

Barley Lane School

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Head-teacher's report to governors: Summer 2016 (reporting Spring 2016)

Context for report

We are now into our second cycle in the new framework of reporting and meeting prompted by the review of governance in the Autumn term 2015.

The safeguarding and learning committee has met as it should prior to full meeting and both chair and vice chair have made school visits and reports so our discussion and scrutiny can and should be well informed. Work by the committee, reporting and visits all shaped by the Ofsted framework and throughout there was a clear focus on those things we agreed needed consolidation and improvement.

Both Ofsted then and school improvement scaffold and imbue our work together; each report incrementally builds governor insight into the school's stability and effectiveness.

The quality of discussion at committee is significantly sharper and improved now we are disciplined to focus on the core and key activities in school: safeguarding and wellbeing; learning and teaching.

We have benefitted too from a planned visit and report (attached) from the SENTIENT Trust and Devon County Council represented by Babcock; this a part of a joint programme between the trust and DCC to ensure there is quality assurance of special schools. The trust is represented by two colleague head-teachers and DCC by a Babcock "associate"; what used to be described as a school improvement officer. The report has pertinence and worth for every section that follows.

The report's findings impact both this report and reporting to the SBLT committee and they can be seen highlighted in red in the latter which is also attached. The influence and impact of the visit will be reflected in the pertinent sections that follow.

Previous meetings and reporting in the emerging new framework we have been building together have included large amounts of data and feedback of all kinds. This counter intuitive given the strong consensus achieved to seek greater simplicity and clarity through less but the right information however we agreed it was helpful as change began to allow all governors to know the extent of information they could access.

A simple but powerful example is the extensive review of all indicators of safety and welfare undertaken by senior staff every half-term; governors know of its existence and have had sight of the documentation it generates but this report will only share key elements.

Another example is the sharing of safeguarding prompts and reminders and updates for staff summarised for governors; now they have a sense of the work they can instead directly access the dedicated email account used to share.

In both these examples if the headline information or indeed governor curiosity prompts the need to dig deeper governors know they can and increasingly where to dig. The number then of supporting documents attached to this report will be considerably less.

Leadership and management

Firstly the improvement activity to challenge and improve governance continues; secondly the operational leadership of the school has been delegated further; the third element of middle management and all teachers as leaders has a related strand; sharpening senior leadership in quality of teaching and learning and this an outcome of the Babcock-Sentient visit and report.

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1. Governor visits have continued and their reports distributed. A key characteristic has been their embedded nature; they arrive unannounced and experience all aspects of school life and engage with staff and students across the school day.

They have then for example been able to see for themselves operational leadership is being delegated and distributed and if so is the school a stable and purposeful community? They have observed the daily sharing and management of risks most powerfully safeguarding. They have spent extended time in classrooms experiencing what the children get.

The first cycle of reporting to committee and full governing body and meeting have been completed and the minutes describe and evidence much greater focus on the core and most important things in school; safeguarding and welfare and learning and teaching. They also evidence governors are better informed and therefore better placed to call me to account.

2. Operational leadership is a particular challenge in our high risk setting; maintaining good order and discipline and the positive climate for learning a tough job day to day. Senior and emerging leaders across school have continued to demonstrate they can and are maintaining both and this evidenced by available measures of behaviour and these measures made credible and real by governor visits. A simple analysis of recorded serious incidents including a four day stretch where all headteacher support effectively withdrawn evidences no collapse of good order.
3. The teaching team have been reminded of the expectation they are all leaders and post audits of planning and assessment in the autumn we moved to lesson observation and sharing of halfway point learning progress plus context and planned interventions to accelerate learning where progress is not good (more of both in “learning and teaching and assessment”).

Accountability has been sharpened through self and peer evaluation and a global look back at the progress and achievements and stories of those students who have left us in the past three years by subject and teacher.

3.i One of the many insightful and helpful criticisms and insights from the Babcock-Sentient visit was a lack of energy and spark in proactively setting the agenda in what “outstanding” teaching looks like in our setting? The inference we drew from this was the risk of coasting as “good”.

And this a matter of leadership for Simon and I. We both embraced this and with the team set out to describe best practice and this used then in peer and self-evaluation.

Our visitors also unpicked a lack of urgency and vigour in how we presented what remain essentially good stories about learning progress for example the learning progress and more rounded stories about children in care at Barley Lane are very positive indeed. Simon has addressed this and shared with the SBLT committee.

The reports of visiting governors offer a basis and prompt for further questioning and discussion; is delegated and distributed operational leadership truly embedding and are governors wholly confident the critical and perennially vulnerable positive climate for learning is secure? Questioning the headteacher further about the shared evidence that good order and discipline wholly secure?

Tackling SR about the rigour and reliability of his leadership work in the quality of learning, teaching and assessment; how does he know for example his judgments about teaching and learning are reliable and credible? This in anticipation of more scrutiny in the next and pertinent section.

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Learning and teaching and assessment

The key improvement activities were: one annual formal lesson observation supported and supplemented by peer and self-evaluation and a retrospective on leavers' outcomes the past three years; second reenergising both our sense of what outstanding looks like and our ambition to achieve it. Imbued in both is the determination of the leadership team to ensure the teaching team feels a healthy accountability and pressure to be reliably good and increasingly outstanding.

1. No teaching observed was inadequate and it was good or better in a very large majority. Peer and self-evaluation are in step and consistent with observation judgments and also the expressed views of the children and young people (there is one exception). Learning progress and end of final key stage outcomes are consistent also with quality of teaching.

The key emerging frailty is a familiar one in our setting where the complexity and challenge innate in the young people undermines good order and discipline and the climate for learning in class. The notion of “bossing the room” is central to our work and can only be securely and consistently delivered through relentlessly good practice and in its absence learning and teaching and assessment cannot happen.

This vulnerability holds for even the best teachers so there is a common and critical theme to tackle and it is in...

2. ...describing and achieving what outstanding is in our setting that our best individual and collective hope of reliably “bossing the room” lies. The elephant in the room is often the willingness and commitment in teacher colleagues to tackle the discomfort and challenge of self-improvement.

It is then not just a matter of the minority of teachers identified as vulnerable and not securely the “boss” but their willingness to embrace the need for positive change? Simon is encouraged by the engagement and positivity of many colleagues in both accepting consolidation and improvement needed and their desire to change and develop their practice.

It is then helpful that as described above even the best teachers and the most embedded positive classroom climates are not invulnerable in our setting because we both prefer and believe it more powerful to act in a collegiate way; as a team that said there is a clear steer and focus for teachers judged vulnerable by Simon. (see emerging focus for team post observation and anonymised example of teacher PM)

Throughout this activity maintaining and applying reasonable pressure on the teaching team to take responsibility for behaviour and learning in their classrooms and to be clear about benchmarks most powerfully if a very complex child or group can be managed and motivated by a colleague, “What are they doing you are not?”

Governor again can access peer visit reports and ask fellow governors to share their experiences of the classroom? SBLT members were keen to pursue and explore how quality of teaching was and is judged in the round and this line of questioning should continue at FGB. SBLT too was keen to address how any weaknesses are being tackled? It would be useful too to discuss the team's preference for a corporate approach to improvement in our small and specialist setting?

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Pupil development welfare and safety

There are two ongoing key themes in this section: one maintaining the safety of the children and young people in school and promoting a positive climate for their learning and wellbeing; two being alive to the multiple and diverse safeguarding risks to our complex and frequently vulnerable and risky students beyond school.

Running through these is a third the national pushes to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation and radicalisation...

...overarching all matters of the children's safety and happiness is their willingness to speak to us because we are working ceaselessly to authentically listen to and support and challenge them and help them keep themselves safe? In a recent conversation with every child present that day in school without exception they could identify somebody that would help them; this is something I urge visiting governors to repeat.

1. Safeguarding risks in school remain frequent and diverse and we include notions of wellbeing, welfare and happiness in our work and given our student body we ask every day at morning briefing what we need to do consistently and reliably well, differently and or better to keep everyone safe?

The school lead remains the focal point for sharing emerging risks and making them safe as the day progresses. The school uses a dedicated email account to share risk and response and a dedicated notice board in the staffroom. Attendance is closely scrutinised daily and weekly as absence has a strong safeguarding element. At day's end a debrief reviews risks and plans for the following day...

Each half-term all indicators of behaviour and safety are reviewed by the senior team and a summary shared with governors. All documentation is available to governors and detail shared at committee and a summary shared at FGB.

The review of the Spring term evidences the children and young people and the wider school community were kept safe and risks managed safely and ethically (this most pertinent and pressing in the risky and potentially contentious matter of holding children). It also evidences a very large majority of our students were not involved in any incidents nor were they held and the drive to allow and encourage reflection and self-control ongoing

Governor visits and reports provide the governing body with human insight to make credible or not what the data is telling us; that we remain a stable and safe community where learning can happen.

Governors also have the benefit of the recent Babcock-Sentient visit report to support or challenge my assertion that the school is currently a safe and essentially happy place where there is vigilance in the culture and there are mechanisms to ensure folk can both share and act?

2. Risks beyond school remain and are a reality for a minority of our children and young people at any given and over time.

The school continues to share and work with colleagues in social care to keep children safe and anonymised information is available to governors; anonymised case studies have been shared at committee. Visiting governors can have controlled access to our record keeping. We have had representation at all meetings to which we have been invited.

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The school's dedicated safeguarding support officer meets daily with the school's designated officer or SDO and the school's operational lead to share new information and stay up to speed with known and existing CP risks. As described above each school day is bookended by briefing and debriefing that prioritise safeguarding; visiting governors have observed this operational sharing.

Risk assessments are reviewed by the team and updated by me half-termly including dedicated assessments for CSE (child sexual exploitation) and radicalisation. Anonymised versions are and have been made available to committee to give governors a sense of the nature and diversity of risk; in one case a successful prosecution the result and prison sentence applied.

One notable element is the battle to secure prompt and fulsome therapeutic support for our children and young people; it is most difficult...

Our morning agenda is explicit in reminding staff that whilst we are now familiar with notions of abuse that is physical, emotional, sexual or rooted in neglect we must privilege CSE and radicalisation and think creatively about those risks.

Staff in increasing numbers are accessing the free "Channel" training provided on-line by the police and dedicated and certificated "Prevent" training on-line. I have attended WRAP training and specific CSE training has also been attended and will be cascaded. Access to safer recruitment has been widened also.

AH has scrutinised and audited again all CP training to be scrupulous and as a part of her wider review of all safeguarding activity. Agency staff access Babcock DCC on line training and SR attended train the trainer training to give us in-house capacity to address any gaps in CP knowledge. We reasonably regard the morning briefing prompts as a chance to develop our knowledge and understanding.

In all this a critical element is the quality of our relationships with the children and young people so they will speak and we are listening and in our work together to describe outstanding practice we also considered the role of the support team but what follows applies to all of us when we get it right the best staff

"...listen hard and with compassion and are therefore always alert to the children's safety and wellbeing...ceaselessly seek to build their understanding of and respect for and rapport with the children and young people...they are so often the "glue" that holds the community together"

Ask the headteacher to talk through CSE and radicalisation risks using anonymised risk assessment. Scrutinise him about impact of training undertaken in Prevent? Ask the headteacher to address an anonymised case study and pursue him about the school's actions to support the child. Using the summary of serious incidents pick one and insist on seeing original record keeping and scrutinise it highlighting any weaknesses or concerns and questions? Ask the headteacher to share and develop a specific instance of frailty in staff practice and make him prove the appropriate steps taken to address it and make things safe.

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Pupil outcomes

In our setting it will always remain necessary and pertinent firstly to report on the critical matter of keeping the children and young people safe addressed in the section above; that students are safe and in a large majority behave well and learn is something hard won day by day, week by week, half-term by half-term and governors must be clear good order and discipline and the positive climate for learning are always at risk.

At this time Simon can and will report to you directly when we meet that children in a very large majority are making good progress in learning at the academic year's halfway point and where they are not that has been scrutinised and understood and coherent plans made to accelerate learning.

We have continued to develop our contact with and knowledge of former students who have left in the last three academic years.

1. The summary of key indicators of behaviour and safety provides reassurance for governors that where there has been challenge and risk it has been managed safely, ethically and pragmatically and that in a large majority the children and young people are behaving well and learning.

There is clear evidence and records of work to safeguard our students and we have safely navigated another term of multiple and diverse child protection risks.

Exclusion is reasoned and minimal and in decline, attendance is holding and good overall and where it is not there is a strong audit trail and evidence of our work to improve matters.

2. Consistent with Simon's recent judgments of a majority of good and some outstanding teaching learning progress is good in a majority.
3. We continued to engage with former students and their families and reviewed their achievements and destinations and the extent to which they achieved what they should and in the round this is a very positive narrative (2013-2015 pupil stories anonymised).

In summary

- In leadership governance continues to develop and governors both more visible in school and incrementally more knowledgeable about school life and all its nuances and they have a developing sense of the range of measures and indicators they can access and scrutinise. Operational leadership is more distributed and whilst that can be challenging for emerging leaders indicators of behaviour and safety remain stable and largely positive. Teachers are being supported and critically challenged in their work to be "leaders".
- The quality of teaching has been assessed both through observation and in the round and whilst there are specific frailties in a large majority it is at least good and sometimes outstanding. Learning at the halfway point is in a large majority good
- The wellbeing and safety of the children and young people has been protected and promoted in a context where risks are many and varied and constant.
- Pupil outcomes in the context above are then good and more measurably those achieved by students leaving us in the last three years wholly positive.

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Summary of supporting documents*	Ofsted framework	comment
1. Report by the Babcock-Sentient QA team	• All	attached
2. headteacher's latest report to SBLT-com	• All	attached
3. Minutes of SBLT-com meeting	• All	Sent by clerk to governors KF
4. Vice CoG school visit report (DF)	• All	Sent by clerk to governors KF
5. Summary Behaviour and safety indicators	• Development, welfare, safety	attached
6. Pupil stories 2103-2015 anonymised	• Leadership and management	attached
7. Extent of good learning progress at academic year's halfway point	• Learning, teaching and assessment	Presented by SR
8. Summary of activity in quality of teaching and learning	• Learning, teaching and assessment	Presented by SR
9. Emerging focus for teaching team post observations	• Learning, teaching and assessment	attached
10. Anonymised example of teacher performance management	• Learning, teaching and assessment	attached
11. Description of best practice (teaching and support teams)	• Learning, teaching and assessment	attached
12. Simple analysis of incidents by day and therefore school leader	• Leadership development, welfare, safety	attached
13. Anonymised extract and safeguarding case study from SDO diary	• Development, welfare, safety • Pupil outcomes	available in hard copy at meeting
14. Anonymised safeguarding risk assessments including CSE and Prevent	• Development, welfare, safety • Pupil outcomes	available in hard copy at meeting
15. Anonymised examples of weekly and half-termly scrutiny of absence	• Development, welfare, safety • Pupil outcomes	available in hard copy at meeting

*all documents listed in report to SBLT committee are available to governors on request and providing the report at least a week and with the goal of two weeks in advance provides adequate time to allow governors to digest report and supporting documents and seek additionally to access further material shared with SBLT.