



The Castle School

A SPECIALIST COLLEGE FOR COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

Love Lane, Newbury, RG14 2JG

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MINUTES of a meeting of the Full Governing Board held on Thursday 27th June 2024, 5.00pm, Held at Castle School, Love Lane Site

Present: Helen Cabell (Chair, Co-opted Governor), Jo Davis (Staff Governor), Charlie Kowalski (Parent Governor), Jon Hewitt (Headteacher), Adrian Crawford (Parent Governor), Nicola Markham (Co-opted Governor), William Alexander (Parent Governor), Indira Hann (Co-opted Governor,) Atul Attra (School Business Manager)

Apologies: Jane Gray (Clerk) Helen Amner-Munslow (Parent Governor)

In attendance: Caroline Whitlock (Deputy Head), James Whybra (Deputy Head) Helen Rogers (Finance Officer to act as Clerk)

Indira Hamm (IH) did a walk around of our Love Lane Site with Atul Attra (AA).

1. Apologies Received

Apologies received from Jane Gray (Clerk), Helen Amner-Munslow (Parent Governor) has resigned and has left the Governing Board. The Governing Board are seeking to recruit for a parent and co-opted Governor and have placed an advert to the world of work and Facebook. Governors were asked if they knew anyone who could join the Governing Board.

2. Declarations of interest for this meeting

None declared.

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

None

4. Minutes from the last meeting, 21st March 2024, and matters arising.

Governors briefly discussed the challenges around getting accurate recording of minutes from the last meeting. They raised concerns that the minutes may be inaccurate on the website and these are visible to parents/public. Jon Hewitt (JH) to discuss this separately.

Old Bungalow development. JH reported that it is very doubtful the development will meet the September 2025 target which is frustrating. JH also stated that The Castle School will not be increasing pupil capacity until this development is fully completed – potentially September 2026.

Governors asked about the car parking at Love Lane and it was confirmed that this will be discussed separately on the Agenda (item 5).

Governors enquired about the MUGA works JH stated a contractor has been engaged for the summer holidays.

JH was asked by the Governors about Exclusions which JH confirmed he would cover in the HT report

5. Committee Reports

The Governing Board briefly covered the Committee Reports. Governors were reminded to read all the committee reports prior to the FGB.

- Premises Committee (18th April 2024)

Charlie Kowalski (CW) presented a summary of the current premises projects from the Premises Committee;

The sensory room installation was completed in summer holidays at both P16 and Castle @Theale by Mike Ayres Design.

As previously discussed The Castle School achieved 95% on the Health and Safety audit as the school have robust plans and procedures in place.

JH briefly spoke about the car parking situation at the Love Lane site and informed the Governors that this is being monitored regularly and staff that leave before 2.30pm are asked not to park in the side parking spaces. Both staff and parents are reminded park sensibly and the site team are assisting to manage the car parking on a regular basis. Governors agreed that car parking will always be busy and problematic and that most schools are in a similar situation. The Love Lane site does not have any local roads that can offer additional short term parking which is why most parents try to drive onto the site to drop off and pick up.

West Berkshire Council (WBC) school transport team visited Love Lane site on Wednesday 26th June 2024 and AA spoke to them. WBC confirmed that they are not increasing school transport/vehicles to the Love Lane site due to a lack of funds so new pupils will join existing school transport/vehicles. AA stated that this will help with the car parking/traffic congestion on site as not increasing vehicles but Senior Leadership Team (SLT) along with the site team will monitor car parking/traffic regularly to ensure it remains a safe site. There will be some changes to home to school transport for P16 as these pupils will be encouraged to use public transport longer term.

WBC school transport team asked AA to consider if The Castle School would utilise own mini buses for home to school transport. AA confirmed that this is not a viable option at present.

Caroline Whitlock (CW) spoke about the parking at Castle @Theale in the long term because pupil numbers will increase so staff will need to encourage parents to use local parking rather than drop off/pick up on site.

- Finance Committee (18th April 2024)

Charlie Kowalski (CW) presented a summary of the Finance Committee;

CW stated that AA has finalised the budget for end of year and the underspend was explained. Governors were reminded that Castle@ Theale was a separate budget. CW briefly outlined the underspend of £236,000 which was due to vacancies across the school and then the overspend in cost centres for unplanned maintenance and air con units. CW highlighted the Energy saving of £29,000, but this is still to be confirmed but energy costs are reducing overall. AA has reduced budget spending in some learning resource areas which was covered in summarisation in budget. JH talked about the staffing costs that have little movement but the biggest impact. Helen Cabell (HC) spoke about the budget surplus and the impact that might have on the school (covered in AOB)

- Curriculum Committee (16th May 2024)

Nicola Markham (NM) presented a brief summary of the Curriculum Committee;

JH confirmed he has removed the HT report from the Curriculum Committee and this will be covered in FGB. However, should JH have anything to report to the Curriculum committee it will be in future reported under Any other Business (AoB).

NM stated that World Of Work (WOW) and careers will not a permanent item on the Curriculum agenda and will be covered FGB.

Anna Scholl is working hard on Artsmark and NM reported there was a lovely exhibition at the Discovery Centre, Thatcham during may half term and asked all Governors to be supportive of future events. James Whybra (JW) confirmed that Governors will be included in the next creative arts letter from The Castle School.

- Staffing Committee (16th May 2024)

Nicola Markham (NM) presented a brief summary of the Staffing Committee

NM confirmed that The Castle School staffing is in a much better position than previously noting that the SEN allowance has given the school some stability. Castle @Theale is currently fully staffed but there are a few vacancies for September 2025 with ongoing recruitment happening now.

NM confirmed that Jane Gray (JG) will work with Governors to ensure all relevant training is completed. NM attended Exclusions and Suspension training and has completed her skills audit. HC will complete her skills audit by 01 07 2024. **Action HC**

NM confirmed that The Castle School currently has stable staffing levels. JH confirmed that 3 recent leavers (2 SA/1 HLTA) were organic losses with no underlying concern about why they left. One was a promotion and left for alternative employment. Theale recruitment is trickier and JH confirmed it is high risk for JH and Governors. Theale grows by 6 pupils each year and Governors asked how many staff need at Castle each year, JH and CW stated that Castle @Theale need 4 staff plus any specialist staff each year dependant on pupil needs. CW and JH both stated there is pressure from the LA to increase pupil numbers.

6. Headteacher's Report (JH)

All Governors were sent JH's Headteacher's Report prior to the meeting and JH asked if governors had any questions. JH spoke about the recent OFSTED inspection which he stated was challenging and quite tough in the deep dives but JH felt the inspectors were fair but thorough. Inspectors spent time at all 3 Castle School sites and focused on lots of detail. JH believes they saw everything they needed to. OFSTED provided very positive feedback with exemplary feedback for Castle @Theale. This was despite observing pupils with some challenging behaviour but JH commented that the inspectors wanted to discuss all aspects of that and felt they understood the whole essence of the provision at The Castle School. Governors agreed that the outstanding status was an incredible result and rightly deserved. William Alexander (WA) asked when The Castle School might be inspected again and JH thought it would be at least 5 years until inspected again. In the future OFSTED will not be giving single word judgements. JH confirmed that the Castle School may be involved in a SEN inspection as part of the Local Authority but no other formal inspections. Caroline Whitlock (CW) stated that the feedback from staff about the OFSTED experience was good. Staff stated that they felt supported and that SLT understood their experience. JH particularly liked that the OFSTED inspectors introduced themselves to staff throughout the visit. Staff feedback from OFSTED was incredibly positive.

Suspensions and Exclusions. JH has slightly changed the recording process which allows for a clear plan. JH to show HC an anonymous record. JH stated that suspensions and exclusions are only used where needed as The Castle School try to manage pupils with a change of environment. Exclusions

are used as a protective consequence not as punishment. Adrian Crawford (AC) asked to raise a few issues over wording and will send these to JH. **Action AC**

Governors asked about the number of MyConcerns raised. Caroline Whitlock (CW) confirmed to Governors that the increase in MyConcern cases were due to attendance issues now being recorded not an escalation of issues so the data is not worrying. OFSTED reviewed The Castle School non-attendance and JH stated that the school absence is below national average and attendance is above national average. JH to add some context around the number of MyConcern numbers as part of a wider conversation about what is being reported. The Castle School staff continue to be vigilant and report as necessary.

7. Policies for ratification

The following policies were agreed and ratified. JH previously advised the Curriculum Committee that the Relationships and Sex Education policy was due for review this term, however, when OFSTED visited a few weeks ago, they requested that the new version needed to go onto the website as soon as possible. Therefore, HC agreed to delegate review of this policy to JH to ensure it went on the website and therefore it did not need to be considered at today's meeting.

Indira Hann (IH) asked if the staff exam malpractice procedure could be clearer in terms of the 10 working days – when does that date start. JW to amend and send to JH to make that change.

Action JW

CW advised that the Behaviour policy was reviewed annually to assess the key changes. This policy has been completely rewritten to focus on therapeutic principles, responsiveness and The Castle School looked at the behaviour tools that we use. Governors were informed there was a section on boundaries added to support staff around pupil consequences. CW talked about the use of mobile phones taking a pragmatic approach in different areas. CW worked alongside our Educational Psychologist when rewriting the behaviour policy. NM asked about the term 'Hazing' which is a cultural/USA term where persons are initiated into a group where they may take part in intimidating or inappropriate acts or tasks which can be seen as bullying.

JH informed Governors that The Castle School have been advised by Judicium to retain and follow the Whistleblowing Policy from WBC as we are a maintained school.

Policy Document	Proposed	Second
Fair Assessment (required)	JH	NM
Internal Moderation (required)	JD	NM
Behaviour	JH	JD
Exam Malpractice (required)	WA	CK
Whistleblowing	NM	CK
Governor Expenses	CK	JD
PPG Support	JH	NM
Minibus Policy	JD	JH

8. Safeguarding update and signing of central record (Single Central Record – SCR)

NM stated how important the SCR is and to inform Governors that Cassy Clark, HR Officer has worked really hard to get the SCR up to date. The whole safeguarding of the school starts with the SCR. OFSTED were satisfied with the SCR, even the 3 gaps which Cassy Clark has accounted for. NM has signed off the SCR for this term.

CW stated that Safeguarding training was all up to date and a new cycle of training will commence in September 2024. Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) changes are not finalised, (draft form), but there may be changes to definitions and adding indicators for early help/ support for young people and their families before they hit crisis point. Other additions will focus on parents who are offenders and young people who have multiple exclusions. CW talked about 'my family plan' for young people and the limitations to support if only the school is involved. KCSIE not affected by any change in central government in any outcome of the general election. JH advised the Governors that WBC are updating their Safeguarding guidance. Education Welfare are overseeing that at present. The Castle School follow WBC lead in terms of safeguarding guidance but there may be a definition change to reflect taking action to enable children to have best educational outcomes. JH believes the monitoring systems will stay the same. The Castle School are using Smoothwall to monitor internet usage as some pupils are particularly vulnerable to online content. James Whybra added that our new internet provider is better in terms of the filtering system as much faster response so that online safety can happen in real time.

HC asked if the Safeguarding policy was too generic. General discussion followed that OFSTED suggested that as a maintained school we should follow guidance from WBC. CW stated that as a school we engage with the LADO and other Local Authorities so that our pupils/young people are safeguarded within that policy. JH confirmed the Castle School will retain the WBC Safeguarding Policy.

9. Governance and Training

- Upcoming training and training needs (JG absent so discussions deferred)
- Meeting Dates for 2024/2025 – provisional dates have been circulated. JH explained that the meeting dates set are linked to Budget setting deadlines and Easter holidays. Governing Board agreed the dates. JH reminded Governors that FGB meetings will be face to face on site, the same for strategy/budget setting but committee meetings can be held online
- Site Visit Reports – nothing to report

10. AOB

- School Development Plan (SDP)

JH presented the SDP for a single year, building on reading and communication which is central to everything we do. JH talked about the quality of staff training and that The Castle School is aiming to be better to offer training that is more targeted to staff needs offering a training programme with real depth – not one size fits all. JW spoke about the in-house Leadership development sessions led by SLT that have been really popular with at least 14 staff attending. The sessions were open to all levels of staff across the staffing structure for anyone looking for some support and advice to develop leadership skills.

JH commented on Objective 4 Curriculum Documentation and the desire to have documents that are clear so if a teacher joined they could teach immediately without the need to do in-depth planning or spend time having staff input. JH said the aim is to have 4 year curriculum cycle written/termly overview with clear objectives but not prescriptive.

JW spoke about Objective 5 – Artsmark. The Castle School are not rushing the process but long term we are on track to achieve this award.

JH stated the SDP is a 3 year plan but changes in education will impact this. The Castle School will always take pupils where we can and there will be approx. 200 in September. JH advised that The Castle School is over capacity but staffed adequately. Castle @Theale are operating at the right level. There are empty classrooms but that does equate to unfilled places. Castle @Theale will grow and increase as planned until 2027.

JH briefly mentioned the Long Term Outreach development. The Castle School will continue to provide advice in a professional capacity only, we will not be setting up HUBS. Primary schools may seek support in conjunction with The Castle Support and WBC.

JH spoke to Governors about the long-term plan for Castle @Theale recruitment, it could become a critical risk as it is harder to recruit staff to work with young people with SEMH.

- Surplus Balance Clawback

JH talked through the challenge with budgets in connection with the funding for the High Needs Block schools across the UK. Governors discussed the Local Authority surplus balance clawback and the reasons why. JH provided some context around this topic as another local school has a large surplus, (51%- £3 million) and the impact that has on other schools. The Local Authority have appealed to the Department Of Education so budgets from 31/3/2024 will be subject to 10% clawback. HT Funding Group meet 02 July 2024 and JH will report back to Governors as soon as is practically possible and arrange an emergency FGB to discuss outcomes.

JH and AA have asked the LA to remove Castle @Theale budget from the overall budget assessment which then reduces The Castle School surplus to less than 10% and have written to the LA. AA and JH to discuss banding per pupil with LA as this has not been sufficient for many years leaving the school underfunded. The Castle School will post a deficit for end 2025/26 next financial year (April 2025). There will be a small surplus but clawback compounds this. Governors asked if the Private Fund/financial gifts were included in the calculation of the surplus but AA confirmed these funds were not affected as not part of school budget.

- Ofsted

OFSTED discussions covered in item 6 – HT Report (see above)

- Consultations

JH is receiving about 15 consultations per week. JH talked about the challenges as there are very few places in special schools. JH has consulted on 320 applications this academic year, some as far away as Slough/West London (case law 45 mins for primary child to travel to school). JH will keep reporting back to Governors as necessary.

HC would like a raise a topic to discuss in closed forum – teams call **Action HC**

11. Date and Time of the next FGB meetings.

Finance Committee –Thursday 4th October 4.30pm on Teams
Premises Committee –Thursday 4th October 4.30pm on Teams
Staffing Committee – Thursday 10th October 4.30pm on Teams
Curriculum Committee - Thursday 10th October 4.30pm on Teams
Full Governing Board – Thursday 14th November 5pm – Castle @Theale
(site walk Castle @Theale to be arranged this term)