



Date of Visit: 7.6.17

**Name of Assessors: Maxine Ward
Emma Woodhouse**

Governor Mark Feedback Form

Pitcheroak School, Redditch

Recommendation: Governor Mark awarded

The evidence grid for Pitcheroak includes an unusual number of criteria marked 'not compliant' or 'partially compliant'.

From the additional evidence submitted and conversations during the assessment visit, the assessors were satisfied that this is a governing board that is compliant with Governor Mark criteria and could demonstrate several elements of best practice. The assessors were satisfied that the board had a clear role in developing the vision, involvement in the SEF with well-articulated processes to validate judgements and effective use of the development plan as a tool to monitor progress.

The assessors established that the governing board sets very high standards and is always looking for ways to do things better. It is both highly reflective and self-critical in its approach to impact on school improvement.

The overall enthusiasm of this board and the passion of all the governors for innovation to better meet the needs of all pupils was tangible throughout this assessment visit.

It commissioned an External Review of governance in June 2015 and this provided the baseline from which to build improvement through training, development and working through Governor Mark criteria.

Several elements of the governing board's strategic leadership and support and challenge represent best practice, for example:

- Governors described how they actively sought to recruit a Headteacher from outside Pitcheroak when the previous Headteacher moved on. Despite being a 'Good' School, they had recognised the importance of bringing in a leader with vision who would be innovative and facilitate a step change in providing the very best education for the pupils. They described how there were very good internal candidates, but to move the school forward, a new inspirational and innovative leader was recruited.
- The board commissions external advice for itself and has access to external reports for the school as a whole. The governance review formed the basis for driving significant change. Several new governors were recruited (effectively informed by a skills' audit) and a new

Chair was elected who has provided increased clarity to the roles of all governors. Training needs were identified and from conversations it was evident that governors know the strengths and development areas of the school, informed by Headteacher's reports, visits, data and external validation. They could describe the impact they had had in improving provision from decisions the board has taken, particularly for children with complex needs.

- The value of effective governance permeates the ethos and all improvement planning at Pitcheroak. The first priority in the school improvement plan is: 'Governors and senior leaders demonstrate an ambitious vision for the school and set high expectations for what every pupil can achieve'. As well as demonstrable evidence in the overall School SEF and Plan, the board has its own improvement plan which is detailed with responsibilities distributed across the team. This is regularly reviewed, RAG rated and supports governors in ensuring their work has appropriate impact.
- Procedures for governors' monitoring visits have been enhanced and one of the staff governors led on reviewing the process. This has helped to ensure that all staff understand the role and purpose of governors' visits. There is now a clear link on visit report forms to the SEF and School Development Plan; during monitoring visits governors are seeking evidence to support statements in the SEF as well as information to demonstrate progress against strategic priorities. Governors attend subject review meetings as well as receiving presentations directly from staff, enabling them to ask questions and inform their objective assessment of how well the school is doing.
- The board recognises the importance of national policy development and guidance in informing its work. Governors and the clerk have developed effective processes for distributing guidance documents such as the DfE Governance Handbook between themselves and producing one-page summaries of relevance/contents and important issues so that the board is well-informed about what it needs to know and how to find it. These summaries are shared at meetings.

Other strengths include:

- The board employs an independent professional clerk who works closely with the Chair and Headteacher. She is actively involved in guiding the work of the board alongside the Chair. Minutes provide clear records of meetings; questions with responses that provide information to hold the school to account are presented in clearly identified box sections.
- Pitcheroak governing board has created a Handbook incorporating terms of reference that describe the remit for the board with delegation to committees and individuals, but it also includes role descriptions for Chair/Vice Chair/Committee Chairs and for clerking arrangements. This provides clarity for both staff and governors.
- The board has ongoing dialogue with the SLT to ensure that reports come to the board in a format that is easily understandable; the latest development is a data dashboard that is clear and presents high level data including context, SEF judgements and high-level indicators that provide evidence for the judgement.
- Governors attend regular training as a whole board and also taking advantage of LA provision. Training records are maintained and regularly updated and there is a culture of sharing, ensuring that individual training has impact across the board.
- Governance is clearly incorporated in the school development plan both in its own right, to improve the effectiveness and impact of governance and with regard to its monitoring and evaluation role. For example, in monitoring that CPD opportunities are planned, promote whole school improvement and are linked to performance management, the board receives a CPD report on the impact of training and development; this is set out in the monitoring and evaluation responsibility. This process is replicated for other priorities.
- Oversight of safeguarding is strong; the safeguarding governor has a clear understanding and the impact statements describe some of the ways the board has developed effective safeguarding procedures; governors understand that everyone is responsible for safeguarding

and the board has assurance that the safeguarding policy is followed through regular visits, questionnaires and feedback from the Headteacher and other stakeholders.

- Finances are well managed and overseen with care and attention.

The Governing Board should consider the following areas for further improvement:

Ongoing reflective development is a feature of how this governing board operates and there is a tangible focus and drive for ongoing improvement. Some governors are relatively inexperienced but are building their knowledge and skill base at a pace.

Whilst it was established that this governing board understands its roles and responsibilities and has worked hard to develop skills to challenge and hold the school to account; much of the work has been driven by the Headteacher and Chair. Governors have a culture of personal development. This must be continued so that all governors are able to operate with greater independence and less reliance on the Headteacher to steer their now very effective ways of working and support them in taking more of a lead in identifying areas for improvement. (Note the work in impact statements came out of Ofsted and Headteacher recommendations, rather than the governing board identifying areas to improve for itself).

The Chair has been pivotal in board development and improving its impact and effectiveness over the last two years. Succession Planning has been a recent agenda item, and it was noted that adequate notice would be provided of his intention to resign. It is important that the board gives this early attention and looks at opportunities for governors to develop the skills. The updated publication (NCOGS), Succession Breeds Success, may be helpful in taking development forward, not only for the Chair, but other roles as well.

The Governing Board demonstrated that it has an impact on:

School Improvement. The school has had rising numbers of students with a range of increasingly complex needs. The board described the work completed since 2013 when it was identified that there was a need to refine the way in which the school meets the needs of pupils with complex learning needs. The board agreed a strategy and specific target to 'Ensure that all teaching staff meet the needs of more complex students by incorporating personalised learning objectives for each student into all lessons.' Several initiatives followed and governors also made the decision to invest in a purpose built complex needs classroom and separate playground as well as support the headteacher in making changes to the composition of class groups and investing in CPD.

The impact is described as tangible and revolutionary for the affected pupils. Feedback from all stakeholders has confirmed the positive impact; parents confirm that the school is meeting the needs of their child effectively and staff confidence is high. Reports indicate a decrease in the number of behaviour and crisis management incidents.

Whilst there are measurable improvements the school and governors have identified this as an ongoing priority and have recently created a new role: Assistant Headteacher for Complex Needs to continue the support for pupils with the most complex needs.

Partnerships and community engagement

This statement describes the board's involvement in supporting the school in implementing various actions to support the SDIP target 'To increase opportunities for inclusive activities to enable wider exposure to different environments.' The board decided to re-structure the staffing and employ additional TA's as mentors. It also allocated funds to purchase a school car to enable mentors to transport small groups of students to other settings.

Again, given the context and needs of pupils this initiative has had challenges, but governors reported that the investment in the car has created significant numbers of students to access the local community, helping to prepare them for life beyond Pitcheroak School.

Pupil Wellbeing and Safety:

Governors reported their decision to make the role of the safeguarding governor higher profile, linked to the issue that the school site was not secure enough and access arrangements to the school were not as robust as they should be. They also completed a Health and safety review.

Governors explained the actions taken to integrate safeguarding into the school's monitoring arrangements and enhance site security with double entrance systems and visitor access recording systems.