



GOVERNORS' ANNUAL REPORT TO PARENTS: 2023/2024

Introduction

School life at Ripon Grammar School goes from strength to strength – the continued strive to ensure that our students leave as well rounded individuals, empowered and equipped to move on to the next part of life's journey is palpable. This year, we have been able to welcome Ofsted into school – our school was rated as Good and our Sixth Form provision was rated as Outstanding. Scattered through the report are consistent references to the culture of growth, personal development and mutual respect which we know are values at the heart of our School. At the heart of a Ripon Grammar School education lie a set of inter-related values which we aspire to instil into every member of the community. These values are **Respect**; integrity and inclusivity; **Growth** fuelled by curiosity and aspiration, and **Support** – enabled by empathy and kindness.

On behalf of the governors, thank you to every member of the Ripon Grammar School staff team for the dedication and commitment they demonstrated throughout the year. I also again pay tribute to the resilience, diligence and motivation demonstrated by students.

Our public examination results were again strong. Students who prepared for and sat A levels and GCSEs and were justly rewarded for their efforts with excellent results. Whilst there is much publicity regarding individual successes, the progress made and the individual achievements of so many is far more. I would like to offer my congratulations to every single student – and hope that you feel justly rewarded for your efforts. Governors are incredibly proud, and to see the interactions between staff and students on results day demonstrated why Ripon Grammar School is so special. The understanding of the individuals and their circumstances. It is not just about the grade. The educational experience is far more than this. We are grateful to the entire staff team for the commitment and dedication they, without exception, devoted to this process, to ensure all students achieved their best. We look forward to hearing of the news of our leavers and hope that you continue your relationship with RGS as a member of the Alumni community.

The RGS News, published monthly, continues to showcase the incredible endeavours of our School. This month we read of national and international individual and team based sporting excellence, music exam results and charity fundraising. The community of RGS remains vibrant.

But our purpose as a school is not just about academic achievement – though of course this is important. Last year, and for the 10th year in a row we have been labelled as top performing state school in the North (by Sunday Times).

Students leave this school with the wider skills which enable them to be successful in the modern world. We are values driven school, where leadership, integrity, collaboration, kindness and care for others creates that culture for growth and development. This hidden curriculum which is underpinned by the wonderful relationships between staff and students, the hard work and dedication of students to their studies and the vast co-curricular offering that makes RGS so very special.

Our role as the governing board is to look in depth at the work of the school. We 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 the Headmaster and staff. We regularly scrutinise the school's strengths and weaknesses and examine how any identified weaknesses are being addressed.

The financial position of our school remains a priority for Governors. Over the last year, as a direct result of increasing costs, across the entire budget, but largely related to energy, with government funding that has not kept pace with these costs, we have for the first time on record, gone into a negative financial position. Governors, over this year, are working to resolve this, by moving to a position where our costs no longer exceed income. A rigorous review of spending, with an embedded strategy for ensuring we analyse the impact of every £1 spent has enabled significant savings, but sadly this has not been sufficient; and further changes may be required.

We are immensely grateful to those parents who have supported the Development Fund. Those contributions help us protect the educational offering to each of our students.

This year governors will continue to focus on the safety and wellbeing of every member of our community. We are grateful for the support from parents. School welcomes communication from parents and I would urge you to proactively contact the school if you have any concerns. The partnership between home and school has never been more important. Governors have been delighted to meet with parents and students through the year and to hear of their experiences of the school. We were pleased to hear that school was responsive to communications raised and all expressed their satisfaction with the pastoral care of their children in school.

Governors have a role to ensure the wellbeing of the staff in school. Without a healthy staff team then how can we maintain the outstanding educational offering we aspire to? We are most grateful to our parents who continue to ensure that when communicating with the school they continue to do so in a respectful and non-aggressive manner. Governors have zero tolerance of any form of aggression towards the staff team.

This annual report provides parents and others with an overview of Ripon Grammar 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 they should do so via the Clerk to the Governors whose contact details are available on the school website.

Governors' Role

The full governing board (FGB) meets four times each year, but governors discharge their responsibilities largely via their committees: Admissions, Boarding, Curriculum, Finance and Personnel, Pastoral and Estate Development (formerly Premises). The principal role of the committees is to look in depth at the work of the school by being analytical, innovative and creative yet challenging and supportive of the headmaster and the staff team. The committees regularly scrutinise the strengths and weaknesses and 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 participating in the formulation of the Strategic Development Plan in discussion with the headmaster and the staff.

We agreed five key priorities which we will work to deliver over this year and the years ahead. These are:

- Personal and Professional Development of all members of the RGS community
- Academic Excellence
- Ensuring a World Class Environment
- Staff Wellbeing
- Community Engagement

Governors are also charged with keeping abreast of changes in education nationally and the past year has seen the continuation of an enormous array of changes which will continue to take effect over the next few years, much of it concerned with public examinations, but also changes in how schools are inspected and assessed, and important updates and developments to enhance child protection and safeguarding.

Governors are accountable to the role they undertake. Attendance at meetings is recorded, and publicly available on the school website. This year we have welcomed the opportunity to resume face to face meeting, whilst still utilising the online platforms to facilitate virtual meetings, where necessary and appropriate.

Safeguarding

This year we have continued to build on the safeguarding initiatives of previous years, and in addition to ensuring this is a regular agenda item on all meetings, seek assurance in many ways to confirm the safety within school. Regular visits from colleagues from North Yorkshire have confirmed their confidence in our processes. Our safeguarding team continues to be led by Mrs Keelan-Edwards who is the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) we have three Deputy DSL (Mrs Day, Mrs Hewison and Mr Fell) meaning that there is always a member of the team available to support our students. Lanyard, card entry doors and CCTV mean the site is safer than ever - whilst our robust and sensitively planned programme delivered via the PSHCE programme educates our students on how to ensure their own safety and that of those around them and, very importantly, what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns whatsoever. Governors have been concerned about the impact of social media on the wellbeing of our students and have been supportive of the programmes of education around this to students and parents. Similarly, the high prevalence of vaping and recreational drug use in Ripon is a threat to our students, and a programme to educate students, empowering them to make informed choices has been welcomed.

Public examination results

Y11 and Y13 students sat public examinations in the summer. This cohort of students had again suffered significant educational disruption during covid. For our GCSE candidates this was during years 7 and 8, and for A level candidates years 9 and 10.

Students approached the exams positively and results were strong. At A level, 70% of all grades were at A* to B with 144 students receiving a total of 83A* grades. The highest number of students on record achieved their first-choice university.

GCSE results compared very favourably with the national average. Governors look at progress measures to assess how groups of students have progressed during their time at RGS based on exam data on entry and at GCSE. Progress 8 at GCSE, determined by the DfE for the full national cohort is one such measure. This year the RGS progress 8 score is 0.72. This means that, on average, RGS students achieved nearly three quarters of a grade better across all subjects than that expected from a national comparison yet again. These GCSE and A-level results again place RGS as one of the highest achieving schools, in the North of England.

The information below summarises the headline data for the current and previous years. Detailed information by subject is available on the school website. Governors would emphasise strongly that high achievement in public examinations is only one aspect of the wide education that the school provides. RGS values all its students as individuals, irrespective of their ability, and strives to support everyone to achieve their maximum potential, through a love of learning. All achievements, not just those of the most able, are celebrated. Governors are also acutely aware that, from time to time, students will face considerable health, family or personal difficulties. The impact of these cannot be overestimated, and the school remains utterly committed to work with parents and others to strongly support students through their education so that they can achieve their best with the highest amount of pastoral support.

		2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
A-level	Pass rate (A*-E)	99.3%	99.8%	100%	99.8%	100%	98.9%	99.8%	100%
	Grades A*A & B	70.2%	82.7%	82.6%	81.0%	82.7%	76.1%	79.7%	79.1%
	Grade A*	18.0%	18.8%	25.6%	28.1%	29.1%	20.4%	19.4%	23.0%
GCSE	Grades 9 - 4	95.6%	90.3%	97.5%	99.6%	99.6%	96.9%	97.0%	98.5%
GCSE	Grades 9 – 7	53.9%	58.1%	69.9%	72.4%	67.7%	61.6%	65.8%	64.4%

2024 Results are provisional until all appeals have been completed.

In 2017 revised grading on a 9 to 1 scale (where 9 is the highest and 1 is the lowest) was introduced in England for GCSE English, English literature and mathematics, followed by a further 20 subjects in 2018. At the same time the syllabuses and examinations for these subjects were made more demanding. Whilst the general intention was to align grades 9, 8 & 7 with the former A*/A grades and a grade 4 or above to be the equivalent of grades C or above, the regulator (Ofqual) advises that the results in subjects with the new grading should not be compared with previous years. However, to maintain some semblance of comparability, albeit with the caveat above, numerical grades have been compared with Ofqual's approved equivalences and these results should therefore be understood in that context.

Destinations of leavers

All Year 11 students proceed on to post-16 education, and again, the majority at RGS but some choosing other schools and colleges which offer subjects or courses that RGS does not offer.

Year 13 students continue to be ambitious in their career aspirations with the majority applying for university but others taking up prestigious apprenticeships, going directly into employment or taking a planned gap year. This year there are 22 students taking up this option. This year, 118 out of our 153 students making UCAS applications were able to take up their first-choice university offers. This included 26 former students who were supported by our sixth form team. Of these, all were able to secure their first-choice application and have embarked on their first-choice university course this autumn. The careers staff and sixth form team provide support and expert guidance to all students, whatever their intentions, so that they can make fully informed decisions.

This year applications for competitive courses were very successful, with all applicants for medicine and veterinary science securing places with one student securing a place reading Dentistry. Similarly, five of our six candidates holding Oxbridge offers secured their places.

Over recent years there has been a particular focus on ensuring that the careers advice given to students is neither narrow nor focussed entirely on university application processes, to ensure that all students are encouraged to be appropriately ambitious and are supported in achieving their ambitions, whatever they are. This year this has included students travelling overseas to pursue prestigious scholarships, university courses and apprenticeships, as well as supporting students choosing to go straight into employment. We are hugely grateful to the support given to all our students by Sixth Form team.

We wish all our students moving on from RGS the very best of luck and send all our good wishes. Students leave RGS as alumni of the school, and we enjoy keeping in touch with them all, and hearing their news!

School Admissions

The school's main points of entry for both day and boarding students are into Year 7, Year 9 and Sixth Form (Year 12). North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) is responsible for administering admissions into Year 7. However, this year, we have been delighted to welcome Mrs Drummond to the staff team. Coordinating the admissions process, she can support the processes around admissions. The governors' Admissions Committee closely monitors the entrance test arrangements to ensure that the potential applicants and the school are not disadvantaged in any way. Once again, a record number of Y6 pupils took the test.

Admission into Year 9 is managed by the school and aims to provide additional 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 test taken at the school in early February. This entry point again proved popular this year

Every year the school admits many new students into the Sixth Form (Year 12) based on their achievements at GCSE. This year was no exception when a record 67 new students joined RGS. They quickly feel part of the school, contribute widely school life and achieve excellent results. They also bring a wealth of experience and talent which enhances the school community, and often become school office holders when they move to Year 13. The Sixth Form Open Evening took place in October – which is earlier than in previous years to allow Y11 students more time to make the careful decisions regarding sixth form application.

Staffing

Governors are only too aware that the success of the RGS is a consequence of the expertise, dedication and commitment of both teaching and support staff. At the end of each academic year several governors usually have the pleasure of interviewing a group of the Y13 students just prior to their departure from RGS. This is always an uplifting experience and, without exception, each year students describe the unending support they have received from the staff team who go that extra mile to ensure that students can reach their full potential.

Each year several staff leave RGS to pursue their careers in other schools, often in promoted posts, or through retirement. This year saw the departure of seven members of staff, each of whom has contributed hugely to RGS over their time in school.

Mr Mann retired from school after many years of distinguished service as a teacher of DT, but also as a form tutor. He has had a positive influence on so many students, and we wish him a long and happy retirement. Mr Long, Ms Sanches, Ms Cresswell, Ms Kettlewell, Mr Watkin-Holmes and Miss Pollard have also left the school for pastures new. We wish them all well in their new endeavours, and hope that their happy memories of Ripon Grammar School will stay with them.

Our staff team is pivotal to the work and culture of our school. As part of the Governor Action Plan for the year, staff wellbeing is a focus of our attention. The dedication and commitment of our staff is unshakeable, and the Board is committed to delivering our Staff Wellbeing Strategy.

Governance

Our constitution deliberately makes provision for a large governing board, principally a mixture of parent-elected and co-opted governors. Each year there are vacancies which we try to fill matching the needs identified from our skills audit. We would encourage all parents to consider putting themselves forward either for election as a parent governor when vacancies arise or making their interest known to the Chair of the Governors in an email.

Governors' Committees

This is a snapshot report giving an overview of the work undertaken within our governor sub-committees. Accepting the limitations of this, below are synopses of governor priorities for the last year.

a) Boarding

The primary focus of the Boarding Committee remains to ensure that boarders are happy, safe, and secure within the school community. To achieve this, the Committee has continued to apply a high level of scrutiny to all aspects of boarding at Ripon Grammar School throughout the academic year. There have been termly reports from Caroline Day, Assistant Head (Boarding), on the well-being of pupils, reviews of maintenance and catering requirements, and updates on relevant policies. In addition, the Committee considers issues relating to both Safeguarding and Health & Safety at each of our termly meetings.

It remains the Committee's ambition to continue this growth, expanding and improving upon the already excellent boarding facilities, whilst always maintaining the defining focus that is the well-being of all within the boarding community.

b) Curriculum

The committee meets each term and calls upon the Headmaster, Deputy Head (Academic) and Assistant Head (Teaching and Learning) to give evidence and answer questions and calls other senior staff as necessary.

The committee regularly monitors student progress and attainment in all Year Groups, as well as analysing GCSE and A Level exam performance. This year, we have continued to pay special attention to our SEND students. The Inclusion Manager, Samina O'Brien, gave us a detailed presentation on what she has done to enhance the organisation, quality and consistency of provision for SEND students. This has included refining the accuracy of the SEND register, which, in turn, allows the committee to access accurately the progress and attainment data for SEND students in each year group. She has assisted departments in developing an appropriate graduated approach to SEND for their subject.

Our examination of GCSE and A Level result in both continue to be strong. In such a highly performing school, our eye is naturally drawn to areas where performance is lower than expected and governors relentlessly enquire about subjects where the results are not quite up to the usual standards and receive regular reports about remedial action.

We have a duty to assure ourselves of the quality of teaching and learning at RGS. While the excellent GCSE and A Level outcome indicate no significant cause for concern, it is important that mechanisms exist to monitor the learning experiences of students. To this end we receive detailed reports of Learning Walks and Departmental Reviews conducted by the school's Senior Leaders and can question them about details.

All governors have a duty to ensure the safeguarding of students and this committee's particular focus is on lesson time. We want to ensure that appropriate health and safety measures are taken in practical subjects and that students' attendance at lessons is recorded. We ask for data printouts each meeting.

The school has always made a wide range of interventions to assist individual and groups of students who for one reason or another are experiencing difficulties with their learning. The list has grown, especially in the aftermath of Covid. It seems that some of our students have found the return to the norms of school routines and behaviours very difficult and governors are both immensely appreciative of the special efforts made by all teachers and support staff and concerned that the level of additional work is unsustainable in the long term.

c) Finance & Personnel (F&P)

One of the major responsibilities of the governors is careful oversight of the school's finances with much of the detailed monitoring work delegated to the F&P committee. The F&P Committee meets regularly, at least once each half-term, and reviews monthly budget monitoring reports prepared by the School Bursar.

Just like in many other areas of the school, over the last academic year the major financial challenge has been dealing with the adverse effects and consequences of rising energy costs, inflation, and the ongoing impact of

the pandemic. Unlike many other State Secondary Schools, RGS is fortunate to benefit from two additional and sizeable sources of revenue – its boarding proposition (with all fees received being reinvested in protecting and enhancing its provision) and letting income from its estate assets (including its 3G pitch and swimming pool).

Despite this, the financial pressures experienced by the school during the 2023-24 year mean that its financial reserves have been significantly eroded. By the end of the financial year, governors were aware that the school's total expenditure exceeded its total income with complete erosion of reserves. As a result of this position, a recovery plan has been put in place. This means that further difficult decisions have been made which have constrained departmental budgets, as well as ongoing work to enhance energy efficiency and other cost saving measures have been maintained.

. Non-essential capital projects remain on hold indefinitely. The F&P Committee are enormously grateful to the premises team that continues to work hard to implement efficiency measures and conduct maintenance as cost-effectively as possible.

By far the biggest expense in the school budget is staff pay, and governors are proud to demonstrate their commitment to maintaining the excellent staff team within RGS – who, as previously described, are the key to the success of the RGS community. We are working hard to ensure that the financial controls necessarily being put in place by the school have a minimal impact on the school's core activities.

The F&P Committee also monitors staff appointments and staff welfare, as well as staff performance. In a climate where the recruitment and retention of teaching staff nationally is challenging, governors remain pleased with the appointments made during the last year, a reflection of the reputation of the school in attracting strong applications. The appraisal process for all staff in RGS is robust, and governors are again pleased to note the very positive outcomes for staff because of this.

Governors are extremely grateful for the guidance and expertise of our School Bursar, Mrs Brine, and Mr Graham Livesey, our Director of Strategic Operations who together ensure careful and prudent management of the school's financial resources.

d) Pastoral

The pastoral committee has an overriding responsibility to ensure the highest standards of care and welfare of students in the school including their safeguarding. The wellbeing and safety of the RGS students and the RGS community is the focus of our meetings. The committee meets with and receives reports on pastoral matters from the leadership team within the school – which includes Heads of Years, the pastoral team and the Senior Leadership Team. The committee have focussed on wellbeing and behaviour of students and have been able to triangulate the evidence received from staff, students, and parents with the data reports we now receive from CPOMS and BROMCOM system.

We have heard individually from each Head of Year and Head of School on the issues facing form and year groups and the new challenges they face. We had reports on the extra levels of support to students who need this and on efforts to support the whole school community.

The pastoral committee prioritises safeguarding - and has at each meeting reviewed the school's safeguarding records and ensured that our response to the safeguarding review has been timely and robust.

The PSCH curriculum is now delivered across the school both in lessons and tutor time. The whole school approach to this, and strong leadership has been well received.

e) Estates Development Committee

Progress on priority projects identified as part of the long-term school estate development plan has been challenging against a rapidly deteriorating financial position, driven principally by huge increases in energy costs.

This has necessitated a pause on most planned capital projects for the foreseeable future (apart from critical ones related to health and safety/safeguarding issues). The committee have worked to ensure the appropriate prioritisation of projects key to the safe running of the school and have ensured active engagement with NYCC Property Services Scheme for support, but also remain reliant on our in house small, but resourceful and highly capable maintenance team.

Using external funding secured through grant application, we have been able to deliver on a small number of projects to enhance the learning environment – including the re-provision of the former staff room into a brand-new classroom, and the conversion of a redundant former kitchen into a staff room which provides areas for private work as well as space of relaxation.

The Committee extends particular thanks to Graham Livesey (DSO) and school premises manager Andrew Hogg, and his small team, for all their work to deliver these projects, maintain our estate and make progress this year despite the hugely challenging financial constraints.

School Publicity and Marketing

Mrs Ruth Savage continues to work extremely actively in her role of Marketing and Publicity Manager for the School. Ruth continues to ensure that the online publication of RGS News which is emailed out monthly is packed with news and information. It is popular with current students, alumni of the school and our community. Over the course of the year there has been a presence associated with RGS on social media with regular updates and advertisements several platforms.

Co-curricular Activities and Achievements

The breadth of co-curricular activities on offer at RGS continues to increase, and Governors are extremely grateful to staff who undertake these voluntarily to ensure an excellent educational experience for all at RGS, with the key focus being on helping all our students develop as all round individuals. We have enjoyed being able to attend concerts, plays and musicals.

Sports fixtures are strong, and the profile of RGS as a centre of excellence for sport is increasing with extremely strong team and individual performances. Equally important to note is the increasing level of participation across the school. The Sports Awards Evening, held in September was unforgettable. With over 120 students receiving team or individual nominations for awards – for achievement but also progress and team working – the sporting opportunities at RGS are ever increasing.

Governors are incredibly grateful to the staff team who go the extra mile and give their time to support students in co-curricular activities. Without the talent and commitment of staff, this offering would not exist.

School trips and educational visits have increased - and participation is high. The Pupil Premium funding the school receives enables all students to access these opportunities. World Challenge, skiing trips, adventure holidays to France in addition to local and overseas trips supporting the curriculum are now part of the school calendar. Such is the appetite from students – several have been oversubscribed. Last year again saw high numbers of students participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. We are very grateful to Dr Smith for leading this exceptional programme.

Last year, the usual Charity Week, held before the Autumn Half Term Break, raised funds for Martin House Hospice - a children's hospice near Wetherby providing care babies, children and young people with life limiting conditions. Students presented a cheque for £10,204.90 to the Hospice – and incredible amount of money for such a worthy cause. Charity Week is led by the School Officer Team, but relies on the involvement of the whole school, and the impact of

the huge collective effort of the entire school community cannot be underestimated. Huge congratulations and thanks to everyone!

Within the Headmaster's half-termly newsletters, RGS News and our social media presence, the wide range of opportunities plus the exceptional commitment of staff and students to the co-curricular life of the school is detailed. Governors are delighted by the strength and success of the co-curricular life at RGS, and the value that the school places on the array of wider curricular engagement and success.

The financial situation facing the school means that the funding of the co-curricular activities is vulnerable. The School Development Fund relies entirely on donations from parents to support, among other things, these additional activities which are not funded out of central government grants for education. The fund exists separately to the work of the Friends of RGS and ensures that every student benefits in some way by enabling the school to deliver a rewarding and varied programme. We fully appreciate the financial challenges families face. However, any donations would be hugely welcomed. A donation of £2 per month per parent would allow us to continue the current operations. Donating is straightforward – and can either be via ParentPay – or via the school website [here](#).

Communication with Parents

The school website continues to be developed. The implementation of 'My child at school' – an electronic record of an individual student life at RGS, along with the website, means that communication with parents is now paperless. All letters which are sent home are hosted on the website as a matter of course but are now emailed out to parents using the IT platform Bromcom. This means that letters from school will feature in your email inbox from bromcom@ripogrammar.com. We would ask parents to check the website - and their inbox - on a regular basis to ensure they are fully informed.

Given that e-mail communication is routinely used, **it is of course vital that the school has an up-to-date email address**. Many parents follow the school's achievements via social media. RGS news is published monthly, updating parents and students on the activities taking place within school. The headmaster writes a newsletter half termly to ensure that events of importance are communicated with parents. Governors therefore hope that parents do feel that they are fully informed about all aspects of school life. If this is not the case, please do let us know.

Despite the huge challenges we have all faced, governors are delighted to report another exceptionally successful year for Ripon Grammar School. On behalf of the Board, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the headmaster and the staff team for their professionalism and commitment to the education and care of the students, and all parents for their continued support to the school.



Elizabeth Jarvis
Chair of Governing Board
December 2024