

Review of Governance Interim Report – Lostock Hall Academy School, Lancashire

Reviewer name	Karina Carter, National Leader of Governance
School	
Name of contact	Margaret Scrivens
Role	Chair of Governors
Name of school	Lostock Hall Academy
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Main issues raised by Ofsted	<p>The issues highlighted refer to the Governance of the Academy. In addition to requesting a Review of Governance, with a specific focus on the use of pupil premium, the report also stated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders and governors have been complacent and have let the decline in achievement go on for too long. • Governors have been slow to tackle the underlying causes of poor performance, such as weak teaching. • Until recently the school did not have a clear idea of just how poorly students were doing because systems to check on students' progress were inadequate. • Governors have not challenged the school quickly enough to remove the large gaps in achievement that exist across the school. • The Governing Body has not acted sufficiently swiftly to make sure that the funds the school received were targeted at improving achievement for this group of students. • Governors bring considerable expertise from the outside world, and show loyalty and commitment to the school. They have developed much more confidence in holding the school to account and have a good grasp of where the strengths and weaknesses are. • The very recently reorganised senior leadership team has begun to tackle the barriers to success with urgency and vigour. This team...has a clear line of sight on what needs to be done to improve this school.
Key priorities for improvement identified through the self-review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a Governing Body (GB) Action Plan that will sit alongside the Post-Ofsted Statement of Action. • Improve understanding of how to use performance data to hold Head / SLT to account. • Provide training for all governors, particularly on use of Pupil Premium.
Key actions to be undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Plan at end of document.

Biography of Reviewer

Karina Carter has been a school governor for over 25 years, and is currently the Chair of Governors at Stretford High School, a role she has held since 2006. The school has been the subject of an Ofsted inspection in May 2013, and is currently graded as Good, whilst Governance received an Outstanding judgement. She is also Chair of Governors for Longsight Community Primary School, a new Free School that opened its doors in September 2013. She became one of the first NLGs in March 2012, and is currently supporting a number of schools in Bury and Tameside. She works in a professional capacity for Manchester City Council as a manager in the Complex Families Parenting Team, and has been an elected member for Trafford Council, holding the shadow portfolios for Education and Supporting Families. Karina is also a lay-Member of the Trafford Safeguarding Children's Board.

Background and Context

Lostock Hall Academy was inspected in October 2013, and was graded as Inadequate. There was a recommendation in the Ofsted report for the Governing Body to undertake a Review of Governance, including a specific focus of the Academy's use of pupil premium.

The Reviewer met with 14 governors of the Academy – these included Staff and Teacher Governors, Parent Governors and Community Governors. Also in attendance at the meeting were the Head, Deputy Head, two Assistant Heads, the Business Manager and the Clerk. The number of people present at the meeting indicates how seriously the Governors are taking their commitment to improve the school. They were fully aware that there were areas for improvement, and they were keen to show how they were dedicated to moving the school out of this category.

The GB has recently (December 2013) appointed a new Chair of Governors, Margaret Scrivens, who is highly capable, articulate and motivated in her desire to improve the Academy, and the previous, long-serving, experienced Chair Bill Pitcher has remained on the Governing Body to offer support to the new Chair.

Process of the Review

The Reviewer conducted a review of the relevant GB paperwork, and spent an evening in school meeting the GB. The Reviewer read previous minutes of Full Governing Body meetings and sub-committee meetings, the Post-Ofsted Statement of Action, and the Governing Body Self Evaluation that had been undertaken in 2012/13. She read the Ofsted report and looked at the school's website. She had telephone conversations with both Mr Pitcher and Mrs Scrivens prior to visiting the school.

It is immediately obvious to the Reviewer that these Governors, who have a tremendous amount of expertise and knowledge, are highly committed to the process of improving the school, and have a shared strategic vision for what they need to do to support the Head Teacher in this process.

The purpose was to undertake a self-review exercise around the All-Party Parliamentary Group's Twenty Questions for Governing Bodies. The Reviewer divided the report into nine sections, based on the Ofsted Evaluation Criterion (in bold throughout the document).

Main findings

There is no doubt that Lostock Hall Academy has been through a period of turbulence since converting to an Academy. They have had three Heads in the past 18 months, and this has led to the Governors losing focus on the achievement of pupils and their own roles and responsibilities. They understand that progress, particularly in English has been slow, and they admit to lacking knowledge around what was expected of them regarding pupil premium funding. They knew 'what' it was being spent on, but didn't question 'why?', and 'what difference has that made?'.

How well Governors ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

The Governors display clearly that they have a unified vision for the school to improve, and they are happy to hold the Head Teacher to account. They demonstrate their knowledge that the GB needs to take a strategic, rather than operational role. They are happy to act as 'Critical Friends', and need to know how they ensure accountability. They had previously relied too heavily on the information they had been given, without asking relevant questions, and admit that they had become complacent.

Governors have played a significant role in creating a vision for the future of the Academy that is shared by all members of the school community. They understand that they have a key role to play in monitoring the Post-Ofsted Statement of Action, which has SMART targets. They are confident that they have the skills to do this, and have recently recruited Governors based on the skills they can bring – business acumen, project management and data interrogation for example. The Reviewer suggests that, for future recruitment of Governors, the GB needs to encourage applications from a more diverse section of the population.

In July 2013, prior to the Inspection in October they had modified their sub-committee structure; the Curriculum Committee has become the Academic Achievement Committee, with a broader remit to look at achievement, attainment and particularly at levels of progress. This Committee now also monitors subjects and pupils causing concern. There is also a Financial Management Committee and a Pupil and Staff Welfare Committee.

The Governors confidently state that the meetings they run are effective. They have an excellent Clerk, and the optimum number of people – enough to contribute to a discussion, but not too many to hinder progress. Their strategic planning cycle drives the GB's activities and agenda-setting – sub-committee meetings are held at appropriate times and Governors feel that their sub-committees work well; there is little duplication with Full Governing Body meetings, where decisions are brought to be ratified, rather than discussed again.

The Governors have named Link Governors that are paired with Subject Leaders, and this will go a long way to gaining a better understanding of how the Academy operates, and to improve the visibility of Governors. This needs to be developed further, so that Governors understand their role in this capacity, and they should try to meet with their allocated teacher at least every term.

How well Governors contribute to the school's self-evaluation, and understand its strengths and weaknesses

Whilst Governors have made a start on recruiting by skill set, they are aware there is still some way to go. It is a large GB, and they have discussed whether to reconstitute under *The School Governance (Constitution) (England) regulations 2012*. Whilst this is not something they want to rush, they are aware that it is an issue they will have to return to. Not all the Governors play a full and active role, and the Chair and Clerk are looking at issuing criteria for the appointment of Governors. They are going to instigate a procedure for re-electing Community Governors when their terms of office are finished. Governors also felt it would be useful to look at other local schools and Academies, to see how many Governors they have, and if they manage on a smaller number.

Since Ofsted, Governors are beginning to gain a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's overall performance. They have undergone a training session on understanding data, and feel more able to cross-reference and challenge what they are told by school leaders. They are familiar with RAISEonline, the school Data Dashboard and data from Fischer Family Trust. Governors understand the importance of looking at Levels of Progress rather than just raw results, and ensure that teachers' reports are easy to comprehend.

The Post-Ofsted Statement of Action indicates that Governor monitoring of progress in achieving the key improvement priorities is expected, and will be monitored. References to Link Governors, particularly the Governor responsible for pupil premium, sub-committees, Chairs of Committees and reports to the Full Governing Body meetings, are prominent throughout the report. Governors appreciate that they will have to play an extensive role in this process to help the school emerge from Special Measures.

The Governors feel that they listen to and understand their pupils, parents and staff. School conducts surveys of pupils and parents, and a Parental Forum has recently been established. The new Head understood the necessity of involving parents more closely in the work of the school, particularly as there had been some unfavourable coverage of the Academy in the local press, which was essentially political in nature. Parents are now fully on board with the measures put in place, and the Parent Governors have been very supportive of the new Head.

Governors believe that the staff are very appreciative of the work that they do, and Governors attend many events within the school. One Governor reported how she feels there is a lot of respect for the GB, and all her interactions with staff, parents and pupils had been really positive. The Governors felt that there was still room for improvement, and that staff need to ensure that Governors are fully involved in the life of the Academy. Governors were prepared to give up more time to get involved on a day-to-day basis – as long as they perceived it to be worthwhile and appropriate. They are happy to ask for time off work if coming into the school was useful. One Governor suggested it might be useful to pair a Governor with a year group, so that Governor could follow a Year through school. This is an interesting idea and will be discussed at the Academic Standards Committee. Governors were mindful that some staff may be wary of Governors having closer links with staff, so Mrs Brimelow has said she will raise it with the SLT to see how best this can be done.

How well Governors support and strengthen school leadership

Governors articulated high expectations for their school, and are aware that there are many benefits to working collaboratively. The Academy has a lot of links within their local community. They work well with another Lancashire school, Broughton High School and have good links with their feeder schools and the local primary school. Local businesses help out with practice interviews for students, and also at a careers event that is held in school. Staff and governors alike attend network meetings and forums. Governors are aware that to improve they need to be making additional external links, looking at existing good practice both locally and nationally, and offering support where they can.

Governors are actively involved in recruiting Senior Leaders, and have recently appointed a new Head, in whom they have the utmost confidence. They are aware of the necessity for succession planning, and have undertaken this since the inspection. A new Chair has been appointed, who has the necessary

knowledge and skills to support the new Head, whilst not being afraid to challenge. Governors trust the new Chair and Head, and are being proactive in helping them to establish themselves in their new positions.

How well Governors provide challenge and hold the Headteacher and other senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and pupils' behaviour and safety

Governors are fully aware of asking the question 'what more can be done to improve the quality of teaching and pupil achievement?'. They admit that their previous understanding of Data, Achievement and Targets was weak. They have undergone training in data interpretation and feel much more confident now – they describe themselves as having made 'significant progress'. Governors understand that the school uses a range of interventions, and more importantly, can now tell how these interventions make a difference.

The Assistant Head demonstrated how data is now presented to Governors, in a format that they understand, RAG-rated and focussed on outcomes for groups of children – e.g. those with special needs, C/D border pupils etc. They know about the Scorecard that school uses to track progress, and they are confident enough to be able to identify trends. In future they want to track whether the results match the data drops, which will be possible by the Autumn term. They are also aware that they must look at their results and levels of progress within a national context, as well as how they are performing year on year.

Governors are presented with Subject Reports, which can be of variable quality. Whilst there is a standard template for teachers to use, there is a disparity in the information that Governors receive. Some reports are very specific and others are vague, and guidelines have been produced for Heads of Departments to summarise their SEFs, so that Governors have a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses of each department. There was a discussion about inviting specific members of staff to Academic Achievement Committee to discuss areas of success and those in need of improvement – Governors feel confident that they are now in a position to have these bold and brave conversations with staff.

Ofsted had no concerns about pupils' behaviour and safety, and Governors are clearly proud of how pupils enjoy coming to school. Attendance and punctuality are good and improving, and exclusions are low.

How well Governors use performance management systems, including the performance management of the Headteacher, to improve teaching, leadership and management

Since her appointment, Governors have already conducted a Head Teacher's Performance Review, aided by the SIP from Lancashire County Council, who they respect. This was a very thorough process, with measurable targets, benchmarked against the Action Plan. The Head reported that Governors had set her challenging targets, which she welcomed. The Head will be subject to termly reviews, ensuring a robust and rigorous process. The link between self-evaluation, the Post-Ofsted Statement of Action and appraisal and performance management process was clearly articulated when Governors discussed this.

Governors are also aware of the appraisal process in place, that will help to monitor staff performance. They are going to monitor the impact of CPD on the quality of teaching, leadership and management, and pupil progress. The Headteacher's report to Governors shares evidence that performance management is robust, and includes explicit information about threshold and links to pay.

How well Governors ensure solvency and probity, and that the financial resources made available to the school are managed effectively

The Governors describe the financial systems within the school as excellent. They are audited annually and the School Business Manager confirmed that the financial management systems were robust and that Governors ensure best value for money. The Governors have received training on Finance Matters, and this was not raised as a concern in the Ofsted report.

However, the Review of Governance was directed to have a particular focus on the monitoring of the Pupil Premium, although no formal training has been provided by the National College of Teaching and Learning to enable NLG's to complete this task, as yet. Lostock Hall may want to engage an NLE with direct experience of using PP to 'close the gap', to further their knowledge.

The Governors gave various reasons for not having a good grasp on this funding, and readily admit they were aware of the funding, but did not concentrate on its' outcomes or impact. They are rectifying this now, and are willing to put lots of effort into ensuring that this money is used to narrow the gap for pupils who receive it. They understand the majority of the money is spent on salaries, giving one-to-one tuition, helping with Special Needs provision and school visits. They are now asking specific questions about 'what difference has that made?' and 'how can we tell that was because of the money spent?' Further training is required.

How well Governors operate in such a way that statutory duties are met and priorities are approved

Governors clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. When Governors start their term of office they are given an induction pack of what to expect. The GB buys into Lancashire's Governor Support package which gives them access to training. They rate highly the service they receive regarding training. They have undergone some whole Governing Body Training on Safeguarding and exclusions, but would like some more Whole GB Training, as they also found it a good opportunity to get to know the other Governors more, as well as developing their skills. They expressed an interest in some training being linked to the curriculum. The Governors are aware that it is important to use part of the budget on their development so they can carry out their roles effectively.

Lostock Hall Governors value their Clerk, Sharon, immensely. She is obviously a pillar of the school and GB, and ensures that the Governors are well aware of their duties. The Clerk expressed some reservations about the support she gets from the LA over Agenda setting, and has expressed some interest in further training opportunities.

How well Governors engage with key stakeholders

In addition to the previously mentioned surveys, Parents Forum and links with other schools / industry, the Academy also sends out a weekly newsletter to parents. Governors see themselves as Ambassadors for the school and are happy to contribute to the newsletter. The new website is an exciting development, and Governors are going to have a separate section, possibly with photos and a small profile about themselves. One of the Governors has offered to co-ordinate this, and it will indeed lead to further transparency. Governors are mindful that the December 2013 'Subsidiary Guidance for Inspectors' issued by Ofsted states *'governors ...are transparent and accountable, including in terms of governance structures, attendance at meetings and contact with parents and carers'*, and as a result may look at publishing the Minutes of their meetings on their new website.

How well Governors use the pupil premium and other resources to overcome barriers to learning, including reading, writing and mathematics

As PP has been covered in this report I will refer to Q20 of the Parliamentary Questions. How much has the school improved over the last 3 years and what has the GB's contribution been to this?

Evidently the school has not improved over the past 3 years. Numerous changes in leadership have occurred, results and progress have dropped and lack of challenge from the Governing Body has led to the Academy being placed in Special Measures. The Governors can't change this now. They can only influence what happens in the future. They describe themselves as now being pro-active rather than reactive. They have formed closer relationships with SLT and now have more of an understanding of the roles that SLT undertake. They have a great awareness of what needs to change and what needs to be reported on.

It was obvious to the Reviewer that the Governors have the skills, capacity and motivation to move the school from its' current grading to become a Good School. They are receptive to new ideas, prepared to access support where necessary, and will be ably-led by their new Chair, who has achieved a lot in her short period of tenure.

Actions Required:

Priority for Improvement	Action Required	Additional comments	By When	By Whom
The Governing Body to be able to contribute fully to school improvement by bringing appropriate challenge	Training. Governors to take full advantage of excellent training delivered by the Authority, and buy in bespoke training if necessary.	A full record of training undertaken to be kept by the Clerk. Governors to seek out appropriate training.	On-going	All Governors. Clerk
Governors to have more awareness of Pupil Premium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PP to be reported on in FGB meetings, as well as Finance sub-committee. • Link Governor to be fully briefed as to spending, impact and outcomes. • Website continuously updated with information. • Attend any local training if offered. • Consider engaging an NLE for further support if this continues to be an issue with HMI. 	KC to find out school in Liverpool that presented at NCTL on PP, and pass on contact details to the Head for possible visit / sharing of good practice.	On-going. Contact details as soon as.	All Governors. Link Governor for PP. Karina Carter.
Link Governor roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidelines and questions for visits. • Governors to meet with their members of staff at least once a term. • Discuss the possibility of instigating a Year Group Link Governor Role. 	Improve Governor knowledge of Teaching and Learning. Increases visibility around the Academy.	On-going	Link Governors. Academic Achievement Committee.
Governors to become more involved with the school.	Governors to be invited in, when it serves a purpose, to improve the learning experience for the pupils.	Mrs Brimelow to discuss this with SLT to see how to make the best use of Governors.	On-going	Mrs Brimelow and all Governors.
Develop a criteria for appointing new Governors, and for re-selecting Community Governors.	Instigate a process that can be followed, to ensure that Lostock Hall has the very best Governors it can attract.		July 2014	Chair and Clerk.
Offer on-going support to the Head	HTPR monitoring termly, and regular informal meetings with Head Teacher.	Mrs Brimelow needs support from all Governors as she establishes herself as the new Head.	On-going	Chair and Performance Governors. All Governors.

Subject Reports	Circulate an example of a Good / Outstanding Subject report to all HoD's, so they can see what level of information the Governors find helpful. Try to get the reports to be more standardised.	Governors need succinct, accurate reports.		Clerk and HoD's
Support for The Clerk	It would be helpful if Sharon had access to more information about her role. I suggest joining Ten Governor Support (online facility) and / or NGA, so she has access to the most up-to-date information.	Clerktogovernors.co.uk is also a useful website for her. Joining either of these Governor Support Associations would be beneficial to all Governors.	As soon as possible	Sharon. Finance Committee to approve the spending.
Reconstitution of Governing Body	Agree to have this as an annual item on the agenda, as an item for discussion.		Annually	Chair and Clerk.
Governor Profiles on website	Write paragraph on Governor profiles, have photos taken, and give consideration to publishing minutes on website.	Greater transparency	By Easter 2014	All Governors, but Martin to co-ordinate.
Holding staff to account	Targeted staff members invited to present to the Academic Achievement Committee.		As appropriate – October 2014	Academic Achievement Committee
Analysing data post results	Establish that the data Governors received has been accurate, and it met expectations.		September 2014	Academic Achievement Committee
Governors to engage with parents at school events, and through the Parental Forum.	Discuss the possibility of setting up a Parent / Teachers Association, and continue to listen to parents' views.		On-going	All Governors