



Thameside Governors

Introductory newsletter to parents and carers,
2015-16 academic year

Dec 2015

The work of governing bodies can seem shrouded in mystery. This term we would like to share a bit more with you about the work that we do and some of our current priorities.

Thameside's governors are busier behind the scenes than may always be apparent! Our aim in this bulletin is to give you some insight into how the governors are actively supporting and challenging your school in the interests of every child at Thameside.

Who we are...

Governors are volunteers, drawn from parents, staff and members of the local community. We all have other day jobs, so we bring with us a variety of skills, experience and perspectives.

What we have in common is the wish to work constructively with Mrs Wallace and her team to achieve the best possible outcomes for all Thameside children.

Thameside's Governing Body comprises...

Headteacher: *Helen Wallace*

Chair of Governors: *Mark Harper*

Vice-chair: *Lisa Anning*

Clerk to the Governing Body: *Sue Harrop*

Staff Governor (1): *Iain Gunn (from Jan 16, Rob Medwell)*

Local Authority Governor (1): *Richard Davies*

Parent Governors (2): *Mark Harper, Elizabeth McCrum*

Co-opted Governors (4):

Sarah Aitken, Lisa Anning, Alison Harwood, Brian Painting

New Parent Governor...

This term we are delighted to welcome **Elizabeth McCrum** as our new Parent Governor following a closely-fought election.

The parent poll attracted four strong candidates and we thank everyone for their participation.

Elizabeth has a professional background in education. She has already assumed leadership of our governor working group to look at issues around optimum staffing.

Governing Body (GB) Reconstitution...

In line with new regulations, Thameside's GB has recently reconstituted. We chose to adopt a more streamlined model of governance which we believe is already making us more focused and effective.

Meetings of the **Full Governing Body (FGB)** are held 6 times a year, and now alternate between evenings and day time, giving governors more opportunities to enjoy "learning walks" around the

school and to hear from school leaders about different areas of learning and provision.

At November's FGB, for example, governors were briefed by Mr Medwell on new teaching initiatives to close attainment gaps between **Pupil Premium** children and their peers.

This objective is a key strand of Thameside's **2015-16 School Development Plan**

(SDP), which prioritises the school's key improvement goals.

While most governor business now happens in FGBs, we retain a **Finance & Staffing Committee**. This group is delegated to monitor the school budget and, amongst other things, to approve pay decisions linked to teachers' performance management, and to audit the school's financial controls to ensure probity.



Link Governors...

Most governors take on specialist responsibility for one or more key areas, such as teaching and learning of Maths, or provision for **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**.

Our so-called **Link Governors** visit the school, confer with relevant staff and ask to see the impact of school action plans.

Link Governors report back to the FGB, helping us to build a collective picture of how the school is doing, and to focus our discussions about school improvement more keenly. They help us to ask the right questions of staff and to make sense of the mountain of evidence that governors review.

Link Governors reflect Thameside's annual improvement priorities, so this year they are nominated for:

- ◆ **Pupil Premium group**
- ◆ **Closing the Gaps** – specifically in reading (Pupil Premium & SEN groups)
- ◆ **Good Progress in Foundation Subjects**
- ◆ **Year 6** – with specific reference to Maths
- ◆ **Safeguarding & Attendance**
- ◆ **Inclusion & SEND**

The school website has more information about the governing team, including our photos and individual designations.

On the [Governor Pages](#) you can also read our **Annual Statement** (September 2015) and **Code of Conduct**.

Governor Visits...

Governors periodically carry out monitoring visits to help us get to know and understand the workings of the school.

We never make judgements about the quality of teaching or the progress of individual children.

What are governors for?

Put simply, the Governing Body is accountable for the quality of education your child receives at Thameside.

As governors we work to:

- ◆ ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction - helping the headteacher to set the school's values and goals;
- ◆ hold the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school across all areas, and the effective performance management of staff;
- ◆ oversee the financial performance of the school and make sure its money is spent to best effect.

Like any governing body, we operate strategically rather than operationally: governors have no responsibility for day-to-day management – this is the clear remit of Mrs Wallace as Headteacher.

The role of governors is often described as '**a critical friend**': we try to provide independent challenge by asking questions which drive continuous improvement. It does not mean that we 'criticise' the headteacher or staff.

Governance entails close monitoring of the school's educational performance and asking challenging questions about action and improvement planning by school leaders.

As recent examples, governors have asked:

- ◆ *What more can be done to boost progress by Pupil Premium children who are achieving at national expectations, but who could do even better?*
- ◆ *What has been the impact on children's behaviour of having less space in the playground?*

Core governor business...

At full governor sessions we will typically discuss:

Progress towards school targets seen through analysis of performance data.

For example:

Are all groups of learners on track to achieve or exceed National levels in the Year 6 SATS tests?

School Development Plan – ongoing action and the impact seen in and outside classrooms

Staffing & budgetary matters.

Examples of items featuring on recent agendas...

- ◆ **Ofsted:** the school's readiness for inspection and securing firm judgement as Good
- ◆ Teaching of **British Values**
- ◆ **Safeguarding:** audit of provision, covering everything from Child Protection referrals to E-Safety & site security
- ◆ School **Self-Evaluation**
- ◆ Use of the **Pupil Premium Grant** (£127,000 in 2015-16)
- ◆ Review of **school policies:** eg Behaviour; Intimate Care
- ◆ **SEND:** achieving consistent provision across the school
- ◆ Partnership building: participation of senior leaders in the "**London Leadership Strategy**" programme
- ◆ Commentary by Thameside's **independent School Improvement Partner.**

Attendance and Punctuality...

The Governing Body agrees the school's annual targets for pupil attendance.

Governors regularly monitor attendance data for all groups of pupils, to identify and query trends linked to children's progress.

Governors are very pleased to highlight the **rising trend in attendance** in recent years.

The Attendance Target for 2015-16 is 96.4%. Children's attendance currently stands at **96.1%** (11 December).

Thank you to all parents for continuing to support your child's good attendance.

Thameside School Website...

Do take a moment to explore the [website](#) if you haven't visited recently.

You'll find Class and Headteacher blogs, results achieved in Key Stage national tests (SATs), termly lesson plans, class timetables, as well as signposting to lots of useful resources.

Recently posted are some exciting new initiatives to promote and celebrate **children's reading at Thameside** – thank you to Mrs Greenaway and her colleagues for putting all these together.

Assessment after "Levels"...

It's now more than a year since the national system of measuring children's progress through *Levels* was replaced with the introduction of *Bands*:

"Expected" Band – where the child is working at the level expected for their age

"Emerging" Band - where the child is working below the level expected for their age

"Exceeding" Band - where the child is working above the level expected for their age.

It is for each school to devise ways to assess the development in, and movement between, these Bands.

Thameside governors have overseen the roll-out of the school's **new Assessment Model** and wish to applaud the work of Mrs Wallace and her team in achieving this well ahead of the curve. Other schools in the Borough have sought advice from Thameside in developing their own methodologies, and Thameside's model has been commended by our external Adviser.

Governors have been impressed with how teachers have embraced this change, coinciding as it has with our teachers already working incredibly hard to implement big changes to the Curriculum.

An overview of the new [Assessment Rationale](#) is on the website.

Over to you... what do Parents think?



Parent View, Ofsted's simple online poll, provides Thameside leaders with a valuable barometer of parent opinion. This 12-question, tick box survey asks parents how happy they are with the quality of teaching, homework, behaviour, management of bullying, and so on.

The 65 responses posted since 1st September are informing our picture of parental satisfaction with Thameside.

Governors are delighted to see that **100% of current respondents would recommend Thameside** to other parents, and that **100% of parents "agree" or "strongly agree" that their child is happy at this school.**

The more parents who complete Parent View, the more accurate this picture will become.

Please register your views - and check out real-time results for Thameside - at: www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk

Thameside Parent Forum....

The TPF was launched by governors in 2011 to establish a space for parent-led debate.

The idea was to engage more parents in conversations about how to enhance the school, through parent support.

Proposals for the new Aftercare service in 2012 prompted what remains the largest attendance to date, leaving no doubt about parents' enthusiasm to see this introduced!

Governors are delighted that Parent Forum remains active, with two sessions already held since September. This is thanks to some dedicated parents - you know who you are!

Governors will continue to follow with interest the themes under discussion.

Questions and answers coming out of TPF are up on the website - recent topics include:

- ◆ prospects for a school Breakfast Club
- ◆ school-parent communications
- ◆ the future of the modular buildings / school playing field

Any parent or carer with a child at Thameside is a member of [Parent Forum](#) and is encouraged to make their voice heard.

We hope this letter has given you a flavour of the governors' work.

There's plenty more to cover and we will issue further bulletins during 2016.

We want newsletters to be relevant and informative: parents are invited to nominate any theme you'd like us to explain more.

Future updates could include:

- ◆ How governors track pupil progress and attainment for different groups of learners
- ◆ Ofsted: preparing for Good (and Outstanding)
- ◆ more about any Link Governor specialism

We will be happy to expand on any aspect of governance, so do tell us what topics you'd like to see covered next time.

Email us at governors@thameside.reading.sch.uk, or contact Mark Harper, Chair of Governors, via the School Office.

Thank you.

- Thameside School Governors