



Re-founded 1555

Ripon Grammar School

Engineering Specialism within a Grammar School



GOVERNORS' ANNUAL REPORT TO PARENTS: 2015-2016

Introduction

This short annual report provides parents and others with a brief overview of the school's main activities and achievements over the last academic year. Governors are always keen to establish effective communication with parents and provide opportunities for dialogue; one of the characteristics of good and outstanding schools is the feeling of inclusion that all members of the school community have in furthering the achievements of the students and enhancing the success of the school. Should any parent wish to contact a school governor contact details are available on the school website: www.ripongrammar.co.uk.

Governors' role

The full governing board meets four times each year but governors discharge their responsibilities largely via their six committees: Boarding, Curriculum, Finance & Personnel, Pastoral, Premises and Publicity & Community Liaison. The principal role of the committees is to look in depth at the work of the school by being analytical, innovative and creative yet both challenging and supportive of the Headmaster and staff. The committees regularly scrutinise the school's strengths and weaknesses and, in particular, examine how any identified weaknesses are being addressed. As a full board, governors are responsible for setting the school's strategic direction, ensuring resources are used to maximum effect and formulating improvement and development plans in discussion with staff. Thus governors have been closely involved in updating and approving the five-year School Improvement Plan for 2016-2021 which is available on the school website.

Governors are also charged with keeping abreast of changes in education nationally and the past year has seen the start of an unprecedented array of changes which will take effect over the next four or five years, much of it concerned with GCSE and A and AS-levels but also changes due to government policy (and precipitate changes in policy) about school structures and governance. Uncertainty at a time of such change is unhelpful.

Academic results

Governors were again very pleased with the excellent academic results in public examinations, with 100% pass rate at A-level with more than 76% of grades at A*- B. Similarly the school achieved excellent GCSE results with over 60% of grades at A*/A in a year when the percentages of top grades nationally were reduced yet again.

It is perhaps worth commenting in a little more detail in this report on the AS-level results. Since 2000, AS-levels have represented the first year of the A-level course resulting in a qualification in their own right but also contributing to the final overall A-level grade. One of the major government changes to examinations referred to above has been to "decouple" AS-levels from A-levels beginning in 2015 with 13 subjects. These AS-levels continue to provide a qualification of value in their own right but AS-level achievement no longer counts towards the overall A-level grade. The result is that a significant proportion of schools in England have decided not to continue with AS-level examinations, returning to the pre-2000 curriculum model of students simply

following a two year A-level course in three subjects. Governors and the Headmaster considered this very carefully but decided to continue with AS-levels for the present time.

Governors always conduct a detailed review of results and work with the school's leadership team to develop strategies for dealing with any identified areas of underachievement. The information below summarises the headline data for the current and previous years. Detailed information by subject is available on the school website. These excellent results again confirm Ripon Grammar School as one of the leading maintained schools in the country and compare very favourably with the major independent schools in North Yorkshire and the North of England. Governors would emphasise strongly that high achievement in public examinations is only one aspect of the wide education that RGS provides. The website provides regular updates of activities and achievements in a whole range of other areas such as sport, music and the arts, all of which contribute to the all-round education the school provides.

		2016‡	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011
A-level	Pass rate (A*-E)	100%	99.7%	100%	100%	98.9%	99.5%
	Grades A* A & B	76.2%	71.5%	75.9%	79.2%	74.0%	79.1%
	Grades A*	19.5%	16.4%	20.8%	17.7%	14.5%	16.8%
AS-level	Pass rate (A-E)	98.7%	98.1%	94.5%	97.1%	94.9%	94.6%
	Grades A & B	62.3%	60.7%	58.3%	63.9%	63.4%	56.9%
GCSE	Pass rate (A*-C)	97.3%	96.9%	98.2%	97.9%	98.5%	98.3%
	Grades A* & A	60.0%	63.0%	68.5%	62.4%	67.3%	65.4%

‡ 2016 results are provisional at the time of writing this report

Destination of leavers

RGS students are rightly ambitious in their career aspirations with the majority of the Upper Sixth Form applying for university, others taking up prestigious apprenticeships, going directly into employment or taking a planned gap year. Whatever their intentions students are given full support and expert guidance from sixth form tutors and careers staff so they can make fully informed decisions. The school is not narrow in its careers advice; the aim is to encourage all students to be appropriately ambitious and to support them in achieving their ambitions whatever they may be. Of those who applied to university this year, a large percentage gained entry to their first choice with a small number accepting a place at their reserve university. Thus, whilst more than 60% of this year's university applicants are progressing to Russell Group universities, including six to Oxbridge, a large number of different universities feature among this summer's leavers' destinations with 14 students heading to Durham University others to London, Scottish universities and the rest of the UK. Two students are taking up university courses abroad, in the USA and in Madrid.

Of the small number of students who left the school after GCSE, all went on to post-16 education at other schools or colleges.

School Admissions

The school's main points of entry for both day and boarding students are into Year Seven, Year Nine and the Sixth Form (Year 12).

North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) is responsible for administering admissions into **Year Seven**. Last year the governors' Admissions Committee closely monitored the new entrance test

arrangements introduced by NYCC, to make sure potential applicants and the school were not disadvantaged in any way. Governors were satisfied the new arrangements were fair and effective.

Admission into **Year Nine** is managed by the school and aims to provide an additional 13 places for able boys and girls who, for whatever reason, did not gain a place at age 11. The **application deadline is late January** with tests taken at the school in early February. This entry point proved very popular again this year.

Every year the school admits a large number of new entrants into the Sixth Form (**Year 12**) based on their achievements at GCSE. This year was no exception when more than 30 new students joined RGS. They quickly feel part of the school, contribute widely to various activities and achieve excellent results. They also bring a range of talents and experiences which benefit those of our own students who have been at RGS since the age of 11.

The **Sixth Form Open Evening** takes place in **late January each year** with applications due by mid February.

Staffing

Governors are only too well aware that RGS's success results from the expertise, dedication and commitment of both teaching and support staff. Sincere thanks are therefore due to all staff members but particularly to the Headmaster for his experienced and purposeful leadership. Each year a number of staff leave RGS to pursue their careers in other schools, often in promoted posts, or through retirement. This year saw the departure of two long-serving members of staff: **Mr Mike Garvey** (PE, sport and classics) and **Mrs Nicola Loffhouse** (Head of German) who had been at RGS for 32 and 26 years respectively. Such exemplary dedication to the school is truly outstanding. We wish them long and active retirements.

Development of major facilities

Governors are very pleased to report, yet again, on the completion of another significant and much-needed capital project for the school. The extension to **Johnson House**, the girls' boarding house, was completed in late August 2015 and opened by the director of North Yorkshire's Children's Services, Mr Pete Dwyer at the end of September. Costing close to £1m, it provides first class modern accommodation for Sixth Form girl boarders, helping to meet the high demand for boarding places. Again, governors are most appreciative of the financial support provided by NYCC through an extended loan. A significant refurbishment was also made in **School House** to the junior washroom facilities.

Committees

Accepting the limitations of a snapshot report, governors highlight the following:

Boarding

The governors' Boarding Committee meets termly, taking a close interest in all aspects of RGS boarding. The primary focus is always to ensure boarders are well cared for and are happy, safe and secure within the boarding community. Thus boarding governors regularly take meals in the boarding houses to sample the food, ensure facilities are kept to a high standard and are involved in a host of other aspects of boarding life, including appointing House prefects and staff appointments. However, our remit is far wider than boarders' personal and social well-being and the committee also takes an interest, alongside the Curriculum Committee, in how boarders are achieving academically and in the

wider curricular opportunities RGS provides.

Curriculum

As well as monitoring the attainment and progress of students in GCSE and A-level exams, the governors' Curriculum Committee now has a standardised scheme for reviewing the progress of all students in all year groups at each meeting. We have followed closely the interventions with students and the work of the staff Teaching & Learning Group to address the gap in progress and attainment between boys and girls. Data suggests that these initiatives are working. We continue to review with the senior leadership team the curriculum offer for all year groups and have set a date for a thorough re-assessment of modern foreign languages options in Years Seven – 11 (1st – 5th forms). The committee considered but rejected the DfE proposal that all students must take EBacc subjects at GCSE. While many RGS students do so, we believe our curriculum structure ensures all students have a broad and balanced set of GCSE subjects without insisting that they must include either history or geography. We continue to monitor the uptake of courses at GCSE and A-level and the resultant set sizes. Our aim is always to provide the widest possible choice of subjects affordable. Two recently appointed heads of department were called to give presentations to the committee and answer questions. We were delighted with the developments they have already put in place and their plans for the future.

As required by the DfE, the governors' Admissions Committee, which is drawn from members of the Curriculum Committee and reports to it, monitors and approves all admissions to the school and oversees the selection procedures. This committee has been busy ensuring the changes made by NYCC to the selection test for Year Seven entry did not put any applicants at a disadvantage.

Finance & Personnel (F&P)

Careful oversight of the school's finances is one of the governors' major responsibilities and much of the detailed monitoring work is delegated to the F&P Committee. This is always important but especially so at a time of very tight government funding. Post-16 funding in particular has been frozen and this impacts significantly on RGS and other grammar schools which have a high proportion of students in the Sixth Form all following academic courses. Governors have made representations to the local MP about this.

In outline, during the financial year 2015-16 the revenue deficit was -£47,920, the brought forward amount from 2014-15 was +£198,818, totalling an uncommitted balance of +£150,898.

The capital surplus for 2015-16 was +£280,524 combined with the brought forward deficit from 2014-15 of -£259,696, totalling an overall capital surplus of +£20,828. The school has received a capital loan of £1,159,000 from North Yorkshire County Council to fund the Johnson House boarding extension which is to be repaid over the next 13 years.

The F&P Committee also monitors staff appointments and welfare, as well as staff performance. Whilst recruitment of good staff is always a challenge, governors have been very pleased with the appointments

made during the year, a reflection of the reputation of the school in attracting good applicants. RGS has a rigorous staff appraisal procedure in place, both for teaching and support staff, and governors have been especially pleased to note the very high performance of staff from these appraisals.

Pastoral

The Pastoral Committee meets termly to fulfil its overriding responsibility which is to ensure the highest standards of care and welfare of students in the school, including their safeguarding. All meetings are focused on monitoring students' well-being and the well-being of the RGS community as a whole. Thus the committee receives regular reports from senior staff but also from students about the work of the School Council and whilst the committee will receive outline reports on disciplinary issues, its focus is on ensuring that a very positive culture of behaviour and respect is evident and that all RGS students are developing as respectful, positive and responsible young people.

Premises

2015-16 saw the successful completion of the extension to Johnson House girls' boarding which has proved very popular with the girls. For a considerable number of years, the committee has been very concerned about a defective roof on the Sixth form building which was newly constructed in 2007. It is therefore very pleasing to report the most satisfactory outcome of a complete re-roof of the building at no cost to the school. New disabled accesses have been constructed at both ends of the clock tower building. This is a major project due to the listed status of the building but also previously unidentified ground conditions. The project has also provided the opportunity to enhance security arrangements.

The committee continues to give a great deal of thought to the need for new dining facilities, how and when the project could be programmed and, more importantly, how it may be funded in the climate of public sector austerity.

A new premises manager, Mr Andrew Hogg, took up post in April and has made an immediate start on creating and implementing a whole estate maintenance programme which is a priority issue for the committee.

Publicity & Community Liaison (P&CL)

In 2016, P&CL has focussed on its school improvement plan objectives of improving communication between the school and parents, stakeholders, alumni and the wider community.

The Clocktower magazine is the main avenue for engagement with alumni and other stakeholders and continues to be commended for its quality. The reputation of the magazine continues to grow and provides an increasingly important link between the school and the non-school community. As in previous years, this is due in large part to the work and dedication of Mrs Ruth Savage. The aim is for Clocktower production and mailing costs to become largely self-financing through use of controlled and appropriate advertising.

The committee has also overseen the introduction of the new school

website which, like Clocktower, has been uniformly well-received. Twitter, and more recently Facebook, have been used to engage with the wider community and parents; the initial response to these enhanced social media offerings is strong and positive. Much of the work here owes a great deal to the time and commitment of Mrs Caroline Bligh. It is acknowledged that school's use of social media avenues requires careful management and this will continue to be kept under close scrutiny by co-opting specialist input where necessary and available.

A major alumni event was held in July 2016. It is to be hoped that, as well as being a successful event in its own right, this may provide a template for how future such events can be organised and structured.

In 2017, these areas will remain important and, in addition, the committee will give prominence to the advertising and marketing of boarding, given its strategic importance to the school. In addition, attention will be focussed on the Activities Fund in an effort to ensure wider support and contribution from current parents and others outside school.

Extra-curricular

Governors are very pleased that the school offers such a wide range of extra-curricular activities and are grateful to staff who undertake these voluntarily to ensure an excellent all-round education for students. It is important all students are involved in at least one activity (most are involved in more) to ensure that each benefits from the wide range on offer and feels part of the school community. There is also an increasing number of educational visits across the UK and abroad, for example the Second year French trip to Normandy, A-level art in Paris and Cornwall and classics and geography visits to Italy.

There is always insufficient space in this short report to comment in detail on **sport, drama, music, expeditions** and the **Duke of Edinburgh award scheme**, or the growth of the much-valued **House system** and the impressive commitment of students to their **charity week**. Governors would simply refer parents to the Headmaster's termly letters for fuller information.

However, in this Olympic year, with former RGS student Jack Laughher gaining gold and silver medals in diving, it is appropriate to comment in a little detail on RGS **sport** which is enjoying widespread success across an ever-increasing range of sports. The introduction of girls' rugby and boys' football has proved very popular. Boys' football teams have been, and will be, entered into the National Cup Competitions. Rugby has enjoyed its most successful year ever with three teams reaching the finals of the Yorkshire Cup and the White Rose finals. Hockey continues to thrive too, with our U15s and U12s being crowned Area Champions. The U15s reached the North Finals once again. Netball is enjoyed by many of our Key Stage 3 & 4 girls and our U12 team is demonstrating plenty of promise having reached the Regional round of the School Games competition this year. Cross country and athletics are proving popular with a number of very dedicated and talented athletes. For the first time, three RGS teams competed in the regional cross-country finals with several students

competing at the Nationals in athletics. Leadership is an area a growing number of RGS students involve themselves in with success in both the Young Leader in Service Award, sponsored by Ripon Lions, and the Youth Sport Trust Step Into Sport Scheme; a huge number of volunteer hours have been registered and our students are always commended for their excellent conduct and leadership skills when RGS hosts primary sports festivals.

Whilst competitive sport is highly valued, the PE department endeavours to provide all students with a life-long love of sport and exercise through the activities on offer. For example, in swimming all students cover the life skills of personal survival and lifesaving, while in team games we not only promote competition but also sportsmanship and an ethos of fair play.

Communication with Parents

The school website is very popular, both from a marketing perspective and as a means of communicating with parents. All letters which are sent home are hosted on the website as a matter of course. We would therefore ask parents to check the website on a regular basis to ensure they are always fully informed. Similarly the texting system is proving popular with parents and will continue to be used for urgent matters only. Routinely, e-mail communication is being used, hence the importance of parents ensuring the school has an up to date e-mail address. Many parents follow the school's achievements via Twitter and the RGS News is published three times a year, updating parents and students on the activities taking place within school. The Headmaster also writes a newsletter twice a term to ensure that events of consequence are conveyed to parents. We therefore hope parents feel fully informed about all aspects of school life but **do please** let us know if that is not the case.

In conclusion governors are very pleased to report another extremely successful year for Ripon Grammar School and warmly thank the Headmaster and all the staff for their commitment and professionalism, and all parents for their continued support of the school

Dr Peter Mason

Chair of Governors

September 2016