in the school, so during the summer term, we took the decision to return to the school for both visits and meetings.

In this year of change – and particularly when governors had to remain at a distance – we considered it particularly important to try and stay in touch with staff in order to seek their views and monitor their welfare. To this end, we continued to carry out exit interviews, sought their input into Full Governing Body meetings and, additionally, carried out two sets of “round table” interviews in November and March to check progress. Throughout the school year, governors have been enormously grateful to the entire staff body, who have shown an exceptional level of resilience, tenacity and professionalism in the face of multiple challenges.

Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility, and a culture of vigilance has always been central to our approach. Despite the challenge presented by remote monitoring, governors have continued to examine safer recruitment practice, attendance and exclusions, restrictive physical intervention data and to have meetings with the designated teacher to monitor the welfare of looked after and previously looked after children.

Despite the difficulties of the year, much has been achieved. In January, following a further round of advertising, we shortlisted two candidates for the potential headship and then undertook a rigorous day of face-to-face interviews and activities. We were delighted to appoint Nathalie Akhmatova, who took up the post in April.

The summer term proved to be one of particular challenge, as the whole school returned and both staff and pupils became used, once more, to a “normal” school day. Lunch in the hall returned, and so did the Friday celebration assemblies. A number of children found the return difficult and there was much focus on behaviour management and, in particular, the replacement of physical interventions, when possible, by a more positive and therapeutic based model. Governors have attended INSET days when training on new approaches has been given and have then returned later in the term to evaluate progress and the response of staff to the changes.

Much of the work of the Governing Body is directed by our main strategic document, the School Improvement Plan. This is put together every year by the headteacher in consultation with the governors and other stakeholders and it provides a blueprint for the focus of the year ahead, including robust means of measuring whether we have been successful or not. Jarlath O'Brien initially put this together at the start of the autumn term but, unsurprisingly, the cycle of changes over the remainder of the school year meant that progress was disrupted and not always as continuous as had been hoped.

In 2020-21, our priorities were:

Leadership & Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop culture, systems and processes -Improve strategic financial leadership & accountability -Develop capacity in leadership team
Quality of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improve use of social & emotional data -Whole staff training to academic learning -Improve outcomes for pupils working below age expected outcomes in Literacy & maths
Behaviours & Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -reduce the use of Physical Interventions - improve recording and reporting of incidents (including PIs) -Enhance opportunities for pupils to access a range of interventions -Ensure systems support therapeutic approaches to Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)
The Lodge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Enhance homely atmosphere -Effective monitoring in line with regulatory requirements -Develop the understanding of parents and service users about The Lodge -Support whole school approaches to therapeutic support

However, by the end of the year, governors considered that much had been achieved. The Senior Leadership Team was strengthened, with effective processes and systems in place, culminating in the appointment of a new Deputy Head Teacher at the end of the summer term. Work is continuing in terms of data collection, which will allow us to target interventions more effectively and measure the results. Good progress is being made towards the reduction in physical interventions and increase in Positive Behaviour Support, in particular with both staff and children adopting the "I do, I get" strategy very effectively. The Lodge underwent a major refurbishment over the year and now looks significantly more homely. While governors continue to

monitor the website to ensure compliance, we are very aware that it is not easy to use and looks very outdated.

Members of the Resources Committee carried out regular health and safety checks of the school, pointing out a few minor issues with school infrastructure on each visit and ensuring that these were corrected. An audit of purchasing orders and payroll was completed, checking both orders and ensuring best value for money was sought. Other financial audits needed to be held over to 2021/22 due to covid. The school budget was reviewed, questioned and agreed.

What will the GB be looking at over the next year?

A new School Improvement Plan will be introduced in September 2021 and will have a focus on the development of the curriculum and the gathering of assessment data; a development of outdoor learning; consolidation of the Senior Leadership Team and the development of an Extended Leadership team for middle managers; a continued drive for Positive Behaviour Support and the development of the interface between the Lodge and the school.