Monitoring Visit 5th July 2017

Governors attending:

Jane Swettenham (Safeguarding Governor)

Gill Jones

Rachel O’Hara

Andrew Worth

Neil Purbrick

Leanne Hedden

1. The visit was focussed on safeguarding, so that governors were able to evidence that the School’s policies and procedures were being practised and to affirm the findings of JS as Safeguarding Governor from the work she has done with JIC as key DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead) during the year. This note includes the feedback of all governors who attended for the day and is supplemented by some additional notes prepared by them, summarising their findings, and a copy of the timetable for the day which details the broad coverage of safeguarding areas governors reviewed.
2. Student Voice: there were a range of opportunities to talk to students during the day, as detailed in the attached notes. Interviews with students in Yrs 7, 8, 9 and 10 were undertaken. We were looking to see whether students felt safe in school (and on external activities, such as at Brentwood School when part of the CCF). Overwhelmingly, they did. They knew who in school to go to if they had any worries or concerns, although some of the older students said they would approach their parents before any member of staff. Where they were aware of bullying, it had been dealt with promptly and effectively. They were able to articulate a wide range of safeguarding topics that they had received education on and information about, including gang awareness and prevention, CSE and online grooming, arson and hoax calling, road awareness, keeping safe outside the home, PREVENT and IS, and e-safety.
3. First Aid and Attendance: the First Aid and Attendance Officers explained how their roles contributed to the safety of our students; how the use of SIMS enabled the control of information to ensure staff were aware of issues; their role with outside agencies; the training they receive and how they access information and guidance material. An example was given to demonstrate their impact: a child missing from school who was found in the High Street within hours as a result of swift intervention. A further example was given to demonstrate the process for dealing with a medical emergency. The First Aid Officer confirmed the process for dealing with student medication and articulated the different responsibilities of the School and the parent/carer, and how the records are maintained to ensure student safety. For attendance, it was clear that the Officer’s engagement in the School’s Safeguarding Board supported her work to improve attendance, ensuring she was aware of students with particular issues or vulnerabilities, so she could adapt her approach appropriately. The process for managing an absence varies according to the circumstances, but if by day 4 a student is deemed to be absent without authorisation, a formal letter goes to each parent, recorded, followed by a home visit in the first week if the child is deemed vulnerable, and in the second week if not. With irregular attendance, she has found that with her interventions, attendance improves for those whose attendance is 90-95%; below 90% it is more challenging as there are usually a combination of issues contributing to the absence. In terms of absence for holidays, the recent judicial decision should help improve the position, as the LA had not been following up fining parents who take their children out of school for this purpose (18 students in this year).
4. A review of our Oasis and WAVES provision was undertaken (see separate note), from which it was clear that a number of students had been able to stay in school and achieve significant personal and educational growth as a result of this unique intervention (now being copied by at least one other local school). Students interviewed were clear they saw the support they had been given as having a major positive impact on their lives.
5. Governors reviewed IT safety, in particular the use of filters, and Health and Safety processes and were satisfied staff understood both existing and potential challenges, and had processes in place or were developing them to meet needs (see separate note). Staff were aware of students who had attempted to access games and had been blocked from doing so, a good test for the system. It is clear that staff have to balance being proactive against time and budget constraints, but governors were pleased to see such initiatives as that of the Science Dept, investigating the use of Student Safety sheets, via CLEAPS. During the day, governors were also able to confirm that the trip risk assessment process had been revised in the light of recent terrorist attacks. A discussion took place on the issue of a “lock down” policy, on which there was limited DfE guidance. A model was being sought, and governors will return to this question next term.
6. Governors met a group of teaching and support staff, to test their knowledge and understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and were very impressed. All staff knew where to access safeguarding and supporting policies; they received annual training, regular updates and signed annually to confirm they read and understood the policies. They quoted numerous ways in which they might spot an issue from an individual child (e.g. from something said in a piece of written work; from a change of behaviour in PE, wanting to change privately). They knew that the first thing to do in such an instance was to report to a DSL, and they named all 4. All were able to name our Looked After Children. They were clear on the acceptable IT use policy, and vigilant in ensuring PCs were locked, reporting where it wasn’t being done. There are times where the strength of the filters prevented access to learning materials but the IT team were able to help in one-off instances. Staff were also clear about ensuring they did not put themselves at risk, with one member of staff citing the need to be careful about personal use of social media for expressing e.g. political views.
7. Meeting DJB, who had recently resumed a role on e-safety, governors learned about the thorough and progressive work being done to further improve the School’s e-safety, as detailed in the attached note. Governors were impressed by the proactivity being shown.
8. The Chair and the Safeguarding Governor spent time with the HR Officer to review the Single Central Record to ensure its compliance with requirements and to test against some personnel files that the record was accurate. We reviewed 4 entries (a new appointee, a long serving teacher, a member of the support staff, and a foreign national), and while not looking at the personnel files ourselves, the Officer was able to show that the required documentation was on the file as shown in the record. We signed and dated A Single Central Record Checklist for each of the four, to evidence our checks. Those will be passed to JIC for retention. We were able to establish that foreign language documents, equivalent to our DBS checks, did give clearance for employment purposes. We also established that the School was correctly applying the change in policy in 2016 that copies of DBS certificates should no longer be kept on file.
9. The two governors then spent time with JIC to evidence that Child Protection procedures were being properly applied (the second time this academic year that JS as Safeguarding Governor had reviewed processes with JIC). JIC took us through 2 case studies to demonstrate the processes used, and each file had at the front a detailed chronology, as best practice suggests. This is a critical area of the School’s work, is stressful and emotionally demanding, particularly when social care authorities are unable or unwilling to respond as swiftly as necessary. JIC compared the level of support provided by one LA for a child that the School had been required to take, where the support had helped the School achieve success for that child (to date), with another instance where the School had had to go to extraordinary and expensive lengths to ensure continuing education for a child who she was concerned was at risk of CSE. While we believe the School is doing the very best job it can bearing in mind resource constraints, we are concerned about the pressure our staff work under in this area and the impact on them. They are managing risks as best they can, but with demand outstripping supply, it is an uphill struggle. And this in a school where governors have taken the decision to maintain investment in pastoral care! We were concerned for JIC’s personal wellbeing; she reassured us that, while the going gets very tough on occasions, she is well supported by the Head, and the appointment of DJB as Assistant Head and DSL was making a big difference. He was undertaking training which would enable him to share the load of such things as Child Protection Conferences.
10. Two governors met with JR and GD to review anti-bullying and peer on peer abuse processes. Both JD and GD showed a great understanding of the reporting system and how bullying is monitored and dealt with within the School. The School has strong polices in this area, with the bullying log monitoring such issues as friendship groups and name calling. As well as students being encouraged to see the team if they have problems, they can also email the teachers about any concerns. Members of the catering team are on the lookout and contact the pastoral team if they have noticed changes in friendship groups or any signs of bullying. Staff are trained to a high level to recognise signs of bullying via staff safeguarding training and they are also present at the student assemblies when this matter is discussed.  Support is given by school to both the bully and victim. In the new term the school will introduce a bus buddy system for year 7s. With student numbers increasing, this small team face resource challenges.
11. Two governors accompanied JIC around the School at lunchtime as she undertook her duty observation – a check carried out by members of SLT to ensure that designated staff members are undertaking the lunchtime duty they are rostered for, to help ensure students feel safe in social time and spaces. We witnessed more staff on duty than had been planned, and when the lunchtime was over staff were encouraging students to return to class without delay. We also saw teachers questioning any students that appears to be wandering around, and this being dealt with where appropriate. Over all, governors were able to experience the good ‘feel good’ factor in evidence during the break which we don’t usually see, seeing the students in a relaxed environment.
12. Although the visit was focussed on safeguarding, governors had wanted to follow up one issue raised by the Resources Committee who had been concerned by the low return rate of the Staff Stress Survey. They wanted to establish whether this masked issues within the staff team and what might be done differently to secure a better response in future. Governors met a group of teaching and support staff to pose these questions. Firstly, the issue of staff morale: staff morale is generally strong. Money is a challenge, with the need to hunt for resources such as paper being cited as an increasing issue. However, the new system of bidding for the departmental budget and allocation of money focused on priorities was welcomed. Staff also understood the major challenges the School had had, and continues, to face on funding, and knew that the restructuring of recent years had been a necessity. Staff are aware of a number of support services available to them such as counselling and meditation. There is a culture of people helping and supporting each other. They are clear that they would have no problem discussing an issue with their line manager, and knew the escalation process should that not be appropriate, knowing they could come to governors ultimately.
13. Turning to the survey itself, there were a number of criticisms, ranging from a lack of confidence in its anonymity, to its excessive length, to how much of it did not apply to staff who have no contact with children. The name was felt to be inappropriate. Staff wondered whether time could be made available on an INSET day to complete the survey. Nevertheless, staff felt a SHS-tailored survey would be a good thing.
14. One governor was able to experience the new initiative being led by GP: practical relaxation techniques for both staff and students via such methods as meditation. This is a good offer although a growth in demand might make resourcing a challenge!
15. After a packed day, governors were able to give positive feedback to CJH and JIC. Our findings are that safeguarding is a key priority in the School, that students feel safe and know how to seek help, that staff know their roles and responsibilities and that all aspects are attended to. Issues we did feedback for further consideration were:
    1. One student suggested e-safety training be delivered as early as possible in Yr 7 as the lack of such support in primary school had led her to make an early, avoidable mistake
    2. Automatic locking of staff PCs after a set period of time, to reduce the risk of them being left unlocked
    3. The proposal that the Site Team be introduced to Yr 7s so that the students know who they are; a student did ask about the role of governors, so that could be covered too
    4. A formal Health and Safety Committee meeting should be convened as soon as possible in the new term, as per previous process
    5. The example of one teacher who felt let down by the Time Out process, when he was told to go through his Head of Dept in what he thought was a dangerous situation
    6. The need to keep pressure on the authorities for guidance on a lock down policy
16. A considerable amount of planning and preparation had gone into the day to ensure that governors could access as many areas and gather as much information as possible, and our thanks go to all those who gave their time, but particularly to JIC, who deserves to be very pleased with how well her areas of responsibility demonstrated their strong competence to support and protect our students.

Leanne Hedden

22nd August 2017

Key:

JS – Jane Swettenham

JIC – Jenny Comerford

DJC – D J Barron

JR – Jamie Rigg

GD – Georgia Day

GP – Gill Power