

Review of Admissions, School Places and Attendance

Reasonable

Opinion: Reasonable Assurance

Some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control.

Key findings

Slough Borough Council (SBC) co-ordinates admission arrangements for all schools in the borough including independent schools. The Council is the admissions authority for Community and Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools. Our overall opinion (Reasonable Assurance) reflects elements of adequate risk management and internal controls, but also areas of weakness that require management attention.

We identified the following areas of strength:

- SBC policies and procedures are in place and being implemented to ensure that all statutory requirements are met.
- A school places strategy (published in May 2023) covering the period 2023 to 2027 has been approved by Cabinet.
- Waiting Lists are held in Capita ONE Education and we confirmed that pupils were automatically added to the waiting lists of the schools which were a higher preference than the school they were allocated.
- Appeals are handled in accordance with the Appeals Procedure and there have not been any appeals raised as a result of admissions processing errors.
- Studybugs has recently been rolled out to all schools in Slough and will enable SBC to meet new government guidance on school attendance which came into effect in September 2022.

We found the following areas of weakness, where controls require strengthening:

- The Directorate risk register is not up-to-date or aligned to His Majesty's Treasury (Orange Book) guidelines.
- There are no defining KPIs as a means of measuring and monitoring the performance.
- Terms of Reference for the new Governance structure is not in place.
- Checks to ensure compliance to current GDPR legislation have not been undertaken.

	High	Medium	Low
Recommendation(s)	2	4	2

Reasonable

Opinion: Reasonable Assurance

Some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control.

Key findings

The purpose of the audit was to ensure that effective arrangements are in place for the Governance, Financial Management, Payments, Assets and Safeguarding arrangements within the School.

We identified the following controls that were designed adequately and complied within practice.

- Roles and responsibilities - we confirmed through testing of the Financial Regulations that the roles and responsibilities of the Governing Body, the Finance, Premises (H&S), Personnel Committee, and the Headteacher were approved by the Governing Body in February 2023.
- Scheme of Delegation - we confirmed that the Scheme of Delegation has been included within the Financial Regulations.
- Declarations of Interest was signed by staff as well as the Governors. The Governors had all filled out the form in September 2022 and the senior staff on 5 and 6 June 2023.
- Whistleblowing Policy was last updated in September 2021 and the next review date is September 2024. The author of the policy is the Headteacher, and the policy was published on the school's intranet.
- Financial Planning - we confirmed through review of the Governing Body meeting minutes and the budget report provided that various factors are taken into account when calculating and agreeing the budgets, including the pupil numbers. The budget for 2022-23 was approved by the Governing Body on 30 June 2022 and a paper for the 2023-24 budget was taken and considered in May 2023.
- Budget Monitoring - we confirmed through review of three months Finance, Premises (H&S), Personnel Committee meeting minutes that budgetary information is provided to the committee, including the variance between the original and the actual spend.
- Purchasing and Payment - we selected a sample of three additional high value payments for the purchase of assets. We confirmed that the school had obtained three quotes for those invoices and the best value quote had been approved.
- Assets Register - we confirmed through review that the assets register had last been updated in May 2023, demonstrating that the asset register is regularly updated, which is usually when new assets are purchased or disposed of.
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy - we confirmed through our review of the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy that it is reviewed each year.

We identified one weakness that has led to one medium priority management action being agreed:

- Authorised Signatories - our sample testing of 12 invoices approved for payment identified three instances totalling c£8.9k where the invoices were signed by members of staff not on the authorised signatory register.

	High	Medium	Low
Recommendation(s)	0	1	2