

Federation of St James the Great and St John's Catholic Primary Schools

Annual Governance Statement 2023-2024

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Introduction and Core Functions

As defined by the Department for Education (DfE), the core functions of all governing bodies, no matter what type of school or how many schools they govern, are:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and
- Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

In exercising their functions, the governing body shall

- Act with integrity, objectivity, and honesty and in the best interests of the school; and
- Be open about the decisions they make and the actions they take and in particular shall be prepared to explain their decisions and actions to interested parties.

Our governing body has a Code of Conduct which is reviewed and agreed annually. All governors and associate members are obliged to abide by this code.

Membership of the governing body

The governing board comprises 16 governors:

Foundation Governors x 9	Appointed onto the governing body by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark
Executive Headteacher x1	Governor by virtue of employment at the Federation
Staff Governor x1	Elected on to the governing board by all staff employed by the federation
Local Authority Governor x1	Nominated by the Local Authority (Southwark Council), and appointed by the governing body

Parent Governor x2	Elected on to the governing body by parents of pupils at the Federation – 1 parent governor per school
Co-opted Governor x2	Appointed by the governing body

There are also associate members who are appointed by the governing body, who have particular skills and expertise that support the ongoing work of the governing body. There are also advisers to the governing body, both Southwark local authority, and school staff who provide particular expertise.

There are three committees that meet termly – Standards & Curriculum, Finance & Resources, and Parish & Premises. The full governing body meets termly also, as well as an extra business meeting at the end of the summer term to plan for the year ahead.

Southwark Local Authority provides a clerking service to our Governing Body. Our clerk is Sally Willcock, and she can be contacted via email at sally.willcock@southwark.gov.uk.

Chair's Review of 2023-24

This academic year has been another busy one in the life of our Federation. Pupils in both schools have had access to a wide range of educational, spiritual and cultural experiences. Our pupils remain at the heart of the decisions that are made by the governing body and the schools' leaders. The two schools in our federation continue to thrive, with both schools' staff sharing best practice, collaborating on curricular and extra-curricular activities, staff training and moderation of assessed work. The office admin teams in both schools continue to work together also, and we really are greater together than the sum of our parts.

We began the year by reviewing and agreeing the School Improvement Plans for both schools, ensuring that robust and ambitious plans were made in all five areas for improvement. These comprise the quality of education, behaviour and attitude, personal development, leadership and management, development of spiritual life of the school. Governor training continued to be offered to all governors through Southwark Council. All governors received an in-house safeguarding briefing in the Autumn Term.

The Key Stage 2 SATs results for summer 2023 were excellent in both schools for all cohorts of Year 6 children, well above the national average. We are very proud of the pupils, and delighted for them, that they completed their primary education with such excellent results, setting them up for their secondary education and GCSEs. Children attending our schools are offered a wide range of opportunities to have a broad, interesting, challenging and Catholic education. They have done very well in all the standardised tests from the phonics reading assessment in Year 1, to SATs in Year 2, the times table test in Year 4 and SATs in Year 6. Governors acknowledge the incredible staff teams in both schools, who have worked so tirelessly and with such enthusiasm and dedication to ensure that the children have had the very best primary education possible.

Sports Premium income for both schools was spent on specialist sports teacher provision, participation in external sporting activities and competitions, dinghy sailing lessons, specialist dance teaching, as well as specialist SEND sports provision. The impact of each intervention was closely monitored by the governing body, and it was very pleasing to see the breadth and depth of sporting and physical activity that our pupils enjoy. Indeed, a local authority fitness assessment of the Year 4 cohort of one of our schools identified that they were the fittest in Southwark – Well Done Year 4!

With budgets remaining tight at both schools, governors continue to closely monitor income and expenses. Both schools are proactive in promoting our Nursery provision, and using parish and community links, as well as word of mouth to encourage interest for Reception places and for any incidental places that arise in other year groups. School leaders actively seek best value for money in any purchasing decisions, and the school accounts are monitored line by line on a termly basis by governors. Unexpected significant expenses incurred this year, include a new flue at St James the Great for the boilers, new playground facilities for the St John's Nursery. Using financial benchmarking data, governors continue to ensure that our schools use their income wisely, focussing on staff costs and ensuring that staffing provision matches need among the pupil cohorts, and that there is good evidence of effective use of staffing resources in both schools.

Governors have been working with school leaders to review projected pupil numbers across Southwark, possible reductions in income from Southwark, and the current direction of travel from central Government and the Diocese towards joining a Multi-Academy Trust. Governors met with senior representatives of the two Catholic MATs in our geographic area with a view to learning more about what they could offer to our strong, successful and financially sound federation should we decide that we would like to apply to join one. At the present time, governors have not formally discussed joining a MAT, but we remain committed to enabling our children to have the best possible education, and we remain vigilant of the headwinds both political and financial that may impact on this decision in the future.

Governors have continued to play an active part in the life of the two schools and parishes. Governors have visited both schools regularly, have watched the children learning both in the classrooms and beyond, have witnessed spiritual and moving assemblies and Christmas nativities and tableaux, as well as Mass in school and in the parish church.

St John's had an inspection from the Catholic Schools Inspectorate in April 2024, and the breadth and depth of excellent RE teaching and learning, as well as the spiritual life of the school was well-evidenced and acknowledged by the inspectors. Governors were delighted that the school's Catholic ethos was so proudly demonstrated by pupils to the inspectors.

At St John's, there has been a significant year on year rise in the numbers of children wishing to attend 'wraparound' care before and after school. Governors agreed with the school's leaders that enabling continued excellent after school care provision, for a large number of children, with the additional senior leader oversight required until 6pm

each evening, was placing additional burden on the workload of senior leaders. Parents using the after school care were surveyed by the school to identify their preferences for care provision. Governors agreed to the use of an external, local, known provider for wraparound care for St John's. This commenced during the year, and the take-up by parents has been very successful, with good feedback on the quality of the provision.

At St John's there was also a review of the current catering contract, and governors agreed that Chartwells would continue to provide the midday meal service at St John's.

During the year, the admission arrangements for both schools were consulted on with all stakeholders, and governors agreed to implement the proposed admission arrangements for 2025-26, using the new Certificate of Catholic Practice developed by the Diocese. We hope that this will make the workload for Catholic Priests easier, and make the admission process more streamlined for parents.

Governors worked with senior leaders on senior leader succession plans, to enable senior leaders to continue to develop their careers whilst offering them flexibility to accommodate their personal circumstances with no detriment to the schools and pupils. Governors remain committed to ensuring that teachers who are earlier in their careers can see a career path for themselves in our Federation, and that flexibility to staff need, whilst prioritising the children's education, is critical to staff retention and development.

Looking ahead to 2024-25

We anticipate an Ofsted inspection at St John's as well as a Catholic Schools Inspection at St James the Great during 2024-25. Preparation for these have begun this year, and will continue into the Autumn Term. Governors and senior leaders will continue to engage with our local MATs and monitor the direction of travel as indicated by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark Education Commission. Financial pressures will no doubt continue to affect both schools, and governors and senior leaders will monitor both our income and expenditure, trying to maximise the former and control the latter without compromising on the pupils' education, or the wellbeing of staff.

The two schools of our Federation are thriving, with happy children experiencing great teaching and fabulous wider educational opportunities. The staff teams are committed, experienced professionals who are ambitious for the pupils, and the senior leaders are driven and determined that finite financial resources are used thoughtfully to deliver excellent outcomes. It is an honour to serve such these two communities.

Jane McManus

Chair of Governors