

Highlands School Annual Governance Report 2019/20



Matt Miller MBE
Chair of Governors

As I write, it is difficult to imagine a more chaotic world as schools prepare for the start of a new academic year. Ordinarily we would be focussing on our students' public examination results and celebrating the successes and consoling the near misses, looking forward to greeting our new cohort of Year 7's and saying fond farewells to those who have left us. But of course, much of our attention is being diverted to the national outcry of algorithm generated results and the apparent unfairness of it all. And then of course, there is the matter of dealing with the uncertainty of a world which is far from rid of COVID-19 and all the anxieties that come with it.

No doubt 2020 will long be remembered as the year education hit an iceberg, when schools were all but closed and teachers the length and breadth of the country scrambling to deliver on-line learning. However, it is how we respond to this once in a generation crisis that will be the measure of today's society. That is why at Highlands we will be celebrating our students' successes and that is why we will be offering the warmest of welcomes to our 240 new arrivals. We must focus on what we can control and not be distracted from that which we cannot.

To this end we must remain loyal to our 'DARE' values because it is these which will serve us well and will ensure that we overcome unfairness and adversity. The world is not fair, nor is it entirely just and as we journey through this period of history in the making, it is hope and opportunity that will guide us driven by determination, aspiration, respect and equality.

The enforced 'lockdown' has given society the opportunity to recalibrate values; many things which seemed so important at the turn of the year no longer hold the same gravitas. The health and wellbeing of family and friends, looking out for the vulnerable and gratitude to those who care for those who cannot care for themselves have reshaped our thinking and attitudes. Remember the Thursday night clap? Stories of courage and generosity have abounded, and what about Captain Thomas Moore, now Sir Tom (did you know his mother was a headteacher?)

Without the preoccupation of league table rankings this year and with Ofsted on a different course for the time being, there is fresh opportunity to review more thoughtfully what matters most to us at Highlands. We must measure what we value rather than value what we measure and by this, I mean ensuring that we do our very best for all students, all of the time. Success comes in many guises and it is important that we develop a culture where every student has the chance to shine, and where every student is encouraged to make the

most of their talents and potential. Not everyone will achieve straight A's or 9's any more than everyone can sing or draw or run a 4-minute mile. It is about creating a world class learning environment based on equality of opportunity and access to a rich and exciting curriculum.

To achieve this, there must be strong, resolute and inspiring school leadership who are committed to developing the very best teachers and who have the highest aspirations for all. Indeed, many of my conversations with Mr McInerney and his senior leadership team are focussed on how Highlands can become a truly world class school. And we're getting there. It may not sound very exciting, but the new Behaviour Policy has been devised to set standards and expectations higher than ever before. Students will not achieve as well as they might if low level disruption is not nipped in the bud, or if tolerance and respect for each other and staff is not afforded the highest priority. Inevitably, there will be a period of adjustment as staff and students come to terms with a higher bar, but I am convinced this will be the foundation upon which greater success will follow.

There has also been a huge amount of work focussing on designing and delivering an exciting and rich curriculum which will support the learning of all students. This has been informed by some of the very best academic research available into how learning and understanding is developed into knowledge and skills and converted to the long term memory, although I rather suspect students will still need to revise!

The pressures of making ends meet financially for schools nationally is well documented and at Highlands we are no exception. However, we have worked hard to approve a 3-year budget forecast and we are confident that our plans are sufficiently robust to survive the challenges that lie ahead. We have set aside funds to upgrade our IT provision some of which has been installed over the summer holidays in brighter new-look classrooms. Our makeover has also extended to communal areas where the achievements of students have been prominently displayed to inspire others.

The year ahead also marks the 20-year anniversary of Highlands. This has been an incredible journey and I look forward to sharing how we plan to celebrate it once we are able to confirm details.

My final note is to acknowledge the valiant efforts of all staff who have worked tirelessly in the most trying of circumstances to carry on doing what they do best; providing the very best life chances for our students through **determination, aspiration, respect and equality**. This, along with our outstanding leadership team and highly committed governing body means that we can look forward to the year ahead with optimism secure in the knowledge that however turbulent the outside world, Highlands will continue its journey of improvement.

Matt Miller MBE
Chair of Governors
September 2020