

# Saint Mary's Catholic Primary School



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2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020  
The Feast of the Guardian Angels

Dear Parents and Carers

At the beginning of the year the Diocese of Westminster advised us that they had been made aware of concerns from some parents and/or carers. Some of the concerns raised the question of how effective the Governing Board at St Mary's was. In response to this, our Chair of Governors, on behalf of the Governing Board, and with the support of the Diocese and the Local Authority commissioned an External Review of Governance. This review was an inspection by an external body and the reviewer is a specialist in "School Governance" and was approved by the Diocese and the Local Authority. Governors, former parent governors and some members of staff were asked to meet with the reviewer and answer the questions she had prepared. We as the governing board wholeheartedly welcomed this as we want to be open and outward looking, always intending to do what is in the best interest the children, staff, parents and other stakeholders (the Diocese of Westminster and the Local Authority) as we work together to build the Kingdom of God. It was important for us to recognize two main points – firstly, that any concerns raised by any of our parents is always taken seriously; and secondly, that as a group of governors we always need to question ourselves and to improve wherever we can.

In the report, the reviewer makes positive comments about your school and your governors, but there are also some areas for improvement and recommendations to help us develop. For us, as a group, this report is positive and a fantastic tool in helping us to focus on these areas. We will be working on the points outlined in the report with the intention of having a positive outcome for each of them, many of them this term – but some will take a little longer.

We see this as a positive piece of work, where only good can come out of it. One of the areas in which we had already started work on, and which the report also highlights, is our communication and relationship with our parents. Your Parent Governors are working towards this and we are giving this a special priority.

We absolutely see the need to involve you more in the work we do as governors and take your views into account so that you are aware of what we do and how we do it and feel that your views matter to us. We have

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made sure that you can all access both the summary of the report (which was written by the reviewer and is included below) and also the full report. This can be found by following this link:

<http://bit.ly/SMIERGov>

We are all working hard to make sure that our children have the best possible education in these difficult times. Your thoughts are always welcome to help us continuously improve. We ask you to pray for us. We will be in touch again shortly to seek your views and report on our progress. In the meantime keep safe and take care.

St Mary's Governors

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**St Mary's Catholic Primary School, Isleworth**

**London Borough of Hounslow**

**External Governance Review**

**Sian Mathias, Independent Governance Advisor**

**September 2020**

#### SUMMARY FINDINGS

The review of governance at St Marys was commissioned by the chair of governors. The reviewer had no prior connection with the school and followed the review model set out by the Department for Education (DfE). This reviews the three core legal functions of the governing board set out in Governance Handbook (DfE) and the way the board performs those functions.

#### **Setting the strategic direction of the school**

The school mission statement agreed by the governing board states:

*'Our school family at St Mary's wants this to be a safe, caring, creative and happy place, where we all have a fair chance to learn and grow together and to do the best we can. We do this by knowing and loving Jesus more every day and by following his teaching in a joyful way'.*

This long-established culture permeates much of what happens in school and it puts the Catholic faith as central to its purpose. A strength of the school is its strong inclusive nature supporting the wellbeing of both staff and pupils. This is recognised and supported by the governing board.

Governors at St Mary's are clear that they oversee the school ethos, and this informs their thinking when they are agreeing the development plans for the school.

The reviewer recommended that it is good practice to take some time to regularly review the mission statement taking into account the views of parents and the school community. This will ensure that it remains fresh and informs all decision making and planning at board level.

#### **Holding the senior leaders to account for the educational performance of the school**

The board is about to review the school development plan for the last academic year and sign off the one for the new year. Governors receive good data and external validation of the school's education performance. They understand the positive impact of the new system for assessment of pupil's learning and the focus in mathematics in maths mastery.

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The reviewer recommended that governors continue to focus on the progress and attainment of pupils post the difficult period of lockdown and as a new curriculum is established. It also recommended that governors consider how to better communicate the good work happening in school to the wider community.

#### **Overseeing the financial performance of the school and ensuring that money is well spent**

St Mary's struggled with significant financial challenges in 2018 and this led to some turmoil and disquiet in the school community. However, the school is now on a much stronger financial footing with a balanced budget and sound financial forecasts. As a result, the sundry's fund for parental contributions has been suspended.

The reviewer found that the systems and processes for governor oversight of financial performance had been strengthened but that governors would need to continue to monitor the budget closely in light of the challenges of coronavirus and changing local pupil demographics.

#### **The functioning of the board**

The governing board at St Mary's comprises of skilled and committed people who know the school well and who are regularly welcomed into school. The board has a good mix of established and newer members and a broad range of skills. Governors who are parents at the school are well represented on the board. The review found plenty of examples of support and challenge from governors in board minutes and the board has taken up significant levels of training and development in the last year.

The board has employed an experienced and knowledgeable clerk who supports the board well.

The review recommended that the board look at how the school's complaints policy is publicised to parents and whether it clearly sets out the ladder of complaint, namely; headteacher; chair of governors; governor complaints panel; secretary of state.

St Mary's governors are well known and respected amongst staff members but are less well known in the parent body. The review recommended ways to address this and to strengthen governor's presence in the school community and on the school website.

The reviewer would like to thank the governors and staff at St Mary's for their welcome and full cooperation during the review.

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