



The Castle School

A SPECIALIST COLLEGE FOR COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

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MINUTES of a meeting of the Full Governing Board held on Thursday 22nd June 2023, 5.00pm, Held at Castle School, Jane Evan's Room

Present: Wendy Batchelor (LEA Governor), Helen Cabell (Co-opted Governor), Jo Davis (Staff Governor), Charlie Kowalski (Parent Governor), Philip Jackson (Co-opted Governor), Jon Hewitt (Headteacher), Adrianna Laconte (Co-opted Governor) (**Remotely**), Adrian Crawford (Parent Governor), Helen Amner-Munslow (Parent Governor) Jane Gray (Clerk)

Apologies: Nicola Markham (Co-opted Governor),

In attendance: Atul Attra (School Business Manager), James Whybra (Deputy Head Post-16) (**Remotely**)

5 governors did an information walk around the Love Lane site with AA before the meeting.

1. Apologies Received

Apologies received from Nicola Markham.

2. Declarations of interest for this meeting

None declared.

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

New Governors (WB)
Refurb of the old Bungalow (JH)
School Reserves (JH)

4. Appointment of Co-opted Governors

The current period for NM has come to an end. As such a vote was put to the Board for NM to continue for another 4 years. All Board members present voted yes, and NM will continue as a Co-opted Governor until June 2027.

5. Minutes from the last meeting and matters arising (Chair)

The latest WOW newsletter has been sent out. When asked JW confirmed that they plan to do this update termly. **JG to ensure that this is sent to all governors when issued.**

JD has asked when the next Governors course will be. **JG advised that it won't be until the Autumn now and she will notify JD as soon as dates are published.**

JH confirmed that training on EHCP's will be at the Autumn/Winter FGB and will take governors through it from the parent and staff perspective. H A-M said that she would be happy to help with this.

As there were no further questions on the last set of minutes, these have now been signed off.

6. Committee Reports

Each Committee Chair provided the FGB of a summary of issues raised, discussed and agreed at the last committee meeting.

- **Curriculum**

JH summarised what was discussed at the last meeting. CW and her team Castle @Theale are currently working up the therapeutic programme for current students and the new September intake, especially as they will all be in the main building.

JH also provided a verbal Headteachers report to the committee, including attendance rates. Part of the issue is that all schools are now having to pick up and deal with this, which in the past was dealt with by the EWO Team. CW & JW will be in regular contact with our Pastoral Team concerning this aspect.

- **Staffing**

Staffing levels are still a major issue, but that is very much in line with the National picture. At present, since the introduction of the SEND Allowance for non-teaching staff, there is still a flow of staff coming in versus leaving. It is still too soon to say if this Allowance has made a difference, but it will be monitored. However, it is worth noting that there has been an increase in applications for current vacancies.

AC asked if there is a way, perhaps through exit reviews, to find out why staff are leaving their role here at Castle. JH said that they have recently been recording this to find out why. WB asked if that information can be shared with governors going forward, and **JH confirmed that it will be added as part of his Headteachers Report.**

We are currently busy recruiting for roles that need to be filled in September. So far things have been good for the Love Lane site, but very patchy in Theale, maybe due to this area being next to Reading. JH advised that we need to review our approach in recruitment for this area.

JD did ask if people who are looking at the HLT roles were aware that full training will be given. **JH said that he didn't think this was in the job adverts at present so will get that added.**

Also, JH said that they are also looking at the various ways to increase the circulation of adverts with the likes of social media. Also perhaps making a short video about Castle for applicants to view.

- **Premises**

This was a very short committee meeting last time as the majority of works was either completed or in progress.

HC did confirm that it is still difficult to get quotes for anything over £5K and AA will continue to present costings to committee members, especially if he can't get the three required quotes.

The H&S walkabout still needs to be undertaken as unfortunately HC has been unable to get out and about following a recent injury.

- **Finance**

AA gave the Finance Committee an overview of the budget prior to the Budget Sign-off meeting, which was held the following week. At that Full Governing Budget Sign-off meeting all governors present approved of the 2023/2024 budget. This was then signed by WB and JH, and was submitted to the LA.

AA had received the Finance Audit report and has gone through the areas highlighted for improvement. AC asked if an action plan has been drawn up? HC and AA both confirmed that this is in place ad AA will go through this later in the meeting.

The committee were also advised the SFVS was completed and signed off in March 2023.

7. Headteacher's report (JH)

JH advised that the report that was sent to everyone prior to the meeting included all updated figures for the year. Instead of going through it in detail he asked for questions on the report.

WB asked about the Exclusion rates. JH confirm that to date, for 2022/23, there were 7. One was a permanent exclusion which members were already aware of with the remainder being short term exclusions. WB asked if this number is likely to increase with Castle@Theale. JH said not necessarily but all short-term exclusions have a follow up programme to help reintegrate back into the school.

HC asked if the absence rate is still going up. JH advised that there is no significant change in the numbers. A number of them are related to school avoidance, which had increased since lockdowns. But we are working with those families to find way to get them back into school.

WB asked if these numbers will be separated into Theale, Love Lane and Post-16? **JH felt that was a good idea and will do this going forward.**

CK was concerned about the number of safeguarding concerns, 1348, added to My Concern. Is this just for Castle? JH said that they are all for the three sites. The majority of the reports are extremely minor, e.g., Little Daisy came into school with a small graze on her knee. However, by logging these minor concerns, it helps to form a log for that child and a bigger picture should it be required.

JW also added that the more staff have been using the reporting system, they are becoming more confident in the type/nature of incidents to be recorded.

AC asked if there was any training to ensure that there is no over reporting. JH said that all staff are trained and aware of the possible safeguarding issues if things are under reported, so we have no concerns that staff maybe over recording. JH add that staff are told that if in doubt it should be recorded. The relevant SLT person will then go through these incidents and decide if they require further information.

AC then asked about Friends of Castle (FoC) and if the accounts have been sorted. JH explained that for the past 18 months there has only been a Chair, so AA has found it difficult at times to get funds transferred to the main accounts if it is needed. JH and AA confirmed that FoC accounts are up to date and fully accounted for. JH advised the board

that from September 2023 FoC will be restarted and a new committee will be formed. JH will also be advising the current FoC Chair of his plans. HA-M asked if this will also cover Castle@Theale and JH confirmed that it will include all 3 sites.

WB was concerned about a report of racism that had been recorded. JH said that the report in question was when a Post-16 child asked a question which used a racist term and had been dealt with accordingly.

JH advised the board that the cost for the build of Castle@Theale has increased. JH, CW and AA agreed with the LA to contribute an additional £41K from our own funds as long as the LA agree to meet the rest, to which the LA agreed. JH said that the building is coming along well and is looking like a new build, even though it's not. Also, the site foreman, from CTS, is really enthusiastic with this project and is proud of the work and details his team have added.

WB asked if it was possible to hold the Autumn FGB there. JH could see any reason why not so **JG can liaise with CW on that when the time comes.**

AA added that the handover of the building will start next week. Unfortunately, it is not possible for those joining Theale in September to have an induction day at the site, so CW and her team have been going round to visit those families at home.

AC asked how well parents understand their child's curriculum. JH said that they all would have had general statement sent to them, but perhaps the school needed to let parents know how they meet this with individual pupils. HA-M said she knows but then again she's on site every day and is always asking staff what is going on. JD also said that most teachers will send home a weekly email to say what they have been doing in class that week, or update parents via the daily diary that goes home with the child. HC suggested that perhaps staff can draw up a base line for consistency when reporting back home and AC said that the curriculum statement will need to be adjusted to reflect this. **JH will take these views back to the SLT.**

8. School Development Plan

JH advised that based on the final report of the Finance Audit that he has added a 3-year plan to the SDP. The plan for 2023/24 remains unchanged. JH hoped that this would be approved today by the board. AC did say that there were a few wording issues he was concerned with but will chat with JH separately. In summary the changes to the SDP are

- Pupil number changes with the rebuild of the old bungalow.
- Additional capacity at each site
- Potential halfway site for those who are not quite SEND but also need more support than mainstream can offer.
- Expectation on demand from SEND, which is extremely high at present.

AC was concerned that adding this into the SDP it might impact the school as a whole in future years. HC reminded the board that this is just a basic 3-year plan and that it would require full approval from governors if we were to implement anything. JH did add that the LA are fully supportive of SEND provision in the area.

WB asked the board to look at the revised SDP and to feedback to JH by 29th June 2023.

9. Finance Update

No further updates to report back at present following the Budget sign-off as this period of spending is very quiet. This will change in September when staff purchase additional items, or required staff training, to support the needs of the new and existing pupils.

We have sent back to the LA £100K from the Castle@Theale budget as we have not had the need to spend it yet. However, we will still have access to this over the next few years as the spend on running the new site increase .

AC asked about the top up funding from Oxford CC. AA confirmed that it has all been agreed and that it will be paid in July and included in the 2023/24 accounts. The delay has been due to staffing issues at OCC.

AA reported that there were 17 issues reported in the finance Audit. HC and AA have reviewed the report. AA and JG still need to meet to go over some of the points raised in the report. AA did respond back to the Auditor on some the issues raised and he has only just received their response back and has not had a chance to look through it. Once he's done so **AA will report back to the F&P committee in due course.**

10. Policies for ratification

The following policies were agreed and ratified.

Policy Document	Proposed	Second
Attendance	JH	HC
Early Years Foundation Stage	WB	JD
Teaching & Learning	JD	WB
Allegations against staff, volunteers or career	JH	CK
Code of Conduct	WB	AL
Induction Policy	JD	HC
Work related stress	CK	JH
SVFS	HC	CK
PPG Support Fund	JH	HC
Internet Access	PJ	JD
Bullying	WB	PJ

JH advised the board the there will be an update in the Admissions Policy which will be reviewed by the S&C committee in Autumn 2023.

11. Safeguarding update and signing of central register

WB reported that she had had an update with CW earlier in the week and that aside from new staff all training is current and up to date.

We currently have 3 Looked After Children and are in constant contact with the families concerned.

CW has spoken to WB about the increase in workload they now have following SS handing over some aspects to the school to deal with. JW added that there is no longer a My Family Support Team within SS, and we are just lucky that we have a Pastoral Team to help with this extra work.

JH said that this is a national issue impacting on families as SS are finding it even harder recruit and retain Social Workers. Also, EWO's are being reduced.

WB is to sign the SCR.

12. AOB items

- **Bungalow**

JH advised that this building on the Love Lane site is no longer fit for purpose, and it is planned to demolish it and put in four new classrooms there. Architects have been in to look at the site and will be submitting their bids in due course.

The LA are hoping for this to be completed by September 2024. It is planned to be a quick build as the structure will be built off site with the hope works can start October 2023 and will not impact on the rest of the Love Lane site.

It is hoped that KS4 will transfer to the new classrooms with the remaining classes moving over into the existing classes.

- **Surplus**

At the last Headteachers Meeting, surplus was brought up by a member and that schools with high level of surplus should hand it back to the LA. Our surplus is explainable and as such JH will be writing a report to justify our £105K surplus and why we need to keep it. **JH agreed to send the report to governors for information and would let governors know if anything else was required.**

- **Academization**

JH wanted to make the board aware that Academization was something we should look at again in Autumn 2023. WB said that she and JH had investigated this some years ago if anything further happens with this. If anyone is interested in assisting JH with this then please let WB know so if needs be a subcommittee can be set up specifically for this issue.

- **Governors**

WB announced that sadly AL will be resigning from the Board of Governors. WB took this opportunity to thank AL for all her support to the school over the past year.

Also, WB did mention that she is planning to hand over her role as Chair of Governors to HC in the Autumn term.