

External Review of Governance

Supporting school self-evaluation and improvement

Accurate school self-evaluation is key to successful school improvement planning. Knowing your starting point will enable you to appropriately prioritise areas for improvement with measurable targets and clear outcomes. This axiom will remain true whatever school inspection framework prevails and is also fundamental to achieving successful and cohesive school leadership – everyone working together to the same ends. This review is designed for governors and headteachers to support accurate school self-evaluation. It aims to give you the confidence that, whatever specific goals you are working towards and whatever standards you need to prove, your priorities are the right ones and you are therefore focusing your time and energy in the appropriate areas to achieve success.

School: King Edward VI Community College

DfE no: 878

Babcock Associate: Jane Lucas

Date of Visit: 8th July 2021

Headteacher: Mr Alan Salt

Chair of Governors: Mr Jim Lodge

Context		
<p>KEVICC is a maintained foundation school and a member of the cooperative trust and the Dart Valley Learning Trust. The Headteacher has been in post since 2014 and the Chair and Clerk have been in post since 2018. The constitution of the Board is for fourteen governors. There is currently one vacancy for a foundation governor.</p> <p>The College was last inspected by Ofsted in 2019 and was judged 'Good'. Leadership and management was judged 'Good' and the governors were described as 'astute in their knowledge of the school' and found to 'ask searching questions at meetings to ensure that pupils' progress continues to rise' and to 'monitor the spending of public funds well'.</p> <p>The Governing Board at KEVICC commissioned an external review of their practice as governors felt it was timely and responsible to have an independent report to ensure that their practice continues to be secure. Additionally, governors are keen to ensure that the challenge they provide to the Senior Leadership Team is appropriate and constructive as they embark on a sizeable project and head into a period of significant decision making and possible long term change for the College.</p>		
	Evidence/Comment	RAG
1. The Governing Board		
1.1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a full or nearly full complement of governors and there are no long standing vacancies. • A balance of skills is considered when appointing co-opted governors and associate members. • New governors attend training and there is a clear induction process for them. (CF4) 	<p>The Board has one vacancy for a foundation governor. Governors complete an annual skills audit and there is clear evidence that the Board's leadership proactively ensures a balance of skills and broad representation amongst its members.</p> <p>New governors attend the induction provided by Babcock LDP. Internal induction has improved in response to feedback from new governors and is well managed by the Clerk with input from the Chair and Headteacher.</p>	
1.2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The governing board is an effective, well organised team and there is a high level of commitment. • There is evidence of regular engagement with training and a culture self-improvement. • Governors understand their role and lead by example. • There is a Code of Conduct in place and revisited annually. (CF1) 	<p>All sources of evidence and conversations during the review demonstrate the Board's commitment to the College, its staff and students and the work of the Board.</p> <p>Attendance at meetings is good and governors attend training. The Board self-evaluates annually and follows through on areas for improvement. Governors are committed to the College's vision and their work and attitudes reflect this. A Code of Conduct is in place and up to date.</p>	
2. The Leadership of the Governing Board		
2.1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leadership of the governing board is effective. • The governing board is well chaired and the chair has received training and support for the role. • The chair is well supported by the vice chair and there are other governors taking a leadership role on the governing board. (CF3) 	<p>Evidence reliably confirms that the Board's leadership is strong and effective. The Chair of Governors has instigated positive and constructive change in terms of the Board's structure, but more than this, he has proactively and thoughtfully built an effective, inclusive and committed team. He is considered in his approach, leads by example and inspires others to follow. There are three vice chairs in place who chair committees and ensure a strong leadership team is in place overall.</p>	

<p>2.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The headteacher takes an active role in supporting and developing the governing board. (CF3) 	<p>The Headteacher speaks positively and enthusiastically about the Board. He works proactively with governors, both in terms of his approach and the information he provides, to enable governance to provide capable and well received leadership and challenge.</p>	
<p>2.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is clear succession planning for the future leadership of the governing board (CF3) 	<p>As a result of building a strong set of skills amongst board members, future leadership is currently secure. At some point in the future, shadowing the role of Chair may be a useful next step.</p>	
<p>3. Strategic Role</p>		
<p>3.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board is committed to undertaking a strategic rather than an operational role. It ensures that its members understand what this means and the headteacher commits to supporting the governing board working strategically. (CF1) 	<p>Evidence from minutes and other documentation shows that the Board understands its role as a strategic body and that, with the support of the Headteacher, focuses its time and energy on strategic rather than operational matters. The Board uses the three core roles to structure its work and its self-evaluation. As a result, this is well embedded in the understanding of the Board and evidenced throughout its work.</p>	
<p>3.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board ensures clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction and communicates high expectations and ambition. (CF1) 	<p>A strong vision and a clear focus on ensuring the best for students provide a cohesive and consistent basis on which priorities, work, discussion and decisions are built. Information on the website about the Board demonstrates its commitment to the vision and there is evidence that governors are able to work as a team and to put the interests of students before their own individual views and beliefs. Continuing to do this as a corporate body will be important going forward.</p>	
<p>3.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board understands the school's strengths and weaknesses and the priorities for improvement in the school improvement plan and focuses its time and attention on these matters. Governors are clear on their strategies to monitor the Improvement Plan.(CF1) 	<p>There is evidence that governors have some understanding of the College's strengths and weaknesses and focus on areas for improvement. However, evidence does not demonstrate clear and systematic engagement with a College Improvement Plan over the past twelve months which means that this practice is not as securely established as it could (or should) be. The area has been marked as red, not because governors have no knowledge of the College's strengths and weaknesses but because, heading into a new academic year, approving and setting up governor</p>	

	monitoring or the College Improvement Plan is timely. More details are provided in the 'Next Steps' section at the end of the report.	
4. The Governing Board Supports and Challenges		
<p>4.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The headteacher and governors work together in partnership to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people in school. The relationship is one of openness, mutual trust and respect, working together for a common purpose. (CF2) 	<p>Under the leadership of the current Chair, the relationship between the Headteacher and the Board has developed positively and constructively. The shared focus on ensuring the best for the students at the College underpins a respectful and open relationship which is clearly productive and appreciated. This sets the tone for positive and respectful relationships with the wider staff and parent groups.</p>	
<p>4.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governors support the headteacher and other school staff. Governors systematically challenge the school by actively monitoring and evaluating the progress of the school improvement plan during the course of the year, asking questions, seeking information, setting targets, considering data and other information as appropriate. (CF2) 	<p>This area is marked amber with reference to section 3.3 above and the reference to the College Improvement Plan. There is clear evidence of support from governors for the Headteacher and school staff. The quality of the relationship between the Headteacher and governors means that there is trust and openness. This allows for open sharing of information which enables good questioning and scrutiny of data. Knowledgeable governors ask searching questions and demonstrate respectful challenge. Structuring this around a CIP will ensure this is achieved and documented in a more systematic way. The wider concept of challenge is expanded on at the end of the report in 'Questions for Consideration by the Governing Board'.</p>	
<p>4.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a strong culture of rigorous performance management throughout the school. Performance management is clearly contributing to improving outcomes. (CF2) 	<p>Performance management governors have three meetings a year with the Headteacher to discuss his performance management. There is a committee which meets annually to look at pay decisions. A midyear meeting of this committee would be worth considering in order to monitor progress towards end of year targets and pay decisions.</p>	
<p>4.4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governors visit the school to build relationships with school staff, to learn about the school and to gather information to aid with their monitoring role. Governors and staff are clear as to the purpose of governor visits and visits are linked to priorities within the Improvement Plan. (CF2) 	<p>There is evidence that a number of governors undertake visits to the College and carry out learning walks. Reports from these are informative, detailed and thoughtful. COVID has meant that visits have been impossible in person for much of the last year. The area is marked as amber with reference to 3.3 and 4.2 above. Although visit reports reference priorities in the CIP, the absence of a clear CIP at governor</p>	

	meetings means that there is a gap in the monitoring cycle. During the review the Advisor discussed ideas for setting up a visits/scrutiny schedule and this is referred to in the 'Next Steps' section at the end of the report.	
5. The Governing Board Ensures Accountability		
<p>5.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board robustly holds senior leaders to account for the performance of the school including the quality of teaching and learning and the deployment of resources. The headteacher reports to the governing board via written reports which provide governors with key information and data, and are circulated to governors at least 7 days in advance of meetings. At the meeting the reports are discussed and any further questions arising are addressed. (CF2) 	<p>The quality of the relationship between the Board and the Headteacher allows for open and positive sharing of information and questioning.</p> <p>The Headteacher reports regularly to the Board via written reports which are shared with the Board in advance of meetings. Governors are encouraged to ask questions both in advance of the meetings and during meetings themselves and there is good evidence of discussion of the reports in minutes.</p>	
<p>5.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board is able to demonstrate a clear understanding of school data, and provide evidence (including minutes of meetings) of challenge. The governing board has access to a range of information on school data from internal and external sources. (CF2) 	<p>Data is shared with the Standards Committee where it is scrutinised in detail. Minutes show that questioning is based on clear knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>The Board is clearly committed to the achievement and wellbeing of the College's students and it is this that drives its approach to data and other information, ie governors make the clear link between data and actual students!</p>	
<p>5.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board reflects on its own practice. It has a high profile and publishes clear information about itself to parents and staff (CF4) 	<p>The Board carries out an annual review of its practice which is clearly minuted and followed up.</p> <p>The presence on the Board of a number of parents and member of the teaching staff is supporting strengthened relationships with the staff and parents groups. Governors regularly contribute to the College magazine which helps to raise the profile of the Board amongst the parents and the wider community.</p>	
<p>5.4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In partnership with the school staff, the governing board seeks the views of parents through appropriate consultation. (CF4) 	<p>Parent and staff surveys were discussed during the review feedback session with the Headteacher, Chair and Clerk. There is evidence that through positive relationships and representation on the Board, governors</p>	

	<p>are aware of the ‘temperature’ of staff and parent views. Staff are surveyed internally but this is not fed back formally to the Board. Staff and parent consultation is about to take place as part of a sizeable development project and the future direction of the College. This will fill this gap but it is something to consider going forward and is raised in ‘Questions for Consideration by the Board’ at the end of the report.</p>	
<p>5.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board oversees the financial performance of the school and makes sure money is well spent. There is evidence that additional resources such as Pupil Premium, Sports Premium and SEND funding is being used appropriately and is making a difference. <p>(CF2)</p>	<p>The Board has structured its committees around the three core roles and financial oversight is carried out in detail by the Operations Committee. During the review, the Advisor was able to have a useful telephone conversation with the Chair of this Committee. The Committee is well supported by the School Business Manager who attends meetings. Practice is therefore secure with good evidence to support the Board’s role in this area. Ensure that both the spend and the impact of additional funding are clearly monitored. This may be done across the Operations and Standards Committees.</p>	
<p>6. Clerking Arrangements</p>		
<p>6.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board has appointed an appropriately qualified clerk who has a contract, a job description and sufficient hours to undertake the role. The clerk clerks all meetings of the governing board. The clerk receives support and has an annual appraisal. The clerk attends training and keeps up to date. <p>(CF3)</p>	<p>The Clerk has been in place for three years and gives excellent support to the Board. She has 350 hours per year and works a regular day in College which she finds very helpful and is available at other times for governors to contact. She clerks all meetings of the Board. The Clerk receives an appraisal by the Chair and is well supported to carry out her role. She attends regular training and ensures she is up to date in her knowledge and understanding.</p>	
<p>7. Meetings</p>		
<p>7.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governing board has an appropriate pattern and number of meetings. <p>(CF5)</p>	<p>The full Board meets five times per year with committees meeting three to five times as required. Two hours is set aside for meetings.</p>	
<p>7.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings are effective and productive because they are: well chaired 	<p>Agendas are timed which supports effective and efficient meetings. Governors who chair meetings are experienced and the Clerk provides support and guidance as required.</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> run to time are strategic in content and approach are focussed on school improvement. (CF5) 	<p>As covered earlier in the report, meetings are strategic and have a strong focus on school improvement overall although refer to earlier comments in previous sections about the College Improvement Plan).</p>	
<p>7.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All governors contribute, Time is used efficiently, Decisions are made and actions agreed with named people taking responsibility for following up actions after the meeting. (CF4) 	<p>Some governors contribute more in meetings than others; this could be because they are more knowledgeable and/or more confident. Chairs need to ensure that all governors have an opportunity to contribute. However, overall meetings run well with time used effectively. Decisions are made as required and actions followed up so that they are completed.</p>	
<p>8. Workload Management and Delegation</p>		
<p>8.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an annual cycle of governor business and a policy review cycle in place These are up- to-date and provide a clear framework for the governing board's business. (CF4) 	<p>Both are in place an up to date. The Clerk keeps the current year's annual cycle up to date on her computer before archiving at the end of the year. This ensures that she captures any changes to the annual cycle during the year for future years. Policies are delegated to individual governors, reviewed and brought back to committees or full board meetings for approval. The system is overseen by the clerk, is efficient and works well.</p>	
<p>8.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a clear programme of delegation to committees and/or individual governors, clearly recorded in terms of reference which are agreed annually by the governing board. All governors are clear about where decisions are made and those decisions made on behalf of the governing board are clearly reported back. Time is not wasted at full board meetings by repeating discussions at committee. (CF4) 	<p>The Scheme of Delegation is in place and on the College's website. Terms of reference are in place and are reviewed annually. Minutes taken in committee show decision making and these are shared with all governors following each meeting. Some committees produce reports for full board meetings but these are brief and discussions are not repeated at full board meetings.</p>	
<p>8.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The workload is distributed equally amongst governors and governors have clear areas of interest and/or responsibility. There is a SEND lead governor, a Pupil Premium lead governor and a safeguarding lead governor who have received appropriate training for their roles. (CF3) 	<p>Some governors are more active than others, however as a team governance is effective and productive. Governors are linked to faculty areas and key areas of provision. There are governors clearly linked to key areas: SEND, Pupil Premium and Safeguarding. Governors attend training for their roles.</p>	

	<p>The Advisor raised a question with the Headteacher, Chair and Clerk about whether the traditional linking of governors to faculties might usefully be reviewed as part of the visits programme. This is referred to in the 'Questions for Consideration by the Governing Board' at the end of the report.</p>	
<p>8.4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The board has evidence of its own effectiveness. (CF6) 	<p>The Board reviews its practice annually and minutes the outcomes. It does not formally survey its members which might be worth considering, however the quality of the discussion and outcomes evidenced in the minutes shows that this activity is carried out in a useful and meaningful way and might not be improved on by a more formal survey.</p>	
<p>9. Information and Paperwork</p>		
<p>9.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The information produced by the governing board is of a high quality. (CF2) 	<p>All documentation seen on the day and on the College website relating to governance is of a high quality.</p>	
<p>9.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agendas are clear, informative, explicit and circulated, with supporting papers, seven days before meetings. Minutes provide a coherent narrative of governing board discussions over time. Minutes provide evidence of challenge and of the governing board undertaking its role and fulfilling its responsibilities. Minutes are circulated within two weeks of meetings having taken place. (CF3) 	<p>Agendas are of a good standard and provide a good template for the meetings. They are sent out on time.</p> <p>Minutes are well written and clearly show appropriate engagement by governors, knowledgeable questions and the answers provided.</p> <p>Minutes from all meetings are circulated to all governors shortly after every meeting and then stored on One Drive where they are accessible to governors.</p> <p>The Advisor noted a high number and frequency of part 2 (confidential) minutes. The Advisor understands that this has been largely due to time-limited sensitive information that has been discussed at meetings and this will now largely move to the public domain. As the College is a public body, spending public money it is important that part 1/open minutes become the standard as soon as possible.</p>	
<p>9.3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The clerk maintains an efficient filing system of all documents relating to governing board business. (CF3) 	<p>The Board uses One Drive for information storage which means that key documents are accessible to all governors. Additionally the Clerk keeps hard copies of information as necessary.</p>	

RAG Rating:**Red** = Action required immediately**Amber** = Less urgent action required/ Action underway but not embedded**Green** = No action or minimal change required

CF in brackets refers to one of the six competencies within the DfE's Competency Framework for Governors.

- CF1 Strategic Leadership
- CF2 Accountability
- CF3 People
- CF4 Structures
- CF5 Compliance
- CF6 Evaluation

The Advisor would like to thank everyone who took part in the review. It was a pleasure to spend the day at KEVICC reviewing and discussing the College's governance. The Board's clear vision and genuine commitment to ensuring the best for students provides a strong focus for the governance team to coalesce around and underpins secure and effective practice.

Questions for Consideration by Governing Board:

During the course of the review, the Advisor raised and discussed the following points with the Headteacher, Chair and Clerk and has outlined these below as questions to be shared with the wider Board for consideration.

1. What do **we** (ie the Board) understand by challenge?

The Advisor's view is that governors provide sensitive, pragmatic and constructive challenge to the Headteacher and the SLT, however the Advisor believes it would be useful and timely for the Board to discuss and agree what challenge means at KEVICC, taking into account its (KEVICC's) culture, ethos, environment, context and setting. Challenge comes in many forms and is variously understood by different people in different settings. What does it mean to you as a team and can you define it in a way that means you can have confidence that you provide it?

2. Are we fully engaged with our key stakeholders?

There is evidence to show that there is strong representation from parents, and more recently from staff, on the Board. Could/should you build in more formal methods of ensuring that, as a Board, you are aware of feedback to the College from parents and, especially following the stresses of the last eighteen months, staff pressures and how they are being supported?

3. Is there merit in reviewing the traditional governor faculty links in order to restructure and focus engagement with the College around key improvement priorities?

Rationale and suggestions as to how this might be 'look' is explained in more detail in the next section.

Next Steps:

1. Approve the draft College Improvement Plan, prepared by the SLT, for 2021/22 and agree how it is going to be monitored.

The key gap in evidence that was identified by the Advisor during the review was engagement with the College Improvement Plan. Governors should annually approve, monitor and evaluate the CIP as a way of checking that improvement priorities have been clearly identified (link to College self evaluation), that progress towards targets is made and that targets are achieved, understanding mitigating circumstances if not. The Advisor suggests that this is a priority for next term.

2. Structure link governor roles around the CIP/priorities for improvement and build a governor visits schedule which covers general scrutiny and CIP scrutiny.

During the feedback session at the end of the day, the Advisor suggested how a governor scrutiny schedule could be set up to give greater structure to governor visits and dovetail with CIP scrutiny. This would be constructed around and assume:

- governors linked to key areas of the College's provision and operation (rather than faculty links)
- governors linked to key priorities in the CIP
- monitoring/success criteria in the CIP making reference to governor scrutiny/visits which will be built into the schedule
- the Clerk overseeing the scrutiny schedule alongside the policy review schedule (impact on clerking hours needs to be discussed and agreed)

The Advisor will share a model with the Clerk in the first instance for consideration by the Board.

Contact:

If you have any questions about this report please contact our Helpline at the Governance Consultancy Team on Tel: 01392 287314, or email us on ldp-governorsservice@babcockinternational.com. Thank you.