

## Scartho Junior Academy

### Initial consultant thoughts based on analysis of the Evalu8 exercise

- Initial indications on beginning the review were that there was complete support for the external review. It was therefore somewhat disappointing that only 8 of the 13 forms issued were finally completed and this was only after several prompts. It is fully recognized that everyone is under considerable time pressures, but the difficulties in completing this exercise may be an indication that there are underlying issues worthy of further exploration as the review continues.
- There was considerable positivity in the responses but the fact that approximately one third of the ratings were in the neutral, disagree or strongly disagree categories indicate there is general acceptance that there is still work to be done in developing strong effective trust governance. This can also be viewed against the fact that debate continues nationally about the understanding of what effective Academy/Trust governance looks like and practice is constantly developing as everyone reflects and evaluates current processes and structures.
- It also must be noted that most of the comments in the Evalu8 reports came from only two people.
- The points in this initial analysis are based purely on reactions after studying the Evalu8 reports and will subsequently be used alongside the overall research and discussions as the external review progresses.
- The 20 questions on the form were divided into 4 categories (The Right People, Understanding the Role, Effective Accountability, Impact on outcomes for pupils) and almost all the ratings where respondents did not agree or strongly agree were in the first two of these. In fact, there was only one disagree and three neutral responses under the accountability and impact sections. Of particular note in the latter sections was confidence in financial systems and the effectiveness of performance management of all staff, policy review and ensuring compliance, understanding of performance data and impact on pupil outcomes.
- There were also areas in the first two sections that, although showing mainly positive ratings, were accompanied by comments that sometimes acknowledged there is still potential to develop these even further. Examples were 'use of the outcomes from skills audits' and 'developing the relationship and maximizing potential benefits of having a newly appointed professional clerk'.
- Reflection on responses in the first two sections suggest that there is benefit in pursuing ways to further develop understanding of what constitutes effective trust governance and to strengthen structures, further clarifying roles and responsibilities to increase the capacity of the team overall. This links to developing the role of those in chairing positions, ensuring that they have support and opportunities to network and develop their roles. There is a need to 'future proof' the board by identifying additional ways of recruiting governors, ensuring a focus on encouraging engagement by people with the skills and backgrounds that will further increase the overall strength and diversity of the board and then allocating them to roles that

utilize their strengths and areas of interest with appropriate access to support and training. This would also then help to embed processes for succession planning.

- The importance of reviewing the long-term vision for the trust is another area that answers indicate is key to preparing the trust and everyone in it for being in a position to focus efforts on clear strategic priorities, tighten up monitoring and accountability processes and be in a position to confidently participate in the discussions and decisions that will be necessary as the academy programme develops nationally.
- The final question that raises areas for discussion is how the board reports on its work to parents and the local community. There are numerous benefits to governors aiming to raise the profile of governance with all stakeholders and finding ways to interact directly as well as through senior leadership activities.
- There is every indication that the board is now in a position to effectively tackle all of these areas. Identifying ways to increase awareness of good practice across the country (another question that did not score highly on the responses) will definitely help with this.
- There are several people who are relatively new to the board which could explain the number of neutral ratings in the exercise. However, it is clear that there is commitment on the board and amongst senior leadership to reviewing all governance arrangements, reflecting on practices and processes and developing a realistic development plan. There appears to already be a good mix of skills, experience and connections which will put the trust in a strong position to react to the findings in this review and to be able to consider the ever-changing guidance and expectations on what constitutes strong governance that impacts positively on outcomes for young people and their families.
- The outcomes of the Evalu8 exercise will obviously be taken into account in helping to focus the next stages of the external review so that the final report presents an accurate picture and informs the next stages of the governance development programme that is being planned at the academy.