



ST. DOMINIC'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL

GIRLS AND BOYS 2 - 18

2018-19 ANNUAL REPORT

of the School Governance Advisory Committee

This report for the academic year 2018-19 reflects the work of the Governance Advisory committee and the decisions it has taken over the last 12 months. The committee seeks to support and advise the Proprietor and the Headmaster in making decisions in the best interests of the pupils at the school. We scrutinize and approve the policies and procedures of the school. We work with the Head to create development plans to show how the school will continue to thrive and improve. We monitor the work of the Head and his team of staff. We monitor and evaluate the safeguarding procedures that are in place to ensure that every child is kept safe whilst at school. We monitor and report on financial arrangements and annually submit accounts to Companies House. All school policies can be viewed on the school website. For information regarding the successes and activities of the children and students at the school, see the Headmaster's reports and the website.

During the year, Dermott Kelly resigned as a governor. He was extremely effective during the transition of the ownership of the school over the last 3-4 years and made a significant contribution to the school. We welcomed his replacement as governor Peter McDonald, a surgeon with considerable experience and expertise in both the public and private sectors.

During the latter part of the year, the school was inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. As Governors, we were questioned by inspectors. We were delighted with the outcome of the inspection, which found the school to be fully compliant with the wealth of statutory requirements. The school was complimented on the clarity and appropriateness of the policies that are in place to make the school run effectively and provide the best possible education for the children in its care. The education provided was deemed to be of high quality, and the Head, other leaders, and the teachers were all complimented on their dedication and effectiveness. In another inspection, the school was delighted to be awarded the top '5 star' category for Environmental Health.

The proprietor, since taking over the school, has ensured that the school is now on a secure financial footing, and looks forward to the future with confidence. There has been significant investment in the buildings and the facilities provided for the children, which are now the envy of many! This year we have refurbished the changing rooms, improved the grounds around the sixth form centre, extended our outdoor facilities, converted the sixth form library into a stunning English classroom, as well as continuing with the significant programme of re-decoration of the school.

There has been investment in the staff. We wish to maintain a stable and loyal staff. As well as appointing well-qualified and dedicated teachers, there has been recruitment of a new Admissions Secretary to deal with the increasing popularity of the school and additional support for grounds maintenance. There are additional PE staff and sports coaches to enhance the range of clubs and to provide fixtures with other schools. A particular commitment of the Proprietor and the governors was to fully fund the recent increased costs of contributions of the school as employer to the Teachers Pensions Scheme. Many independent schools have not funded this significant cost, and

the staff at St Dominic's expressed their appreciation that the school was investing in their futures as well as those of the children.

The outcomes of the school continue to be excellent. Academically, the data showing how much progress the children make in their time at the school are impressive (and indeed in 2018 the only local independent school recording a 'positive' score). The school again featured in the Top 35 of the Sunday Times 'Best Independent Schools' league tables. The provisional data from the results in summer 2019 examinations are again extremely encouraging. But the school also continues to invest to improve our provision for youngsters with particular needs, thus ensuring we are true to the inclusive and caring ethos of the school.

In consultation with the Headmaster, the governors approved a rationalization of the curriculum offered in the senior part of the school. We are determined that St Dominic's Grammar School will continue to offer a curriculum that allows ALL pupils to access the broadest possible scope for further study in both the sixth form and/or in Further and Higher Education. We want our students to have access to the best courses at the best universities if that is their choice, and not be hampered by inappropriate subject choice in their earlier years. We will protect the key core subjects.

Other decisions taken by governors have affected the operation of the school. It was decided that it was in the best interests of our pupils that the Nursery be run by a separate organisation which was expert in the field. Although the transition was not without challenges, we have sought to provide continuity for the children. The Nursery continues to thrive and is growing in number. The school recognizes the importance of maintaining good relationships in order to ensure a smooth transition from the Nursery to the school Reception class for those parents who choose this route.

The Headmaster continues to actively promote the school and the benefits that a 'St Dominic's education' can give to a child. He works tirelessly providing taster days, talking with heads of potential 'feeder' schools and showing prospective parents around. His efforts have borne fruit as the growing popularity of the school shows. This meant that two major decisions were needed. The first was to admit boys to the senior part of the school - an action approved by the Department for Education. Why? An increasing number of parents of boys in the junior section were expressing disappointment that they would have to leave the school on reaching the end of Year 6. Parents also expressed the view that having a boy in one school and a girl in another (often some distance apart) is a logistical problem. The governors were also aware that single sex education nationally is becoming less popular, and that difficulties lie ahead regarding gender equality.

Following the decision, there has been a pleasing uptake of places by boys. Levels of interest in the 11+ entrance examination from both boys and girls has meant a second major decision: to create a second class of Year 7 pupils. We either had to disappoint a large number of applicants, or increase our class size or create another class. We are committed to maintaining small class sizes allowing greater individual attention to your child, and so the decision to have two Y7 classes was approved.

The number of pupils throughout the school shows steady and sustainable growth. This popularity of the school is not due solely to the excellent academic record, but also to the outstanding opportunities provided by the school beyond the classroom. The enrichment activities help to support youngsters develop into well-rounded young people who become active, interesting and valued citizens leading fulfilled and happy lives in years to come. The governors are acutely aware that these only take place because of the commitment and goodwill of the staff. We are also aware, however, that some of the trips can be extremely costly. As part of our commitment to inclusion, we want to ensure that a significant number of trips and visits and outdoor activities are affordable to *all* families so that no child is denied these valuable and often life-changing experiences. The

governors were delighted, for instance, to hear that this year's trip to France was enjoyed by almost the whole of Years 6 to 10.

The governors decided to continue to support the Brewood Music Festival as part of our determination to build strong links with the local community. The proprietor has also built strong links with Brewood Cricket Club. The Headmaster continues to have regular meetings with colleagues at Brewood Middle School to explore ways in which they can work together for the mutual benefit of the schools, their staff and pupils.

The governors are delighted with the financial position of the school. The proprietor not only secured the position of the school but has also enabled significant investments to be made. The governors decided to make the whole fee structure much more clear, open and transparent. We want fees to be fair and reasonable. The re-structuring of fees has been well-received and parents have commented that the system now has clarity and fairness. In terms of expenditure, the school has stronger checks in place, and has benefited from the financial expertise of the proprietor and his company to ensure that the school gets the best possible deal whether it be for resources such as books and IT equipment, or energy costs, buildings and grounds maintenance, and so on.

Finally, I want to thank you, the parents! No school is successful without the support of the parent body. We need to work together as governors, staff and parents to ensure your child receives the best possible start in life. But we also need to recognize that though everyone has a viewpoint, not every view can be accommodated! We do, however, seek views of parents both formally and informally. The casual comment at the school gate is welcome, but more effective are your collective comments in the recent parent survey. We were delighted that your comments were so incredibly supportive, and that you appreciate all that the school does in the interests of your child.

I would urge more of you to attend the next Parent Forum. The governors came to listen, but few took the opportunity to 'have their say'! Perhaps it is an indication that parents are extremely satisfied? We hope so! The other way parents can often get involved is through a parents and friends association.

Governors are acutely aware of the importance of parents, and so we want to re-focus the efforts of the Friends of St Dominic's. We will be working with the Friends and the Headmaster to prepare a 'terms of reference' document and produce a 'Charter' which outlines the role of the Friends and the ways in which every parent can get involved. We see it as key to the 'inclusive' ethos of the school. We want parents to support and help the school in a multitude of ways – and that often demands time, not money! We want events to be attractive, accessible to ALL parents, and in accord with the inclusive ethos of the school, so that we can build a community of which we can all be proud.

The proprietor and governors are hugely appreciative of the prodigious efforts of the Headmaster, his senior staff, teachers and all the support staff, every one of whom has contributed to the success of St Dominic's Grammar School over the last year. We thank them all for their efforts and talent. The school is in excellent health and the future for the school and its pupils and students is a very positive one.

Sir Michael Griffiths
Chair – Governance Advisory Committee
September 2019