

Audit and Governance Committee Report – July 2022

Annual School Assurance Statements - September 2020/ August 2021

Background/context

During 2018/19, ARA discussions with the Director of Children's Services raised that internal audit activity within schools appeared low. ARA also undertook a benchmarking exercise with other local authorities in July 2018, which identified that Gloucestershire County Council allocated 1.8% of the total internal audit plan days to pure school audits, with the average number of audit plan days allocated to schools by the benchmark group being 7%. A growth bid resulted in the schools' audit days increasing to 7% of the audit plan from 2019/20 onwards. This is more in line with peers and better supports the S151 Officer in providing the relevant formal assurances to the DfE as required.

The then Director of Education requested that the Head of Education Outcomes and Intervention should put in place a process of assurances from schools and governing boards that the audit recommendations were acted upon satisfactorily. The Head of Education Outcomes and Intervention agreed a process for this with Internal Audit and with Governor Service Officers.

The confirmed assurance approach for 2020/21 applied by Education/Governor Services, is outlined below, and is designed to meet the objective to provide assurance that processes are in place to manage the Internal Audit identified schools' risks, and to update on audit recommendation implementation.

The 2019/20 schools audit outcomes were detailed in the 2020/21 Annual Report.

Approach

Governor Services has exercised its role in ensuring that Governing Boards follow up and complete as required the recommendations for actions that are made in a school audit report.

The process adopted by Gloucestershire's Governor Services is as follows:

1. Internal Audit carries out an audit at a school and produces a report, with recommendations for action.
2. The report is copied to the Governor Services team governorsvs@gloucestershire.gov.uk
3. For audit reports finalised between September 2020 – August 2021: in September 2021 Governor Services issues Statement to Chair on date

agreed with the Head of Education Outcomes and Intervention for return by mid-October.

4. Governor Services contacts the Chair of Governors and requests that the Chair completes and returns a statement on the progress on the recommendations made in the report. This might include either actions completed or current progress towards completion where there are longer-term actions.
5. The statements are collected and provided to the Director of Education, who reports to the GCC Audit and Governance Committee. Copies of the statements are sent to Internal Audit and are available for scrutiny.

For the 2020/21 audits, the Director of Education or representative will attend the July 2022 Audit and Governance Committee to report and provide assurance to the Committee that processes are in place to manage the Internal Audit identified schools' risks and update on audit recommendation implementation.

Key Findings/Outcomes

The following audit reports were within the scope for reporting to Governor Services during the year.

School	Date of Audit
Northleach C of E Primary *	November 2020
Heart of the Forest Community Special	January 2021
Maidenhill	January 2021
Coalway Community Infant *	March 2021
St.Mary's C of E Infant	April 2021
Bledington	April 2021
Beech Green Primary	May 2021
Birdlip Primary	May 2021
Cashes Green Primary	May 2021
Huntley C of E Primary *	June 2021
Warden Hill Primary	June 2021
Shurdington Primary	July 2021
Pauntley C of E Primary	July 2021
Meysey Hampton C of E Primary	July 2021
Andoversford Primary	August 2021

* No recommendations for actions were made.

Statements have been received from all schools where recommendations were made.

The overarching key findings that required improvement from the finalised

audits related to: Governance and Budgetary Control, Procurement and Staffing and Payroll.

In all cases, the governing board statement has confirmed that the recommended actions have been completed by the governing board, or that boards are in the process of ensuring that the actions are completed.

GCC colleagues have continued to work closely to develop coherent and joined up approaches to deliver audit and financial services to schools. The links were strengthened between the role of Governor Services in the development of annual assurance statements; Area Finance Officers; the Education Outcomes and Intervention team in terms of obtaining support and advice for schools causing concern; and Internal Audit. Relationships have developed and are better understood, this is particularly so with regard to the relationship between Deficit Scrutiny, Area Finance, leadership and management in school improvement and the role of governance.

Conclusion

The confirmed assurance approach for 2020/21 applied by Education/Governor Services, met the objective to provide assurance that processes are in place to manage the Internal Audit identified schools' risks and confirm update on audit recommendation implementation.

The overarching key findings that required improvement from the finalised audits and related to: Governance and Budgetary Control, Procurement and Staffing and Payroll have been communicated to governors across the county. Key themes/common findings have been shared via Schoolsnet (the Gloucestershire County Council schools' intranet) and the Heads Up and What's Up Gov newsletters for school leaders.

Further Recommendations

The Governing Boards whose schools were audited will continue to submit a return to Internal Audit to confirm the progress that has been made with the implementation of the audit recommendations that were identified.

July 2022