



**Effective and Efficient Governance at
St Mary's CE Primary School 2020/21**

St Mary's CE Primary School is a member of the Durham & Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (D&NDLT). The Board of Directors of the Trust has identified that each school in the Trust will have a dedicated committee to oversee the governance arrangements of the school on their behalf. This committee is called the Academy Council and its members – Academy Councillors - work closely with the Head Teacher and the school's leaders in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for all pupils.

The membership of the Academy Council is as follows:

Composition of Academy Council	Membership 2020/21
Elected staff member	Ms A Saunderson Darkes
Head Teacher	Mrs E Robertson
Elected parent	Mr J Clark
Elected parent	Mr D Artley
Ex officio Foundation	Vacancy
Foundation	Mrs K Holmes
Foundation	Mrs J Lewis
Foundation	Mrs A Chapman-Jones

The role of the Academy Council is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. The Academy Council meets half-termly and its work reflects the Trust's Scheme of Delegation that identifies the duties delegated to the Academy Council by the Board of Directors.

Councillors work very hard to ensure that they know what it is like to be a learner in the school and undertake a range of activity in relation to the three core functions of governance:

i) Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.

The Academy Council helps to shape the vision for the school and councillors review this annually, as well as looking at the progress being made against the school's aims.

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) identifies the school's priorities for the year and the Academy Council is instrumental in working with the Head Teacher to develop this and then monitoring progress against the identified priorities for the year.

Councillors are linked to areas of the SIP and undertake a range of activity – meeting staff, talking to pupils, reviewing plans, looking at pupils' work – so that they can see the progress being made against the priorities for themselves.

Councillors are also linked to other areas and aspects of school life – e.g. science, safeguarding, Pupil Premium - and this helps them to understand the school and enables them to build relationships with members of staff. This ensures that the decisions they make are based on a good knowledge of the school.

Councillors report on their activity to the meetings of the Academy Council so that all councillors are aware of what is going well and what is in need of development.

Councillors also identify and then manage any risks that might impact on the outcomes achieved by the school.

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ii) Holding school leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff.

Councillors act as critical friends to the Head Teacher and are always striving to ensure that the school is doing the best it can for every pupil.

Councillors look at the information provided by the school on the progress and attainment of pupils and challenge the Head Teacher when performance appears to be uneven or inconsistent. They ask about the organisation of the curriculum and the quality of teaching in the school. They make sure that the school has a robust system in place for the performance management of staff. Councillors rely on the Trust to undertake the performance management of the Head Teacher on their behalf.

Councillors look at a range of external data and information to see how their school compares to local and national benchmarks. They also look at the reports of external partners about their school so that they have as wide a view as possible of how their school is performing.

iii) Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and ensuring that money is well spent for the benefit of all pupils.

Councillors are involved in discussion about the projected budget for the year but the final decision on the school's budget is taken by the Board of Directors. Councillors then receive regular updates on the progress of the budget for the year and challenge where there appears to be variations in what has been spent compared to what was expected to be spent.

Councillors also receive information about the school's plan for spending its Pupil Premium grant and PE and Sport grant. The school provides regular updates on the impact of these plans to meetings of the Academy Council.

Impact of the work of the Academy Council

The school has a clear vision for the future that is understood by all members of the school community. Councillors know their school well and are clear about the school's priorities for improvement. Budget spending is closely linked to these priorities and councillors' challenge and support in meetings helps to ensure that the school has a clear focus on the best possible outcomes for every learner. Councillors ensure that staff and pupils have a safe and secure learning environment. Councillors have worked hard to support the Head Teacher and staff during the current pandemic in making sure the school is safe for those pupils who have attended.

As well as attending business meetings of the Academy Council, councillors also attend regular training and development sessions. These relate to either the development of the Academy Council as a whole or to the personal development of individual councillors. All councillors are expected to undertake a two-year cycle of Trust-identified training. Councillors can also access on-line training as members of the National Governance Association. Newly appointed councillors receive a planned programme of induction support.

The Academy Council is always trying to improve what it does and an annual self-evaluation takes place at which councillors decide, in terms of governance, what has gone well during the year and what the areas of focus need to be for the following year. This is based on the criteria for effective governance identified in the *Governance Handbook* (DfE).

The Academy Council has the following as its areas of focus for 2020/21:

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- i) Ensuring that the school's response to Covid-19 enables learning to continue for those pupils attending school and those working remotely;
- ii) Successfully inducting at least three new councillors into the Academy Council;
- iii) Continuing to ensure that councillors actively engage with the school during lockdown and post lockdown;
- iv) Ensuring that councillors have a consistent overview of the key areas of school life.