

Board of Governors' Annual Report to Parents 2022/23 Academic Year

Report of the Chair of Governors (May 2023)

It is not often that a report is out of date before it is actually written, but this one nearly was! At the outset of writing, reconstitution of Boards of Governors in all schools in Northern Ireland was about to take place and it was my intention to thank the members of the current Board of Governors of Stranmillis Primary School for their hard work and commitment during their period of office. This I do anyway, but since commencement of this report the situation has changed, and I'm just glad that I have been able to capture the change, and the reasons for it, before publication. Let me explain...

The role of the Board of Governors in schools 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 of the Board of Governors.

These include:

- Setting the school's vision and aims
- Establishing and maintaining the school's ethos
- Setting the school's plans and policies
- Monitoring and evaluating school performance
- Promoting self-evaluation to sustain school improvement
- School performance measures
- Curriculum planning
- Employment issues
- Pupil pastoral care and safeguarding issues
- Publication of information regarding the school and its pupils
- Managing school premises and relations with the community
- Being a critical friend
- Supporting pupils, parents and staff.

Traditionally Boards of Governors serve for a four-year period, after which reconstitution occurs which allows a change of membership. However, as of May 2023, the four-year period for Boards of Governors in Northern Ireland has long expired and, to date, the current governors of Stranmillis Primary School, in common with all others, have served for five years. The extra year has been one product of the Covid pandemic and, given the circumstances, this has been regarded as sensible in relation to re-establishing processes and procedures and maintaining continuity and progression.

Here in Stranmillis Primary School the Board of Governors has always been highly proactive in discussing and managing various strategic issues pertaining to the school, including school policies, the School Development Plan, financial matters and staffing, and I am indebted to all members of the Board for their dedicated commitment, enthusiasm and tireless hard work, as strong in the fifth year as it was in the first, in helping to take the school forward at this strategic level. Despite the ravages of Covid-19, the current Board has remained relatively intact throughout its five years, although this year Ms Denise Elliott, a Stranmillis University College transferor, stepped down due to increased work commitments, after many years as a governor of our school. I thank Denise sincerely for her contributions over the years and wish her well for the future.

August 2023 will also see the retirement of Mrs Deirdre Hill, P1 teacher and governor representative of the teaching staff, after a massive 37 years' service to our school. Deirdre's contributions, as a teacher, colleague, member of the Senior Leadership Team and school governor, have been truly immense and we

will all miss hugely her wisdom, her wide experience, her down-to-earth approach and her sense of humour. I'm sure you will all join with me in wishing her a very long and happy retirement. She deserves it!

So what of next year? Well, just as I was finally preparing for the long-overdue reconstitution of the Board of Governors, things have changed again, with recent weeks seeing wide-scale strikes throughout the public service sector and unprecedented cuts in budgets by the Secretary of State, all set against the seemingly-perpetual lack of a working Northern Ireland Assembly. Endless letters from government bodies to school principals scream of the ultimately impossible task of reducing annual school expenditure even further, cutbacks in basic services including support for children's learning, lack of resources and understaffing in government departments, resulting in an inability to deal adequately with basic difficulties that school principals encounter on a daily basis. One of the Department of Education's solutions? To ask Boards of Governors to remain in place for yet another, sixth year!!!

It is truly difficult to conceive of, and have sympathy for, a system in which largely well-paid departmental employees have to rely on unpaid members of the public who undertake to lead and manage schools on a purely voluntary basis!

However, I have no doubt that our governors, as true professionals, will do so.

Wishing you a relaxing summer break, despite the chaos!

Maureen Thatcher

Dr Maureen Thatcher (Chair of Governors)

The Board of Governors, 2022-2023

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

Parent Representatives: Mr John Murray
Mrs Jane Moriarty

Teacher Representative: Mrs Deirdre Hill

Transferor Representatives: Dr Rachel Campbell
Ms Denise Elliott
Mrs Dawn Brown
Mr Darren Feely

Honorary Secretary: Mrs Linda Wilson (Principal)

School Development Days (Exceptional Closures):

As for all schools, we 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. Professional collaboration one day
4. Self-evaluation and data analysis one day

School Finances

	Financial Year		
	2023/2024	2024/25	2025/26
Total Budget	1,376,309	1,379,376	1,384,639
Total Planned Expenditure	-1,420,367	-1,431,343	-1,450,441
In Year Underspend/Overspend	-44,058	-51,967	-65,802
Carry Over from Previous Year	52,302	8,244	-43,723
Closing Cumulative Surplus/Deficit	8,244	-43,723	-109,526

Additionally:

- the current PTA project is seeking to raise £30,000 (over three years) to fund the outdoor classroom in the playground to the side of the Nursery; £15,000 has been donated so far.
- £5,000 has been set aside from Private Funds for resources for; ICT, Professional Development of all staff & Wellbeing which are the priorities identified for development.
- £8,000 has been 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.
- the Educational Trust Fund, consisting of voluntary donations from parents, provided an additional £12,320 to purchase reading material & support priorities identified in the School Development Plan in Numeracy.
- Renting of premises has increased from £10 to £20 per hour to meet some of the huge increase in utility costs. This will be reviewed with governors in line with EA guidance. This will raise approximately £10,000 in income should all the organisations continue to avail of our premises. From September 2023 the Chinese School no longer use Stranmillis PS as the numbers have grown to an extent where there isn't the capacity to accommodate all the pupils.

SEN

As a school committed to developing all our pupils in a holistic manner, we recognise that all pupils are unique and develop at varying rates. We aim to cater for all these individuals, including the most able and those who are experiencing social, emotional, behavioural, physical or learning difficulties. We have high expectations of all our pupils and a determination that each child will achieve to his / her full potential, and that any barriers to learning will be identified and overcome. The arrangements for addressing special educational needs are set out in our Special Needs Policy. In particular:

- We aim to identify as early as possible, children who are experiencing difficulties with their learning. Such early identification of need will be achieved through a mix of teacher judgement and diagnostic assessment.
- We recognise that all teachers have a collective responsibility for the special needs of our pupils.
- The LSC will liaise with and support the class teachers in the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans and to ensure that each child follows an agreed programme of work designed to address his or her educational needs.
- The support provided will be matched to the needs of the child and will be focused on tackling any barriers to learning that have been identified.
- The Principal, LSC and SLT will ensure the provision of appropriate staff training and professional development to raise staff capacity to meet the needs of the children.

Currently SEN provision includes:

- the development of IEPs and group EPs;
- differentiation of work within the class;
- withdrawal support for targeted children, provided by our LSC and an additional teacher x1 day weekly;
- withdrawal support for individual children displaying emotional and social anxieties, provided by our LSC;
- access to a fully equipped sensory lounge for those children who benefit from sensory input with the support of a classroom assistant or our LSC;
- withdrawal support provided by specialist peripatetic and outreach teachers;
- Reading Partnerships, provided by trained classroom assistants;
- Reading and Numeracy support provided by adult volunteers, and
- the identification of and support for those children deemed to be under-achieving.

Attendance

Excellent pupil attendance is promoted at Stranmillis. In the 2022/23 academic year, the attendance percentage for the school was 94.4%. This is the lowest attendance in the last 10 years & is a pattern seen across schools in Northern Ireland post covid. A significant number of absences were recorded as unauthorised due to holidays taken during term time. This will be addressed in 2023/20204 through the Well Being action plan.

Warm Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maureen Thatcher". The script is cursive and fluid.

Dr Maureen Thatcher (Chair of Governors)