

The Education & Training Foundation

External Board Effectiveness Review

Report

Prepared for
Inspire Education Group
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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2023, The Education & Training Foundation (ETF) was asked to undertake an independent review of the Board of Inspire Education Group.

The objective of the review was to gain an understanding of the strengths of the Board and the areas that need development. It also aimed at facilitating collaborative effort between the reviewer and members to co-design pathways to improving the effectiveness of the Board. The framework and methodology used to undertake the review was developed by ETF in collaboration with governance experts and stakeholders in the Further Education and Training sector.

The scope of the review was agreed through an initial meeting between the Reviewer, the Chair of Governors and Governance Professional with an agreement to provide an overview of what worked well and any identified areas of development. The process involved interviews with the chair, governance professional and other members of the governing body; a survey; examination of a sample of governing documents and papers; an observation of one full Board meeting and two committee meetings.

This executive summary should be read in conjunction with the full report as the report contains important contextual information and rationale and evidence for all the recommendations made.

Principal Strengths

1. Composition of the Board and structures to support strong governance
2. Relationships between the Board and senior team
3. Governance processes
4. Well-chaired committees

Principal Areas for Improvement

1. Seeking better opportunities for strategic discussion
2. Representation of challenge within minutes
3. Review remit of committees to free up more time in Board meetings

There is very strong evidence of successful and insightful Board operation with all expected processes in place, a strong committee structure and Board confidence in how the college is run, recently endorsed by a good judgement from Ofsted.

Board relationships are respectful with excellent contributions and observations made by individual governors, including those newly appointed. The Board uses a governance portal very effectively, allowing full access to all Board and committee papers by all governors.

From the survey, individual meetings and observation, one area for improvement stands out – finding more time for the Board to concentrate on the future and move away from the high levels of scrutiny currently in place. The report findings and recommendations focus on this key area and will hopefully allow the Board to review its operation to allow strategic oversight to become its main priority.

2 INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction and Context for the Review

Inspire Education Group invited the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) to put forward a proposal to conduct an external review of governance. This request is in line with the objective to strengthen further education governance as set out in the 2021 Skills for Jobs white paper. To meet this objective, a requirement was introduced for colleges to conduct an annual self-assessment and 'an external governance review at least once every three years, based on the governance code(s) used by the governance body' as set out in the ESFA Education and Skills agreements for 2021-2022 (effective 1st August 2021 to 31st July 2022) and 2022-2023 (effective 1st August 2022 to 31st July 2023).

2.2 Review Methodology

The approach to conducting the reviews was developed after extensive research on methods of conducting Board reviews and consultations with members of college Boards.

The process used with the Board of Inspire Education Group involved:

- An initial planning meeting with the Chair, CEO and Governance Professional to agree the approach to our review, the timelines for the review activities and the focus of our review.
- An online Board Review Survey was tailored for the Board and was issued to all Board members. This was completed by 17 Board members plus a separate survey for the Chair, Governance Professional and an anonymous survey completed by the senior leadership team. It was noted that two governors had only just been appointed so their responses were not counted in overall percentages.
- One to one interviews with 7 members of the Board, including Chair, Governance Professional, CEO, Vice Chair, two long serving governors and one newly appointed governor.
- Desk-based review of selected Board documents such as the governing documents and minutes. There was also a review of the responses to the survey that was completed by Board members.
- An observation of a full corporation meeting on 31st October 2023
- Observations of two committee meetings on-line

The Board Effectiveness Review questionnaires allowed a snapshot view to be taken of how the Board is currently operating. This Questionnaire looked at 10 areas, namely:

1. Purpose, Vision & Strategy
2. Board Composition & Structures
3. Effective Behaviours, Culture, Values & Inclusivity
4. Performance Management & Quality
5. Internal Controls & Risk Management
6. Stakeholder Relationships

7. Board Meetings
8. The Chair
9. Board Support & Information
10. Members key recommendations and comments

The interviews and observations then allowed us to analyse and assess:

- areas of perceived strength and weakness; and
- variations in opinion between different Board members (the report does not identify individuals)

Thanks go to the Board and in particular to the Chair, CEO/CEO and Governance Professional for their welcome and for providing the reviewer with open access to relevant governance documentation.

2.3 College Context and Background

IEG is an established group following the merger in August 2020 of Peterborough Regional College in Cambridgeshire and New College Stamford in Lincolnshire. The College operates from two substantial sites in Peterborough and Stamford along with four other smaller sites. The Board of the group comprises a mixture of governors from both colleges and more recently appointed governors.

The Group offers a wide range of courses across most curriculum areas for students aged 16 to 18, with 5100 enrolled in the current academic year. There are a substantial number of students following higher education programmes plus adult and apprenticeship provision.

At its most recent Ofsted inspection in March 2023, the College was awarded a grade of Good with the following key findings:

- The quality of education - Good
- Behaviour and attitudes - Good
- Personal development - Good
- Leadership and management - Good
- Education programmes for young people - Good
- Adult learning programmes - Outstanding
- Apprenticeships - Requires improvement
- Provision for learners with high needs - Outstanding

3 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section of the report is structured around the governance areas of the Board Effectiveness Survey that was completed by Board members. However, all aspects of the review fed into the findings and analysis outlined below.

3.1 Purpose, Vision & Strategy

Governors are rightly very proud of the achievements of the Group and the success of the merger, all endorsed by the recent Ofsted grading and confirmed through responses to the survey. The strategic plan runs until 2024 and plans for the new vision and strategy are in the early stages of development through discussion between the senior team and chair of

governors. In most cases, Board papers show a direct link to the strategy on the front summary sheet to provide governors with an understanding of the purpose of the paper.

The vision and mission are:

“To be the first-choice provider of education and training in our region”

“To transform lives through inspirational education and training”

Several comments emerged from the survey of governors on a perceived lack of emphasis on strategy at meetings and limited opportunity for strategic discussion. The Chair is aware of this and is keen to adjust Board agendas to become more focussed on strategic thinking, with a good opportunity presenting itself with the new strategic plan and outcome of the Ofsted inspection.

Under leadership & management in the Ofsted report, the following is quoted: “Governors are passionate and proud of the College. They add significant experience to the strategic oversight of the College. They frequently challenge leaders to set more stretching targets”.

Observation of the Board meeting fully endorsed this paragraph from the inspection findings with governors showing strong challenge in areas under discussion. They hold strong ambition for the college, in particular at the stage they are at, with the merger now bedded in and the ringing endorsement of the group’s performance by Ofsted.

With the Chair relatively new into post, there is now a real opportunity for the Board to lead on the strategic direction of the Group and determine an ambitious future in conjunction with the experienced and effective CEO and senior team.

The Chair felt there was value in developing a better understanding of the skills of individual governors to support wider strategic conversations and to ensure good succession planning with well-prepared and informed governors. However, most governors agreed with the survey statement that their skills and experience are properly used by the Board.

However, from the executive team survey outcomes, only one member of the team strongly agreed that the group strategy and business model was thoroughly understood by the Board but with all other members agreeing. The CEO referred to the next phase of the college as being the growth and innovation phase and it will be a good opportunity for the Board and senior team to develop their future strategy together, building on a very strong foundation of success over the last couple of years, and to utilise the skills of governors in achieving the college’s ambitions.

Board meeting agendas heavily comprise reporting and I would recommend looking at the schedule of meetings for the year to allow for more time dedicated to strategic discussion. Whilst the meeting schedule has been slightly reduced and amended to include specific sessions on strategy, incorporating some dedicated time to a key strategic item at each meeting would support better engagement and separation from operational detail. Meetings in general last for up to two hours so adding a bit more time or using the existing opportunity to take more routine reports “as read” would also free up time for valuable strategic discussion. One governor commented that whilst “meetings stay to time, the time is insufficient to allow reasonable discussion”, suggesting that an earlier start or later finish would support better Board confidence. It is noted that the July corporation meeting only lasted 1.5 hours and the October meeting was concluded in 2 hours with final items fairly rushed through.

From survey outcomes, the majority of governors agreed that the Board differentiates between Board matters and detailed operational issues although there were several comments on a lack of opportunity for longer term discussions, “Board can be too short term in its function and not devote sufficient time to the longer term”, and the Board should “spend less time talking about issues

surfacing from subordinate (committee) meetings and...make room for more strategic discussion” and Board meeting “time is insufficient to allow reasonable strategic discussion”. Another governor suggested that too much time was spent processing information received rather than focussing on the college’s future. Six governors surveyed, disagreed or were neutral with the statement that the Board devotes sufficient time to strategic discussion and debate relative to other board agenda items.

3.2 Board Composition & Structures

The Board operates as a committee structure as follows:

- Curriculum & Quality
- Finance & Resources
- Search & Remuneration
- Audit

Comprehensive terms of reference are in place for each committee, approved by the Corporation on 23rd February 2023. Membership is reviewed by the Search & Remuneration Committee to ensure the right balance of skills for each committee. The Terms of Reference are published on the website and include the requirement for a minimum of a termly meeting and an annual report of activity to the Board (a recommendation from a recent internal audit).

The current Board comprises seventeen external governors, two staff governors (one from each campus), student governors (one from each campus), the CEO and one co-opted member of Quality & Curriculum Committee.

There is a good balance in terms of gender through more recent appointments and with the age profile. Diversity of the Board is a key consideration when making appointments and ethnicity is appropriate for the area although some governors expressed the need for wider diversity to better represent the Group’s community.

In terms of skills, a comprehensive skills audit is completed annually to support future recruitment. Most governors serve a second term with some extending where their skills are felt to be useful to the Board. Several governors’ terms of office are due to complete in the next year. There is one qualified accountant who serves on the Audit Committee and the Board could benefit from a second qualified accountant although three governors identify in the skills audit as having outstanding expertise in finance and financial planning.

Whilst the skills of the governors demonstrate a strong representation across different sectors, the majority of expertise comes from the public sector and having another governor with private sector employment background could bring a different dimension to Board challenge. One governor interviewed felt that having more employer representation on the Board would help the Group ensure it is meeting areas of demand although he did suggest that the quality of Board membership had significantly improved to allow for better strategic thinking going forward.

Two student governors have been appointed but were not present at the Board meeting attended by the reviewer with their first Board participation being at the Curriculum & Quality Committee. Governors reported that there had been a very effective student governor the previous year. The two newly appointed students are both involved in the respective Student Unions of the two main campuses. They have completed bespoke student governor induction and meet with a senior staff member to support their integration onto the Board.

3.3 Effective Behaviours, Culture, Values & Inclusivity

There is clear evidence that the Board follows NOLAN principles with 100% of governors surveyed agreeing with the question about being listened to and being respectful of the view of others. The culture of the Board as witnessed through attendance at the Board meeting demonstrates that governors are encouraged to ask challenging questions and are committed to promoting the best interests of the Group. Governors accept collective responsibility and endorse Board decisions. The overriding mindset of the Board is open, supportive, inquisitive and constructively challenging.

Individual governors commented on the importance of being conscious of Board responsibilities in respect of culture and values at all times and especially when involved in college activities. One governor suggested that the Board does not sufficiently test that values are being upheld and that “they surface by exception in Board reporting rather than by purposeful design”. Another comment suggested that the Board should “avoid self-congratulatory or defensive discussion and focus on more open, reflective and developmental approach” to culture and values.

At the observed Board meeting, the staff governor attending was able to comment very effectively on monitoring of student attendance which was valued by other governors. The same staff governor was observed providing important staff perspective at the meeting of the Curriculum & Quality committee. As this was the first meeting for the Student Governors, they were not expected to say very much. However, their perspective on much of the agenda would have been very helpful such as in respect of the findings of the student survey report. To support their settling into Board business during their short governance tenure, they are very well supported ahead of each meeting and are seated next to one of the Vice Principals for additional support.

Through the survey, the Chair suggested that not enough time was spent on culture, stating that “improvement will come from frequent conversations in a safe environment from well-prepared and informed governors...” It may be worth considering how reference to values could be incorporated into the front sheet summary of reports especially as a new strategic plan is developed alongside links to strategic priorities.

Some governors felt the culture of the Board itself would be improved if they got to know each other a bit better, particularly those who joined the Board during the COVID years. Opportunities for social meetings of the Board may be one way of cementing respect and trust between Board members.

3.4 Performance Management & Quality

The front sheet summary directs attention and is useful. Some papers are repeated in different meetings, noting that a paper on student recruitment was received by the Board meeting and then was presented again at a following committee meeting with only minor updates.

Quality of the student experience and outcomes is well covered by the Curriculum & Quality Committee with a number of senior staff presenting comprehensive papers to governors, including both staff and student governors. The committee is well chaired by an experienced educational consultant. The CEO was very effective in drawing out areas that governors needed to focus on rather than simply allowing the good news to flow from the reports. With time, newer governors will start identifying where to challenge but it was helpful for them to receive questions from within the senior team and to know that the status quo would not be acceptable in a Group that has ambitions to be outstanding in all it does.

At the meeting of the Finance & Resources Committee, it was sometimes not clear what was expected of the Board in terms of making a decision. This is where changes might be possible by reducing the number of reports “for information” or “governors asked to comment on areas of interest” presented at committees. Key decisions on capital build projects, financial approval and

statutory policies are requirements of the Board and its committees but it could be argued that routine HR reports on staff recruitment are slipping into operational with that responsibility already delegated to the CEO. Reviewing how assurance on performance management and quality can best be provided to the Board may well release the valuable strategic discussion time that the Board is seeking.

It would help minute writing and future report writing for meeting chairs to summarise any decision that is taken or key points to be recorded. That way, the “so what” consideration can be applied. Was the report essential to meet statutory requirements or was it just interesting to hear about? Some minutes would read better to the outsider if they included more reporting of challenge, assurance, robust scrutiny that clearly takes place at meetings rather than “the information was received and noted”.

3.5 Internal Controls & Risk Management

At each Board meeting, governors review a very comprehensive dashboard of key performance indicators including for finance, quality (achieving excellence through attendance and retention data), growth (recruitment by provision type), “valuing our people” data on sickness, vacancies etc and compliance through internal audit reporting. There is also a risk summary report identifying where risk has been identified or raised.

At the October Board meeting there was a good debate over attendance and retention data presented and approval given over the development of an improved dashboard for the 2023/24 academic year data.

Audit & Risk Committee carry out all expected functions from the Audit Code of Practice with comprehensive monitoring of internal audit recommendations. The December 2023 meeting includes scrutiny of the financial statements and recommendation of approval ahead of the December Board meeting.

Recommendations from the internal audit into Corporate Governance have been followed through with the relevant committee and include the preparation of annual committee reports to Board. The recommendation to update the terms of reference has been completed and the reports will be included in this academic year’s reporting timetable to mirror the annual Audit & Risk Committee report summarising the committee’s activities and how it has met its statutory responsibilities.

Safeguarding responsibilities are closely monitored and a very comprehensive annual report was provided for governors at the October Board meeting. Strong input from the outgoing safeguarding link governor over the robust college’s safeguarding processes was very effective in providing all governors with assurance in this important area.

Governors have access to all papers including all committees via the governance on-line portal. There is also a supplementary pack provided to allow additional scrutiny where required, including minutes of recent committee meetings. Governors are encouraged to ask questions ahead of the meeting for clarity.

Very close monitoring and scrutiny of a new build project on green technology was evident with updates provided on progress, meeting targets and costs. The Board has been very focussed on getting best value for this important project with risk reviewed.

3.6 Stakeholder Relationships

An Ofsted monitoring visit took place in September 2021 and noted the significant progress governors, leaders and managers had made in meeting skills need; *“Governors have an excellent awareness of the skills needs of the local communities in Peterborough, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire. They inform and support senior leaders in designing a curriculum that meets these*

needs. Through their highly effective discussions with a variety of external agencies, such as the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Combined Authority, they have supported leaders' decisions to develop specialist qualifications in engineering, sustainable construction technology, information technology and uniformed services."

The Ofsted report of March 2023 confirmed that position.

The Governor survey comments suggested that more could be done to support the Board's involvement with employers through having more opportunities to meet a wider range of stakeholders. Some governors also suggested better representation from major employers would help the Board understand trends in the local and national economy.

3.7 Board Meetings

The schedule of meetings includes five full Board meetings held in October, December, March, May and July, split between the two main campuses at Stamford and Peterborough. Outcomes from the governors' survey confirmed that the majority felt this is the appropriate number of meetings, that the length of meetings is about right and that papers are well prepared ahead of the meeting.

Relations between Board members and senior staff in attendance are very positive with staff proudly and confidently presenting their reports.

Attendance at Board meetings by governors could improve although individual absence is explained and followed up where appropriate.

As is the case for most college boards, the size of board packs can make it very difficult for busy working governors to feel sufficiently prepared ahead of meetings and to dedicate enough time to pre-meeting reading of lengthy reports and data tables. Consistent use of the executive summary to highlight key indicators would help all governors make a stronger contribution, again supporting the "so what" question as to whether all the data and reporting is needed.

Based on the position the Group finds itself in, consideration is now being given to the role of each committee and how to structure agendas to allow for more strategic discussion, linked to the new strategic plan and a growing confidence in the quality and performance of the college post-merger.

3.8 The Chair

The Chair took up his role in July 2023 having been on the Board since 2014 where he was a committee chair at the former Stamford College before the merger. He demonstrates a strong passion for the success of the college and was heavily involved in the merger process. He would be interested in undertaking more training for the role. He is very keen to steer the Board in fulfilling its role as strategic decision-maker by spending more time reviewing, reflecting and revising the strategic objectives as the college moves towards a new strategic plan. He wants to become more familiar with the skills offered by individual governors to enable wider strategic conversations.

He has developed a very strong and supportive working relationship with the CEO, holding regular meetings with her. He recognises the importance of his role in supporting the CEO in achieving excellence.

He acknowledges the need to develop that same relationship with the Governance Professional and it would be good to see regular scheduled meetings of the Chair, CEO and Governance Professional going forward to support agenda setting and looking at ways to provide that strategic space identified by several governors in the survey.

His style as chair is very supportive, ensuring all those who wish to speak are able to make a contribution, and he has a friendly style of leadership. As previously mentioned, he would like to develop a better understanding of the skills each governor brings to the Board. That knowledge will

develop as he settles more into the role and meets governors in a less formal setting or through one-to-one meetings as part of future performance reviews. One governor felt that the Board would benefit from more opportunities to meet socially so that they all get to know a bit more about backgrounds and skills.

A helpful comment from the survey was; “manage what you measure – hold the senior leadership team to account against metrics and key performance indicators – in essence, trust but verify”. This approach will serve him well in ensuring the Board is able to gain the assurance it needs to effectively govern the Group.

Governors questioned on the efficacy of the Chair were all in agreement that he is doing a good job, utilising his own business experience to take the college forward but always looking for ways to improve performance. A more formal approach to undertaking performance review of the Chair should be developed going forward.

The recently appointed Vice Chair has a strong housing association background, experience that was helpful in supporting the Board through college merger. She now chairs the Finance & Resources Committee having previously chaired Curriculum & Quality. She has recently taken on the safeguarding governor role all of which will support her in future succession planning for the Chair’s role if she so wishes.

3.9 Board Support & Information

The Board is well supported by the Governance Professional with very positive comments noted in the survey. She has, fairly recently, returned from two periods of maternity leave with the cover role filled by a former college clerk. She is working hard to identify how to allow for strategic space within Board agendas and to catch up on areas that received less attention during her absence.

All expected documents for governance are in place and up to date. The self-assessment process for the 2021/22 academic year was delayed due to timing of this review but has now been completed with an action plan going forward that includes recommendations from an internal audit on governance where substantial assurance was provided.

Governors receive a monthly newsletter from the CEO outlining successes and key new items about the Group. Governors find the newsletter very informative. Past copies are available on the governor portal. Governors appear to be using the portal effectively and training has been provided to support their own development of the opportunities it provides. The Governance Professional can review how and when the portal has been accessed and will be able to make modifications going forward to make best use of its capabilities.

The website lists governors and the committees they serve but does not yet provide any information on their backgrounds although this is being worked on through a new website design. Most minutes of past meetings are published with the exception of Search, Governance & Remuneration Committee due to the sensitivities of some content. Other key documents such as the register of interests and the Instrument & Articles have been updated and will be uploaded as part of the annual cycle of updates.

The Governance Professional is very involved in the recruitment of new governors and manages the promotion of vacancies, selection process and induction. Governors attend the AoC regional induction sessions plus a full college induction. A new governor interviewed was very complimentary about his welcome to the Board and the whole induction process.

The Governance Professional has undertaken a significant amount of training and attends the regional AoC meetings plus conferences to ensure she keeps up to date. She is also planning to undertake governance qualifications at level 6/7 going forward. She is clearly very experienced and demonstrates an excellent understanding of the role and relationships with Board members. She

has been involved in difficult situations in the past and is now keen to work more closely with the new Chair.

A governor training log is maintained with governors all required to complete safeguarding and Prevent training. A governor development event was held in January 2023 with key speakers on FE landscape, regional and local perspective plus a second event in May looking at LSIP priorities and the accountability statement.

A governor link scheme is in place and reported to the July Board meeting. However, a decline in link governor activities was reported and a review of the process will now be undertaken.

3.10 Members key recommendations and comments

As referenced above, the key recommendation coming through from Board members surveyed or interviewed involved the introduction of more time for strategic discussion and separating out governor responsibilities from those of the senior team. Governors expressed a desire to change the shape of agendas to allow more dedicated time to such matters, recognising that the college is now ready to move forward with an exciting future ahead, post-merger and post-Ofsted.

The following recommendations are therefore put forward:

1. Seeking better opportunities for strategic discussion
2. More reference to observed challenge within minutes
3. Review remit of committees to free up more time in Board meetings
4. Student Voice

The survey was completed by 18 governors (but to note that the responses from two newly appointed governors were not included). The survey covered the main areas of the review over a total of 67 questions, asking for a response to a range of statements, ie: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or don't know. In most cases the responses showed a high proportion of strongly agree or agree, with governors invited to add a comment at the end of each section:

A sample of responses is given below:

100% agreed or strongly agreed that decisions made at Board are effectively implemented in the group

69% strongly agreed (4) or agreed (7) that they had sufficient opportunity to observe the operation of the college to see their decisions in action with two disagreeing and three remaining neutral.

100% agreed or strongly agreed that the college had been successfully steered through recent challenges

71% agreed or strongly agreed that all Board members are sufficiently prepared ahead of each meeting

90% agreed or strongly agreed that there are rigorous processes for setting and monitoring key performance indicators. 31% strongly agreed and 62% agreed that the board has robust

systems in place for effective oversight of the quality of the learning experience, including those off site and those in key disadvantaged groups.

Many useful comments were put forward by governors through the survey with a few noted here:

1. Detailed information is provided but summaries would be more helpful, succinct reporting to help identify trends
2. Reduce the number of reports
3. Board has less collective understanding of apprenticeships (referencing Ofsted grading)
4. From governor training, develop better questioning when discussing reports
5. Stay in the strategic space and resist the temptation to stray into management areas.
6. Aside from our statutory duties/requirements I would like to see fewer agenda items and more time for discussion.
7. More reliance on committees for scrutiny to allow more time in Board meetings for wider strategic discussion. Adjust Board activity to be more forward-facing. Allocate more time to longer term opportunities.
8. Spend less time talking about issues surfacing from subordinate meetings, and perhaps dig less deeply into finances, to make room for more strategically focused conversations.
9. Meetings usually run approximately to time unless more discussion is needed, when the additional time is taken to do this. However, trying to run meetings to finish 'on time' when the time is insufficient to allow reasonable discussion is not helpful - discussion is stifled and the work of the board is diminished. Starting some meetings earlier, or finishing a little later than planned would improve some meetings.
10. Avoid articulating their "judgement" on the value/quality of contributions of board members. Stimulate productive discussion that involves all members. Encourage productive challenge and debate and avoid defensive or self-congratulatory discussion.
11. We have an excellent Director of Governance who offers very good support to the Board and individual members.
12. Although the time commitment for many members is very difficult, a deeper understanding of how the organisation works would be of benefit.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence based recommendations

GOVERNANCE AREA	OBS. #	GOVERNANCE ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION
S1: Purpose, Vision & Strategy	1	Opportunity at Board meetings to include strategic discussion	Review Board schedule of work and agendas to incorporate a key strategic item for each meeting
	2	Differentiation between operational and strategic reporting	Review terms of reference for committees to identify where operational reporting could be reduced
S2: Board Composition & Structures	3	Recruitment of governors noting diversity and skills gaps	Continue to seek additional governors with financial skills and representatives from local employers and area
	4	Gaining the student perspective	Ensure new student governors are used effectively to gain the student perspective
S3: Effective Behaviours, Culture, Values & Inclusivity	5	Board members to become more familiar with individual skills	Look for more opportunities for informal meetings of governors to allow them to get to know each other better
	6	Develop culture of the Board	Look at how culture and values can be tested and made more visible through a more reflective and developmental approach
S4: Performance Management & Quality	7	Information for governors	Review front page summary sheets to ensure governors are more aware of what is expected of them and how the report meets strategic priorities.
S5: Internal Controls & Risk Management	8	No recommendations	
S6: Stakeholder Relationships	9	No recommendations	

GOVERNANCE AREA	OBS. #	GOVERNANCE ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION
S7: Board Meetings	10	Length of agenda and timings of meetings	Review schedule of work and how much can realistically be achieved in the time allocated to Board meetings
S8: The Chair	11	Developing relationship with Governance Professional	Look at setting up regular meetings of the “triumvirate” to support agenda setting
S9: Board Support & Information	12	Minutes to reference more challenge	Look for more opportunity to record challenge where evidence in meetings
	13	Review schedule of meetings and timetable for receipt of papers	Look at where meetings can be better spaced out to avoid a build up in November or consider additional admin support to meet the demand for meeting administration around this time
S10: Members key recommendations and comments	14	See comments	

5 CONCLUSION

Governance at Inspire Education Group is very effective and instrumental in ensuring a strong future for the Group. Following merger and a very recent good outcome from the Ofsted inspection, the Board is now ready to change its focus through a new strategic plan on future opportunities. To support that future focus, there are a number of recommendations made to support the Board to concentrate on a strategic future rather than spending a lot of its time on scrutiny of operational details. “Trust but verify” is the suggestion of the Chair but this needs to be proportionate to the time given for governance and it will be worth reviewing just how much detail committees need to receive to gain essential assurance.

There are strong relationships between governors and the senior team, and particularly between the Chair and the CEO. Governors have a lot of confidence in financial management and reporting and on risk management. There is a lot of good work being carried out by the Curriculum & Quality Committee that could include more student governor perspective as the new student governors gain experience.

The Board is very well supported by the Governance Professional and her work is appreciated by Governors. It would be good to see more reference to challenge and governor questioning within the minutes to better reflect that which is evidenced in meetings. The Board portal is used very effectively by governors to access papers and reports. It will be worth reviewing the schedule of meetings to allow the Governance Professional to better prioritise her part time hours over the year.

The composition of the Board is strong, particularly with the recent appointment of new governors who will bring a different dimension to the Board. A review of individual governor performance and a better sharing of their skills will enable the Board to use its members to best effect. Several governors suggested they would like to get to know other members better and understand a bit more about their backgrounds.