



## HCC Commissioned School Visit Report

School	Rickmansworth Park JMI School	Date	18 <sup>th</sup> October 2022
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Name of consultant	L. A. Hardman	Visit focus	Strategic Governance
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Length of visit (including preparation, visit and writing of the report): 1 day

Focus of visit:

The purpose of the visit is to explore the effectiveness of strategic governance.

The three core functions of governance are:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure that its money is well spent, including the pupil premium.

This visit focuses on the first two core functions.

Outline of the visit:

- A review of pertinent documentation shared by the headteacher ahead of the visit. This included:
  - The headteacher's reports to the governing body for the past year.
  - The governing body minutes for the past year
  - The reading development plan
  - The current summary of school self-evaluation
  - The current school development plan
  - The maths development plan
  - The most recent parent survey for 2022
- An exploration of the school website to gain further insight on the leadership and management of the school and the governor presence.
- A meeting with the team to discuss the context of the school.  
The discussion related to:
  - Leaders' current school improvement priorities
  - How these have been identified?
  - The extent to which they reflect the current Education Inspection Framework.
- The chair, vice chair, a governor with an education background, the headteacher, and the consultant met to explore current practice regarding how governors hold leaders to account for the educational performance of the school.
- The co-construction of a governance action plan.

Context

- Rickmansworth Park JMI School is a one form entry primary school. A large percentage of pupils (62%) come from White British backgrounds with 12% identifying as coming from Any Other White background and 6% identifying as Asian or Asian British-Indian

Eleven of the possible seventeen ethnic groups are represented in school (as identified from the most recent ISDR - Inspection School Dashboard Report 2022)

- Additional relevant contextual information from the same source include:
  - 6% FSM well below average
  - 9% SEND support below average
  - 0.5% SEND EHCP well below average
  - 25% EAL above average
- Rickmansworth Park is a high achieving school. The following areas of particularly strong performance is recorded on the ISDR for 2022:
  - Key stage 1 attainment of the expected standard in reading (87%) was significantly above national and in the highest 20% in 2022.
  - The proportion of pupils meeting the phonics expected standard (32+) in Year 1 (97%) was significantly above national and in the highest 20% of all schools in 2022.
  - Key stage 2 progress in writing (2.9) was significantly above national and in the highest 20% in 2022
  - Key stage 2 attainment of the expected standard in writing (97%) was significantly above national and in the highest 20% in 2022.
  - Key stage 1 attainment of the expected standard in writing (77%) was significantly above national and in the highest 20% in 2022.
  - Key stage 2 attainment of the high standard (110+) in mathematics (40%) was significantly above national and in the highest 20% in 2022.
  - Key stage 2 attainment of the expected standard (100+) in reading, writing and mathematics (77%) was significantly above national and in the highest 20% in 2022.
  - Key stage 2 attainment of the high standard (110+) in the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test (47%) was significantly above national and in the highest 20% in 2022.
- Rickmansworth Park JMI School was last inspected in October 2018 under Section 8 and was confirmed to still be a good school. A wide range of strengths were identified in the setting. The points for further development have been a sustained focus of improvement planning. This included the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, the teaching of mathematics and pupil handwriting and presentation in all subjects.

#### Additional observations and commentary

- The reason the school chose strategic governance as their focus for the Hertfordshire Commissioned School Visit is to ensure that there is high quality leadership evidenced across all aspects of the school. The governance team also wish to be aware of any refinements to provision and practice, to ensure they provide highly effective governance as the team around the school, by providing an appropriate level of support and challenge.
- The governing board at Rickmansworth Park JMI School are a highly committed and dedicated team who are strongly focused on ensuring they support the school leaders to provide the best quality provision for the children in the school's care. They work closely and effectively with the headteacher and school leaders. The current structure that is adopted by the school includes six full governing body meetings over the year. All governors attend all meetings so that all are aware of every aspect of the school planning, provision and performance. In addition there are governor visits for specific

purposes. At the beginning of each governing body meeting there is a selected focus which is presented by specific leaders in the school to ensure that all governors are updated on provision, practice and planned developments. This works effectively and is a model of good practice. In addition governors are attached to specific year groups and attend school events such as assemblies so they are very much a visible presence in the life and work of the school.

- There is some representation of the governing board on the school website which could be further enhanced. Currently there is information on the membership. It would be a good idea to reflect upon what further information might be relevant, informative and helpful. For example, terms of reference, the governors monitoring and evaluation cycle, confirmed minutes of meetings for transparency, a termly governor newsletter, highlights from governor visit reports, the premises development plan etc. There is perhaps an assumption that anyone accessing the school website knows what the role of a governor looks like at the school. This would strengthen representation of the work of the team around the school.
- Minutes of meetings were shared. These minutes demonstrate that governors ask suitable questions to challenge leaders about their provision.
- Governors at Rickmansworth Park JMI School demonstrate that they are skilled and knowledgeable, and this has been achieved in part by their willingness to complete relevant training with HfL Governance team and through the modules available to them on Modern Governor. Their wider life and professional range of expertise also enables this, which is channelled to support the school. Recent training includes a wide range of topics such as premises management, health and safety, mental health and wellbeing, headteacher's performance management, disciplinary hearings, GDPR, social media, financial management, induction, pay and appraisal, effective use of pupil premium, exclusion and complaints. All governors have refreshed their safeguarding training in September 2022. The clerk has also received training in being effective in this role. The chair attends the Strategic Information Briefings. This ensures that she is well placed to guide and support the work of the governing board in their key responsibilities. The commitment to training is a great strength of the work of the governing body at this school and it makes the team around the school highly effective.
- Governors have specific responsibilities allocated to members of the team. This relates to finance, premises, health and safety, SEND, personnel and safeguarding. Responsibilities have been allocated according to individual expertise. Governors complete a skills audit periodically and have identified that the current gap is for legal input. This knowledge supports their strategic planning going forward.
- The governing board ensure that they immerse themselves in the life and work of the school. Visibility is an important priority for them. There are governor mornings which enable engagement with children, parents and staff. This open and transparent strategy enables governors to gather information objectively and first hand for themselves. What is strongly evidenced is that the governors at Rickmansworth Park JMI know and care about the school.
- Current priorities for the school are:
  - Embedding consistency in high quality teaching and learning across the school.
  - Ensuring good attendance for the most disadvantaged learners
  - Improving provision in Mathematics teaching and learning

- Improving pupil presentation in handwriting.
- The above were the key points for action identified in the last inspection. This has been carefully monitored by the headteacher and the governing body to ensure that improvement has been prioritised. Detailed plans evidence the steps that the school has taken to ensure these matters have been robustly addressed.
- Governors are able to confidently articulate the effectiveness of actions that have been put in place to address school priorities. High emphasis is placed on the forensic approach, led by the headteacher, in identifying and addressing gaps in pupils' skills knowledge and understanding.
- In addition recent areas of focus have been expanded in relation to issues that emerged during the pandemic – for example, reading has been an area of concern -supporting parents to assist with reading fluency and the development of cultural capital. Comprehensive plans are in place to address this and governors are fluent in their understanding of the impact of these plans.
- Governors ensure that parental views are sought around the school provision. The most recent survey outcomes were shared which indicate that the school is held in high regard by the community it serves with high percentages of the families in support of all strands of evaluation. This serves to support the school's view of its overall effectiveness. 96.7% would recommend this school to another parent.
- The one area where parents may need to have greater information is in relation to SEND. There was a high percentage of neutral responses in the parent questionnaire. Even if their child does not have SEND do all parents know the system or processes in place here? The school uses the Hertfordshire SEND Benchmarking Toolkit and this assists in ensuring that school processes for early and swift intervention are well established.
- Governors report that they are confident that safeguarding is effective, and the culture is well embedded at the school. This is an area that is taken seriously by all parties. It also links across into the proactive work of the health and safety governor.
- Governors explained that they learn about the impact of the curriculum from a variety of sources. This includes from their links relating to different areas of the curriculum, the clarity of information in the headteacher reports to the governing body and the information provided to them through the subject leader presentations to the governing body. Governor visits could be strategically linked to monitoring activities with the subject leaders so that the governor and subject leaders complete some of these activities (eg pupil voice, learning walks, book reviews) collaboratively. This would support governors in their understanding and enable them to know more and remember more about the area of the curriculum they have oversight of. In this way governors can demonstrate that they have gained an incisive understanding of the impact of the whole curriculum, so they can routinely hold leaders to account for every aspect of the school's performance.
- Governors are confident that this school remains at least a good school. They have evidence of this through their independent monitoring processes and the supportive evidence provided by the headteacher and other leaders. They confidently discuss the quality of education, the personalised provision, the role of the school leaders and their capacity to drive improvement. They observe that the approach and the high expectations are explicit at this school. Staff continually evolve and embrace change and there is no complacency or resistance to change. They observe that staff are passionate

to ensure that the school continues to offer the children in its care the very best quality of educational provision.

- The strength of this school is a highly aspirational headteacher, skilled senior leaders and an enabling and skilful team of governors who provide the most appropriate form of support, challenge, and accountability.

Report to be copied to:

- Tania Rawle, HCC Head of School Standards and Accountability
- Simon Newland, HCC Operations Director, Education, Children's Services
- Jeremy Loukes, HfL Head of Primary: School Leadership
- Anne Peck, Regional Lead for the West
- Linda Hardman, District School Effectiveness Adviser, Three Rivers

Strategic Governance Action Plan for Rickmansworth Park JMI School

Plan written by Linda Hardman on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2022 with the intention of building on existing good practice in evidence.

Area in focus:	Current status:	Actions:	Timescale	Evaluation
<p>Governors have a secure understanding of the principles underpinning the current Education Inspection Framework.</p>	<p>Governor training records show the valuable and extensive breadth of training in the team around the school.</p> <p>The current gap in training, specifically relates to the current Education Inspection Framework. Governors need to be able to confidently articulate the EIF principles.</p> <p>Training would also enable governors to be well-prepared to articulate how they fulfil their roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>All governors to complete relevant training modules – for example “Knowing your School - “Towards Outstanding”</p> <p>CoG / Clerk to encourage governors to access additional free online training on the inspection processes, examples of which include:</p> <p>“<i>Being Ofsted Ready</i>” a podcast via Modern Governor</p> <p>Ofsted webinar “<i>Governance and inspection</i>”</p> <p>Ofsted webinar “<i>How schools are inspected – a detailed walk through an inspection</i>”</p> <p>Please note – The above Ofsted webinars will be made available on Ofsted’s YouTube channel <a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/Ofstednews/videos">https://www.youtube.com/user/Ofstednews/videos</a></p> <p>DSEA to provide support for the governing body to improve their understanding of the EIF</p>	<p>All governors by July 2023</p> <p>DSEA to send relevant resources</p>	

		<p>CoG / Clerk to remind all governors to familiarise themselves with Ofsted's school inspection handbook, with a particular focus on how inspectors inspect, and form judgements, on leadership and management, the quality of education, personal development, behaviour and attitudes and early years.</p> <p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook</a></p> <p>Tweak the focus of subject presentations to the governing body. How is the school demonstrating exceptional provision? This is the aspiration for the school.</p> <p>Ensure the strategic planning of governor visits to evaluate the implementation of the quality of education across the school. Is there clarity about the focus and lines of enquiry being explored? Current training will clarify this.</p>	<p>ongoing</p> <p>HT to guide SL in expectations</p> <p>HT and CoG from January 2023</p>	
<p>Governors are fully involved to the process of school self-evaluation.</p>	<p>This is evidenced through feedback at governing body meetings and governor visits.</p> <p>Governors have a monitoring plan that fulfils statutory duties and responsibilities.</p>	<p>All governors and staff to be aware of the strategic overview of whole school monitoring processes.</p> <p>Align governor visits / feedback to this programme.</p> <p>How does each governor with allocated responsibilities learn about their area?</p>	<p>Ongoing from January 2023</p>	

	<p>Key questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– What else would be beneficial to include on this plan? - Updated knowledge of the current EIF will refine this plan.</li> </ul>	<p>How do they assess how effective the provision is? What is their evidence base?</p> <p>Are school/ subject/ aspect self-evaluation summaries shared systematically and robustly with the governing board?</p> <p>Is this scheduled into the work plan of the governing body?</p> <p>What opportunities are there to challenge and question?</p> <p>Does the format and content of all the headteacher's reports to the governing body provide the most relevant and helpful information to governors? Do you want / need any adaptations?</p>	Sections shared at each GB meeting	
<p>Governors are fully involved in the process of setting whole school priorities for school improvement.</p>	<p>Governors are informed of school improvement priorities through the school improvement plan, school visits, the headteacher's reports to the governing body and the school summary of self-evaluation.</p> <p>Key question:</p>	<p>Sustain the monitoring the SIP as a standing agenda item on FGB meetings, so that progress against key priorities is reviewed periodically</p> <p>Consider organising a strategy day to enable all governors to contribute to setting school priorities for 23/24. Think longer term.</p> <p>Consider carrying out a SWOT analysis to support the strategic long-term planning (<a href="#">SWOT</a>)</p> <p>These prompts will be helpful:</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>From January 2023</p>	

	How does the governor strategic plan align to the school improvement plan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where do you want your school to be in 3-5 years' time – what is your vision?</li> <li>- When did you last review this?</li> <li>- What needs doing to achieve this?</li> <li>- How will you bring stakeholders with you?</li> <li>- What are the risks and opportunities now and on the horizon?</li> <li>- What is your culture, values and ethos?</li> </ul>		
Governance structures support the effective monitoring of progress towards school improvement priorities.	The governing body agenda is strategically planned across the full year, inclusive of standing items	<p>Continue to prioritise statutory requirements.</p> <p>Ensure whole school priorities have tight review and accountability.</p> <p>.</p>	Ongoing	Build in review dates
Governors are active participants in visits from external improvement partners.	<p>This is a strength of the school's work at the present time.</p> <p>Participation in these visits enables governors to receive first-hand information from an external professional and this supports governors to have greater insight into the quality of education in the school.</p>	<p>Continue to ensure there is a governor presence for every strategically planned visit.</p> <p>This could be either in person or remotely.</p> <p>This enables the detail of the verbal feedback to be captured alongside the formal written report.</p>	Ongoing	All governors with specific responsibilities relating to the visit.

<p>Governors use the headteacher's performance management process to celebrate achievements and affect change.</p>	<p>Leaders report that this is a robust process which is conducted in a procedurally correct way with rigour. An external adviser has always been used to support the process.</p>	<p>Continue to link elements of the school self-evaluation summary, the annual school improvement plan and current national and local educational priorities to the appraisal targets for the headteacher who then cascades these down to the teaching team.</p> <p>Ensure rigour in review.</p> <p>Plan collaboratively the headteacher's continuing professional development opportunities, linked to needs and aspirations, to sustain high quality leadership</p> <p>Ensure clarity in the overview of the appraisal process and themes of targets for all members of the school team. This ensures that human resources across the school are maximised to the benefit of the pupils.</p>	<p>HTPM committee with HT</p> <p>Through the HT reporting to the governing body.</p>	
<p>Governor training schedules are coordinated and systematic and ensure governors have the knowledge and understanding to fulfil their roles and responsibilities</p>	<p>Governors are keen to engage with training and have covered many valuable strands which is supporting them in their effectiveness.</p> <p>How strategic is the approach to governor training?</p> <p>Do all governors have sufficient knowledge and</p>	<p>With support from the school's clerk, analyse the governor training records to identify gaps and/or elapsed training.</p> <p>With support from the school's clerk, identify training requirements and support governors to access the necessary training.</p> <p>Include training requirements on the annual programme / plan of governor activities.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	

	<p>understanding to be able to support and challenge school leaders?</p> <p>Training provides governors with the knowledge and confidence to provide the correct balance of support and challenge to ensure tight accountability:</p> <p>Key questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you know this?</li> <li>- What has been the impact?</li> <li>- Where is the evidence to support this?</li> </ul>	<p>Consider following the GREAT governor training pathway (<a href="#">GREAT</a>)</p> <p>Ensure all new governors access induction and safeguarding training.</p> <p>Ensure governors remain compliant with safeguarding training schedules, including safer recruitment training.</p> <p><i>Cross reference also to training related to developing governors' understanding of the Education Inspection Framework specified in the first section of this plan.</i></p>		
<p>There is a succession plan in place to ensure that the school is not exposed to strategic weakness through a lack of purposeful monitoring, evaluation and accountability.</p>	<p>At the present time, the governors are confident that succession is well considered amongst senior leaders and within governance. This would benefit from being formally recorded.</p> <p>Key questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does the succession plan look</li> </ul>	<p>Consultation with the HfL Governance team about scenarios to prepare for this going forward, if appropriate</p> <p>Draw up a succession plan for the school in terms of governance, headteacher, other leaders and key staff.</p> <p>Ensure that a school leadership succession plan is in place for all potential future scenarios.</p>	<p>C of G and HT with HFL Governance.</p> <p>Prioritise in 2023 and keep under continual review</p>	

	<p>like at Rickmansworth Park JMI School?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are governors planning for this strategically?</li> <li>- What opportunities are being created to grow leaders within and around the school?</li> </ul>	<p>This will sustain a high performing school and provide other benefits such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- creating meaningful work and growth opportunities for staff</li> <li>- encouraging a climate of continuous learning</li> <li>- ensuring staff recognise their value'</li> <li>- contributing to diversity and inclusion</li> <li>- making best use of the school's human resources to achieve high quality outcomes for the learners.</li> <li>- increasing productivity</li> </ul>		
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