

Board of Governors' Annual Report to Parents 2023/24 Academic Year

Report of the Chair of Governors (May 2024)

This year, 2023-24, finally marks the termination of current Boards of Governors in schools in Northern Ireland, following six years of service. Never, in my experience as a school governor over the past thirty years, have governors served for so long. The extended period of office, from the usual four years, to five in 2022-23 and now six, was largely a product of the pandemic and the need to provide some sort of stability and continuity for schools, but it also placed undue burden upon those who undertook the role willingly and voluntarily back in 2018.

In Stranmillis Primary School we have been very fortunate to have a strong, committed and dedicated team of governors which has remained largely unchanged over the six-year period. This year Mrs Deirdre Hill, who retired last summer, has been replaced by Mrs Jenny McKay as teaching representative. Similarly Dr Joanne Gardiner has joined us as a Stranmillis University College representative, replacing Ms Denise Elliott. Both ladies are very highly experienced in their own fields and have already made major contributions to our work. We welcome them both and hope they will stay on board following the reconstitution of Boards of Governors next year.

Boards of Governors in controlled (state-run) schools such as Stranmillis comprise nine members: two are nominated by the Education Authority, two are elected by parents of children attending the school, one is elected by the teaching staff and the remaining four are nominated by what is called a 'transferor'. Transferors are linked historically to the period in which schools were organised and run by the church or a local factory, whose leaders then subsequently 'transferred' duties to members they deemed responsible and capable of fulfilling them. However, the transferor representatives in Stranmillis Primary are slightly different and are rooted in much more interesting beginnings. Because of its proximity to Stranmillis College (our school was originally sited near the top of Ridgeway Street), the young college students used to be marched, in uniform and in twos, to the school, to witness and observe the Masters of Methods as they were known, essentially a small number of elite, expert college lecturers, delivering masterclasses to the children of our school. This occurred on a weekly basis throughout the then two years of the teacher training course, resulting in very close bonds between the school and college which led, ultimately, to the college becoming the transferor and nominating staff representatives to serve on the management committee of our school. It is pleasing to see that this custom still pertains in the present day with four staff members nominated as governors at each reconstitution. It is also noteworthy that Mrs Wilson and Mr Arneill are actively seeking and promoting ways of developing and strengthening the historic links with the University College, through joint teaching, increased student placement, outdoor learning and the like, to mutual benefit.

Although the transferor representatives on our Board of Governors are nominated slightly differently from the majority of controlled schools, the role of all governors remains the same. Once constituted and in place, the role of the Board of Governors in any school is to oversee the management of the school with a view to providing the best possible education and educational opportunities for all pupils. Boards of Governors have a range of statutory duties, particularly with regard to setting the strategic direction for the school and taking corporate decisions in relation to the statutory functions. These include setting the school's vision, aims, plans and policies; monitoring and evaluating school performance; curriculum and financial planning; safeguarding and child protection; staff employment and deployment; managing the school premises; and supporting the pupils, parents and staff by being a critical friend.

By far the most important of these duties is safeguarding and child protection. Each year in

Stranmillis commences with training for governors, provided by the school's designated teacher (DT) for this area. All significant changes in policy are highlighted along with any responses deemed necessary by the school. This year, in the absence of the current DT who has been on maternity leave, Mrs McKay provided the training for governors. Further training for governors is provided by the Education Authority and available online.

The day-to-day management of the school is delegated by governors to our Principal, Mrs Wilson, who also acts as Secretary to the Board. Mrs Wilson, along with the Senior Leadership Team, works tirelessly in relation to curriculum planning and, each year, produces the School Development Plan which is brought to the Board of Governors for discussion and ratification. She is ably assisted by our Vice-Principal, Mr Arneill, who is also in attendance at all meetings of the Board of Governors. Each new development plan is the product of annual monitoring and evaluation by teaching staff, which enables governors to evaluate overall school performance.

Another important aspect of the work of our governors is that of staff selection and recruitment. Whilst quite a daunting task at the outset with a plethora of paperwork involved, most governors have enjoyed the experience of shortlisting and interviewing candidates for both teaching and non-teaching roles. This is undertaken by small selection panels based on governor availability and the nature of the posts involved. This year two new teachers have been appointed, for Nursery and P3 respectively.

Financial responsibility is probably the most challenging aspect of school management for governors and senior school staff. Some schools have a designated Finance sub-committee of governors to consider and report on financial matters, but in Stranmillis all governors are involved, under the leadership of Mrs Wilson who presents ongoing financial reports for discussion at every Board of Governors' meeting. In an era of political uncertainty and extreme cuts in school budgets, it has not been an easy task to keep matters on a level footing and some schools have even referred to themselves as charities, forced down a route of fund-raising to purchase even the most basic of resources. Fortunately our very proactive PTA in Stranmillis helps to relieve some of the financial burden, and we are very grateful for all their work, but funding still remains a pertinent issue, requiring constant monitoring.

In summary, our outgoing Board of Governors is to be congratulated, highly commended and thanked most sincerely for the excellent work it has done over the past six years, in carrying out its statutory duties, in guiding our school through the pandemic years and in encouraging and promoting return-to-school strategies and new development opportunities and projects. As we approach the constitution of our next Board, I hope I have given you something of a flavour of our work which will entice some of you to become involved. We particularly welcome anyone with financial expertise, but education is not all about money and if you are genuinely interested in making a difference to your child/children's school, then please give it serious consideration.

Thank you for reading and I wish you and your families a relaxing and enjoyable summer break!



Dr Maureen Thatcher (Chair of Governors)

The Board of Governors, 2023-2024

EA Representatives: Dr Maureen Thatcher (Chair)
Dr Andrew Charles

Parent Representatives: Mr John Murray
Mrs Jane Moriarty

Teacher Representative: Mrs Jenny McKay

Transferor Representatives: Dr Rachel Campbell
Dr Joanne Gardiner
Mrs Dawn Brown
Mr Darren Feely

Honorary Secretary: Mrs Linda Wilson (Principal)

School Development Days:

Stranmillis PS closed for five School Development Days during the past year. These days were used in the development of the following areas:

1. Parent communication two days
2. The Outdoor Classroom/Using ICT one day
3. PE/Professional collaboration one day
4. Self-evaluation and data analysis one day

School Finances

	Financial Year		
	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027
Total Budget	1,592,824	1,605,348	1,608,479
Total Planned Expenditure	1,477,276	1,511,531	1,499,661
In Year Underspend	115,548	93,817	108,818
Carry over from Previous year	111,389	226,937	320,754
Closing Cumulative Surplus	226,937	320,754	429,572

Additionally:

- the current PTA Outdoor Learning project, Phase 1, funding the outdoor classroom in the playground to the side of the Nursery is complete. Phase 2 of the project in the back playground has been installed at a cost of £46,000. £23,000 has been donated so far for this phase. The PTA has set a funding target of £30,000 over the next 2 years to complete this payment & provide additional resources to enhance the fixed equipment.
- £5,000 has been set aside from Private Funds for resources for; SEND, professional development of all staff, outdoor learning & play which are the priorities identified for development. £1,000 has been allocated to wellbeing.
- £8,000 was set aside to refurbish the library, music room, resource room & foyer to provide much needed teaching & learning space & to improve the aesthetic appearance of the school. Two additional learning spaces were updated on the upstairs corridor. The foyer is yet to be refurbished.
- the Educational Trust Fund, consisting of voluntary donations from parents, provided an additional £12,720 to purchase reading material & support priorities identified in the School Development Plan.
- Renting of premises has increased from £10 to £25 per hour. An agreement was reached with Kidztime for monthly payment of £850. This will raise approximately £20,000 in income should all the organisations continue to avail of our premises.
- £7,518 in the LMS budget has been earmarked to fund a teacher x1 day weekly to support in SEND.

Attendance

Excellent pupil attendance is promoted at Stranmillis. In the 2023/24 academic year, the attendance percentage for the school was 97.31% which is a significant improvement from 94% in the previous academic year. There were absences recorded as unauthorised due to holidays taken during term time however this has improved.

Warm Regards,



Dr Maureen Thatcher (Chair of Governors)