

Governors' Report to Parents & Guardians

School Year 2019/20

Many of us will not forget the school year 2019/20. Lockdown due to Covid 19 meant that many of The Mill children spent about half the year “home schooling”. This produced challenges for both families and the teaching staff and the impact of some of these will no doubt carry into the new school year.

To use a well-known football phrase, for governors the year was very much like “a game of two halves”. Starting the year with our normal meetings taking place in school – including a governor visit day – like many others in the UK, we then had to adapt to “virtual meetings” using the internet. This worked well and governor meetings for the foreseeable future will continue to use this format.

A key focus for governors during the year was to look at how the school was delivering the broader curriculum – i.e. subjects other than Reading, Writing and Maths. This was therefore the focus of the governor visit day which took place in October 2019. The day’s programme included a presentation on the new history curriculum, and the opportunity for pairs of governors to meet up with different subject leads and question them on how their subject was being delivered. Governors were pleased to see how there was a clear link in the subject content from one year to the next and that subject leads were monitoring how it was being delivered to ensure consistency.

The past six months have shown the importance of Information Technology to us as a society and governors have asked questions in the past about how the school was going to deliver this important subject. This led to a presentation being given at the full governing body meeting in December 2019. A clear plan was demonstrated and we were told that parts of the curriculum would be trialled in a couple of Year Groups prior to a fuller implementation commencing in the new school year. Obviously, lockdown prevented this from happening, but governors look forward to seeing what will be implemented in the coming months. They hope to see the school accelerating the use of IT to enable the delivery of a rich curriculum, given how important remote learning could be going forwards.

Part of the governors' role is to monitor and hold the school leadership to account for children's attainment and progress. We were advised at the start of the school year that a new system to enable senior management to track attainment and progress was being introduced. This happened and a presentation was given at the full governing body meeting in December 2019. Unfortunately, it was too early for governors to see actual data at that time and, in view of the likelihood that fully comprehensive data might not be available until nearer March 2020, governors asked for, and received, a summary of the data early in the New Year. A series of questions about the data were submitted to the Head Teacher and responses received. Unfortunately, further follow in this area was not practical due to lockdown.

Governors are keen to learn the view that parents and guardians have of the school, so asked the Head Teacher to conduct such a survey in October 2019. The results were subsequently discussed at the full governing body meeting in December. Governors were pleased to see that the responses to most questions were positive. There were two or three issues where the feedback was not so good and the school leadership were challenged to take actions to address them. We planned to have a follow up survey in the Summer to see what impact the actions had had, but Covid 19 stopped this.

Lockdown at the end of March changed everything. With the school operating in a different way and priorities changing, so the emphasis of the meetings had to change. Meetings in March and April were cancelled but, by May it became possible to organise governing body meetings over the internet and three of these took place during the Summer months.

Initial focus was on what the school were doing for the children of key workers and those deemed vulnerable, who were still attending school. However, we also asked questions about what was being done for the majority of children who were at home and wanted to know what the school was doing to maintain contact with all parents and guardians, whether or not their children were at school. As well as finding out what support was provided for the education of the children at home, governors challenged the leadership on what they were doing to ensure the safety of such children – particularly around the topic of safeguarding. The responses received indicated that the leadership were definitely focused on this issue and that regular contact was being maintained with all children and parents/guardians.

Subsequently governors' focus moved to the risk assessments that were produced, both prior to the return to school in June of Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 children, and a subsequent one prior to the whole school return in September. Our aim was to understand how the school were going to keep both children and staff safe with a far larger number of people in the building at any one time. In both cases senior management were challenged over a number of issues – as part of a meeting in the first case and with written questions via email for the second one. Satisfactory responses were received in both cases.

The final meeting of the year provided the opportunity for governors to find out how the first risk assessment was working and what was being done to support the education of those children in Year Groups 2-5 who were still at home. A key question related to the children's access to the internet at home. We were pleased to hear that only a few children had very limited or no internet access and that the school were providing those children with alternative means of learning.

Governors have a responsibility to monitor the spending of the school budget and, like most aspects of school life, this has been a challenge this year. However, we are pleased to report that, at the date of writing, the school has kept within its delegated budget.

As governors, we recognise that the school staff and leadership have faced many challenges this year but trust that, in the future, they will be able to look back and be “forever proud” of how they responded during the second half of the 2019/2020 academic year.

The Mill Governors

October 2020