



Governor Newsletter

SIR JOHN BARROW SCHOOL

July 2020

COVID - 19 update

It has become a cliché: that we are living in unprecedented times, but it is a cliché because it is true. Everyone has experienced their own personal version of the pandemic over the last few months. Although we're not sure about when an end will be in sight, we thought it would be relevant now to share how the SJB governing body has contributed to the school and wider community effort to safeguard each other.

Two key features have characterised the events of the last few months: the very rapid pace of change, and the high level of uncertainty about the situation and the best way to respond. These features have served as a backdrop for making some very serious decisions, decisions which under normal circumstances we would want months not days to prepare for.

It is the school staff who have done all the heavy lifting over the last months. We cannot overstate the hours worked and the creativity and dedication of our staff to quickly and effectively solve the problems thrown up at them. We are hugely grateful to them, and to our families and wider community for your support and understanding throughout.

The governor role has been a supporting one - we have been careful to step back and allow decisions about the day-to-day running of the school to be made by the staff on the ground. But we have played a significant part in helping the senior staff to navigate the minefield of advice and information, to help them feel confident about the right way to lead the school through this crisis.

The priorities of the governing body and staff throughout has been: to safeguard everyone's physical and mental health and wellbeing; to provide vital childcare to key workers and finally to maintain as high a quality of education as possible given the restrictions which are in place.



Our main responsibilities as governors have been:

- To be a sounding board for difficult decisions, for instance when to re-open and to whom since our capacity is hugely reduced
- To monitor the effective safeguarding of all pupils, but especially vulnerable pupils, who are not coming in to school
- To ensure effective and regular communication is taking place between school and families and to make sure school is approachable to address families' anxieties or concerns
- To oversee the use of a suitable and robust risk assessment procedures for re-opening, and to monitor how it is followed
- To have a duty of care to our staff and consider their well-being during all of the planning and decision making
- To oversee provision of material available to support learning and wellbeing of pupils who are at home rather than in school
- To have an understanding of the potential legal repercussions of decisions which are made by the governing body and bear this in mind throughout
- To be available where we have specific skills to contribute (data analysis/ knowledge of local structures/ HR experience)
- To help staff to plan for the next stages and the "new normal" as that begins to emerge...

Throughout this chapter, we have made every effort to be as informed as possible and have made use of the following sources of information:

- We have sought out information and advice from different sources both local and national, and helped to interpret data about the local situation regarding viral infection and transmission
- We have worked with governing bodies of other local schools to share advice and ideas
- Our Chair is a National Leader of Governance and has used her network of other such governors to share good practice and advice
- We have made use of the many online training sessions available through our networks (what did we all do before Zoom?) to make sure we are getting the best and most up-to-date legal advice and help in interpreting government guidance.

We are not there yet, but we feel proud to have been able to support the SJB community, to help our staff and enable our pupils to make the most of what has been the most difficult and challenging time. We will continue to work hard for our school and our community as the situation continues to evolve.

Message from Headteacher

Governance of a school is a huge responsibility. The work is voluntary and it often goes unseen. So I thought I would take a few minutes to say thank you to our Governors and to let you see a little of what I see.

Whenever I talk about the governing body here at SJB I usually find myself telling people how lucky I am to be a Headteacher in a school with such a strong and effective governing body. They know their role to strategically guide the school and they do it well. They are a group of caring, highly skilled and hard-working individuals who demonstrate again and again that they are in the role, not for themselves but to get the best for the children in the local community. Governors meetings aren't easy for me as Headteacher - I feel challenged! Yet in the most supportive of ways!

The Governors listen, question, reason and consider. They demonstrate our SJB values in practice and show in practice a desire to meet the needs of all our pupils including the most vulnerable. They are willing to think out of the box and consider creative ways to solve solutions.

SJB governors are very knowledgeable and professional about their role. They work hard to keep abreast of changes in schools and what that means to the school. During this time through the pandemic, they have attended webinars to gain an understanding of the current situation for schools in order to know and fulfil their role and support the school. They have held Extraordinary Governing Body meetings to ensure the school is doing everything it needs to do to serve the community.

The fact that every governor wanted to remain part of a COVID Response working group to support the school at this time speaks volumes. I, or other senior leaders, have had weekly phone calls from the Chair of Governors in a supportive role and to ensure we are managing to respond well to changing situations. The only times this hasn't happened has been at times when the school workload has been so heavy that it was recognised that even a weekly phone call would be an added unnecessary pressure! Other governors have also played key roles at this time, monitoring and supporting key school responsibilities, including Health and Safety, Safeguarding and SEND.

I am grateful that we as a school have walked through this time with such a group of compassionate, able and professional governors. THANK YOU

