

OXFORDSHIRE GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION (OGA)
Notes of the Open Meeting held at Gosford Hill School
on Monday 11 June 2018

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM CHAIR OF OGA

Carole Thomson welcomed governors to the meeting. She and Judith Bennett had attended the NGA Annual Conference that weekend which had been addressed by the Secretary of State for Education. The speech had been uploaded and a link would also be put on the OGA website together with a summary of the conference in due course.

The next Open Meeting would take place on Saturday 29 September 2018 with Tony Breslin. Thanks were offered to Gosford Hill for use of the school to hold the meeting.

Dr Tony Eaude was introduced.

Going beyond the data: exploring what Governors need to know about Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural development

A few questions to start

SMSC did not often come up in governors' meetings; it was not an item on the agenda for around 1/3rd of delegates. It was sometimes covered by a Link governor.

It was suggested that SMSC could come within strategic. Attendees from Church of England schools and a values-led school felt that it was involved in the strategic underpinning. TE agreed that it could link with the church foundation etc but thought it was worth thinking about SMSC as an umbrella term that sat above any particular programme.

How prominent has SMSC been in the school's Ofsted reports?

One attendee explained that there had been a sentence included in their Ofsted report – it was not prominent but it was important. Another noted that it had been used in relation to mono-cultural school with predominantly white British children and the report had stated that further work was required to educate pupils about other cultures.

What immediately comes to mind when you think about SMSC? What do you associate with SMSC development?

Community events

School council

The way of organising or mapping the curriculum

Assemblies

Enrichment activities

Art and drama

Value of the month etc

Extra curricular provision eg residentials

Forest school

Children having responsibilities and taking on leadership roles

Interviewing potential headteachers

Teamwork and employability project

The context of Ofsted

TE felt that you would wish to see notions of thriving and flourishing included in Grade descriptor for overall effectiveness for Outstanding. It was noted that physical well-being was specified but not mental well-being.

SMSC was an important part of leadership and management and it was essential that it was debated in staff meetings and imbued in the ethos of the school. Young people should be enabled to search for answers to questions of meaning, etc. Asking 'why am I here?' was a different sort of question to 'what is 7x8?'

TE felt it was necessary to recognise that lot things dealt with in SMSC were inherently not measurable: any attempts to quantify were meaningless and unhelpful. The question 'Rate how much you love your children on a scale of 1 to 10' does not make any sense. Stories or narratives where children asked profound questions etc could be gathered as evidence and provided to Ofsted if appropriate.

The notion of awe and wonder could be useful to consider.

One attendee explained that her goal as a parent was for her children to be happy and have interesting opportunities and that was what she wanted for other pupils too. TE thought that a more helpful approach was to use Ofsted language, aiming for pupils to thrive and flourish. This should recognise individual students' ability to achieve that.

Special schools challenged the notion that education related only to cognitive aspects. One attendee who worked at Christchurch Cathedral explained that they 'worked with awe and wonder'. She described a visit by a special school with pupils with significant disabilities and how moving their reaction had been TE agreed that awe and wonder could arise from a visit from a Cathedral or other great building but could also take place in a quiet garden at school or when a small child looked at a leaf.

Evidence could be gathered in every department or subject area. It might come more easily in English and drama but could also be in science.

A section could be included on governor visit forms requiring a comment on what had been seen on the visit relating to SMSC.

Lunchtime supervisors could provide a wealth of evidence gathered over the hour that they worked with pupils.

How Ofsted defines SMSC (1)

Education was often seen as a desperate race to cover the curriculum. It was necessary to have time to ask questions about meaning, identity and purpose.

It was not possible to ensure a child's spiritual development but opportunities could be offered. There were two main traditions in ethics: duty ethics which looked at right and wrong, and virtue ethics which focused on the characteristics of the sort of person that it was hoped to develop.

One attendee explained that they had changed their behaviour policy to a positive policy with restorative approaches.

How Ofsted defines SMSC (2)

Governors had a practical role to support art and music. It was noted that provision could be expensive. However, some of the children in school would have opportunities to access drama lessons etc. Governors needed to consider the sort of opportunities to the full range of pupils.

Adolescent children asked what they remember about primary school usually spoke about a residential trip or going to the theatre for the first time.

Implications and a few further questions

Schools with a religious foundation had a particular approach to spirituality built in and the school was tethered to that specific focus on spirituality.

The world that pupils were now being educated for was not the world that attendees had grown up in. Children would experience a more diverse world, living and working abroad more. There was a lot of cultural diversity in urban schools so it may feel easier. There was often less diversity in smaller, village or rural schools though there may be more than was immediately apparent. Children learnt a lot through example and there may be other images of success in their environment around disabilities, cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, etc.

There is benefit to fundamental British values. However, too many schools had responded by putting up a display with images of the queen, people playing cricket, etc. British values needed to be running through the school.

What did it mean for SMSC to be more about process than content?

The focus was normally curriculum content. SMSC was not about adding another subject or more to the curriculum but was about adding processes of reflection, working creatively etc. It was the way that people were encouraged to work and relate to each other.

It was hoped that pupils would have integrity and behave consistently. It was an intrinsic motivation to behave as a decent person and not just because the teacher was watching.

It was important to be mindful of the environment when applying changes and not to go 'cracking all the eggs'. Governors should recognise that SMSC could raise strong responses. If governors undertook an audit of their school they would find lots of evidence of SMSC which could be built on.

The curriculum should support SMSC and the governing board played a key role in ensuring that the curriculum was broad and balanced.