



Kingswood, Leeds and Broomfield CE Primary, Platts Heath  
and Ulcombe CE Primary Schools.

## **Chair of Governors Annual Report 2019-2020**

At this point in these unprecedented times, I thought it would be helpful to provide an update/Annual Report to summarise the work of the ASPIRE Federation Governing Board during the academic school year 2019/20 during the ongoing pandemic, as this illustrates how the Governors work collaboratively with the Executive Headteacher, three Heads of School and all of the staff ensuring your children are always at the forefront of everything we do within the ASPIRE Federation. Its principle audience is parents and carers of our pupils.

We started the year in September 2019 by becoming the ASPIRE Federation, joining together four rural Primary Schools in Kent.

We operate the Circle Model of Governance which basically means that all Governors attend six Full Governing Board meetings a year with the occasional extraordinary meeting, if required, in exceptional circumstances.

In conjunction with the four Individual School Plans and the Federation Plan written by the Executive Headteacher and three Heads of School, Governors undertook monitoring visits to ensure each of our schools is where it should be at milestones throughout the year.

There are also standard Governance actions that happen every year including the Executive Headteacher Review and approving the budgets across the Federation as well as in each of the individual Schools; all of these tasks have been carried out successfully, although we struggled to balance the books (as did most other small schools).

This was helped by the initial Federation idea to share resources, experiences, cost etc for mutual benefit and this also extends to Governance.

When school closures appeared imminent, under the exemplary leadership of our Executive Headteacher, Emma Hickling, the Board adopted what we believed to be the most appropriate and proportionate response to ensure all our children and staff were as safe as possible in such unprecedented circumstances.

We decided with the benefit and flexibility of a Federation to keep Kingswood Primary School open and close the other three schools: Leeds and Broomfield Primary CE, Platts Heath and Ulcombe CE Primary Schools.

We then explored taking the then current scientific and medical advice into account by instigating a 14 day isolation plan. We decided our best option was to divide all staff into three teams as we have three Heads of School. The teams worked on site on a three week rota, minimising the risk of any infection in school. I also ensured our Executive Headteacher adhered to this plan, ensuring her safety and wellbeing.

All risk assessments were presented to the Board (in particular the Safeguarding and Health & Safety Governors) for discussions and challenge, before being circulated along with a handbook to all staff. All Government and KCC guidance was continuously updated and circulated to all staff and Governors to ensure it was adhered to and continues to be updated as I write this report.

We remained open from 8am until 4.30 pm for all key workers (extending this to those with just one key worker parent, not as the Government stipulated both parents) and our vulnerable children and those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities); again, the Government requirement was to make the offer of a place only to children with an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) but we elected to support all of our SEND pupils within Aspire.

Children on site accessed core learning through education packs (provided by their class teachers) in the morning. In the afternoons the team, led by a Head of School, planned a weekly themed topic of creative and fun activities, supporting teachers on site with planning, wellbeing, and work/life balance.

Weekly phone calls took place with any vulnerable children not accessing the onsite provision by each Head of School who maintained contact with every family regularly over the lock down period - they all know about and support all of our individual children.

The Executive Headteacher sent a weekly update to all parents and also separately to all staff; this has continued since we reopened all four schools, ensuring regular communication channels are always open. We sent weekly Wellbeing emails to parents/carers and separately to all staff. The content has obviously differed but has always made sure that everyone stayed connected. The updates and emails were also circulated to all Governors.

From July, uptake increased slightly at Kingswood as more parents started returning to work, but only to the extent that a few bubbles were full at 15 children.

We elected to keep Kingswood Primary School open throughout the summer. We became fully aware how extremely anxious and worried some of our parents were about how they were going to cope through the summer. This was particularly evident within our key worker parents as leave was not really an option for them in these unprecedented circumstances.

The Executive Headteacher, our three Heads of School and our Senior Teacher all volunteered to lead a team for one week each. We have a magnificent team of staff who also volunteered to work one week of their five week summer holidays and the Board of Governors have also been available and kept updated throughout. However, funding remained extremely tight, and the summer childcare provision was assisted with the support of a grant which I was able to obtain thanks to our local Borough Councillor Shellina Prendergast. This helped support our key workers' children and volunteer staff with extra creative, fun craft activities, treats and drinks throughout the summer holidays.

In these unprecedented circumstances this year, we have embraced Zoom technology for many online meetings which has proved interesting! This way of working has created new opportunities and may make governance, particularly for monitoring visits (although very different in some cases) easier to complete, given the time constraints that we all have. I am also sure the virtual monitoring will continue to evolve over time.

Clearly Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the Federation and our four schools, and it has also had an impact on Governance. I am confident that things are slowly achieving some form of normality, and the monitoring of the Federation and Individual School Plans, particularly with the recovery curriculum, is showing signs of being extremely successful. Also the staff tell us how impressed they are by the way the children are all settling back into school life.

We are delighted to have taken on some new Governors this year, and we have sadly also had a few Governors resign; my thanks again to them all for their time given so willingly during these difficult times. I now look forward to recruiting new Governors again this academic year. Never one to miss an opportunity, if this is something you or someone you know have ever thought about, please do not hesitate to contact me directly or talk to the Office Manager at your school office.

Moving forward, we anticipate 2021/2021 being an interesting academic year for Governance as we adapt to the challenges involved in a new way of governing. Changes often bring new opportunities, and we have a Board of Governors with energy, enthusiasm and commitment to the role; the Governors have a wide variety of transferable skills and experience, whilst all sharing one common interest: ensuring the best possible education for all of the children in our Federation Schools.

Finally, we are a very committed, busy proactive Governing Board and we welcome comments and suggestions from parents, carers, staff, and other members of the school community who can always contact me directly by email or via any of the school offices.



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October 2020