

Impact Statement from the Local Governance Committee of Castle Academy

September 2021

From 2016 until August 2021, Castle Academy and the nearby Hillside Academy (formerly Balby Street Primary) shared a local governing body, known as a Transition Management Board (TMB). The TMB was comprised of dedicated volunteers from the local area, chosen for their objectivity, skills and experience, plus representatives from the Astrea Trust, who were instrumental in offering essential targeted support to the schools.

However, after the recent closure of Hillside Academy (many of whose pupils relocated to Castle in April 2021; the entire closure process was also closely monitored and questioned by the TMB) and with the continued excellent and positive progress being evident at Castle Academy, the Astrea Academy Trust has, as of September 2021, reconstituted the school's TMB as a **Local Governance Committee (LGC)**, incorporating minimal Trust representation.

The 2020-21 school year saw the appointment of three new committee members; they have undergone an Astrea induction process and are regularly signposted to other sources of relevant CPD, both within and outside Astrea. ***And now, to begin the 2021-22 school year, the LGC is delighted to be able to begin the process of recruiting two parent members from the Castle Academy community.*** The LGC is now in an excellent position to develop further its role within Castle Academy and 2021-22 will see a significant increase in its engagement with the school community.

What role does the Local Governance Committee play in the life of the school?

The LGC is a supportive forum in which the school Principal has access to the objective insights of people with professional & voluntary experience primarily outside the education sector; it also plays an important role in informing Astrea Trustees' understanding of local context and individual school performance. Astrea's local committees do not hold any legal responsibility for their school, thus enabling committee members to focus in particular on the following accountabilities:

- 1. To ensure that the vision, ethos and strategic direction of Astrea is maintained within each school***
- 2. To hold school leaders to account for educational performance of the schools, the inclusion of all pupils and the offer of a knowledge-rich and broadly-based curriculum***
- 3. To work with the school's leadership and central team to ensure that high standards of safeguarding are maintained***
- 4. To promote positive parent, community and stakeholder engagement and to drive school-to-school partnerships for improvement within the Trust***
- 5. To identify, understand and report to Trustees any strategic risks facing the school***

*“Reach for the top
of the tree and
you may get to
the first branch
but reach for the
stars and you’ll
get to the top of
the tree.”*

Lemn Sissay, MBE

“Inspiring beyond Measure” is an ambition firmly embedded within every Astrea school & its governance committees. Monitoring the impacts of the school’s measures to maintain Astrea’s high standards and expectations is a role the LGC takes very seriously. Committee members use their experience, comments, questions and school visits to check and ensure that pupils – from the lowest-achievers to the highest - receive the best possible educational and life-preparation experiences. In addition, the LGC Chair (Mrs Fitt) has still been meeting (mainly online) regularly with the Principal, (Mrs Mason) to discuss matters relating to the school. In-person visits by all LGC members will increase during 2021-22, offering more opportunities to meet with and chat to staff and pupils.

Meetings are twice-termly, at which the Academy Principal, Mrs Mason, plus other school/Trust staff as required, provide the committee with detailed reports on a wide variety of topics affecting the school, including (but not restricted to):

- School highlights, events & celebration of pupils’ achievements. Committee members are encouraged to attend events and take part in school life, such as Sports Day in 2021.
- **School Improvement Plan** – this major document informs and influences how individual schools operate. The committee monitors the school’s progress towards achieving its targets & goals; members ask for clarification when necessary and question & challenge content and data. From September 2021 the **curriculum** (recently modified) is another area in which committee members will be strengthening their interest in order to gain deeper knowledge of the effectiveness of its content and subsequent impact upon the pupils (and staff).
- Data and information relating to the **educational performance & progress** of pupils. The committee monitors & questions the comparative progress and attainment of different pupil groups, such as ethnicity, gender & ability, ensuring that school focus is firmly upon equality of opportunity for all pupils. For those pupils targeted by the Pupil Premium grant etc, members have questioned in-depth the reasons behind the school’s use of such funding, ensuring that it is efficiently and *effectively* used for the benefit of disadvantaged pupils. During the next school year specific responsibility for monitoring grant funding (Pupil Premium, Sports Premium, Catch-up) will be adopted by one of the LGC members.
- The support offered to different groups of **children with additional needs**, e.g. SEND, EAL and Looked After Children. This area is a particular monitoring responsibility of the SEND link member, Ms Newton, who helps ensure that all pupils’ needs are being met and that they are able to make the most of the school’s educational offer.
- **Safeguarding** is a major focus of every LGC meeting and enables members to build a picture of strengths and concerns. The Safeguarding link member (Mrs Fitt) was present at the school’s annual Safeguarding Review (very positive), has regular discussions with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (Mrs Mason), and ensures that relevant local/national safeguarding issues are discussed in meetings (e.g. the June 2021 Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools) and any potential impacts/effects on Castle Academy noted. All committee members undertake the necessary Safeguarding training.

COVID-19

Throughout the past months of COVID restrictions and remote education Castle (& Hillside) staff worked tirelessly on behalf of their pupils and colleagues, in an energetic effort to minimise the negative effects of the breaks in education caused by COVID-19. The TMB was kept informed and was fully supportive of the essential measures put in place by the schools to ensure the in-school and online safety of both pupils and staff. Although the Board is not involved in operational matters, the nature of its support was that of acting as a sounding board and offering advice.

The wellbeing of staff and pupils has been – *and will continue to be* - of paramount importance, with all committee members highly concerned about the varied impacts of COVID upon pupils & families (e.g. access to online education/facilities, engagement with online learning & school in general, issues affecting vulnerable children & pupils with SEND) and also upon school staff (e.g. their workload, training needs, work/family/health balance).

The TMB fully appreciated the unavoidable difficulties caused by the need to implement the various essential COVID-safe measures within and around the school, in particular the drop-off & pick-up measures introduced at the start & end of the school day. These were difficult circumstances for everyone, staff included, and the LGC would like to join Mrs Mason in extending sincere and grateful thanks to all the parents & carers for helping ensure that everyone – children, parents & staff – remained safe. The school is proud of the fact that no class ‘bubble’ had to be sent home.

TMB meetings, from April 2020 until July 2021, were held remotely via Microsoft TEAMS, with committee members unable to visit the school in person for most of that period. However, these online meetings did not differ much in content from normal times and committee members were still able to offer challenge & focused questioning in order to gain a full picture of daily life in Castle Academy. In addition, members have attended various Astrea-instigated online CPD webinars/courses during the past school year, plus some organised by the National Governance Association.

The Castle Academy Local Governance Committee in 2021-22

Most important will be the appointment of two parent committee members. This will significantly enhance the role of the LGC by bringing a parental perspective directly into the heart of school discussions.

The profile of the LGC within the school community will be raised through:

- Increased visits into school and attendance at school events by committee members enabling them, both individually & collectively, to gain a deeper understanding of how the school operates
- Developing & progressing relationships between school staff & committee members, through a variety of link responsibilities and activities, as identified by school priorities
- Enhanced presence on the school website and increased engagement with parents

The LGC will continue to monitor the School Improvement Plan closely, ensuring that school & pupil development objectives are challenged & achieved, and that positive, sustainable impacts are gained and enjoyed by every pupil at Castle Academy.

Appendix

The expectation of individual members of Castle Academy Local Governance Committee (LGC) is that they will:

- Enhance the work of the LGC to enable a strong focus on raising educational and personal standards & aspirations, so that every child is encouraged to achieve his/her potential
- Demonstrate their commitment by getting to know the school and becoming involved in school life and activities by visiting during school hours at least once per term
- Take personal responsibility for their ongoing training and development
- Prepare for meetings so that they are as well-informed as possible, with a minimum requirement of reading all the papers sent out with the agenda
- Attend meetings and play an active part. If unable to attend a meeting they should submit questions beforehand, based on the agenda and connected papers/information
- Support the school through whatever means available to them
- Recognise the corporate status of the LGC and the concept of collective responsibility
- Respect confidentiality and the need to act with circumspection
- Work together so that the LGC has a demonstrably positive impact on the school and its community