

## **Audit and Governance Committee Report - July 2023**

### **Annual School Assurance Statements - September 2021 to August 2022**

#### **Background and context**

During 2018/19, ARA (Audit Risk Assurance) discussions with the Director of Children's Services raised that internal audit activity within schools appeared low. Following a benchmarking exercise, ARA has consistently applied 7% of the productive audit plan days to schools' audits. This supports the S151 Officer in providing the relevant formal assurances to the Department for Education (DfE) as required.

The then Director of Education requested that the then Head of Education Outcomes and Intervention (EOI) 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 2021/22 is outlined below.

It 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. In January 2022 it was agreed that Internal Audit would take responsibility for obtaining the update on audit recommendation implementation. This applied to all the audits undertaken from September 2021 onwards.

The 2020/21 schools audit outcomes were detailed in the 2021/22 Annual Report.

#### **Approach**

The process adopted is as follows:

- i Internal Audit carries out an audit at a school and produces a report, with recommendations for action where appropriate.
- ii The report is copied to relevant parties.
- iii For audit reports finalised between September 2021 and August 2022: Internal Audit 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.

- iv The statements are collected and provided to EOI. The Director of Education reports the outcomes to Gloucestershire County Council's (GCC) Audit and Governance Committee (AGC).

For the 2021/22 audits, the Director of Education or representative will attend the July 2023 AGC 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 and Outcomes

The following audit reports within scope for reporting are:

School	Date of Audit
Fairford C of E Primary	November 2021
Yorkley Primary	December 2021
Leckhampton C of E Primary	December 2021
Northway Infant	January 2022
Bluecoat C of E Primary	January 2022
Linden Primary	March 2022
Tibberton Community Primary*	March 2022
Amberley Parochial	March 2022
Naunton Park Primary	April 2022
Eastington Primary	May 2022
Rednock School - Secondary	May 2022
Chalford Hill Primary	June 2022
Uley C of E Primary	June 2022
The Shrubberies - Special	July 2022

\* No recommendations for actions were made.

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

The overarching findings that required improvement from the finalised audits related to Governance and Budgetary Control, Procurement and Staffing and Payroll. The key Internal Audit findings in relation to these themes were reported to the AGC in July 2022.

In all cases, the Chairs of Governors have indicated that all recommendations have been implemented.

GCC colleagues have continued to work closely to develop coherent and joined up approaches to deliver audit and financial services to schools: 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 2021/22 applied as above 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 and common findings have also been shared via Schoolsnet (GCC's schools' intranet) and the Heads Up 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 2023