



WYNSTONES
A WALDORF SCHOOL

Governance Review Report

Ian Lawrie QC

The Ofsted reports and their conclusions submitted earlier this year on 21st & 22nd January 2020, represented for Wynstones a distressing form of 'Ground Zero' This occurring in a much loved school, dedicated to the pursuit of learning via the inspirational Waldorf Steiner method of education. A school that has been left bruised and battered both in terms of its reputation and future prospects.

The situation the school currently finds itself in will have caused distress and uncertainty to many as to the future of Wynstones.

I start by making it clear Wynstones' future is not uncertain, it is in fact very much assured for reasons set out below.

I am pleased to have joined the Trustees at this crucial time, to support the school's renewal and contribute my skills and life perspective. I am confident my fellow Trustees would express a similar sentiment in terms of their decision to agree to be Trustees.

I have volunteered to be lead Trustee on the Leadership & Management committee ably supported by James McCullagh, a former pupil of Wynstones. I also volunteered to take up the post of Interim Vice Chair of Trustees giving my support to Juliet Lambert in her role as Interim Chair of Trustees.

My task and function, along with every other Trustee in collaboration with Paul, is to bring together our collective life experience to restore and nurture Wynstones. This will be vital as the school undergoes a steady and detailed process of recovery in preparation for re-opening next year.

In our collective role as Trustees, this recovery and its achievement will pivot around a necessary renewal of the school's governance arrangements. The charitable objects of the school, and its steadfast commitment to Steiner Waldorf education, are not under consideration or review. We start however with a consideration of the relevance and effectiveness of the Memorandum and Articles of Association. This is the very document that sets the legal and spiritual bedrock to the school's purpose and functioning in terms of governance. The current Articles are dated and clumsily drafted and not in reality fit for purpose. The school's legal advisors concur with the view that the Articles are in need of urgent review and simplification. That will be a lengthy and tortured process, so we will focus on more immediate changes to help guarantee the school's future and counter past problems.

The Ofsted reports clearly indicated that the school had unquestionably, at that point, failed and it was as a consequence closed. This sorry event occurred because the school's settled culture of governance and accountability was neither open nor transparent. Ofsted's citation in their report of 'vested interests' betrayed in many ways the very heart of the previous problems with governance.

Problems which could not be mitigated, excused or defended. There was an environment which stood as a marked counterpoint to the expected modern standards of understanding and managing conflicts of interest and the efficient operation of governance arrangements within the school. These failings were echoed in poor record keeping, safeguarding failures, a failure to observe appropriate boundaries between component parts of the school and absence of transparency when those boundaries were breached.

When Paul came onboard in March 2020 and, as it were taking the deck of a sinking ship, he was compelled to make a number of difficult decisions. The first decision was to set out, in the central part of an Action Plan

submitted to DfE, a clear analysis that concluded school governance and accountability, as indicated above, was in need of review and renewal.

The overall picture has redeeming and cheering aspects. Juliet's comment about the loss of a beloved school is apposite – but there is no structural assurance of the school's traditions in its previous governance structure, it is only in the evolved traditions of the staff, Trustees and Association members that the guardianship of the school has been tended, and these evolved traditions have not enabled or guaranteed the school's success at this point. There was clearly a collectively positive and loyal spirit amongst staff but not sufficient to act as an effective counterweight to flawed governance.

The necessary review and renewal has started with the following steps of change.

The overhaul of the Board of Trustees' composition. The former Trustees selflessly recognized, following the Ofsted reports, that a new board of Trustees was indeed necessary, and they stood aside as new volunteers stepped forward. This has been broadly achieved with the selection of Trustees of varied and differing backgrounds with equally varied life experiences

Next will be to ensure that whatever revised governance structure is settled upon, it recognizes the following very core aspects of governance:

- i) The governance structure and operation must be transparent.
- ii) A transparency underpinned by flawless record keeping,
- iii) A recognition and agreement of a clear and open delineation of function and operation amongst the component parts of the school.

All this will be predicated on the Trustees' primary responsibility of consistent and objective supervisory oversight of the school's function and its differing components, in particular Paul as the school's Principal.

The selection and skills profile of the diverse Trustees has been generated by the need of the school to meet those assorted objectives. All allied to the requirement that there is a level of detachment from other stakeholder groups within the school in order to demonstrate a necessary transparent independence.

Appropriately, but not yet formally constituted, the Principal has been meeting most weeks with the PTFA executive as part of a governance culture where stakeholder engagement should become standard as part of an open culture of leadership and management. When the school reopens, this should also include student voice (Council) and staff meetings (College of Teachers). Again, transparent and punctilious record keeping will aid and inspire confidence in open collaboration amongst the constituent parts of the school and as part of governance.

It has been an integral part of the governance review that Bishop Fleming, experts in school governance, have carried out a much-needed review. The review made clear the two-stage scrutiny of operational management by a board of Trustees and then Association members is clearly not effective in sufficiently holding leaders and managers to account. The governance review recommended a simplification of responsibility and legal accountability.

That simplification will form part of the open forums we will hold in the autumn as we take this particular part of the school's evolution forwards. This will ensure that we have a governance structure that will enable the school to thrive.

This is but the start of a journey whereby assorted aspects of school governance are subject to review and refinement via a process of open consultation. We as Trustees will purposely deploy such skills and experience we possess, to ensure Wynstones is indeed brought back to life and we restore its reputation of education excellence in the spirit of Waldorf Steiner education. We will also ensure that there is clarity in future governance arrangements.

Ian Lawrie QC
July 2020

