

Saltburn Learning Campus: Developments in Governance

“I’m a Governor at both a Primary and Secondary School and the styles are very different,” said a representative at the Governors’ Association Spring 2014 meeting. “How does one Governing Body at Saltburn Learning Campus work?”

Ruth Mayes, Executive Headteacher and Anne Asprey, Chair of Governors of the Federation replied that it had grown successfully from the Collaborative Committee, set up when the two schools were established on the same site. In 2004, the Local Authority proposed that new Saltburn Primary and Huntcliff Schools could be built on the latter’s grounds. Funding for this from a successful Target Capital Bid became available, with the prospect of more money from the eventual sale of the land of the split site Primary School. Building started in July 2007; Huntcliff moved in for September 2008 and Saltburn Primary for September 2009.

The schools had then (and have now) two DfE numbers, two budgets and two OFSTED inspections. The Headteachers were accountable to their own Governing Bodies, but a Collaborative Committee of Governors from both schools was set up to oversee matters of joint interest. In the language of the time, this was a Soft Federation.

The Headteachers were very positive about working together to enhance the education of the children. Teachers looked forward to establishing links with colleagues in other phases and to the benefits of sharing facilities. Joint premises and administrative staff were appointed and some savings were achieved by cutting duplication. These funds were re-invested in the pupils’ education.

Consideration of becoming a Federation with a single Executive Headteacher and Governing Body began when Janet Richardson, Headteacher of the Primary School announced that she would retire in August 2013. Although there were already many instances of the educational benefits of co-location, it was agreed that a single Headteacher would have an overview of the whole Campus and be able to lead developments more efficiently and effectively. The single Governing Body would include former Governors from both schools, but also new Governors who would be excited to be overseeing education from 3 - 16.

Because the law doesn’t allow the creation of a new Governing Body before a Federation comes into being, few Governors could be in place on September 1st 2013. Two parents and one staff member had been elected and these Governors, with the Executive Headteacher, co-opted a Local Authority representative. The law then required these five to co-opt the remaining Governors, who included members of the former Governing Bodies and staff and parents who had been pipped to the post in the summer term elections. “I was very pleased to have the new Governing Body set up in three weeks, as a visit from OFSTED to the Primary School was expected imminently!” said Ruth.

The new leadership team, who were delighted with the OFSTED recognition of the Primary School as ‘Good’ in November, consists of the Executive Headteacher, two Deputies who are Head of the Primary School and Head of the Secondary School and further Assistant Heads. There is increasing sharing of expertise across the phases and imaginative initiatives are flourishing. For example, secondary technology students construct the sets for primary productions and able older primary children are able to take advantage of the secondary library.

“We’re also finding that our Governors are enthusiastically working across the campus,” said Anne, former Primary Chair and now current Chair of Governors. “Most of our Committees have a remit to consider issues with a 3 - 16 focus and this is very helpful in ensuring the best possible transition between phases.”

A Governor asked whether pupils find the transition to secondary sufficiently exciting, since they are already used to working in some areas of Huntcliff School. Ruth was reassuring: “There is still a great deal that’s new in moving to a subject-based curriculum and there are areas of the school that the primary pupils aren’t familiar with. There’s also the challenge of meeting lots of pupils from other primary schools, as we welcome half our intake from them.”

Having achieved ‘Good’ designations for both schools, the staff and Governors are now working towards being ‘Outstanding’. They want to maximise outcomes for all the children, through increased collaboration within the Campus and with other local schools. Joining the East Cleveland Co-operative Learning Trust in September 2014 is a priority, as is making the Campus a focus in the community.

“We look forward to developing the leadership structure further and to contributing further to our membership of Schools North East too,” added Ruth.

Rosemary Nicholls

Secretary of the Redcar and Cleveland Governors’ Association