

## **Annual Governance Statement**

### **The Downland Federation Governing Board 2024-25**

This statement reflects the academic year ending July 2025.

#### **Our Vision**

Our vision for the Federation was that each child became a powerful learner, allowing them to achieve the best possible outcomes and enabling them to take an active part in the challenges that lay ahead by learning together; learning for life and providing a seamless education from 2-18.

Each of the schools within the Federation have their own unique character; similar, although bespoke, values; and collaborate in a strong, supportive and resilient structure to provide a seamless education from 2-18.

#### **Governance Aims**

The Governing Board aimed to provide the Federation Schools with outstanding governance. In doing so, the Board referenced Ofsted's 2025 inspection framework, which evaluates leadership and governance on a 5-point scale. The Board strived to meet the 'strong standard' and 'exceptional' criteria, where leaders and governors collectively ensured that the Federation's provision enabled every pupil to thrive, with a clear commitment to raising standards of education and care to improve the lives of all pupils.

#### **Instrument of Governance**

The name of the federation was **The Downland Federation**, comprising:

- The Downs School (Foundation)
- Basildon Church of England Primary School (Voluntary Controlled School)
- Compton Church of England Primary School (Voluntary Controlled School)
- Beedon Church of England Primary School (Voluntary Controlled School)

#### **Governing Board Constitution**

The Governing Board constitution consisted of:

- 2 Parent Governors
- 1 Staff Governor
- 1 Headteacher
- 1 Local Authority Governor
- 5 Partnership or Foundation Governors (appointed by the Oxford Diocesan Board)
- 10 Co-opted Governors

The constitution, roles, declarations, terms of office and committee membership were published on the Governing Board area of each school website.

## Federation Strategy

The strategic priorities for 2024-25 were:

1. **Operational excellence:** To strive for operational excellence working collaboratively and creatively as a Federation
2. **Outstanding partnerships:** To build outstanding partnerships to improve school capacity and community cohesion
3. **Outstanding curriculum:** To embed an outstanding curriculum that promoted achievement, engagement and independence with the highest quality teaching and first-class, robust assessment
4. **Collaborative learning environment:** To develop a collaborative learning environment with a continuously reflective 'learning dialogue' resulting in professional growth for all
5. **Recruitment and retention:** To maintain a clear recruitment and retention strategy to ensure the Federation maintained strong staff engagement with a culture of leadership and commitment to wellbeing and growth for all

### Strategic Development: Multi-Academy Trust Formation

A key strategic focus for 2024-25 was the formation of a new multi-academy trust (MAT). This development represented a significant milestone in the Federation's evolution, enabling enhanced collaboration while preserving the individual ethos and identity of each school.

The MAT it is hoped will commence on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026, following completion of all necessary procedures and approvals. Schools within the MAT retained their own ethos and identity, with no attempt to apply a uniform Trust brand to member schools, whilst benefiting from a shared Trust vision and values philosophy.

### Governance Structure 2024-25

The Federation operated through a two-tier governance structure:

#### Full Governing Board

The Board provided strategic oversight across the Federation, focusing on:

- Strategic direction and vision
- Financial oversight and sustainability
- Risk management and compliance
- Performance monitoring across all schools
- Safeguarding oversight

#### Local Advisory Boards (LABs)

The Local Advisory Board Committees for the Primary and Secondary Schools monitored tactics for improving the Quality of Education, Leadership, Behaviour and Attitudes, and Personal Development as set out in each School's Improvement Plan.

The Board determined which governance functions were delegated to LABs. While there was no 'right' model for delegation, the Board maintained oversight of areas such as setting HR policies, choosing school improvement support, SEND provision, setting schools' budgets, and appointing senior staff, although LABs were consulted in the recruitment process.

### **Governor Activity 2024-25**

Throughout the year, governors conducted multiple visits to each school, meticulously documenting each visit and reporting on them. During these visits, governors focused on various specialisms aligned with Ofsted's evaluation areas: safeguarding, SEND and Pupil Premium, curriculum and teaching, achievement, attendance and behaviour, personal development and wellbeing, and leadership.

A particular focus within the primaries was Christian Distinctiveness and Collective Worship. The reports from governors highlight a strong and consistent expression of their Christian vision—particularly the theme “strong in spirit, full of wisdom”—through inclusive, invitational, and inspiring Collective Worship practices. Pupils are actively involved in worship through readings, singing, prayer, and symbolic acts, which foster ownership and engagement and were keen to take part in Pupil Voice exercises with governors. Worship services are thoughtfully planned, often incorporating awards and moments of reflection that reinforce school values and celebrate achievements.

Governors focused on improvements in the Early Years offering particularly at Basildon. The EYFS monitoring visits to Beedon and Basildon schools highlighted inclusive, child-focused environments that support emotional wellbeing, independence, and development through play-based and outdoor learning. Both settings showed strong staff commitment and clear plans for improving indoor and outdoor spaces, with Basildon identifying specific areas for curriculum differentiation across EYFS age groups.

Focus Fortnight lesson observations at The Downs School highlighted strong teaching practices, including effective use of questioning, student engagement through varied resources, and clear learning outcomes. Strong classroom management, clear subject knowledge, and effective use of praise and student work to support learning were also strengths. Areas for development were discussed with leaders and other governors at committee meetings and fed back into school improvement plans for the coming year.

### **Safeguarding**

Safeguarding governors visited each school, meeting with staff to establish that the Federation had a culture in which staff, pupils and parents felt comfortable raising and discussing concerns that related to safeguarding pupils. They reviewed policies and

procedures to ensure they were understood, applied and had a positive impact on pupils, and ensured that staff knew, understood and upheld their safeguarding responsibilities.

During these visits, governors inspected the Single Central Record (SCR), and their findings were reported back to all governors at Full Governing Board (FGB) meetings. All inspections confirmed compliance with statutory guidance from the Department for Education issued under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002, which schools must have regard to when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

### **Health & Safety**

Health & Safety governors carried out visits to each school, reviewing records related to equipment such as fire systems, legionella testing, school evacuations, and building safety. All schools maintained high standards, with particular commendation for robust Health & Safety management practices.

### **Inclusion and SEND**

Governors monitored the provision for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), ensuring that leaders had established a culture in which staff understood the range of barriers that pupils may have faced to their learning and/or wellbeing. They reviewed how the qualified SENCo was empowered through their leadership status to lead whole-school improvement for pupils with SEND and confirmed that the published SEN information report accurately described the school's provision and support for pupils with SEND.

Governors assessed the impact of SEND arrangements and reported their findings to the FGB, ensuring that the Federation's approach aligned with the SEND Code of Practice and supported successful transitions for pupils with SEND.

### **Pupil Premium and Disadvantaged Pupils**

Governors responsible for Pupil Premium engaged with staff to ensure that leaders had a secure understanding of disadvantaged pupils' needs and used the best available evidence, including high-quality research, to inform their approaches. They reviewed the pupil premium strategy to confirm it was aligned with wider school improvement priorities, that staff were clear about their roles in delivering the strategy, and that it was implemented and monitored effectively.

These assessments were reported back to the FGB, demonstrating the positive impact on pupils' learning.

### **Curriculum and Teaching**

Governors focused on reviewing and understanding the curriculum across all key stages, ensuring that it covered the statutory requirements and was at least as ambitious in breadth and depth as the national curriculum. They confirmed that the

curriculum was designed to give pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, the knowledge they needed to take advantage of opportunities in later life.

This often led to providing feedback and challenge to school leaders on curriculum design and implementation.

### **Attendance and Behaviour**

Governors monitored attendance data and behaviour policies across the Federation, ensuring that schools maintained high expectations and that any barriers to attendance were identified and addressed promptly.

### **Personal Development and Wellbeing**

Governors reviewed how leaders took account of staff wellbeing and ensured that workload was manageable, that effective systems were in place, and that all staff felt valued and supported to do their jobs to a high standard. Particular focus on the Primaries led to key strands of the School Improvement Plan 2025-26 including agreed actions from those wellbeing meetings.

### **Leadership and Governance**

Governors ensured that leaders demonstrated consistently high standards of principled and professional conduct, established and sustained the Federation's ethos and strategic direction in partnership with those responsible for governance, and took a strategic approach to improvement. Governors supported and challenged school leaders effectively, assured themselves that leaders had an accurate understanding of each school's context, and held leaders to account appropriately for the impact of professional learning programmes and provision for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.

### **Financial Management**

Governors are required to have robust effective oversight of the operations and performance of the schools ensuring appropriate use of funding and effective financial performance and keeping our sites safe and well-maintained.

Across all Federation schools, the latest year-end forecasts indicate that each will end the financial year with a surplus carry-forward balance. Robust budget-monitoring is in place, providing close oversight of expenditure and ensuring that spending is well-controlled throughout the year. This discipline and close control continues to support the maximisation of year-end surpluses, with the most recent forecasts showing improvements to the projected carry-forward positions for every school.

The following building works and IT infrastructure were undertaken (this does not cover all of the day-to-day operational aspects, repairs, and minor improvements around the site) totalling a spend of nearly £500,000:

- Design and fit of a new pool cover and new pool floor

- Astro carpet refurbishment and fencing, bids submitted to sport England for floodlights and cleaning machinery to improve upkeep.
- 4 new major toilet refurbs across the school x 3 student and x2 staff
- Installation of new tills and complete retake of biometrics for all students to streamline their purchasing ability and improve their breaktimes.
- Sixth form redesign to facilitate more students in the common room and classroom space.
- Added another meeting room in Student Support Centre
- Added 2 new offices and a chill out room in learning support
- Improved the heating in SP and Tribe with new wall heaters
- Installed a canopy to improve student experience in outdoor spaces
- Improved fencing around school that was old and damaged
- Designed and commissioned wall art in 3 locations around the school
- Commissioned a marketing video
- Improved IT infrastructure saving for future years expenditure - switches, WiFi, cabling for improved student and staff connectivity
- Initiated solar panel installation for 2 of the 4 schools

## Policy Review

Governors reviewed all statutory policies throughout the year using a policy schedule, ensuring timely reviews and sign-offs. The Board developed further protocols to monitor the effectiveness of these policies to ensure their impact.

This structured approach ensured compliance with statutory requirements whilst also evaluating the real-world impact of policies on school improvement and pupil outcomes.

## Professional Development and Training

Throughout the year, all governors who needed to underwent safeguarding and child protection training, including online safety training. This training was regularly updated in line with advice from local safeguarding partners, ensuring that governors maintained relevant skills and knowledge to support effective safeguarding across the Federation.

Governors also participated in training on Trustee responsibilities of MAT governance, exclusions and their specific roles within committees.

A skills audit was undertaken with a view to recruiting a balance of skills and experience to the new governance structure of the MAT.

## Impact and Outcomes

The Governing Board maintained rigorous oversight of the Federation throughout 2024-25, ensuring:

- **Safeguarding remained paramount:** All schools maintained robust safeguarding procedures with effective reporting mechanisms

- **Inclusion was embedded:** SEND provision was strong across all schools, with effective identification and support for pupils facing barriers to learning
- **High-quality education:** The curriculum was ambitious, well-sequenced and effectively taught across all key stages
- **Strategic development:** The successful formation of the MAT positioned the Federation for sustainable growth whilst preserving individual school identities
- **Staff wellbeing:** Leaders had effective systems to support staff wellbeing and manage workload
- **Effective challenge and support:** Governors provided appropriate challenge to school leaders whilst supporting continuous improvement

### Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2025-26

Building on the achievements of 2024-25, the Governing Board's priorities for the coming year include:

1. **Embedding MAT governance:** Ensuring effective operation of the new Trust Board and LAB structure
2. **Continuing focus on inclusion:** Further strengthening provision for disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND, and those known to children's social care
3. **Curriculum development:** Ensuring curriculum excellence across all schools within the MAT
4. **Monitoring policy impact:** Further developing robust protocols to evaluate the effectiveness of policies in practice
5. **Staff development:** Supporting professional learning programmes that build expertise and support succession planning

### Contacting the Governing Board

If you would like to correspond with the Chair of the Governing Board, you may do so by contacting:

**Telephone:** 01635 270000

**Email:** [governor.atow@thedownsschool.org](mailto:governor.atow@thedownsschool.org)

**Post:** Chair of Governors, The Downland Federation, Manor Crescent, Compton, Berkshire, RG20 6AD