

Oakwood School Annual Report of the Board of Governors

2016 / 2017

Introduction

As Chair of the Board of Governors of Oakwood School my first duty is to report to you on what has been a difficult and eventful year for Oakwood School & Assessment Centre. Following a disappointing inspection report the school management has implemented positive change and recorded on-going improvement.

I would like to thank the outgoing chair Frank Quinn and deputy chair Edith Shaw for their unfailing support for the school and all their hard work over many years. I wish them well in their retirement.

The Principal and the Oakwood Leadership Team continues to provide guidance and support to staff in the development of a safe and nurturing environment for our children and ensures that the highest possible educational experiences are extended to the pupils.

The school governors have worked tirelessly to support everyone involved with the school, pupils, parents and staff alike and I would like to thank them for their continued commitment.

My thanks are also extended to the EA Educational Psychology service for the excellent work and support provided by our named psychologist.

BHSCT continue to supplement the work of the school staff by providing high quality nursing and therapy services. The input of the behaviour support services over the last year have also proved invaluable.

This report simply serves only to give a 'snap shot' of the school if parents or other interested parties which to discuss any aspect of the schools work please feel free to contact me or any member of the governors.

Elaine Colgan

Chair

Oakwood School Board of Governors

OAKWOOD SCHOOL & ASSESSMENT CENTRE

BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEMBERSHIP 2016-2017

Mr Frank Quinn BELB Rep	Chair
Mrs Edith Shaw BELB Rep	Vice-Chair
Mr Jude Offodum DENI Rep	
Mrs Elaine Colgan DENI Rep	
Mrs Kelly Sharratt Parent Rep	
Mrs Brenda Kernaghan Parent Rep	(joined June 2017)
Mrs Deirdre Currie Teacher Rep	
Mrs Tish McCann Secretary to BoG	Non-voting member

Child Protection & Safeguarding.

Following on from our inspection some changes were made to the safeguarding team as advised by ETI inspectors.

Addele Lynas was appointed as the designated CP Teacher for Oakwood School and Michelle Walsh was appointed as Deputy Designated Child Protection officer along side Lynn Lavery (VP). All staff received their annual in-house child protection training from Addele Lynas. Kelly Sharratt (Parent Governor) was elected as the designated governor for child protection.

The Governors were given up-dates from Tish McCann on child protection and safeguarding issues at each meeting of the Board of Governors. Addele and/or Lynn attended all safe guarding, child protection and LAC meetings on behalf of the school. There were no child protection matters that had arisen regarding staff.

Child Protection Policy Update

Parents received an up-dated copy of our Child Protection Policy. Parents were asked to sign a slip to confirm they had received it and read it.

The policy on the acceptable use of the internet and E safety was updated and approved by Governors. Staff were given advice about the use of Social Media.

Child Protection Allegations Against Staff

The governors were up-dated regarding incidents or allegations against staff and the chair signed the Confidential 'Black Book' locked in the child protection cupboard in the Vice Principal's office. It was confirmed that the child protection cupboard should remain in the Vice Principal's office. The procedures for investigating incidents or allegations against staff were reviewed and updated as required. We are pleased to be able to report that no child protection allegations were made against staff.

Securing Child Protection Information In School

Kelly Sharratt made an annual check to ensure that all confidential child protection information was locked away safely in the child protection cupboard. It was agreed that only those staff members and Governors who were given BOG approval should have access to the files. These were Addele Lynas(Designated Teacher), Michelle Walsh and Lynn Lavery(Deputy Designated Teachers), Kelly Sharratt(Designated child protection Governor)and Tish McCann (school Principal).

Reviewing & Updating of Risk Assessment

The Risk Assessment process for all activities had been reviewed and revised during the previous school year and these policies were implemented in full during the school year 2016-17. It was agreed that the risk assessment process would continue to be under constant review on an on-going basis to ensure that children are adequately protected and safeguarded. New procedures for risk assessment were introduced in September 2016. Mr Tom Ferran as the new Health & Safety officer following the retirement of Mrs Noreen Dorman provided staff training during the August 'Baker days'. We are confident that our system is robust but are monitoring and assessing its effectiveness on an on-going basis.

All staff were instructed on how to complete the Risk Assessment forms and procedures documents.

Managing Attendance & Staff Welfare

Managing attendance and staff welfare continued to remain a daily challenging issue for the leadership and management team. Tish McCann again began the school year by updating the staff on the policy and on the management of such. She asked teachers to discuss managing attendance with the general assistants in their rooms. Once more she made the distinction between being unwell and unfit for work. Mrs McCann advised staff that unpaid leave was not a 'right' but was considered in line with the needs of the school and reminded staff that 'unpaid' leave still accrued a cost to the EA.

However, it should be noted that despite the support and tireless effort by all those involved, attendance patterns for some staff still remains a difficult challenge to overcome despite EA / HR input at times.

Oakwood School has developed and implemented a staff welfare policy, although the leadership team was disappointed to note that no such policy exists within the EABR.

Vetting Procedures

ACCESS N.I. continued to be used to 'vet' new staff and/ or voluntary helpers. This is still organised through EA/Board and the procedures followed rigorously.

Collaborative Working

Oakwood School remains committed to collaborative practice and therapists and other service providers or stakeholders are considered to be important stakeholders in supporting education at Oakwood. Following a lengthy dispute relationship with OT services have improved and OT once more takes place within the school. The new collaborative working practice procedures appear to work well with the therapists and the development of a teacher / therapy liaison officer in the person of Mrs Starrett has further enhanced relationships. Teachers have affirmed that they are happy with relationships between education and other professionals

Governors continue to be concerned that therapy provision in school is not adequately covered when therapy staff leave, or are on maternity leave or numbers of pupils have increased.

Complaints by Parents Against Staff

Governors have been made aware of the new procedures issued by the EA for handling parental complaints against staff. Parents were also sent a copy of these procedures and they were up-loaded onto the web-site. Any complaints against staff by parents were investigated by Governors and/or the Principal or Vice Principal and appropriate feedback and action taken.

Visitors & Security

Safeguarding of children is of paramount importance in Oakwood School. No visitors or parents are allowed to 'wander' freely around the school building. An electronic visitor's scanner (card reader) is installed to help monitor and record people entering and/or leaving the building (i.e. staff, visitors and parents). All parents, visitors, and contractors must report to the main office immediately on entering the building and they are not permitted to walk around the building unaccompanied or without permission. They must also wear the visitor passes that have been issued to them on entering the building. School staff wear ID at all times.

Creating & Maintaining a Supportive Learning Environment

We continue to strive to do the best for our children by improving the quality of teaching and learning. Following inspection by the ETI in October the school has developed an action plan for improvement and created new staff teams to monitor Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation and School Leadership. These teams worked tirelessly during the school year and the impact of the changes implemented are beginning to be felt.

School Improvement & Development Targets

We are committed to raising school standards and to following a school improvement agenda which focuses on giving our children a wider range of experiences that will promote independence. The governors support the action plans drawn up to raise standards and improve performance through the post inspection action plan and with the support of the EA..

Self-Evaluation & Review

This process has been a dominant theme across the post inspection action plan and is developing well. A team led by Tom Ferran has drawn up a new policy for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and school effectiveness.

PRSD

The PRSD process for teachers continued to be linked to monitoring teacher performance and effectiveness in the classroom. Once again the promotion of self-review and self-evaluation has led to class teams evaluating their effectiveness more systematically.

strategies for communication. All staff have now been trained to deliver Attention Autism and this technique is proving very successful in the classrooms.

Behaviour Support

Meeting the needs of children presenting with challenging behaviour continues to be developed. Challenging behaviour and supporting the increasing complexity of pupils remain a priority. A sensory support programme has been designed to help children with sensory processing difficulties. Outside support from CDT has been accessed for specific pupils.

Literacy

Literacy remains a priority area for the school and has been identified for audit in the school year 2017-18.

Planning for Differentiation

All children have been given full access to the N.I. Curriculum. The way our timetables are written was evaluated to ensure all our children are being given a broad and balanced curriculum tailored specifically to meet their individual needs and Educational Statements. Timetables were adjusted and rebalanced as necessary and the whole process evaluated during the Baker Days in August 2017. The language used on timetables was amended to be more in line with curriculum and Quest areas.

IEPs

Our IEP format was adjusted to reflect the Q skills pupils were working towards and we are pleased to be able to report that our staff welcomed the challenge of planning and assessing this presented. In addition, ICT targets are now identified on the IEPs. Teachers continue to use all available resources to ensure we give each and every pupil an individual programme differentiated specifically to meet their needs.

Monitoring and Recording Progress

Following on from the review of IEP writing, the ways in which we monitor and record progress have been reviewed. The systematic monitoring and recording of progress is fundamental to individual pupil performance and whole school planning. We are pleased to report that we introduced a new system on a trial basis while this remains on-going we are confident that it provides a robust and suitable system for ensuring that continuity and progression exists throughout a pupils' school career.

Management of Resources

Finance

Under the 'Controlled' Schools umbrella, Special Schools in NI have still not been allocated a fully delegated budget by EA. English and Welsh school have and as a result they can dictate and control staffing levels, therapeutic input and resource demands.. Once again our budget allocation to cover consumables and resources is very limited and may yet prove to be insufficient to meet the needs of the school and its pupils.

School Building

The school building is beginning to show its age. In an effort to improve the appearance of the school, the caretaker and staff have undertaken school maintenance projects. There continues to be a problem with the heating in the senior end of the school. The principal has requested an estimate from maintenance to paint the outside of the school

School Transport

School Transport is provided and run by the EABR. The governors continue to have concerns about the length of time children are on buses and about the standard of other agency buses. For some pupils individual taxis are necessary especially for those children with complex medical needs. The EA agreed to support some families financially to transport their children.

Training for Governors

Governors attended various training sessions held by EA although many found it difficult to attend due to pressure of work. Governors remain disappointed that some of the courses are 'Mainstream School' focused with no direct relevance to Special School Management.

Staff Changes and Redeployment

This year our procedures for staff deployment were reviewed and agreement reached as to how we could make them more effective. While it was agreed that staff expertise within a specialised area must be utilized as much as possible so that everyone can benefit accordingly, it was also recognised that changing staff around can have huge benefits in giving staff a fresh and new challenge. It was also agreed that the needs of the pupils must remain paramount and as such, staff must agree to be flexible to deployment where the need is greater at that moment in time. Staffing quotas still remain under EABR control, following a meeting with Ruth Bell (EA) the school received it's 'core staffing' allocation for the incoming year and posts were identified, advertised and appointed according to EA policy. Two new permanent teaching appointments were made in June alongside two temporary posts to cover the two teachers on secondment to the ASD service. Marian Doran continues to work a four-day week, and Caroline Ward and Debby Kerr continue to operate a job share arrangement. Andrew Cleary worked a two-day week as a specialist PE teacher funded from the extended schools budget, his contribution to the school is highly valued.

Management of Measuring & Recording Pupil Performance

Measuring and Recording Pupil performance

The assessment policy has been up-dated to reflect recent additions to the monitoring and recording of pupil progress.

The assessment process tracks the attainments and progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils over time and is designed to help teachers make well founded judgements about pupils' attainments, provide information for future planning as well as to give parents accurate information regarding their child. A wide variety of written data and photographs are also being kept as evidence of progress. All progress is monitored and the outcomes recorded. Information is collated so that governors are enabled to evaluate practise across the school.

Planning and Monitoring

In order to ensure that our planning and review cycle is of the highest standard we are reviewing the way we present our planning and agreeing new formats for recording. We are still working hard at reducing bureaucracy and 'fine tuning' paper work further to reduce teacher work-load.

Rhona Grant continues to work hard at finding ways to 'bench mark' progress and record the achievements more systematically.

Assemblies, Celebrations and Recognition of Cultural Diversity

We have reviewed the format of our assemblies and have reduced the duration of such. We have now established a set format that ensures that all pupils are able to participate regardless of ability. A sensory Assembly has been developed and runs alongside the main assembly. The content used for assembly is welcoming to all pupils regardless of age, culture and/or religion. We enjoy celebrating pupil achievements at our assemblies and recognise individual pupil's and staff birthdays. We encourage the use of positive rewards and motivation systems throughout the school.

The school has achieved the UNICEF 'rights respecting schools award' and all staff are mindful of the importance of respecting and valuing everyone regardless of colour, culture or religion. These values are firmly embedded in our school ethos.

Health Care & Social Services Trust

Therapy

The Belfast Trust remains committed to providing for the medical and therapeutic needs of our pupils. We are now working together using a more effective and efficient system of collaborative working to agree targets and to plan and deliver programmes and we would like to thank them for their effort and hard work.

Clinical Psychology

We also work in partnership with the Belfast Trust with regard to Behaviour Support. A special thank you to Clinical Psychologist Dr Philip Moore and his team for their on-going support for parents and pupils at Oakwood School.

Swimming

Thank you to all our volunteers who help with swimming without you we would not be able to provide this valuable activity.

Pets As Therapy

Tish's dog Charlie was registered as a Pets As Therapy dog. He comes into school to visit the classes and the children are benefit greatly from his presence.

Sports Coaching

Both the IFA and the IRFU provided coaching sessions for our pupils during the school year. Their help support and enthusiasm was very much appreciated by staff and pupils alike.

Communicating with Parents & Parent Workshops

We are trying to find wider and more successful strategies for communicating more effectively with parents. The school continues to develop its web page and has introduced a successful Facebook page. The newssheet continues to go home to parents half termly.

School Budget

Special Schools in NI do not manage their own budget and this definitely is problematic when it comes to governance and control. Oakwood is reliant on EANI allocating a budget (Article 60) they believe will enable the school to run successfully. However, this allocation continues to be ineffective in meeting the needs of children in Oakwood School.

During 2016-2017, we struggled to keep within budget; governors had expressed their concern that the budget would be further squeezed in the next financial year.

Conclusion

In conclusion, may I take this opportunity to thank all staff for their hard work throughout the school year. Many of our staff - secretaries, supervisory assistants, cleaners, teachers, classroom assistants, general assistants, drivers, escorts, therapists and the Buildings Supervisors - work tirelessly as unseen heroes, and our thanks must go to them for their on-going work that goes unnoticed by parents and other staff alike throughout the year. Can I also take this opportunity to thank all parents for their support over the year and I look forward to working in partnership with you once again throughout the 2017-2018 academic year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tosh H', written in a cursive style.

Chair of Oakwood Board of Governors

Principal & Secretary to Board of Governors

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