



The Castle School

A SPECIALIST COLLEGE FOR COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

Love Lane, Newbury, RG14 2JG

Tel: 01635 42976, Fax: 01635 515725

MINUTES of a meeting of the Full Governing Board held on Thursday 25th February 2020, from 4.30pm, Virtual meeting

Present: Wendy Batchelor (Chair, LEA governor), Marie Verney (parent governor), Nicola Markham (co-opted governor) Charlie Kowalski (co-opted governor), Helen Cabell (Vice Chair, co-opted governor), Giles Francis (parent governor), Roses Parfitt (staff governor), Luke Adams (parent governor), Jon Hewitt (Headteacher) and Jayne Tomlinson (clerk).

Apologies: Joan Sargent (parent governor).

In attendance: Atul Attra (School Business Manager), Caroline Whitlock (Deputy Headteacher).

1. Apologies

Apologies received by JS.

2. Appointment of Co-opted Governor

The board agreed to Giles Francis becoming a co-opted governor, from a parent governor position. This is because GF had moved with his family out of the school area so is unable to hold a parent governor position.

3. Any other business (AOB) items for the agenda

- Terms of Reference- all committees
- New Governor Recruitment
- Online Governor Training
- Additional Provision Proposal
- Plans for full re-opening on the 8th March.

4. Declaration of interest at this meeting

No declarations were made.

5. Minutes from the last meetings (12th November 2020) and matters arising

Governors agreed with the minutes from the last FGB meeting and they will be signed when it is possible for the chair to do so. The following matters arising were discussed.

- DBS checks

AA stated that he had carried out any new DBS checks for new staff but that he had not started the process of renewals which he is hoping to do from March/April time .He explained that the guidance from West Berkshire stated that DBS checks should be carried out every 3 years. Di Ellard in the office will start to look at all those staff who need DBS checks renewing. LA confirmed that he had had his DBS check. **ACTION: AA to restart DBS checks.**

- *NM enquiry to the school nurse*
NM explained that she had still not been able to action the meeting with the school nurse due to the COVID restrictions and that she would approach the school nurse when the school re-opened and it was deemed safe to do so. **ACTION: NM will meet with the school nurse after the school reopens and when it is safe to do so.**

- *Governor training on the assessment process*
JH explained that he will set up training for the Governors when it is appropriate, possibly in the Autumn. This will be so the governors can ask questions about the process and see some meaningful data. WB asked if any governor would like to take a lead role in this area and if so to let her know. **ACTION: Any governor who has a particular interest in pupil assessment to contact WB.**

- *Assistant Headteacher Recruitment*
JH stated that stated that the new Assistant Headteacher would start after Easter. Shannon Booth was due to leave after February half-term but would now leave after Easter. **ACTION: JT to correct the Last FGB minutes to state Assistant Headteacher.**

6. Committee reports

- a. *Curriculum (MV)*
MV stated that the committee had looked at how the school was operating, the criteria that was used for allowing children to be in school and the IT requirements for remote learning. MV praised the school for the work and effort put into making the school operational. MV stated that NM had looked into Riding for the Disabled costs. The committee discussed the pros and cons of Lateral Flow Tests and PCR tests for staff. The committee had discussed that the school was moving towards a learning curriculum and thanks were given to the SLT for their involvement in getting this to happen. Policies were reviewed and approved and a safeguarding update had been given by CW. School meals were discussed and the school was moving back to the school meal voucher system rather than the school meal hampers.

- b. *Staffing (MV)*
MV stated that the minutes needed a correction to Assistant Headteacher recruitment and the committee were very happy with the manner in which the staff has supported the school.

- c. *Finance (HC)*
HC stated that a 7 seater car had been purchased for transport to and from work placements for Post 16. HC explained that the catering contract tender process is progressing well. In regards to the budget the school has a sizeable surplus which is not surprising given the circumstances. The committee looked at the implications of this surplus and whether money could be clawed back and whether things could be brought forward as the school has not yet been charged for the roof which is about 12K. HC explained that fundraising had been discussed and was challenging given the circumstances at the moment. Policies were reviewed and approved for ratification.

d. *Premises (HC)*

HC explained that the school had continued with a programme of maintenance despite it being difficult. Policies had been reviewed and approved for ratification.

e. *Pay Panel (HC)*

HC stated that the panel had met with Jon and to review his objectives and that despite all the challenges the school had faced she was pleased to report that everything is on track and that it was good to see everything going well.

7. **Headteacher's report**

JH had circulated an updated report in advance of the meeting. JH asked for any questions the governors had in regards to his report.

WB asked JH to clarify the pupil changes. JH explained that one pupil had joined and two had left, this was due to one child moving away and one child on transition to another placement. WB asked how the attendance figures were obtained, JH explained that SIMS is a reporting system used for children in school and for children at home a spreadsheet system is used by staff and that is monitored by the Pastoral team.

WB asked about the curriculum and assessment process. JH stated that he would like it minuted at the meeting that the staff and the SLT have been brilliant. The national average for special schools with regards to getting pupils into school is 30% and at the school currently have 44% of pupils. GF asked if the school was at maximum capacity currently. JH explained that the school worked in bubbles and some pupil numbers were higher in some bubbles however, if a pupil needed critical support the school had managed to get them in and only a very few had been turned away on safety grounds. CW added that where the school was at full capacity in some bubbles, a few of the pupils had moved into different age groups within bubbles and staff had been creative. JH explained that the school was operating a two weekly staff rota however the SLT, admin team and site team had been in full time.

GF asked how engagement with the staff was progressing. JH said that he couldn't have asked more of the staff and that they had been amazing. One member of staff was on long term sick leave and one member of staff had been signed off for 4-6 weeks but good trust had been built up and good decisions made. GF asked whether the staff were being pushed too hard and risking too much. CW replied that the SLT had looked at this and where support was needed it was given. JH stated that also that the uptake of vaccinations by the staff had been very good which would protect the staff moving forward.

JH stated that with the curriculum, CW and James Whybra would be working on that across the different age groups and there would be new names for each of the areas. For the school assessment and reporting tool the school would be moving away from using B squared to Earwig, B squared will finish this term and from Easter the staff will be focussing on the Earwig system. WB stated that that is was good that plans were progressing well. JH added that there were no further plans for SIMS at the moment although the plan is to investigate its uses more thoroughly but it will not be within the original timescales.

8. Policies for ratification

The following policies have been discussed by committees and come to this meeting for discussion and ratification. WB asked if there were any additional comments to be made regarding the policies.

SEND

Admissions

Creative Arts

Capability

NQT

Redundancy

FMP- **ACTION AA to put in the necessary dates on the draft document**

Severe Weather

Manual Handling

ACTION: Governors noted these had all been reviewed by committees this term and ratified them. WB will sign a copy of all the policies when she is next in school. JT to update the school files and to place them on the intranet.

9. Safeguarding update and signing of central register (CW / WB)

CW stated that the Universal Safeguarding Training sessions were continuing virtually and that it was a requirement to attend these sessions every 3 years, she added that holding the virtual Universal Safeguarding Training sessions had meant that more people could attend. CW informed the governors that no children were on the Child Protection Plan and there were no referrals to the Children's Services. Since September 2020 there had been 496 concerns raised compared to 457 concerns last year in the same time period, which is a slight increase however, there were two main areas that increased which were mental health and well-being. CW added that the school fully anticipated that concerns in these two areas will continue to be higher and it would be fair to expect an increase in safeguarding concerns. CW stated that the school have bought a COVID catch up plan package with a Health Clinic worker who does 1:1 and group work. **ACTION: WB to sign the single central record when next in school.**

10. AOB items.

- *Terms of Reference for all committees*

The Terms of Reference for all the committees were reviewed and approved by the FGB.

- *New Governor Recruitment*

WB stated that the board needed a co-opted governor on it to comply with the Instrument of Government and skills that would be particularly useful to bring onto the board would be IT skills. JT stated that a job advert for a co-opted governor had been placed online with the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire but as yet no interest had been shown from it. GF suggested a leaflet drop to houses in close proximity to the school. WB suggested that perhaps social media networking might enable better targeting as the board were looking for specific skills. HC suggested looking at local employers in the Newbury area as there were many small IT firms. **ACTION: JT and WB to work on a local advert to approach local companies to find a co-opted governor.**

- *Online Governor Training*

JT encouraged all governors to access the National Governance Association Learning for governors. It has several modules which include structure, roles and responsibilities, good governance, strategy, pupil success and well-being, executive leaders, the best use of

resources and compliance. The modules are all given a time element so that the governors know how long it will take to complete the module. **ACTION: WB suggested that JT recirculated the link to the National Governance Association learning.**

- *Additional Provision Plan*

This was discussed by the governors and questions were asked by the governors in relation to this provision.

- Plans for full re-opening on 8th March

JH stated the school would be opening to all pupils on the 8th March. The bubbles would remain the same and the operation of the school would be similar to September – December 2020. Remote learning will stop on Thursday 4th March and attendance will be expected at school. Regarding masks for staff and secondary pupils, the school will take a pragmatic approach as masks may increase the anxiety levels in the children. GF asked if there would be any exceptions to wearing masks and JH replied that as the government guidance was only out today he would be reviewing that guidance but he expected masks to be worn by the staff in all communal areas. HC asked that since many of the staff had had their first vaccination were the risks lower. JH stated that the pupils could still transmit the virus however the school would be adding increased ventilation to the protocols, which would sent out to parents and staff on Friday 26th February. JH added that nearly 90% of staff had had their first vaccination which in trials, after 3 weeks, had been shown to give high immunity. JH added with regard to off-site visits they will need to be discussed but would only be granted in exceptional circumstances such as off-site work placements and since the 16+ pupils will be given the vaccination that would give the pupils protection against the virus and would hopefully attract employers. Visitors to the school will not be encouraged unless it is for exceptional circumstances.

From the 8th March the staff will move to Lateral Flow home testing kits, staff will be given 7 tests which will be done on Sunday and Wednesday evenings although this is not compulsory. The test takes 30 minutes to confirm a positive and negative test result. The PCR testing will stop as the school does not want to run both testing systems. The school had one positive COVID case this term which meant that one bubble had to shut but there was not one case of transmission from it. With Lateral Flow Testing asymptomatic cases should be picked up.

JH stated that the school were not going to test pupils for COVID due to many factors. WB asked if parents could be offered the kits. JH said that he would look into this.

HC asked how the school would deal with absence if the pupils don't come into school. JH stated that there was one child who was in a very high risk category which might mean that they did not return to school which would be individually dealt with but he expected children to come into school. JH stated that he would send an email to parents on Monday 1st March to give them an overview of the school reopening.

JH stated that the school would close on Friday 5th March to pupils so staff training on testing could be carried out and cleaning which he hoped parents would understand. JH stated that he would include governors in all communication to parents on the re-opening and transport. JH added that many of the staff were still to receive their second dose of the vaccine which potentially could mean staff shortages to attend their appointments and therefore class closures, however many of these second vaccinations should take place in the Easter holidays. WB thanked JH for the update and stated that the governors looked forward to receiving the communication from him.

JH stated that the governor's strategy day will be on the 8th June and it will probably be a virtual meeting due to restrictions.

CW mentioned that Shannon Booth was now leaving at Easter and she and Kate Mason were compiling a photo book for Shannon so if the governors had any photos or notes that

they wanted to include they would be appreciated and to email them to CW. **Action: Governors to send any photos or notes to CW.**

11. Date of next meeting. JT confirmed the date of the next meeting as Thursday 11th June 2021.