Cornerstone Schools

Building Futures With Love

Annual Governance Statement for the Local Governing Body of Cornerstone Schools July 2025

The Governing Body has published this document to give parents and carers an idea of the work that has been undertaken during this academic year. We hope you will find it informative.

School Context

Cornerstone schools are within the Dales Multi Academy Trus. They are a collaborative group of Church of England primary schools committed to nurturing excellence and community across North Yorkshire. The schools share a unified ethos and strategic direction. The Cornerstone group benefits from shared governance and leadership, enabling consistent standards and mutual support across schools. The schools are deeply embedded in their local communities, fostering strong relationships with families, churches and local organisations. Staff across the Cornerstone schools engage in joint training and development, enhancing teaching quality and leadership capacity.

The Cornerstone schools strive to be a group of schools that enable every child and adult to flourish and be the architect of their own future, rooted in love.

The theological rooting of the school's dates back to when they were originally gifted by the churches to the villages. The aim was to educate children so they could learn to live as God intended, informed and influenced by the Christian faith. The Cornerstone vision continues this theological rooting with the vision statement '*Building Futures with Love'* and our overarching aim is to be a group of schools which enable each child and adult to flourish and be the architect of their own future which is rooted in love.

The schools are built on a foundation of love, understanding and support for all children, parents, staff and the community. Love is at the heart of the greatest of God's commandments, and we endeavour to use our Cornerstone value to guide us through every decision made and every action taken.

When asked, 'which is the greatest commandment?' Jesus answered, 'love the Lord Your God with all you heart, with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself'.

(Matthew 22:36-40)

In accordance with the Government's requirement for all governing bodies, the three core strategic functions of the Cornerstone schools Local Governing Body are:

1. **Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction**
2. **Holding the Executive Head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils**
3. **Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent**

Governance arrangements

The Local Governing Body of Cornerstone schools was reconstituted in January 2021 and was made up to 12 members:
2 Foundation Governors, (Susannah Bateman and Wendy Arrowsmith,) 1 ex officio incumbent governor (vacant), 2 Parent Governors (Anthony McGeeney and Claire Goodchild), 4 Co-opted Governors (Jean Lang, Corinne Bell and Jackie Brinicombe + 1 vacancy, the Executive Head Teacher (Kirstie Petch) and 2 Staff Governors (Holly Coxon and Amy Whiteley).

There are currently two vacancies, one for an ex officio incumbent and one for a co-opted governor. Experience in education, finance, personnel, management and health & safety are valuable to the Governing Body. However, the key attributes that Governors need are time, enthusiasm, and an interest in education.

We do not have committees with delegated functions; instead, we discuss all business as a full Governing Body. Meetings have taken place five times a year; this has ensured that all governors are fully informed and able to contribute to all aspects of Governance. The responsibilities of the Governing Body are determined by the Scheme of Delegation of the Multi Academy Trust (MAT).

Whilst we have no LGB committees, the foundation governors, alongside the Executive Head and other staff meet regularly to further develop our church school distinctiveness.

Four governors stepped down during the year: Kirsti Hume, Nicki Walsh, Sam Johnstone, and Wendy Arrowsmith.
Nicki Walsh and Sam Johnstone, both co-opted parent governors, made valuable contributions by sharing their professional expertise in health and social services, which enriched the Local Governing Body's understanding and decision-making.
Wendy Arrowsmith and Kirsti Hume served longer terms and played significant roles throughout their tenure, offering support and meaningful input to the body.

Attendance record of governors

A record is kept by the clerk of the governing body of governors' attendance at meetings; details of attendance can be found at the end of this report. Meetings need to be 'quorate' to ensure that decisions can be made. All meetings have been quorate this year.

The work we have done in the governing body meetings.

The Dales Academy Trust provides the LGB with a draft agenda including items related to statutory duties of the LGB; this is then personalised to meet the particular priorities of Cornerstone schools. The agenda includes items such as the curriculum, policies, finances and health and safety, wellbeing and the headteacher provides the meeting with a detailed report and pupil performance data. Members of the LGB scrutinise all meeting papers prior to attendance so as to carry out the three core functions previously identified.

Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

A strategic planning meeting was held in September 2024 to scrutinise the school improvement plan, identify the key priorities for the LGB in the coming year, and plan governor monitoring to take place over the academic year.

Strategic Planning for the future

The following priorities and associated actions were agreed at our strategic planning meeting in September 2024:

Cornerstone priorities		
1. **Ensure the best possible outcomes for all pupils that prepare them for a happy and fulfilling life.**	2. **Recruit and retain the very best staff**	3. **Grow the schools to be sustainable and viable.**
Apply research evidence-based strategies to inform teaching and learning.	Provide clear and supportive induction for staff at all levels. Prioritise staff wellbeing, finding ways of reducing bureaucracy and	Find ways of promoting the schools so that they are the first choice for all parents/carers in the local community.

Robustly monitor the academic and personal development of all pupils, providing additional support when needed. Share expertise across the schools to further develop the very best curriculum, making use of the local environment and community strengths. Find opportunities to bring pupils from all schools together so that they feel that they are part of a bigger organisation which shares the same vision and values and builds friendships across all schools.	creating opportunities for team building. Create inspiring professional development pathways for all staff to meet their own aspirations as well school improvement priorities.	Further develop stronger links with local pre-schools. Share expertise of Cornerstone staff across the Trust schools. Build a community around each of the schools.

The School Development Plan 2024-2025 focused on the following areas:

- Priority 1: Quality of education *To improve the delivery of maths in mixed age classes to ensure rapid and sustained progress and improved outcomes*
- Priority 2: Quality of education: *To improve outcomes in writing for all children to bring writing in line with reading.*
- Priority.3: Quality of education: *To refine and develop foundation subjects to ensure they are taught and assessed effectively.*
- Priority 4: *Church school distinctiveness. To further strengthen our church school distinctiveness through broadening our horizons beyond the school and the local community.*

At the strategic planning meeting held in September, link governors were identified and attached to each priority to monitor progress towards meeting the priorities.

Our curriculum intent:

Our curriculum is designed with the unique needs of the children in each of our four schools at its heart. Building on an engaging and stimulating foundation in Early Years, our four-year rolling programme provides meaningful, creative and knowledge-rich learning experience, which enable children to become active, healthy, imaginative and engaged citizens of the world.

Our Christian value of love, weaves throughout all teaching and learning, and high academic expectations are set alongside a nurturing approach to pastoral development. Carefully curated topics and meaningful themes enable all children to learn to love themselves, each other, the world and beyond.

Our curriculum implementation:

Our small, mixed-age classes provide both academic challenges and creative opportunities. Children can be with the same teacher and cohort for a number of years, and we find these become special relationships which deepen over time. Teaching and learning are designed to maintain the academic rigour and progression of subject disciplines, whilst also ensuring a flexible and creative approach tailored to individual needs. Our four-year rolling plan of learning means children never study the same topic twice, but their knowledge and skills build over time in a cyclical manner ensuring clear progression within a bigger picture of meaningful, recurring themes.

The impact of our curriculum:

Regular visits from the Director of Primary (Dales) have monitored the impact of the curriculum and visit notes from these meetings are discussed by the LGB. This year it was noted that the Early Years curriculum is strong; it progresses from Nursery to Reception and includes key knowledge and skills for each area of learning.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Our aim is to realise the potential of all our children by addressing their individual needs. We strive to ensure children at our schools are not being discriminated against because of physical disability, national origin, language, religion or gender.
The needs of highly able pupils are identified, and they are encouraged to develop their skills through

the challenging, yet supportive curriculum. Joint activities with other schools are utilised to provide different and extended learning opportunities wherever possible.
Children with special educational needs (those that require different and additional educational provision) are very well supported by our schools and we involve parents/carers as essential partners in their education. Quality First teaching with differentiated planning, a range of teaching methods and class organisation are used to ensure our schools are inclusive to all.
Our schools provide an Individual Provision Map (IPM) for all children with a special educational need and reviews them termly to evaluate progress towards, and achievement of, specific targets. Children may also be supported by small group intervention programs.
We have a dedicated, non-teaching SENDCO, employed to lead SEND across all schools and work closely with families, children, staff and outside agencies to provide the best possible opportunities and learning experience for all.

Mental Health and Well Being

Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH**)** is a key priority at Cornerstones. We fully understand that positive mental health is the bedrock of all learning and enables children to thrive both in school and all through life. Our sensitive and pro-active approach to the wellbeing of pupils and staff is something we are very proud of, and having small cohorts enables us to engage with and understand the social and emotional needs of our pupils intimately. Our schools care very deeply about the aspects of children that cannot be measured or easily observed through academic assessments.

The World Health Organisation defines mental health as a state of wellbeing in which every individual achieves their potential, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to their community. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and act

The wellbeing of staff and pupils is an agenda item at each LGB meeting.

Academy conversion and formation of a Diocesan led Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

After discussions between the Diocese of Leeds and York and a number of Church of England Schools in North Yorkshire, the decision was made by 11 schools to come together to form a new Multi Academy Trust. Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust (BDAT) was commissioned to set up the new MAT for North Yorkshire and appointed the BDAT Chief Executive Officer (CEO) interim CEO of the new Trust. A dedicated CEO for Dales was appointed in September 2017 and a Finance Officer shortly afterwards. The Cornerstone schools joined the Dales Multi Academy Trust on 1st April 2020. This marked the inclusion of the Trust's first community school, expanding its reach beyond its original Church of England foundation. The Cornerstone four school model was formed 4 years ago to enhance support for four, smaller than average, rural schools. There was an interim board appointed in January 2021, this became the substantive L G B in January 2022.

Holding the Executive Head Teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils.

Each Autumn Term, the Executive Head Teacher is set performance targets by the CEO of the Trust, the Dales Director of Primary, and the Chair of Governors. These targets are aligned with the school's strategic priorities and areas identified for development. Progress against these objectives is monitored and formally evaluated throughout the academic year. One of the Governing Body's most important responsibilities is to provide both support and constructive challenge to Mrs Petch as she leads the school forward.

British Values

Schools have a duty to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. As Governors, we monitor how this is being implemented in school and, most importantly, how children are living out those values.

Pupil Premium

Pupil Premium is additional government funding given to schools in England to support disadvantaged pupils and raise their educational outcomes. The funding is allocated based on pupil eligibility, which includes those from low-income families registered for free school meals (FSM) at any point in the last six years, as well as children who have been in care or adopted from care. Schools must spend this money to benefit these eligible students, though how it is used is determined by the school itself. Governors are involved in preparing a Pupil Premium Strategy. The funding is spent on research-based activities. They monitor how Pupil Premium is being

spent and what impact it has on children's outcomes.

Sports Premium

The school sports premium is a government-funded initiative for English primary schools to improve the quality and provision of their physical education (PE) and sport. Jointly provided by the Departments for Education, Health, and Culture, Media and Sport, it is a ring-fenced fund for headteachers to use on sustainable improvements that encourage healthier, more active lifestyles for pupils. The goal is to raise the profile of PE and sport, increase staff confidence, and improve pupil engagement and a range of experiences in physical activities. The headteacher reports to the full Governing Body on priorities for PE, how the PE grant is being spent and the impact it is having on pupils. The report is on the school website.

Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent

The Governing Body oversees financial management through scrutiny of monthly budget reports and forecasts provided by the Trust's Finance Director and Link Officer. Spending is aligned with the School Improvement Plan, though budgets remain tight due to rising inflation, energy, and staffing costs. With income dependent on pupil numbers, achieving best value is essential.

Community support continues to play a vital role in sustaining school activities. The Friends of the Schools have organised successful fundraising events, and generous donations of time and resources from families and local organisations have helped enrich the educational experience. These contributions strengthen the schools' connection with their community and help maintain a nurturing, inclusive environment for all pupils.

The closure of Kirkby Fleetham CE Primary school

During the academic year, the Governing Body was informed by the Trust board of the decision to close Kirkby Fleetham CE Primary School at the end of the academic year. The Trust cited the decision being made in response to sustained challenges including declining pupil numbers and financial viability. Whilst The Governing Body were not directly involved with the decision to close the school, we worked closely with the Trust, Local Authority, and community stakeholders to try to manage the transition as sensitively as possible and to support affected families and staff. Governors considered 'lessons learned' from the process of closure of Academies defined by the Department for Education and applied by the Trust, and this was fed back to the CEO. The closure has prompted renewed focus on strengthening enrolment and community engagement across the Cornerstone schools.

Governors' Development

Many changes happen in the course of a year in terms of educational development and practice. Governors keep on top of these changes by attending relevant training, local and regional conferences. Our training has included the new SIAMS framework, Curriculum, Safeguarding, Safer Recruitment and School Improvement. The Chair of Governors was also Chair of the LGB of Trinity Academy, Richmond and there is a Dales Chair of Governors group. All Governors complete child protection training, online safety, Prevent (prevention of radicalisation), cyber and counter terrorism training. Governors also receive support through membership of The Key for School Governors which provides training and resources to support our role.

Communication

The Local Governing Body is committed to engaging with parents, staff, pupils, and the wider community in all aspects of school life. Our Chair and other governors are regularly present in our schools to carry out monitoring or to attend school events and are always happy to speak with anyone who has questions or concerns.

The schools offer a variety of information events for parents These events provide valuable insights into what children are learning and how parents can support their education at home. Additionally, we have been expanding our social media presence—particularly on Facebook—so that parents and the local community can celebrate and stay informed about the wonderful things happening in our schools.

Staffing

This has been a very challenging year for all staff, and we have been extremely grateful to them all for their hard work and commitment to the schools. There have been several staff changes during the year including the retirement or promotion of long-standing and highly valued members of the staff team.

School Year

The pupils have excelled in several areas over the course of the year and here are some highlights:

- Ravensworth and East Cowton schools both held MacMillan Coffee Mornings to raise money for a charity very close to the hearts of some of our children.
- Children from all four schools travelled to Darlington to sing carols for our former Vice Chair of Governors, Barbara Whittle who was recovering from illness at the Garden Care Home. Barbara

and a large number of residents were thrilled to be joined by the children who sung their hearts out!

- Many of our children took a trip to Richmond or Northallerton during the year to take part in various sporting events. These events are a great way to give children an opportunity to meet other children, experience 'big' school and play sports competitively. It is sometimes a bonus to do rather well at events too! Well done to all for taking part (sometimes scary in itself) and even winning for some!
- Four brilliant Easter services were led by the children and our vicars. The children all spoke beautifully and made sure Easter, new life and new beginnings were celebrated.
- Our Year 6 children reached an important milestone in their lives and completed their end of Key Stage 2 SATS tests. The children approached these tests with determination and calm, despite it being a quite scary experience in some ways. We are incredibly proud of them and the attitude that 'SATS don't measure everything' and everybody has skills that are far more important than those the SATS measure.
- We aim to use our sports premium funding to broaden pupils' experiences and promote active, healthy lifestyles. This year, children had the opportunity to take part in a wide range of activities, including paddle boarding, African dance, and martial arts; some of which extended beyond Sports Week. These experiences not only support physical development but also build confidence, teamwork, and resilience. By offering diverse and inclusive sporting opportunities, we help children discover new interests and develop lifelong skills.

A message of thanks.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all parents and carers for the unwavering support you provide throughout the year. Children thrive when there is a strong, positive partnership between home and school, and your encouragement, involvement, and care make a real difference. Your continued support is deeply appreciated by all staff and governors and plays a vital role in helping our pupils achieve their very best.

Jean Lang
Chair of Governors

Corinne Bell
Vice Chair of Governors

Governing Body attendance at meetings

Cornerstone FGB 24/25	Term expires	23rd October 2024	15th January 2025	26th March 2025	21st May 2025	9th July 2025
Jean Lang (co-opted)	31/8/26	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kirstie Petch (HT)	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Claire Goodchild (parent)	2/10/27	x	✓	✓	✓	✓
Corinne Bell (co-opted)	31/8/26	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
Holly Coxon (staff)	2/10/27	✓	✓	y	✓	✓
Jackie Brinicombe (co-opted)	31/8/26	✓	✓	x	x	✓
Kirsti Hume (staff)	28/9/26	✓	✓	✓		
Susannah Bateman (Foundation)	31/8/26	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wendy Arrowsmith (Foundation)	1/1/26	✓	x	✓	x	✓
Anthony McGeeney (parent)	16/4/28	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Nicki Walsh (co-opted)	31/8/26	✓	✓	✓		
Sam Johnstone	31/8/26	✓				
Amy Whiteley Staff	20/5/29				✓	✓
Governors left in the last 12 months						
Barbara Whittle	Term ended 31/8/24					
Sam Johnstone	Resigned 5/12/24					
Wendy Arrowsmith	Resigned 9/7/25					
Nikki Walsh	Resigned 16/5/25					
Kirsti Hume	Resigned 26/3/25					

Minutes of the Governing Body meetings are available from the school office once they have been approved by the full Governing Body.

How to contact your governing body.

Information about the school's governing body is available on the governors' page of the school's website https://www.dalesmat.org/cornerstone/governors/pen-portraits/

E mail the Chair of Governors at admin@dalesmat.org For the attention of the Chair of Cornerstone LGB
Or leave a message/ letter at your nearest school office.