



# St Mary's C of E (VA) First School

'Excellence Together, Learning through Faith'

## Governor Newsletter

January 2014

Dear parents and carers,

This newsletter aims to give you an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the Governing Body and to update you on our strategic aims for the school.

### What is a Governing Body?

We are a group of volunteers, who work collectively, as a corporate body, forming part of the school leadership. We have three main roles:

- Providing strategic direction – setting overall aims
- Acting as a "critical friend" to the headteacher, supporting the school, but also asking challenging questions
- Ensuring accountability in all areas of the school's activities - assuring high standards of education, ensuring effective school management and organisation, ensuring value for public money by efficient and appropriate allocation of resources

The governors do not run the school on a day to day basis, but are responsible for determining the overall strategic direction and they call those who run the school to account for how they do it.

### What do we do?

The ways in which we fulfil our three main roles include:

- Establishing the school's ethos, aims and objectives
- Overseeing the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement
- Being accountable to all key stakeholders for the school's performance
- Setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives through the school improvement plan
- Monitoring and evaluating the progress the school is making towards those objectives
- Being a source of challenge and support to the headteacher
- Approving policies for the achievement of our objectives
- Looking outward to form effective partnerships and stakeholder engagement to deliver 'every child matters' outcomes for children in the school's community
- Setting and monitoring the school budget
- Appointing the headteacher and assisting in teacher recruitment
- As a Voluntary aided (VA) school, we are the employer of staff, the admitting authority and have responsibility for any new building or external repairs (supported by a grant from the Department for Education of up to 90%).

### Our strategic aims:

This term, we have reviewed our strategic aims, taking into account the views of our pupils, their parents and our staff. The output was:

A new mission statement, "To be a caring, Christian environment, nurturing a life-long love of learning".

A new motto, "Excellence together, learning through faith"

With a whole-hearted commitment to putting our Christian faith and spiritual development at the heart of St Mary's, we aim to:

- achieve excellence in all that we do
- deliver the highest standards of teaching and learning
- develop happy, confident children, instilled with a life-long love of learning
- create an environment where everyone in the school can reach their full potential
- encourage mutual respect, acceptance and tolerance throughout our community
- encourage a true partnership between the school, parents, the parish, governors and the local authority, for the benefit of our children

### Who are the Governors?

Our governing body is made up of representatives of all those groups who have an interest, or stake, in the effective delivery of education and care of the pupils in our school. These groups are represented by the different categories of governors. As a VA school, the majority of our governors have to be foundation (church/Diocese) governors.

Governors are elected or appointed for a term of office of four years and the Chair and Vice Chair are elected annually. You can find our photos in the entrance hall.

Mark Drew and Jonathan Gordon took up the Chairmanship from September 2013. This year we have welcomed Haidee van Duyvenbode and Brian Etheridge to the governing body and we look forward to David White joining us in February.

Head teacher	Elly Haezewindt
Ex-officio (Incumbent)	Jonathan Gordon (Co-Chair)
Parent Governor	Mark Drew (Co-Chair)
St Mary's PCC	Heidi Baker Peach Berry Hannah Horton Andrew Reay Haidee van Duyvenbode
St Albans Diocese	Helen Holmes-Higgin (Vice Chair) David White (from Feb 2014)
Local Educ. Authority	Sue Yeomans
Parish Council	Brian Etheridge
Teaching staff	TBC
Non-teaching staff	Karen Bristow
Associate governor	Lynne Barclay David Jervis
Observer	Tom Potter

### Committees, panels and individual linked roles:

We organise ourselves into committees, who report back in to the full governing body. These are:

- Finance and premises
- Curriculum (focussing on pupil progress, pupil attainment and the quality of teaching)
- Personnel, pupils and community
- Ethos group (sub-committee of the Curriculum committee, monitoring, evaluating and developing the Christian ethos of the school)

We also have a Steering Committee, which takes a strategic and co-ordinating role, made up of the headteacher, Chairs and Vice Chair of Governors and the Chairs of the committees.

We form panels to look after particular areas of responsibility eg admissions, exclusions, headteacher performance management.

We have set up a working party, headed up by Andrew Reay, to look after construction for the school expansion project. Please look out for regular updates from the team as we move forward with the expansion.

We appoint governors to become linked to a subject (e.g. Maths, Literacy) or a particular aspect of the school's operation (e.g. Special Educational Needs, Parent Forum, Health and Safety). These governors gain detailed knowledge of their linked area, supporting and challenging the subject co-ordinator (the teacher who oversees this area) to drive progress and attainment. They report back to the full governing body.

### Your views are important to us

We are committed to listening to and understanding the views and needs of our pupils and their parents. Some of the ways we do this include:

**Annual parent questionnaires** – we would strongly encourage you to fill these in, adding comments in the space provided on the form. The results are analysed, circulated to the whole governing body and then feed into our strategic planning.

**Annual pupil questionnaires** - next year, rather than filling in these in during school time, your child will fill in the questionnaire alongside you, at home. We ask for the children's names on the responses, enabling follow up of any individual concerns raised.

**Parent Forum** - gives parents the opportunity to give express their views and to contribute to the development of the school. Issues that you would like to put to the Headteacher and the governing body can be raised at the half termly meeting. Issues that the head and the governing body would like to ask for parental feedback on are taken to the meetings. If you would like to stand as a representative, please contact the school office.

If you have a concern or a complaint which is specific to your child, your first port of call should be the class teacher, or other appropriate member of staff (e.g. the Special Needs Co-ordinator, if the concern is regarding special needs). If the issue is of general concern, you should make this known to the Headteacher, or it can be raised at the Parent Forum. Individual governors should not provide an alternative route to voicing parental concerns. However, if any matter is not resolved to your satisfaction using the routes above, you can write formally to Mark Drew / Jonathan Gordon Co-Chairs of governors, c/o the school. Please see our complaints policy summary on the website for more details.

In the spring term, you will receive an update from Mrs Haezewindt and the governing body on our priorities for school improvement in the coming year.

We hope that this gives you a clearer understanding of who the governors at St Mary's are and the role that we play at the school. The governors appreciate your partnership in supporting your children's learning, but also through your involvement with the School Association and its activities, like the recent Christmas Fayre.

### Thoughts from a new Governor:

Becoming a Governor is something I have been considering for some time. I took the plunge in September 2013.

I really wanted to be actively involved with my children's school but was finding it difficult to help in school time with a part-time teaching job and a hectic family life.

I have been teaching in primary schools since 1995 and have worked with children from YR up to Y6. I currently work 2 days a week in Y5 in a large Primary school in Hertfordshire. I thought my classroom experience would stand me in good stead as a member of the Curriculum Committee. In many ways it has, I have an understanding of (most) of the jargon, of the implications of levels and targets, of the curriculum and what is realistic and achievable in the classroom. However, although I have been working in primary schools for such a long time, I really had no idea how the Governing Body worked, nor how enormous the role as a Governor would be. It's a huge commitment. It's not just about attending meetings, sipping tea, eating biscuits and nodding sagely. It's hard work! There is a lot of preparation before we meet, mountains of paper work, training courses to attend, visits to the school, reports to write...

We are so blessed to have a great team of earnest, dedicated, hard-working Governors at St Mary's. One thing that has become undeniably apparent to me since September is that the members of our Governing Body have our children's welfare at the centre of everything they do.

Before my first meeting I was really nervous, I was worried I'd be out of my depth. I was right! I do try to contribute to discussions in meetings though. I am certain I often state the obvious or ask silly questions, but I have only ever found the other Governors to be supportive.

It's hard work, but I am hoping to play a teeny part in helping our school to be the very best that it can be. I'm proud to be a part of the team.

Haidee van Duyvenbode

