



## **External Review of Governance for Romero Multi Academy Company**

Dear Brendan

28th Oct 2022

It has been a great pleasure to work with you, your directors and local governing boards. Further to the presentation on Zoom on the 20th October 2022 and a separate conversation with Helen Quinn, please find below a full report, which describes the process, findings and recommendations.

The review activities included:

- An initial scoping meeting with the Chair and CEO;
- A brief document review using GovernorHub;
- A Director online survey, and semi structured interviews by video call with the chair, CEO, and most Directors;
- Shaping Governance sessions held with all local boards, to review their effectiveness, their strengths and areas for development;
- Presentation of the initial findings to the MAC board;
- This final report, which explores governance effectiveness and in particular against the three core roles of governors, and how you connect to local boards.

### **Governance check**

| Name            | Term of office             | GIAS | Companies House |
|-----------------|----------------------------|------|-----------------|
| Brendan Fawcett | Until 1st August 2023      | Yes  | Yes             |
| Dean Kavanagh   | Until 19th April 2024      | Yes  | Yes             |
| Eleanor Barry   | Until 1st August 2023      | Yes  | Yes             |
| Victor Bellanti | Until 25th March 2024      | Yes  | Yes             |
| Julie Fulea     | Showing as ending May 2022 | No   | Yes             |

Following the adoption of the new articles in May 2022, Helen Quinn stepped down as Director and was also removed from companies house.

Consistency of the membership of local governing bodies needs looking at. As recognised and agreed at the July 2022 board meeting, Directors should not be governors on LGBs. A Link Director role as a conduit of information is allowable, but thought should be given to whether this is scalable. However as of the 19th October:

- Mrs E Barry is still cited as a governor at St Patrick's - according to the website and GIAS. Eleanor is named as a governor on both the website and the terms of reference. However her term has expired 31st May 2022
- Mr B Fawcett is still cited as a governor at St John Fisher according to the website and GIAS. Brendan is a Governor on the board on the website, but on the terms of reference, named as Link Directors without a place on the terms of reference.

## Key Message

Directors on the MAC Board bring a diverse and strong set of skills, which has overseen the development, creation and continuation of the MAC. The Company board is carrying out its core governance functions effectively, however how the company and the directors build assurance from local boards into their governance is worthy of exploration.

1. The MAC's mission and values are evident. There is uniformity with individuality, and the support of the MAC is welcomed. However schools are more clear on the MAC vision than their own vision in some cases. This emerged for some schools during the Shaping Governance sessions with confidence in this area.
2. There is a strong CSEL and corporate team that provide robust information to the Directors on the performance of the company and its schools. The Core Committees work well and cover the breadth of the work of the schools and MAC. However, the link between local governing boards and the directors could be improved further by linking monitoring arrangements from Governor to Director; providing assurance from outside the corporate team.
3. Financial procedures are well documented, with skilled individuals focusing on the budget. However, the nature of being in a MAC is that schools are less clear on their finance and their role in monitoring how the school budgets and spends.

A summary of the strengths and areas for development are contained in Appendix 1

## Shaping Governance at MAC schools

Shaping Governance sessions have been held with all schools in the MAC. Shaping Governance is a facilitated session that supports governors to review their effectiveness against nine areas of governance and use this to develop an improvement plan.

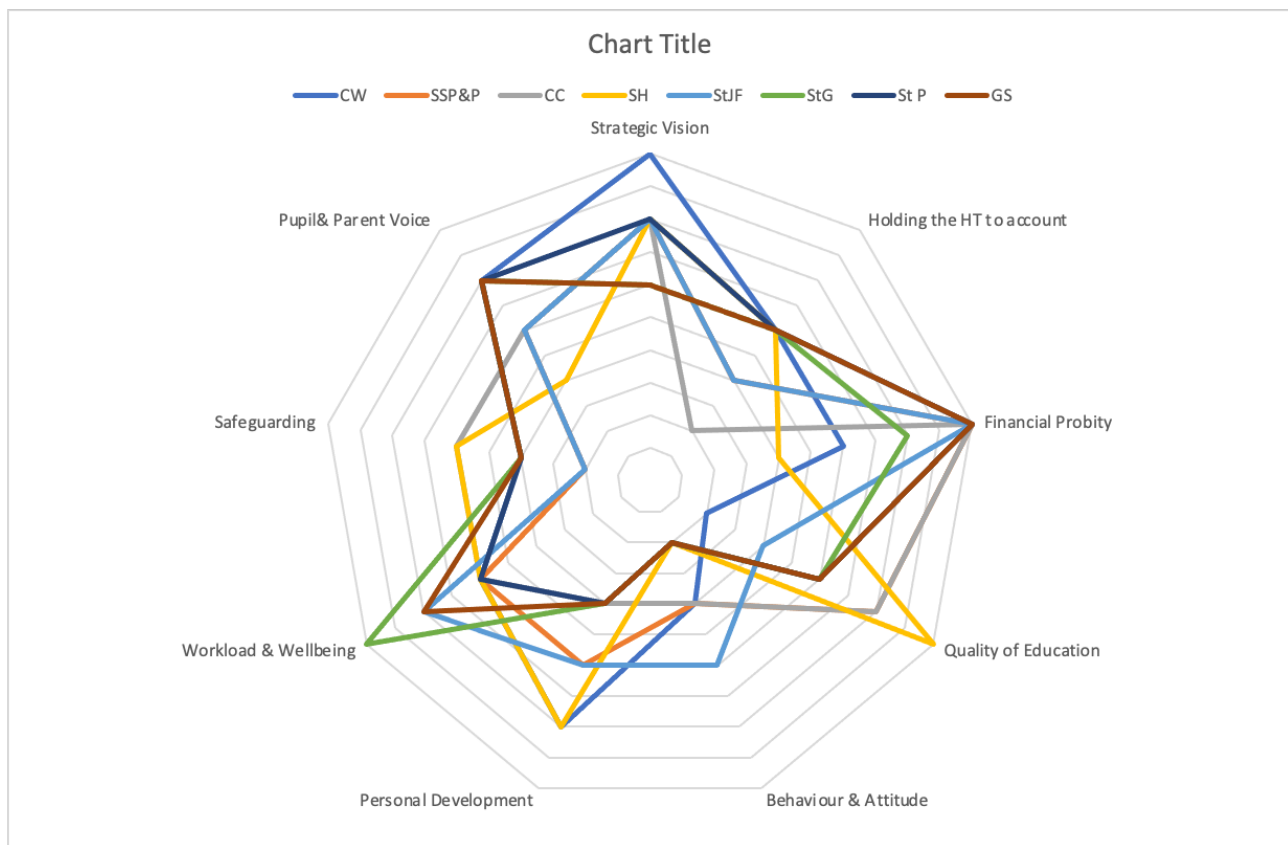
Feedback from schools has been positive, and the sessions allowed schools to reflect in a structured way, learn new information and identify where they could improve. Each school has been issued with a report, which includes a summary of their conversations and also some recommendations to help implement their improvements.

Participants also recorded their confidence by undertaking a diamond nine exercise. This is drawn from a consensus on their confidence and awareness of the topic. Whilst this is not an exact science, when reviewed across a MAC, common messages are drawn out, and as you can see from the Radar chart below, there are some similarities and consistent messages, that I feel the MAC is best place to lead improvement on.

|                                |                         |                        |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Strategic Vision and Direction | Quality of education    | Workload and Wellbeing |
| Holding leaders to account     | Behaviour and Attitudes | Safeguarding           |
| Financial Probity              | Personal Development    | Pupil and Parent voice |

It was a delight to work with your local governors and to feel the connectedness to the MAC that is very evident. Below is a summary of governing confidence that the process revealed.

## All school comparison for The Romero Catholic Academy



**Interpretation:** areas of strength are closer to the centre, with least confident areas on the outer edge.

### Analysis of diamond nine activity and key themes

There are emerging themes from the work with each school:

- Governing boards seem to be most confident when the theme is regarding **behaviour, safeguarding and holding leaders to account**, this I believe to be because of the defined approach, policies and understanding of a governors' role in monitoring these areas; and due to the well defined structures that have formed over the years that you have been a MAC.
- There were some inconsistencies across the 8 schools regarding:
  - **Personal Development** with two schools citing this as a less confident area - CW, SH
  - **Workload and wellbeing** with three schools citing this as a least confident area StJF, StG, GS.
  - **Quality of education** with three schools being less confident SSP&P, CC, SH
  - **Pupil and parent voice** features as a least confident area in half of your schools, whereas for the other half this was an area of confidence (CW, StG StP GS).
  - There is potential for board to board support for these inconsistent areas - learning from where governors perform this well.
- There is consistency in the least confident areas, which are key areas that the MAC can review and support:
  - **Ensuring Financial Probity;** featuring as a least confident area for six out of eight schools, which could be a reflection of the lack of understanding of where the financial governance line is drawn, from MAC to school. Improvement areas ranged from the need to develop governor finance skills, to a better understanding and 'control' over some aspects of financial monitoring.

- **Strategic Vision and Direction;** again, this was a least confident area for six out of the eight school. Improvements identified ranged from a need to understand and articulate the school vision, to refining the Link Governor system and better understanding school improvement planning. Improving the golden thread of vision to reality and the role of governors within this is a key area.



### Recommendation 1:

Build the capacity in local governing boards to become the eyes and ear, developing a robust and consistent monitoring framework that feeds through to the MAC for assurance.

#### Rationale:

- LGBs are an important part of a MACs work
- Directors need assurance from Local Governors who are the eyes and ears - not just staff of the MAC;
- Aligning link roles and responsibilities (at local board level) to school priorities using Ofsted themes will help governors to maximise their roles, and the MAC to develop a consistent picture.
- It means that Link Director roles are not needed (which is not scalable in my view should the MAC grow).

I recommend that you review how the local boards can provide assurance to the Directors Board - providing 'Governor to Governor' assurance. This could be done in three ways:

#### Recommendation 1a:

Creating consistent Link Roles - helping to monitor and provide a MAC wide picture.

#### Recommendation 1b:

Local oversight of the Romero Child Charter - local governors ensuring that their school implements the charter. This could then be fed to the MAC board as assurance.

#### Recommendation 1c:

Currently the principals produce a '5 things you should know' summary for Directors - could this be replicated by the local boards from a governance angle?

### Note:

For some MACs and Trusts I advocate a shift in structure, replacing a top down model with a left to right; local governance on the left, feeding through to the MAC on the right. However for your MAC this would just be a visual change as I feel that schools feel a part of the MAC - I can discuss this further if you wish to explore a change in approach.

### **Recommendation 2:**

Strengthen the capacity and number of governors on Local Governing boards:

- Recruitment drive with local Chamber of Commerce and community;
- Federating Boards - where recruitment is impossible; you could easily bring together two boards that naturally work with an Executive Head - this would strengthen capacity
- Remove Directors from local governing boards as approved in July 2022.

### **Recommendation 3:**

Using Shaping Governance insight, hold MAC-wide governance hot-topic sessions for all local boards:

- Refining Local Governance Link Roles - ensuring a consistent and robust approach;
- Vision to Curriculum - supporting governors to see how the vision for the school is being threaded through the curriculum and school;
- Develop ways for governors to systematically embed the voice of pupils in their governance;
- Helping governors to monitor and support staff wellbeing

You will also see from the Radar Diagram above, that there are areas of strength for some schools, that could be encouraged to share these with their colleagues in other schools. Each school has a full report of their individual session, which captures their conversations in detail, recognising strengths and areas for development. This report read alongside the 8 reports, provide a comprehensive view of the MAC and its governance.

### **Recommendation 4:**

Governance administration considerations and actions:

- Consider the appointment of a Governance Professional;
- Changes should be made so that challenges and questions more clearly identifiable in minutes;
- Consider the process that minutes are signed off - to ensure that are signed following approval;
- Ensure that Directors and governors match across websites and GIAS.

### **Next Steps**

This concludes our agreed work for year one. I have very much enjoyed working with you and your schools.

All schools have been invited to join a Facebook group so that they can network outside of their schools, and learn from others. I will arrange a 6 monthly catch up with the Chairs of each school, and the MAC. As you agreed to a two-year Shaping Governance programme, which means that I return again to review what has been implemented and the governance of the schools. However if you need any more support, as you discussed, please get in touch as it would be great to carry on working with you all.

Su Turner, Managing Director  
Shaping Governance and Insight to Impact  
28th October 2022

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## **Appendix 2**

These are a list of strengths and areas for development that were identified during the review. These have mostly been built into the report and the recommendations.

### **Strengths**

- Committed knowledgeable Directors, bringing a wealth of experience and practical support
- Company Governance
- Directors connect to local governing boards, via CC's or as a Link
- MAC support is valued by schools
- Romero Child Charter - commitment - link director for monitoring
- Five things I want you to know about the school - from Principals
- Regular opportunity for chairs to meet, and twice year briefings for all governors
- Central team is effective and supportive
- Risks are regularly reviewed - at CC's and board.
- Standards in schools
- Cohesive, well managed and financially strong
- Schools collaboration
- Dedication, commitment and understanding of the schools
- Good or better Ofsted and Section 48 inspection judgements

### **Areas for development**

- Connectivity to local governing boards
- Local governing boards not fully appreciating their role
- One MAC discussions have clouded focus
- Succession planning
- Finance managed centrally - but local governing boards unclear
- Directors get assurance from CSEL and central team but not systematically through local governing boards
- Directors are governors in 2 schools
- Recruiting a further Secondary school
- Governance Professional - providing compliance and assurance from within the MAC
- Minutes - content and signing off process