



Governance in Bellevue Schools

Gateway School

Bellevue Education Group embraces eight independent prep schools in the UK and two international schools in Switzerland. Children and students in Bellevue Schools cover an age range from just a few months to over 18, the majority falling in the 3 to 11 bracket.

Bellevue Education is committed to excellence in education. Each Bellevue school is run independently, built on the foundation of the same shared values: we believe in broad curricula, delivered in innovative ways that excite and engage children; we believe in investment – in teachers, buildings, and technology; and we believe that exceptional results should be a by-product of the education that we offer, not the exclusive focus. Bellevue pupils are encouraged to aim high and we aim to provide them with everything they need to succeed.

The governance model developed for Bellevue Schools establishes a unique framework to ensure that the group's governance committee provides excellent support and well-focused challenge to the schools and to facilitate the sharing of best practice and resolution of challenges between the schools. It stimulates a strong focus on development through self-evaluation and incorporates a timetable of annual review to ensure regulatory compliance.

The overall framework for the governance of Bellevue Schools includes termly governance and Heads' management meetings, regular visits to the schools by the group's CEO and Education Director, the provision of training for heads and staff and the benefit of central services from the group's head office.

Governance committee

The governance committee consists of four people with a wealth of relevant experience in education. The CEO was previously the proprietor and headmaster of a highly successful North London prep school and has extensive business experience. The Education Director is a Reporting Inspector, Early Years Lead Inspector and Lead Boarding Inspector in independent education. He brings the experience of three headships and has also worked as a Local Authority advisor. Two education advisors complete the committee, one an educational consultant and former Ofsted inspector and the other a head of a North London independent day school.

Governance meetings

Governance meetings, chaired by the Education Director, are divided into three regions; North, South and Swiss. On an annual basis one of the UK schools joins the other UK region as guest in order to strengthen the sense of whole-group partnership and promote the cross-fertilisation of ideas. Within each region, the schools take it in turns to host the termly meetings; the day includes a tour of the school and an opportunity to meet the leadership

team and other staff, enabling heads and advisors to strengthen their understanding of each school and facilitating the sharing of ideas and challenges. After introductory sessions from the CEO and Education Director, each head presents a report to the governance committee and fellow heads. Subsequent discussion enables not only the committee but also fellow

heads to offer support and challenge in the areas under review and provides for all heads to take examples of excellent practice back to their own schools.

Schools' reports to governance meetings follow closely the school's cycle of self-evaluation, which echoes the ISI format (see "Role of the Education Director" below). Accordingly, reporting by heads to the governance committee is under the following headings:

Autumn Term	Governance, Leadership and Management, Links with parents and carers
Spring Term	Achievement, Attainment and Progress, the Curriculum and Extra-curricular provision, Teaching
Summer Term	Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development, Pastoral Care, Welfare, Health and Safety.

Heads' management meetings

These meetings occur termly at Head Office and are preceded by a dinner on the previous evening for heads and key office staff. Meetings are for all the heads in the group and are central in setting its strategic direction. They facilitate excellent communication and sharing of best practice between all schools. They are chaired by the Education Director and cover a very broad range of topics. Typically they feature a briefing from the CEO on group issues, and update from the Education Director on regulatory changes and other educational matters and training and information sessions on topical issues. These may be led by the CEO, Education Director, office staff, visiting speakers or the heads themselves. Recent topics have included the group's new information management system, the new EYFS framework, marketing, dealing with bereavement in schools and pupil assessment.

Role of the CEO

The CEO has overall responsibility for the group's ethos and strategic direction. He oversees matters of finance, premises and overall school development. He also takes responsibility for staff contracts and human resources matters. He visits each school on a regular basis for focussed meetings with the head on the school's current situation and future development.

Role of the Education Director

The Education Director undertakes an annual cycle of review* with each school, closely linked to the school's programme for self-evaluation. This engenders a collegiate approach to self-evaluation within the school, following the ISI format, reviewing a third of the framework each term. The Education Director joins each school's leadership to consider and finalise each term's review in anticipation of the head presenting it at the following term's

governance meeting (see above). The cycle of review ensures that self-evaluation is a central school process and not simply a tool for preparing for inspection; it links closely to staff performance review, development planning and the identification of training needs.

Integral to the self-evaluation cycle, the Education Director undertakes a programme of policy review and data analysis, ensuring the close monitoring of performance and the provision of support. Policies are attached to the relevant term's self-evaluation topic, ensuring that all key policies are reviewed on an annual basis in tandem with the self-evaluation focus for the term. This includes the governors' annual review of safeguarding procedures. The Education Director, or the CEO if he is unavailable, is the point of contact where safeguarding procedures require communication with governance and has undertaken appropriate training. The role of the Education Director is therefore central not only to schools' achieving high standards but also to their sustaining regulatory compliance.

The Education Director also oversees the provision of professional development across the group. This takes the form of both training days in individual schools and subject or topic specific group-wide training. Recent themes for individual school training have included differentiation, lesson observation and the role of subject co-ordinators. Group-wide training aims to provide an annual training day for each academic subject. Recent topic-related training themes have included 'the role of the child protection officer' and 'forest schools'. The Education Director also undertakes the annual performance review of the heads and provides individual support and advice on an ongoing basis.

Education Advisors

Alongside the heads' presentation of the self-evaluation, the rotation of hosting schools for the Governance meetings and the inclusion of a tour in the day's programme enable the education advisors to develop an understanding of each school. They also visit schools to undertake specific tasks or projects, including lesson observations, co-ordinated by the CEO or Education Director.

Interaction between schools

Bellevue Education Group sees interaction between its schools as pivotal to developing and sharing excellence. In addition to the Heads' meetings and central training noted above, several other initiatives promote the sharing of best practice between the schools;

Heads' visits: each head visits and is visited by other heads on a regular programme for a carefully focussed day, whose activities may include lesson observations, discussion of particular challenges and successes and development ideas.

Mentoring: newly appointed heads are provided with a more experienced head within the group to act as mentor as they take up their post. After noting that several deputy and assistant heads were new in post in September 2012, a group-wide mentoring programme was initiated. Every deputy/assistant is involved either as mentee or mentor and those new in post have a specific project relative to their role as the focus for mentoring.

Networking: Through the subject specific training days, teachers of each subject are able to develop an email network of colleagues to share advice, ideas and

challenges. This leads in turn to subject staff visiting colleagues with similar roles in other schools.

Sporting and Cultural events: Bellevue Education Group is developing a series of events to promote interaction between staff and pupils at different schools. A Bellevue Olympics was unfortunately washed out in summer 2012. A Bellevue Music Festival is scheduled for Spring 2013 and further events are in the pipeline.

Central support

Bellevue Schools benefit from central support and economies of scale in a number of key areas. These are either provided by or facilitated by head office. Office staff provide marketing and website management support, accountancy services and human resources management. Schools also take advantage of central purchasing in areas such as insurance, software licences and information management systems.