



Date of Assessment: 24 March 2021

Name of Assessor: Phil Hand

Governor Mark Feedback Form

Pitcheroak School, Redditch, Worcestershire

Recommendation: Governor Mark awarded.

The Governing Board has the following strengths:

This governing board has developed well during the last four years since the 2017 Governor Mark assessment. The board has developed and maintained a good focus on school improvement and ensured the best possible provision for pupils at the school.

The following aspects of governance at Pitcheroak School could be regarded as best practice:

- The governing board is at the forefront of the strategic development of the school. As a special school, Pitcheroak is under constant pressure to admit pupils, however due to capacity their needs cannot be met with current resources. Governors are working hard to secure more appropriate funding from the local authority, taking the lead with meetings with officers and councillors.
- This leads to proposals led by governors to expand the site and develop the premises. The School House, an on-site building that has become vacant, has provided space (on the ground floor) for early years education, with the upper part of the building (using a separate entrance) being adapted for community use as well as by 6th form students.
- Governors have given very good oversight of remote learning. Like many schools, Pitcheroak has had to develop this more effectively. This has been particularly well managed in Key Stage 4 and 5. Governors received a report on a survey from the Deputy Headteacher showing high pupil engagement.
- Governors show a strong vision and awareness of change. The Headteacher reports that 'governors are systems-driven and remember to do things'. 'They hold me to account for pupil welfare'. This includes a recent report from the Headteacher on physical intervention and governors were perceptive and rigorous in their challenge.

There are other aspects of their work where the governing board works well:

- The focus on teaching and learning through the School Development and Improvement Plan (SDIP) is strong, and provides a collective purpose that draws governors together to achieve the right outcomes for the students;
- Safeguarding is well managed and overseen by the Chair of the Staffing Committee who is the Safeguarding Link Governor;
- Budgets and finance are well managed. The school carries a modest surplus in a context of a constant struggle for better funding;
- The governing board is supported by an experienced and committed clerk. She is developing a 'share point' where governing board documents are stored and available to governors;
- New governors are welcomed onto the board and are developed well. They report to being 'blown away' by the way they are valued and supported through training and coaching;
- The school website is well maintained and carries all the statutorily required information.

The Governing Board should consider the following areas for further development:

- Ensure ongoing vigilance regarding the quality of teaching and learning at Pitcheroak. This is a particular challenge for a special school. The Board should make sure that external reports on the quality of education continue and that once restrictions permit, governors see the reports as written by the external consultant or adviser.
- The school has developed the SOLAR curriculum and assessment system, aimed at pupils with complex needs. This is relatively new to the school and is still bedding in. Governors need to strengthen their understanding of SOLAR so that they can develop tools with which to hold the school to account for educational outcomes on behalf of all pupils.
- There are two issues that need to be tied up in terms of minutes and governing board records. These are both small but important issues.
 - There is no doubt that the appraisal of the Headteacher has been carried out within the timeframe required and with an external adviser present from the Local Authority. This should be properly recorded in the minutes of the board, giving clarity about who will carry out the appraisal, and confirmation that it has taken place.
 - From the information available to the assessor, it appeared that an additional governing board meeting was held on 2 November 2020 but no minutes were approved at a subsequent meeting. This is particularly important because a new governor was co-opted at that meeting and the board needs to make sure that the statutory status of their members is legally watertight.

The Governing Board demonstrated that it has an impact on:

School Improvement

There has been a great deal of investment of both time and resources into curriculum development, particularly in the alternative and sensory curriculum. This is a response to the 2018 Ofsted report, and the SOLAR assessment system is designed to complement it. Governors have invested in the necessary ICT capability for its effectiveness. They have been monitoring its implementation through visits and reports, although visiting has been significantly hampered by the Covid pandemic. Much time at Curriculum meetings has been invested to maintain good governance oversight of this part of the school.

Governors are fully aware that this development is in its early stages, and that much work is needed to ensure its success. A recent staff re-structure has been approved by the governing board with the introduction of a new assistant headteacher to lead core curriculum development in the years to come.

Partnerships and community engagement

The School House recently became vacant and governors have pressed hard for the resources to upgrade the building and make it suitable for teaching and learning, so as to expand capacity at Pitcheroak School. They successfully secured £300K for this purpose which has enabled an increase in the school's number on roll.

The building has currently provided room for early years education with the long term plan to develop on-site provision for vocational learning for sixth form students.

Like many such projects the arrival of funding and the implementation of plans has been held back, not least because of the pandemic, but governors are determined to make this a success.

Pupil welfare

Pitcheroak, like all schools, has had to adapt its systems to manage the Covid-19 pandemic. Individual risk assessments were prepared for all students and submitted to the local authority. Governors supported the high use of staff time that this process required. The safeguarding link governor and the finance governors were involved in the development of systems working with outside organisations that, for example, provided food vouchers for children entitled to free school meals.

The pandemic has shown the challenge presented to secure the support of external agencies. There have been some frustrations over the past year due to the different expectations of public sector workers since some work from home and others are 'client-facing' such as those working in schools.

This demonstrates that safeguarding and health and safety are the most important aspects of a school's work, and governors must be vigilant to make sure the needs of vulnerable staff and students are met.

Further comments on the assessment:

This was a re-assessment following the award of Governor Mark three years or so ago. The governing board have responded to the recommendations in the 2017 report in the following way:

- If some governors were inexperienced in 2017 they certainly are not inexperienced now. A number of governors are seasoned players, and alongside this they bring new governors on with thought and expertise, and a warm welcome.
- In 2017 there was a sense that the work was driven largely by the Headteacher and the then Chair of Governors, and that the board risked a degree of over-reliance on the Headteacher. The board is now well led by a new Chair, who leads with expertise and distinction. The Headteacher is a natural leader and there is evidence that she is well respected by governors. There is no sense that she is spoon-feeding them; rather that they are proactive both in challenging the school to continually improve, and also in leading work with the local authority to ensure proper funding for the school.
- The leadership provided by the Chair indicates a good process in place for effective succession planning as required by the report.