



External Board Review

South Staffordshire College

Reviewer: *Rachel Nicol*

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Executive Summary

Governance at South Staffordshire is characterised by robust and comprehensive systems, planning, reporting, openness and transparency.

The External Board Review has identified that:

-Board Composition is a strength both in terms of the strong balance of technical skills and the way these have been deployed across the structure to provide scrutiny. Recent proactive succession planning and recruitment has ensured that collectively the Board is well positioned to support the delivery of the College's strategic vision.

-The Board Structure has all the components to provide robust oversight. Opportunities to further develop the governance framework in terms of formalising improvement groups as committees and reviewing the scheme of delegation will avoid duplication of discussion and create space for more strategic conversations.

-Engagement and interactions are positive, student and community focused with well chaired and inclusive meetings. Monitoring the balance of in person, online and hybrid meetings and aligning expectations of individual governors will further support interaction across the structure. Discipline in report presentation will elevate strategic discussion.

Headline strengths and areas for development are summarised in the relevant sections.

This report has sought to identify opportunities for reflection to enable the Board and leadership team to articulate a workplan and scheme of delegation that provides greater authority for decision making across the wider structure. Formalising the improvement groups for Finance & Resources (FaRG) and Curriculum & Quality (CQIG) as committees and ensuring an appropriate balance of appropriately skilled external governors, will increase the scope for delegation. Committee to Board reporting should be sufficiently disciplined to provide the Board with required assurance but reduce duplication of discussion.

Success of any of these initiatives will rely as much on behaviours as on structures and on a willingness for continual debate on the strategic / operational line and where it is positioned.

The summary recommendations (set out in the table below), if accepted, could be implemented in stages and the Board and leadership team at South Staffordshire College have, in my view, sufficient expertise, maturity and mutual trust to be effective in this transition. The recommendations have been discussed with the Chair, CEO & Principal and HoG and any recommendations agreed to be taken forward by the Board of South Staffordshire College will be incorporated into their Governance Improvement Plan.

I commend the Governors, staff and students at South Staffordshire for your achievements in recent years and for your engagement with this review and wish you all every success in your future governance journey

Recommendations and Action Plan

A summary of the key recommendations is set out below but should be considered in the context of the report.

1 Establish groups as formal Committees and develop the governance framework further through clear terms of reference, scheme of delegation and work flows to ensure Committees and Management can make decisions appropriately (creating space on the Board agenda for strategic conversations) enhancing assurance and avoiding duplication.
2 Ensure consistency in cover reports and review committee to board reporting to reduce reliance on minutes and consider short form reports from each chair highlighting key areas covered, decisions taken and recommendations made.
3 Review KPI sheet (Board and leadership) to ensure the rationale for each KPI is understood. Periodically reflect on the balance between lagged and lead indicators that align to identified risks and create visibility for monitoring at board and committee level
4 Consider guidelines for presentation of reports at meetings, assuming papers have been read, and asking management to guide Governors to key points. This in turn will help management to present written reports with greater focus and build confidence in reporting by exception.
5 Work to align Governor expectations in terms of the HoG role to reduce emphasis on administration to strategic focus. This will help facilitate constructive debate around Governor requests of the leadership team at meetings and ensure the governance value of work requested is proportionate to the workload created.