

**External Review of Governance
Report**

Shenfield High School - Trust

Alexander Lane,
Shenfield, Brentwood,
Essex, CM15 8RY

February/March 2023

Ruth Murton
National Leader of Governance



Review of Governance

Name of Trust:	Shenfield High School (SAT)
Chair of Trust:	Jane Swettenham
Headteacher:	Clare Costello
Governance Professional:	Karen Whordley (HR officer for the school) supported by other members of the administrative team
Date of Review:	27 th January – 14 th March 2023
Conducted by:	Ruth Murton, Leadershipwise Ltd, National Leader of Governance

Introduction

This External Review of Governance was commissioned by the Chair supported by the Headteacher, Members and Trust Board (Governing Body, GB). It was conducted between 27th January – 14th March 2023 and based on the following evidence:

- 10 interviews carried out with;
 - Headteacher,
 - Chair of Governors, Vice Chair, 5 governors
 - the Governance Professional
 - 2 independent Members
- Governing Body minutes, which were scrutinised, as well as, a variety of supporting reports and documents that were made available at the time of the review.
- A workshop held with the full governing body – 13 people attended. Everyone attending participated fully.

Background

- Shenfield High School is a non-selective secondary academy catering from children between 11 to 18.
- There is a stated capacity for 1499 children and currently there are 1543 on roll according to [Get Information about Schools](#).
- The school converted an academy on 1st February 2012. It is a stand-alone academy trust.
- The long standing Headteacher retired at the end of the last academic year and the new Headteacher was appointed from September 2022.
- The school was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2018, this was a section 8 (short inspection). The report stated that the school continues to be a good school and has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last



Review of Governance

inspection. Comments in the report included, “The experienced and effective governing body has played a central role in securing the continued improvement of the school.”

Governance Framework

	Name	Appointed by (Ref articles)	Listed Companies House	Listed GIAS	Listed trust website	Comments
Members	Jane Swettenham	Founder		1 Sep 2019		Founder member
	Jody Gee	Academy members		3 Dec 2020		HT - Anglo European School
	Leanne Hedden	Founder		1 Sep 2019		Founder member
	Mike Seager	Academy members		3 Dec 2020		DH- Anglo European School
	Vivienne Miller	Academy members		3 Dec 2020		BM - Anglo European School
Governors (Trustees)	Jane Swettenham	GB/board	5 Jan 2012	11 Dec 2008	Y	
	Andrew Williams	Academy members	1 Sep 2022	1 Sep 2022	Y	Parent- related to member of staff
	Cajiten D'Silva	Academy members	1 Jan 2023	1 Jan 2023	Y	
	Clare Costello	Ex officio	1 Sep 2022	1 Sep 2022	Y	Staff
	Clare Hoddy	Academy members	16 Dec 2021	16 Dec 2021	Y	Parent
	David Churchill	Elected by parents	22 Nov 2019	22 Nov 2019	Y	Parent
	Gary Haines	Academy members	1 Jan 2023	1 Jan 2023	Y	Parent
	Joanna Gray	Elected by parents	21 Feb 2022	21 Feb 2022	Y	Parent
	Julian Beard	GB/board	28 June 2017	28 June 2017	Y	
	Karuna Shaunk-Hobbs	Elected by school staff	14 Nov 2016	14 Nov 2016	Y	Related to member of staff
	Katharine Anne Boulton	GB/board	22 Jan 2018	22 Jan 2018	Y	Parent
	(Belinda) Lynne Smith	Academy members	16 Dec 2021	16 Dec 2021	Y	Parent
	Stuart James Roberts	Elected by school staff	1 Sep 2017	1 Sep 2017	Y	CFO and Comp Secretary
	Victoria Noonan	Elected by parents	20 Oct 2021	20 Oct 2021	Y	Parent

- Items in red indicate inconsistencies between Get Information About Schools and Companies House information- both require full names.
- The current articles clearly identify who the Members should be and how they are



Review of Governance

appointed. The Membership is not constituted in this way. A reciprocal arrangement with another school was established in December 2020 however the articles were not amended prior to these appointments.

- The governing body was successfully led by one of the founder members who mentored the current Chair of Governors who has been chair for the last 3 years.
- The CFO is company secretary and also the trustee elected by school staff.
- From the annual report and accounts, the school's financial performance demonstrates total income of £8,641,547 (2021: £9,006,955) with an in-year deficit for the year ending 31 August 2022 of £465,035 (2021: £349,526). The deficit has been allocated to reserves.
- Over the last 3 years, number on roll has been increasing steadily both in the 11-16 and at 6th form which will have put pressure on the budget through timing of funds following these increases.
- The Governing Body operates with a number of committees:
 - Standards and Performance
 - Resources
 - Pay
 - Headteacher's Appraisal
 - There is provision for a number of other ad hoc panels as required.

Confidential



Review of Governance

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE

RAG	ASPECT	KEY POINTS OF ANALYSIS
Amber/ Green	Strategic Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Setting strategic direction• Culture, value and ethos• Effectiveness of decision making• Collaborative working and civic duties• Risk Management
Amber/ Green	Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educational improvement• Analysis of data and other information (use of and triangulation)• Financial frameworks and management• Staff and performance management• External accountability
Amber/ Green	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building an effective team• Recruitment, induction and development of those in governance• Succession planning• Effectiveness of communication
Green	Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structures of governance
Red/ Amber	Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting statutory and contractual requirements• Employer• Health and Safety and Safeguarding• Terms of Funding Agreement and ATHB, Charity and Company Law• Acting within powers
Green/ Amber	Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Evaluation of impact and effectiveness of the Board• Self-evaluation of skills, impact and effectiveness of Trustees

The RAG rating is subjective and based on the reviewer's opinion.

This school with its Governing Body is entering a new phase. Under new leadership, there is a shift in behaviour by further developing by introducing a culture of accountability both across the school staff and governance.

What is working well

- Strong chair who leads the Governing Body effectively.
- The Governing Body is working well with the new headteacher and her leadership team. Working relationships are developing and the ways of working together are evolving and will be powerful once all the important information and data can be collated by the school and is available for use.
- After a period of change on the Governing Body, a number of new governors, with the skills that the Governing Body identified they needed, have been recruited and they are settling well into their new roles.



Review of Governance

Areas for improvement

- The Trust urgently needs to update its articles of association and consider these alongside the constitution of members for the trust.
- Leadership of the Governing Body would benefit from being distributed further and more governors being empowered. There is an over-reliance on the chair.
- The Governing Body would benefit greatly by the support and guidance of a governance professional who could ensure the matters of the Governing Body are well documented, efficiently stored and that the Governing Body is fully compliant.
- There is an opportunity with a number of new governors coming on Governing Body to review the recruitment, onboarding and induction process to see it fully meets the needs of new governors so they are able to hit the ground running.

Key Messages

The governance of this Governing Body is effective and is continuing to develop, with further training and development it will get stronger and provide more robust challenge.

The Governing Body is carrying out its core governance functions effectively, as a result it is:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the and the effective and efficient performance management of staff
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent

The school has an exciting future ahead. The Governing Body is comprised of a nucleus of dedicated committed long-serving individuals who feel passionately about the children and are being supported by a new team of governors who are developing into the role.

In its current form the Governing Body and the executive leadership does have the structure, capacity and capability to move rapidly towards being effective in areas where it is currently less effective and to support the school on the next leg of its journey under new headship.



Review of Governance

Key findings

Strategic Leadership

1. This is an exciting time for the school as new leadership is bringing about a cultural change. Work on the strategy for the future of the school is underway. Working with the new headteacher, the Governing Body and school leaders met earlier this year to reflect on and review the vision for the school. They are now working with a variety of stakeholders to fully incorporate their views into a clear statement.
2. There is no agreed view of what the school will look like in 5 years' time and as yet there is no 3–5-year plan in place yet. This is the next piece of strategic thinking the Governing Body recognises needs to be formulated. Governors identified in the facilitated workshop that this will support governors to become more proactive rather than reactive.
3. There is a risk register which has been revamped. Governors reported that this has increased their understanding. There is more to do to develop the understanding and use of risk evaluation in the Governing Body's decision making.
4. The programme of governor visits sessions incorporates garnering the views of children and staff to support monitoring and decision making. Governors recognise that increasing their knowledge and understanding of all stakeholder views will enrich their strategic thinking and inform their decision making.

Accountability

5. The arrival of the new headteacher has brought about a change in the relationship with the Governing Body too. It has strengthened its accountability due to her approach to working with the Governing Body. She provides a wide selection of objective information which governors are learning to understand and use. The Headteacher is keen to work with governors to support them to identify what information would be useful and would support them to further improve the challenge they are providing. Together, they are keen to create a culture of accountability.

During the facilitated session governors and leaders agreed that there is still more to be done to improve the quality of information the Governing Body is provided with which will enable them to improve their triangulation of information.

6. There is a termly governor visit schedule where a group of governors under the leadership of the chair come into school to look into various aspects of the school; inclusion, SEND, Safeguarding etc. During these visits they talk to children and staff, visit classrooms and look at relevant information. In the main, the chair writes up the report which others get a chance to contribute to. It is shared with the Governing Body at the next meeting. There is an expectation that governors will sign up to join in some of these sessions across the year. These 'visit days' form a good platform for governor development and all governors getting to know the school.

During interviews with governors there was a suggestion that more could be done to ensure that observations made from these visits were followed up on at future visits



Review of Governance

or revisited in meetings.

7. Some governors have other responsibilities such as safeguarding, health and safety, equal opportunities, training, attendance, careers etc. These roles are fulfilled in addition to the governor visit days as are the subject link roles.
8. Not all governors understand how the school makes decisions about teachers' pay or the headteachers performance management process. These discussions during the facilitated session also explored governors limited understanding of how the Governing Body looks after the headteacher's welfare and in turn how she looks after the staff.

People

9. The Governing Body has undergone significant change in personnel in recent times. There have been 5 new governors over the last year alone and several are new to academy governance. Quite a few of the governors are parents or ex-parents of children at the school. This may cause an imbalance.
10. A skills audit was completed in September 2022 and is being used to inform recruitment as well as training and development of the Governing body. Governors identified more training and development was needed to develop and embed their knowledge and understanding. There is a governor leading on this who is developing a program for governors from the resources they subscribe to.
11. The processes and procedures for recruitment, onboarding and induction in to governance at Shenfield School were identified as an area in need of rapid improvement. The governors bring a variety of skills and knowledge which need to be transferred into the school's context so that they can contribute effectively as quickly as possible. All new governors meet with the headteacher and chair. There are systems in place to ensure they access mandatory training and are expected to complete the Juniper Introduction Course.
12. There are currently 5 Members, one is the Chair of Governors. The school entered into a reciprocal arrangement with another local school. As a result, 3 of the members are senior leaders from the other trust; chair, headteacher and business manager. These arrangements are not reflected in the Articles of Association. They meet once a year at the AGM.
The role of Members is a grey area for governors.
13. The Chair is very capable and competent; however, she takes on a huge amount herself and is in essence a potential single point of failure. She is highly committed to the school and her role and is generous with the time she devotes. She has built a good relationship with the new headteacher.
14. The Governing Body has been supported by the school administrative team for both full Governing Body meetings and committee meetings. Different member of staff has traditionally supported each. The lack of professional dedicated support is evident from the record keeping and lack of support the Governing Body and Chair have.



Review of Governance

15. The CFO who is company secretary is a staff governor too.

Structures

16. The structure the Governing Body operates with is secure. It was pointed out during interviews, that to improve effectiveness, there is a need to review the timing of meetings and ensure that everything works in a timely way and in sequence as well as being aligned to the data releases by the school.

Compliance

17. As identified in finding 12, the trust is not compliant with its current Articles of Association.
18. The overall quality of record keeping and the use of 'Weebly' indicates that governors may not know if they are compliant or not. Without the support and oversight of a Governance Professional this is falling to the Chair. Documents are difficult to locate on the system and not all documents are filed there.
19. There is no mechanism outside Weebly to share information and communicate. This results in significant email traffic.

Evaluation

20. The Governing Body last engaged in a self-evaluation process last year. The chair, in particular, is aware of the areas for development.

Confidential



Review of Governance

Recommendations

Strategic Leadership

1. The Governing Body and Headteacher are working to develop a simple statement about their vision for the school which can be easily articulated. The views of stakeholders are being sort to be included. Alongside this there needs to be a 3–5-year plan. The consensus was that the Governing Body would benefit by some defined time for strategic thinking outside the usual meeting schedule to develop these collaboratively.
2. All governors would benefit from more opportunities to extend their understanding of evaluating and managing risk so that it is intrinsic to their discussions and decision making. Engaging in some training on this would be beneficial.
3. Together with the school leadership team, the Governing Body should consider what information they currently gather on stakeholder views, whether it is sufficient and what more they would find useful and how this could best be gathered and what it would be used to inform.

Accountability

4. As the Headteacher develops the data reporting systems, governor should work with her and SLT to understand what would be useful to governors, how it could be used and what training, if any governors may need to be able to deepen their knowledge and understanding; as well as how to interpret it and use it to inform discussion.
5. The governor visit days are providing a useful selection of evidence to support their monitoring of the school improvement plan and oversight of critical areas such as inclusion, SEND and safeguarding. By engaging with these, governors are increasing their knowledge and understanding of the school which is an essential part of their role. When reported back to committee or board there should be a discussion and actions identified which follow on from these sessions so that things discussed after the day do not get lost.
6. Developing a profile for key governor roles, training to engage in and how to carry them out would help new governors when they take on these roles. These should be developed by the governors carrying out the roles and all of these role descriptors should include, frequency of visit, expectations and activities typically undertaken. New governor may benefit by buddying with experienced governors when they are visiting to see them performed and deepen their understanding.
7. Two areas that emerged from the facilitated workshop should be addressed by; training to ensure all governors understand how the school makes decisions on pay and the basics around the Headteacher's performance management process. Secondly, and related is about how governors look after the headteachers welfare (an integral part of the performance management process).
8. Governor should also consider how the welfare of staff is monitored and what the school provides to support their mental health and overall wellbeing. This should be integrated into the work of one of the committees, or if it is there look at the air time it is given



Review of Governance

People

9. The balance of parents/ex parents and independent governors from the community should be built into the recruitment policy as should evaluation of diversity and inclusivity of the Governing Body.
10. The onboarding process and induction of new governors needs to be reviewed. This is an essential piece of work so that there are clear expectations of governors, time commitment, training as well as a sound introduction into the role which allows them to swiftly transfer the knowledge and skills they bring to the context of the school and education as a whole.
11. The work being undertaken to build a training programme for governors should be completed so that there are courses signposted that meet the needs of individuals and the Governing Body based on the recent skills audit. Opportunities for governors to feedback and share key learning points from development sessions or reading should be introduced.
12. The role of the Members should be clarified for all those involved in governance. The reciprocal arrangements in place should be reviewed and the membership considered in parallel with adapting the Articles of Association so that the trust is fully compliant. Members should consider if meeting only once a year provides them with sufficient information to carry out their role effectively.
13. The Chair of Governors is diligent, hard working and very capable. She may be a hard act to follow. More needs to be done to ensure that there are succession plans in place and potential future chairs are undertaking the necessary development to support them in the role should they take it on.
14. The role of Chair is made more challenging and time consuming than it needs to be because the Governing Body does not employ a dedicated Governance Professional to advise, guide and support it. This would be a very valuable investment as would replacing the current document storage systems with an off the shelf solution with integrated communication facilities such as GovernorHub.
15. The CFO is the company secretary and a staff governor, while this is not illegal it is not considered to be good practice. The CFO could rightfully be invited to attend meetings for his development and to contribute to the key matters he is responsible for without being a governor.

Structures

16. Once the data release timings are identified, it would be valuable to review and realign the timings of meetings to coordinate with these and other requirements.

Compliance

17. The articles of association must be updated to ensure that they reflect practice or desired future practice.

Evaluation

18. A governance action plan should be developed from the recommendations in this report



Review of Governance

and monitored regularly. The Governing Body should put in place a programme to review the changes it is implementing.

Ruth Murton

Director Leadershipwise Ltd

National Leader of Governance

17th March 2023

Confidential



Review of Governance

Sources of useful information

[Governance Handbook 2020](#)

[Competency Framework 2017](#)

[New – Governance Roles and structures 2020](#)

[Improvement Capacity Framework for Trust Governance](#)

[Academies Financial Handbook](#)

[Governance in MATs](#)

[Multi academy Trusts – good practice guidance](#)

[School and Trust governance investigative report - NFER](#)

[Leading Academy Trusts – Sir David Carter](#)

[Building strong trusts - DfE](#)

Confidential