

Annual Governance Statement

Date: 2025-26

Overview

Our role as a governing board is to provide strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance. Our core functions are set out in regulation and include, but are not limited to ensuring:

- that the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the schools are clearly defined
- that the Head of Federation performs their responsibilities for the educational performance of the schools
- the sound, proper and effective use of the federation's financial resources

Each governor has specific responsibilities. Below are summaries from each of the governors from the last 12 months.

Safeguarding

Governors: Sue Hayward-Giles, Rachel Cooper

School leaders have a duty to make sure that safeguarding policies and procedures are understood, applied and have a positive impact on pupils. As safeguarding governors, Sue Hayward-Giles and I meet with the safeguarding lead for Sphere Federation and each school's Head of School every half term. This gives us an opportunity to review safeguarding policy and procedure and challenge leaders. Visits follow a checklist, enabling a systematic approach so that over the academic year all areas are covered. However, we constantly review the checklist to ensure it is current and covers any new statutory requirements or recommendations.

We also have opportunity to meet with unprepared staff and pupils, independently from the safeguarding team. This allows us to explore how pupils and staff feel about safeguarding in each school. For staff, we also review training and discuss the impact this has had.

Recognising that safeguarding is all governors' responsibility, we have introduced regular short training sessions once per term for the full governing body, led by our safeguarding lead. These are especially useful for understanding changes to policy and contextualising national, regional and individual school safeguarding issues.

Maths, Foundation Subjects, Attendance, Inclusion

Governor: Andrew Gibson

Under the new Ofsted framework, my year has involved monitoring a range of areas as a Governor. Foundation subjects are well-established with continual improvement showing in the development and delivery of the curriculum. I continue to be impressed with both the breadth and depth of provision for these subjects. Attendance continues to be a top priority; all three schools have demonstrated strong relationships with their families, and with local partner agencies and support services. I am impressed with the high level of support offered in very challenging circumstances of increasing demand for support provision. My work focusing on Attendance translated well to the high priority subject of Inclusion. I am pleased to be part of the newly formed team of Governors with this area of focus. It was reassuring to see how inclusion is woven into lessons and the subtle changes that are taking place to ensure that all children are invited to participate in ways that advance their education while also accounting for their specific needs. I was pleased to observe this in a Y4 lesson observation visit in one of our schools.

Inclusion and Strong Foundations: Writing

Governor: Rachel Barker

My areas of focus include Writing and Inclusion. As the Writing link governor, I have had regular insightful and purposeful sessions with Ollie Catherall (Sphere Federation Writing Leader), including our termly visits to each of the schools in Sphere Federation. Through the lens of inclusion, our visits include learning walks to see lessons in action and discussions around writing successes and learning points, whilst covering what resources are being used, how these are working in practice and what the key challenges are. For example, we have reviewed the writing data to understand the link between inclusion and attainment, considered how Christian distinctiveness is highlighted through activities such as different spelling focuses at St James' CE Primary, or how each school's vision is reflected in writing tasks. We have also considered how to improve writing performance through the implementation of best practice from early years and throughout the school, particularly focusing on the physical aspects of writing (posture, pencil grip, pressure and paper position) to further support our inclusion aims.

I aim to be a critical friend, providing meaningful support and constructive challenge during these meetings, so all parties find them purposeful and productive. With planning for the next academic year in place, there is a proactive, thorough, and clear plan for continued improvement and development for Writing across Sphere Federation in place.

Inclusion and Strong Foundations: Reading

Governor: Steven Trangmar

This year, I have taken on a new role as education governor and, as part of this role, contribute to the inclusion sub-group. Whilst reading is an important focus for all year groups, I have prioritised my visits this year on EYFS and early reading, given their importance in establishing strong foundations for future learning. I have met with the leaders for Early Years (Lottie Flynn) and Early Reading (Vicky Latham) and, within these meetings, have sought to provide strategic support and challenge in relation to progress data, the effectiveness of the new EYFS curriculum implementation, and alignment with the wider strategic priorities of Sphere Federation. A highlight of the year was visiting EYFS/KS1, where I gained first-hand insight into pupils' engagement with reading at an early stage of their education. Through my work on the inclusion group, I have ensured that my contributions are framed through a focus on inclusion. I have gained assurance that leaders are supporting staff in embedding inclusive practice, tracking progress, and adapting approaches where necessary to ensure all pupils can succeed.

Inclusion and Strong Foundations: Foundation subjects

Governor: Andrew Gibson

This year, I have taken on two new areas of focus: foundation subjects and attendance.

In Foundation Subjects, I am impressed with the evidence I have found of continuous curriculum development, and the continuous professional development undertaken by teachers and staff to ensure the breadth and depth of the foundation subjects learning across all year groups. Foundation subjects are at the heart of the two-year cycle curriculum structure. I was pleased to notice the consistency of approach across Sphere Federation.

We know that excellent attendance is fundamentally important. Attendance is a top priority for all Sphere Federation schools. While we have seen improvements in terms of attendance, there remain some challenges, especially at St James' CE Primary. I have observed the strong relationships between staff and families, and the caring culture that helps and supports our families when needed.

My work next year will be to continue to challenge and support the staff and teachers on these two important areas.

Health & Safety, Estates, GDPR

Governor: Craig Barker

As someone relatively new to the roles, over the last year, we have developed a structured approach to assessing all areas of Health and Safety and Data Protection. This has enabled me to develop a more detailed approach to governance within these areas, and working with the Sphere Federation Head of Federation, Heads of School, and Resources Manager, I have had very reassuring experiences on my school visits across the federation.

In my role, I visit all three schools to discuss all aspects of the above and the general management of resources across the three sites in terms of buildings, land and estate management. This ultimately ensures that the estate and its facilities are fit for purpose and are being monitored regularly. Overall, although my role as governor in this area is still embryonic, exposure to the staff and leadership across the federation continually reassures me that all three schools provide a safe, happy and healthy place to learn.

Finance

Governor: Kathryn Wenn

During the year, I have worked closely with Sue Quirk (Sphere Federation Resources Manager) as well as David Roundtree (Head of Federation) and our local authority Finance Partner to understand and challenge the procedures and processes in place to ensure funds are being used effectively, appropriately and in line with the schools' plans and budgets. This is particularly important against the wider backdrop of funding changes and increasing costs and the impact this has on setting and managing budgets. I have attended the mid-year budget review meeting and annual budget setting meeting to scrutinise the process and better understand the inputs and outputs. I have also led the governor review of our schools' financial value statements (SFVS) to ensure accuracy, clarity and completeness.

Following this, I have suggested some clarifications on the financial information provided to governors. All governors are now given the opportunity to review and challenge the monthly finance reports to assess progress against these budgets and to question leaders on the termly financial update provided in the Leaders' Report. Governors also regularly discuss financial benchmarking reports provided by the DfE which compare key categories of expenditure in Sphere schools to that of similar schools.

Staff governor

Governor: Owen Goodwin

This year, I was delighted to begin my role as staff governor across Sphere Federation. As a classroom teacher within the federation, I am able to bring insight from day-to-day school life and contribute a staff perspective to governing board discussions and decision making. My role allows me to represent the experiences, views and professional perspectives of staff across all three schools whilst continuing to support the strategic vision and priorities of Sphere Federation. Over the course of the year, I have developed a greater understanding of the wider responsibilities of governance, including accountability, school improvement and strategic leadership. I have particularly valued the opportunity to contribute to discussions surrounding teaching and learning, staff wellbeing and the experiences of pupils across the federation, whilst also providing constructive challenge and questioning from a staff perspective during governing board meetings.

Christian Distinctiveness – relevant to St James' CE Primary only

Governors: Kathryn Wenn, Sue Hayward-Giles, Matthew Peat

The purpose of this group is to support St James' CE Primary leaders in developing and maintaining the school's Christian vision as a lived reality, ensuring it has a positive impact on the ways in which adults and children in our community can be supported to flourish. We use the Church of England SIAMs framework as this basis of this and have the support of an adviser from the Diocese of Leeds. Whilst the work of the Christian Distinctiveness (CD) Group focuses on St James' CE Primary it also works with all leaders and governors to seek opportunities to enrich the life of the whole federation.

During the Autumn term, the group focused on understanding how the school's theologically-rooted Christian vision (*St James' CE Primary is a happy and healthy place to achieve and believe*) enables pupils and adults to flourish. The work was split into three parts focusing on collective worship, pupils and their understanding and experience of the vision, and staff and their understanding and experience of the vision.

In the Spring term, the group reflected on what it had learnt through the work looking at the impact of the vision and particularly how the school's vision can enable pupils (and staff) to experience a sense of connection to something beyond themselves.

In the Summer term, the group will be building on this by asking pupils and staff about the impact of the refreshed 'Reflect and Connect' approach to spirituality. The group will also be looking at how the school meets the requirements of the Church of England's statement of Religious Education which sets out the aim for pupils to leave school with a well-informed understanding of Christianity, other faiths and religious freedom.