



## **GOVERNING BOARD IMPACT STATEMENT 2020-21**

The Governing Board continued to fulfil its three key responsibilities during the academic year 2020-21 of ensuring the school has a clear vision and strategic plan, holding Steph Harvey, as Acting Headteacher, to account for the educational performance of the school and the performance management of the staff and overseeing the financial performance of the school and ensuring money is well spent. The purpose of this statement is to outline the structure of and summarise the overall effectiveness of the Governing Board. To give additional context, areas of particular significance are explained in more detail through the document.

Since March 2020 the Governing Board has met virtually for all meetings but this, on occasions, has enabled us to meet at short notice with sufficient governors to be quorate. On these occasions we have been able to support the school by providing dynamic decisions and governance for key issues, e.g., extended opening, approval of risk assessments. During the Summer Term 2021 we have continued to meet virtually but have been able to visit the school to perform our individual governance roles. We have met face to face on one occasion to review the School Improvement Plan, determine our findings and report these to the School Leadership Team.

### **Composition and Attendance**

The structure of the Governing Board is as follows:

- One staff governor – elected by the staff
- The Headteacher – appointed automatically
- Two parent governors – elected by parents and carers
- One Local Authority governor – nomination approved by the Local Authority and appointed by the Governing Board
- Seven Foundation governors – appointed by the Diocese of Exeter

Our school has one Associate Member who is available to support the Board through being a panel member if required for formal hearings (e.g. exclusions, complaints, staff matters etc.). Beyond that he does not play an active role in the Governing Board.

Foundation governors have particular responsibility to uphold the Christian ethos of the school. All our governors have, in the opinion of the Governing Board, the skills and experience required to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school.

The Governing Board changed how it operates during the school year. Initially it was organised into two separate key committees that met once each term. These were:

- Resources (Finance, Health and Safety, Premises and Staffing)
- Teaching and Learning (Parent and Christian Community Links, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Inclusion, Safeguarding, Data and Curriculum)

In the Spring Term it was decided that to improve the effectiveness of the Governing Board the work of these committees would be incorporated into main Governing Board meetings. This means there are four Full Governing Board meetings each term where an expanded range of business is managed.

There are two specific and separate committees that meet in addition to the Full Governing Board:

- Leadership and Teachers' Pay (meets termly)
- Admissions (meets as required)

Committees to consider pupil discipline and staffing matters are set up as and when needed.

St Martin's School is a well-established school in our town and a key part of our community. We experience high levels of mobility, with children joining in years throughout the school between September and July. We have a stable core of children who spend their entire primary school education with us.

The last sixteen months has been an extremely challenging and difficult period for education and St Martin's is no different. The school has done an incredible job in maintaining high levels of attendance, even in the midst of two lockdown periods. It has focused on the needs of children who require extra help and support and in so doing has been a major supporter of the community. The school leadership team has been dynamic, responsive and focused on the needs of our children. It has done a wonderful job in supporting its staff and they, in turn, have displayed dedication and commitment to provide a good educational experience for their children over the past twelve months.

In a period when the resilience of children, parents and families have been tested like no other the school and all of its staff have provided stability, support and confidence which has helped immeasurably.

Due to the pandemic there are no statutory performance measures on which to assess ourselves and compare our children's achievements to others. The school has taken care to regularly assess the development of our children and we are confident that despite all the interruptions our children, as a whole, have made good progress. We know that some children have not fared well but they are known with plans to address their needs when they return next year. A number of subjects have not received the same attention as they would have had in previous years but there has been an understandable focus on the core subjects of English and Maths. As from September 2022 there are plans to provide a wider and more complete range of subjects.

Steph Harvey has been our Acting Head-Teacher throughout and has worked tirelessly in leading the school over a very difficult period of time. The Governing Board had plans to conduct a recruitment process for a new Head-Teacher during the Spring Term 2021 but this was affected by Lockdown 3.0. The governors decided we were unlikely to secure a good number of quality applicants, would be unable to show off our school to best effect and running a selection process virtually was not in the best interests of the school. Our plans included the new Head-Teacher starting in September 2022. As this was not viable, we

have asked Steph Harvey to continue in an acting capacity for another twelve months and we intend to have a permanent Head-Teacher in position by at least September 2022. This ensures we have a stable academic year 2021/22 with the least disruption for our children and staff.

We believe that we are a strong and effective Governing Board. The Board has a core of highly motivated governors who are willing to volunteer to take on roles. Morale is high, meetings are well-attended and individual contributions are good.

**See Appendix 1** for details of Governors on our Board during 2020-21.

## **Summary of Governor Activity**

### **Governance Development Action Plan**

In order for the Governing Board to be “the best we can be for ourselves, for each other and for God’s world”, we have objectives that sit within the School Improvement Plan under Leadership and Management.

#### **1: Membership, recruitment and training**

The Board has continued to see turnover in terms of membership and at the time of writing this report we have a number of vacancies that are proving difficult to fill. Over the past twelve months we have recruited three new governors but three governors have resigned due to the pressure of work in their full-time roles. Thanks go to Andy Wood, Hannah Wood and Lisa Malton who all contributed significantly to the workings of the board.

We are due to lose Reverend Lythan Nevard at the end of the school year and this will be a tremendous loss. As well as being our local minister she has been a wonderful governor, giving time, insight and a genuine focus on children to the board. We will miss her enormously. Efforts have been made throughout the year to identify new governors but at the end of the year we will be five governors below our establishment.

Fortunately, the governors we have are in possession of a wide set of skills and are increasingly confident in their understanding of the key issues facing the school. A mentoring and induction process is used for each new governor but all governors could do with more personal support and development. The quality of work undertaken by governors is good and although we are short of numbers this is made up by the amazing amount of work completed. They regularly go over and above what is expected so all Governing Board business is completed. Governors have demonstrated the ability to ask searching questions at Board Meetings to determine if the right actions are happening.

Governor training from the Governance Consultancy Team at Babcock LDP and the Diocese has moved online due to the lack of face to face meetings and opportunities. In house sessions regarding the new performance data system and safeguarding have been provided whilst all governors have been accessing online sessions provided by support services locally and nationally. There is good sharing, across the Governing Board, of lessons learned and information gathered at these sessions. Our training attendance has actually increased over the past twelve months.

All governors have been provided with access to the National College, which the school has signed up to. This has enabled individual governors to access training events through the college as well as recording continual professional development they have completed elsewhere. Governors have attended a range of external training including Ofsted framework training, governance development and governor progression.

The Governing Board is confident that we have a developing, committed group of governors who are competent in what they do. They are growing in experience.

## **2: Leadership**

The Chair of the Board has been in role for the past three years and over the past year has worked closely with the Head-teacher and the School Leadership Team to ensure the school is optimising the opportunities for our children in a period where full-time education has been disrupted.

He has been able to focus the energies of the Governing Board on key issues whilst making sure that basic governance roles, e.g., finance, staffing, premises, safeguarding and SEND have been fulfilled.

One substantial piece of work undertaken by the Governing Board and led by the Chair was to consider other operating models for the school, e.g. joining a Federation or a multi-academy trust (MAT). This involved making contact with a number of federations and MATs in Devon, holding meetings, determining the opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses and then coming to a decision. A large number of meetings were conducted, a number of discussions took place, staff were consulted with and a specific Governing Board meeting was held where a final decision was made. It was decided that the school would not change how it operated and would stay as it is. The key reasons we determined at the time were:

- The school has a clear identity and we want to preserve this
- We have our own ethos and were concerned this could be lost or affected by joining others
- Our financial situation is secure, better than many partnerships
- Our decision making is effective and prompt, this has given us a distinct advantage over other schools, e.g. opening the school more widely during the pandemic
- Our staff felt our school is unique and our good features may be threatened by joining a partnership with other schools
- We have an outward looking leadership team who are engaged with new educational opportunities
- Both the staff team and Governing Board already have strong links established with other local schools through the East Devon Church Schools Partnership, sharing practice, providing support and undertaking joint training.

Although nothing in effect changed this was a valuable experience and provided the governors with a broader view of operating models, governance and school leadership. This will stand us in good stead as we move forward.

Despite the pressure on staff and the governors due to the pandemic and other pieces of work it has been possible to develop the style of governance to suit the school. As mentioned above we have removed two committees and now hold more Full Governing Board meetings. Efforts are being made to remove duplication of effort and there is a much closer working relationship between the governors, staff at the school and the School Leadership Team. There are further plans to develop this during 2021/22. Special thanks must go to the Head-teacher who has valued the work of the governors, initiated new pieces of work and has generally inspired the board to work in a different and more focused way.

## **3: Strategy, support and challenge**

The School Improvement Plan continues to be a key item for the Governing Board cycle of work although the plan this year was much simpler due to the pandemic. Governors had limited opportunities to access the school for much of the year but it was gratifying to see

other means of communication being used to monitor what was happening. Key leads from the school were identified for the SIP and governors linked in with those members of staff to understand what progress was being made. When the school re-opened after Lockdown 3.0 in March 2021 governors stepped up their efforts. The Governing Board held its first face to face meeting of the school year in July 2021. It was a meaningful and valuable meeting where it was able to fully review the plan. The session was held in the absence of staff and the findings were presented to the School Leadership Team to reflect on the progress made and to support the development of next year's plan.

The approach to supporting children with Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) has remained an area of focus for the Governing Board. The ethos of the school remains very inclusive with both school and governing board striving to provide the best outcomes for our children. Progress has been made in the completion and management of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and this has ensured additional funding is received sooner, enabling the school to provide better support. The Head-teacher has worked wonders in making improvements in this key area.

The school has introduced one new initiative and is working on another, both of which should support our children with additional needs. The Inclusion Hub was introduced in the Summer term to support children with additional needs. It is in its early stages and should develop further during 2021/22. It has been introduced to support children being able to work more successfully in their classes whilst taking pressure off class teachers. Specialist support will seek to develop personal strategies to support learning behaviours and styles. The other initiative is the introduction of the bus that will be used as an additional facility within the school to support all children and build better connections with families and the local community. The bus is located within the main playground and is currently being adapted for use.

The curriculum has been a focus throughout for the school and Governing Board. The Board feels the school has effectively balanced providing 'catch up' learning on core subjects, providing continuity of learning during lockdowns and keeping a connection with other subjects whilst making sure the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children is supported. This has not been straight-forward but it is clear this has been considered and acted upon throughout the year.

Another focus has been the development of 'greater depth' learners and although a priority that could easily have been lost during the year we have experienced good progress. There are new plans to stimulate, inspire and challenge a large number of our children.

Learning behaviours have been good throughout the school year with low rates of exclusions and low numbers of part-time timetables whilst attendance rates have consistently been above county averages. This is impressive considering the demographics of Cranbrook. Behaviour in classrooms has been good despite significant pressure being placed upon children. The caring and nurturing approach of all our staff is seen as the key reason behind this. We have highly competent staff who have a good range of skills to support the needs their children have.

There are good links between local services and the school. Within the Early Years Foundation Stage there are good connections between health and social care services to support speech and language, behavioural and neurodiversity needs. This is creating good outcomes for many of our children who arrive at St Martin's with few learning skills. Through the skill of our staff and their connections with other services children are able to start Reception with solid learning foundations.

The budget, as usual, has been a continuing area of focus for the Governing Board this year. The financial position of the school has improved since the early part of 2020 and we are

now in a comparatively secure position. Good financial management, rigorous monitoring and good oversight is contributing to the is situation. Our Lead Governor for Finance has an excellent relationship with the School Business Manager, has a good knowledge of financial matters and supports in a constructive manner. One key point to note linking to the SEND paragraph above is the improved financial situation due to the more effective management of EHCPs. As well as receiving funding sooner due to improved processes, the school has received further funding due to the proportion of children at the school with EHCPs. This has improved our financial situation and allowed us to support our children more effectively. The school is securing good outcomes for its children with additional needs so there is good evidence of our effectiveness in this area.

The expansion of the nursery has been a significant focus over the last two years and the effort made is bearing fruit. Both are full and this is enabling us to support and develop a greater number of younger children and increase revenue for the school. An intended by-product is the number of children choosing to join the school at Reception stage. All of our current children eligible to join are starting in September. The school continues to have low numbers of children joining its Reception classes from other sources and we are continually seeking new ways of increasing our numbers.

We are aware of future plans to build new houses adjacent to the Younghayes end of Cranbrook and we are prepared to engage with the families this development attracts to boost our numbers. Elsewhere in the school the numbers are healthier with most of our older years approaching, or indeed over, full capacity. We attract good numbers from other local schools due to our inclusive approach. For example, over the last twelve months we have gained approximately 20 children.

#### **4: Ensuring accountability**

Governing Board engagement with parents and the local community has been difficult over the past sixteen months and it is acknowledged as a priority for the school year 2021/22. The focus of the Governing Board is monitoring the relationship between the school and families. Though this we know that the school has maintained strong links with parents, particularly through the use of media such as Class Dojo. Positive and effective lines of communication have been critical throughout the pandemic, especially with those children who have not accessed school during the lockdown periods. It is clear through our routine oversight and school surveys completed with parents that the style of communication has been appreciated, has worked and has reinforced the nurturing ethos of the school.

The Headteacher's annual appraisal was undertaken by a panel of governors and an external advisor during the Autumn Term to review previous and set new objectives. The new objectives related to the academic year ahead. The objective setting was followed up each term by meetings where progress is reviewed, personal development considered and work-life balance discussed. The objectives were affected by the lockdowns but the meetings provided opportunities to value the work of the Head-teacher, offered structured mentoring and considered the school's overall performance. This process is working well and supported by regular contact with the Head-teacher throughout the school year.

### **Other Governor Impacts**

#### **1: Health and Safety**

Over the pandemic health and safety has been a critical issue. The safety of children and staff is paramount and a huge amount of effort has been put into this. The school layout and the modern facilities have given us an advantage over many schools but good management and oversight has ensured these advantages have been maximised. An effective culture

has been developed, maintained and communicated to all relevant parties be they staff, children or parents. High levels of compliance have been evident throughout and this has ensured there have been limited incidents. At the time of writing only one 'bubble' has had to be closed, with staff and children having to self-isolate. The limited disruption has benefited our children enormously. Governors have been involved throughout, signing off risk assessments, providing the opportunity to discuss plans and giving reassurance that the right approach is being followed. This is a huge success story.

## **2: East Devon Church Schools Partnership (EDCSP)**

The East Devon Church School Partnership has continued with Withycombe Raleigh Primary School and the Otter Valley Federation as part of a collaboration agreement. The pandemic affected the amount of joint working but the respective head-teachers maintained in contact sharing good practice, providing support and creating sounding boards for each other. The series of joint governor/head-teacher meetings continued and are of use. I feel as the pressure grows to work more closely together with other schools we will need to get more from these opportunities and our priority for 2021/22 will be to review how these meetings should operate to best effect.

## **3: Policies and budget review**

The lead governors review all policies on a regular basis. This is not a tick box exercise; rather each policy is given careful scrutiny and updated as needed. In all our work, but particularly in this area, our impact has been all the greater thanks to having an excellent Clerk to the Governors, Jacqueline Brooks, whose record keeping and reminders enable us to function as a Governing Board.

## **4: Financial management and care for buildings**

The School Business Manager, Brigid Thompson, provides succinct financial reports that allows the Governing Board to monitor the budget at regular points during the financial year. As already reported the Lead Governor for Finance manages this specifically for the board but this is an area where this is reinforced by Full Governing Board oversight. The School Business Manager regularly attends Full Governing Board meetings to answer questions and discuss financial matters.

The Lead Governor for Premises and Health & Safety works with the School Business Manager to monitor issues including buildings, maintenance, information security etc.. Feedback is now provided to the Full Governing Board. The annual site "walkabout" by the Business Manager and the Lead Governor for Premises and Health & Safety was not possible this year due to restrictions on access to the school site. The lead governor and the School Business Manager have discussed this through other means and this process will be resumed in the Autumn Term 2021.

The lead governor and the School Business Manager now regularly review the strategic use of the school site. There have been improvements over the use of space within the school, e.g. co-locating the SENCo, the Family Advocate and IT Manager, development of the school pond for educational purposes. This aspect is becoming increasingly important with the demands on the school growing.

## **4: Governor visits and input to the school**

As already mentioned this part of governor activity has been disrupted as visitors were prevented from entering the school for large parts of the school year. As soon as the restrictions eased governors resumed visits and there have been a large number since Match 2021.

Several governors have maintained or resumed their volunteering at the school, e.g. class support in maths, leading Collective Worship and this enables them to gain different perspectives.

The blend of skills provided by a small group of governors is impressive, e.g. HR, Finance, Leadership, Analysis, Surveys, Safeguarding, community work and this supports the Governing Board being open-minded, receptive to new ideas, motivated and constructive.

## **5: School Christian Ethos**

As a Voluntary Aided (VA) school the Board, and in particular the Foundation governors, are responsible for upholding and contributing to the Christian ethos of the school. Every Governing Board meeting and committee begins with prayer and ends with the question "How has this meeting benefited our children and contributed to the Christian distinctiveness of the school?". Having to answer this question reminds the Governors of their particular role in improving this.

Responses recorded in recent Governing Boards are set out below and help to demonstrate the impact of the Board with regards to Christian distinctiveness;

September 2020

- All the discussion that the school has helped children cope with Covid – it is good for governors to appreciate this
- Understanding the impact of Covid and moderate our work so that the children and staff are looked after
- How we practise our governance but without an unfair burden on the school
- The values really shine through in our meetings
- There has been quite a clear focus in the DIS children and how they need support to make accelerated progress.

October 2020

- Exploring alternative leadership models was about providing the best possible school for the children – undertaking this exercise shows the commitment governors have to the school. The research was undertaken with the best interests of the school
- The research and discussion process has highlighted the many positives of St. Martin's as a school
- RG feels the decision to remain independent will be seen as a huge confident boost to staff and confirmation that governors believe in what the staff do
- The exercise has been about focusing also on staff and them getting what they need. Governors agreed it is the staff who make the school what it is
- The approach of governors models behaviour which echoes that of everyone in the wider school family

December 2020

- GB discussion on developing and improving governance based in its Christian distinctiveness
- The GB's scrutiny of the HT report looked at the breadth of children and issues across the school and did not just focus solely on attainment. This reflects the Christian ethos and values of St. Martin's
- The leadership team and the GB are modelling behaviours and values which then run throughout the school



### January 2021

- Receiving the safeguarding training and ensuring all governors understand their responsibilities has been critical
- The approach shown that safeguarding is not just about the school, but about the whole local community, is very much in line with the Christian ethos
- The school's response to Covid serves the community as a whole and recognises the need for an inclusive approach and to do the best for those more in need
- The GB is acutely mindful of the need to look after the school staff and ensure their well-being. The GB is supportive but still is working to ensure that good standards for pupils remain in place
- RG stated that it is clear that the GB values the staff and their support came across very strongly at this meeting. He will be feeding this back to the staff team

### February 2021

- The way the governors work shows how people of different backgrounds can work together as a team; this models a good example for the children
- The focus of the GB is the well-being of children and staff and ensuring safeguarding is in place
- Discussions around the structure of the TA team were focused on making the best use of support possible to put in place
- Planning for use of the bus shows a commitment to supporting the wider community of families locally, not just the pupils
- The holistic approach taken to staff and pupils is evidence of the Christian distinctiveness of the school

### March 2021

- Hearts, minds and well-being are the key focus of governors and staff alike
- The change to the governance structure so that all governors see how all areas of the school are working is more holistic
- Lead Governor reports have been comprehensive and create a good record of doing governance well. This will in turn support the children well.
- The background experiences and skills of governors are feeding well into the work of the GB
- The meeting has shown a really strong focus by the GB on outcomes for children. The GB's intent is to ensure that children are getting the best start possible and that no-one is missing out – this includes every child.
- The GB acts as a check to ensure the school's ethos runs through everything

### March 2021

- The proposal for a governance event which will include the whole GB and link with the school community will create a better sense of community spirit and be a distinctive piece of work for this GB. It will also provide an opportunity for the children to see governors and staff working in partnership and to better understand what governance is.
- Promoting the positives of the school more and publicizing more widely the positive feedback about the school on social media will raise the profile of the school.

- Plans to develop and increase Collective Worship to retain some of the online approaches demonstrate how valued it is
- SIP Monitoring reports evidence further how child-centred governance and school processes are at St. Martin's
- GB meetings are all about supporting the school to be able to function with the children at the centre of everything

#### April 2021

- Governors now have a good understanding of the data system and how this will positively impact the children. FFT is one of a number of measures that support the positive development of our children.
- The way in which governor contributions are valued and welcomed is very Christian and will in turn have a positive impact upon the school
- That the data reporting system is aspirational for all pupils feels very equitable
- The quiet and strong commitment of the governors is seen also within the staff team

#### May 2021

- The GB's agreement to support the creation of the Learning Hub will have a hugely positive impact on both staff and pupils
- ETHOS group discussions reflect the clear values of the school
- Approval of the budget stems from the GB understanding and seeking the best use of money for the children
- Understanding attainment data and Covid impacts on children, especially those children who are disadvantaged, means governors are really focused on improving outcomes for all, and in particular those who have been identified as having been most impacted by the lockdowns

#### June 2021

- The GB thanked one of the governors for taking on so many of the Lead Governor roles following the number of vacancies now on the GB. This has meant that all aspects of governor work have remained covered. It was felt that 'going the extra mile' in this way was very Christian
- The focus as always remains on ensuring that children who need the most support receive it, and that all children are treated in a nurturing, loving way

Collective Worship has been an example of good practice during the pandemic where innovation, commitment and hard work has created good outcomes for our children. Although our children were in their 'bubbles' technology was used to maintain connections and allow them to communicate with Reverend Nevard. The use of smaller groups has allowed some of our less confident children to contribute, be involved in activities and participate in discussions. There have been exciting conversations which have developed further through the imaginative provision of thought-provoking topics.

At points throughout the year key Christian features, e.g. the Parables, were introduced and evidence shows greater participation and consideration of how they can relate to our lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The school has benefited hugely from having a local minister with high levels energy and a strong local connection. We hope we are able to have a similar relationship with her replacement.

## **Conclusion**

Through all of the Governing Board meetings, our actions and questions, reviewing of policy and creating new School Improvement Plans we are clear that the children are the centre of everything at St Martin's.

The Governors believe that our best impact can be seen through a school that has an ethos of care, a foundation of faith and that strives to support and encourage children – and staff and families – to be the best they can be.

**Appendix 1 - GB Membership 2020-21**

Head-teacher	Steph Harvey
Staff Governor	Russ Green
Chair	John Clements
Vice-Chair	Jason Knight
Lead Governor for Finance	Jason Knight
Lead Governor for Staffing	Sam Jamieson
Lead Governor for SEND & Inclusion	Rev Lythan Nevard
Lead Governor for Parent and Christian Community Links	Claire Morrison/Andy Wood
Lead Governor for Early Years	Liz Kane
Lead Governor for Safeguarding	Lisa Malton/John Clements
Lead Governor for Premises/H&S	John Clements
Lead Governor for Data/Curriculum	John Clements/Hannah Wood

## Appendix 2: 2020-21 Meetings Attendance

	Full GB		Teaching & Learning*		Resources*		Leadership & Teachers' Pay		Admissions	
	Possible	Attended	Possible	Attended	Possible	Attended	Possible	Attended	Possible	Attended
Steph Harvey	11	11	1	1	1	1			0	0
John Clements	11	11	1	1	1	1	3	3	0	0
Lythan Nevard	11	11	1	1						
Jason Knight	11	11			1	1	3	3	0	0
Russ Green	10	9			1	1				
Liz Kane	10	10	1	1			1	1		
Sam Jamieson	9	8			1	1	3	2		
Claire Morrison	8	8								
<i>The following governors either resigned or completed their term of office in-year.</i>										
Andrew Wood	3	2	1	0						
Hannah Wood	4	2	1	1						
Lisa Malton	9	4	1	1						
Mel Turl (Associate)	1	1								

*\*The governance structure of the Board changed at the end of 2020 with Committees reduced to only Leadership & Teachers' Pay and Admissions.*