



The Castle School

A SPECIALIST COLLEGE FOR COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

Love Lane, Newbury, RG14 2JG

Tel: 01635 42976, Fax: 01635 515725

Minutes of the Full Governing Board Meeting

Held on Thursday 14th November 2024, 5pm, at Castle @Theale

Present: Helen Cabell (HC) (Chair) (Co-opted Governor) (*via Teams*), Nicola Markham (NM) (Vice Chair) (Co-opted Governor), Jon Hewitt (JH) (Headteacher), Jo Davis (JD) (Staff Governor), Adrian Crawford (AC) (Parent Governor), William Alexander (WA) (Parent Governor), Chris Fisher (CF) (Co-opted Governor), Charlie Kowalski (CK) (Parent Governor), Emily Owles (EO) (Co-opted Governor), Atul Attra (AA) (School Business Manager), James Whybra (JW) (Deputy Headteacher), Caroline Whitlock (CW) (Deputy Headteacher), Jane Gray (JG) (Clerk)

1. Apologies

Indira Hann (IH) (Co-opted Governor), Jane Seymour (JS) (Co-opted Governor)

2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair to the Full Governing Board

Being the first Full Governing Board (FGB) of the new academic year, a vote was held for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair for 2024/2025.

Chair – John Hewitt (JH) nominated Helen Cabell (HC) for the role of Chair. All voting Governors agreed unanimously with this nomination.

Vice Chair – JH nominated Nicola Markham (NM) for the role of Vice Chair. All voting Governors agreed unanimously with this nomination.

Therefore for 2024/2025, Helen Cabell will be Chair of the Full Governing Board and Nicola Markham will be the Vice Chair.

Jane Gray (JG) mentioned that she was awaiting confirmation from Governor Services as NM raised a question with regard to Chairs/Vice Chairs not having to be voted on every academic year, instead they can serve a term, for example a period of three years, before another election is held for these roles. As a result, JG advised that the Standing Orders will be presented to the next FGB.

3. Appointment of new Governors to the Board.

Tonight, the existing Governors were able to meet two of the three potential new Co-opted Governors. Chris Fisher (CF) and Emily Owles (EO). Unfortunately, Jane Seymour (JS) was unable to attend and sent her apologies.

After introductions were made, the existing Governors who were present were asked if they approved the appointment of CF, EO and JS. Unanimously, all agreed in favour for CF, EO, and in her absence JS, to join the School Governing Board.

Afterwards JH added that the different skills that each new Governor brought to the table will expand the skills range of the Board further. JH said that he had sent HC an email earlier outlining which committees the new Governors would be best suited to sit on. Unfortunately, HC did not

have a chance to look at his proposal prior to this meeting and will get back to JH with her thoughts as soon as she can.

4. Declarations of interest on items pertaining to this agenda

None.

JG did mention that she has had all the Declarations of Business Interests returned from Governors and will update the relevant documentation so JH can get the website updated.

5. Any other business items to be raised at this meeting.

None.

6. Minutes of last meeting, 27th June 2024, and matters arising

HC asked if anyone had any queries with regards to the minutes from the last meeting held in June. As there were none the Minutes were signed off.

With regards to the matters arising, the MUGA has now been completed and was noted at the last Finance and Premises Committee (F&P). Also, the issue with regards to parking at Love Lane was raised at that meeting and an update on this will be provided as part of Committee Updates, Item 7, along with an update on the old Bungalow.

With regards to Exclusions and Suspensions Jon will touch on this as part of Headteacher Update, Item 8.

7. Committee Updates

HC requested that the Chairs for the following committees provide an update following their last committee meeting.

Staffing

NM informed the Board that staffing levels across the whole school were good and currently meeting the school's needs. She mentioned that CW was extremely pleased with her new DT teacher B Jones. Some Governors who were able to join the tour of the site prior to this meeting had the pleasure of meeting her.

NM did mention that due to a couple of members of staff who are leaving, or have left, two roles will be merged to become one. The Pastoral Lead, Jackie Hogg, will be retiring at the end of the year, and our Behaviour Therapist, Megan Beckingham has already left. Therefore, it made sense to merge these two roles into a Pastoral and Behaviour Lead as they fit together well but also it helps make a saving on the Staffing Budget. JH informed Governors that the interviews have happened and Kayleann Christensen has been appointed to the role and will start in January 2025.

NM mentioned that there is now a requirement to have a Governor who has been trained in cyber security. Jo Davis (JD) agreed to do the training and she confirmed to the Board that she has completed the online training for it and recommended for other to complete it. JG will follow this up and provide details to Governors.

NM also added that last week she attended a course where she met the new Director of Education and SEND for West Berkshire (WB) Neil Goddard, who is keen to visit all schools. NM said that following the course she contacted his PA who assured her that a date would be arranged. JH added that normally they would contact him for a date and time and agreed to have a chat with NM about this following tonight's meeting.

Curriculum

NM said that there was a discussion with regards to the Declaration of Business Interests. JG had reported that at that time of the committee meeting she was still outstanding some. However this evening JG confirmed to the Board that this has now been completed for all Governors with just the declarations for school staff outstanding.

With regards to Safeguarding NM said that CW updated the committee on the number of incidents that have been added to MyConcern. She also mentioned that CW informed the committee that the new Safeguarding Policy has been completely rewritten by WB.

At the time of the committee meeting JG reported that some Governors had confirmed that they had read Keeping Children Safe In Education, Part 2 and JG confirmed tonight that all Governors, including our new members, have now read the document.

NM advised the Board that at the time of the last Committee she had met with Cassy Clark (CC) to look through and sign the Single Central Record (SCR). For the benefit of CF and EO, JH explained that the SCR is a centralised record of all the pre-employment checks conducted on staff, including teachers, support staff and volunteers and detailed their qualifications and that their DBS checks are completed and are up to date. It is the most important record and is the first document that Ofsted will always inspect. It forms the foundation for everything at the school. To sum up the SCR, CW added that it is the window into your safeguarding culture.

Before getting the update for Finance and Premises, HC asked if anyone had questions for NM. Atul Attra (AA) said that NM mentioned that the SCR is checked and signed off six times a year. His understanding is that it should be done three times a year, prior to the next FGB meeting being held. JH explained that there might be some confusion of the term "School Terms". The Government still refers to a school year being made up with three whole terms. Whereas schools class each half term as a whole term, therefore making six terms per academic year. Because of this we updated the Terms of Reference (ToR's) to say that each committee and FGB meet three times a year instead of each term, otherwise we would be required to hold the relevant meetings up to six times during the academic year. However, JH said that we need to double check this as in Government Legislation it doesn't define what a "School Term" is. NM did say that she did have a look online and had a chat with CW about this and NM is happy to meet with CC six times a year to go through and sign off on the SCR. CW said that she will look into this and come back to the Board to confirm if it is three or six times a year. NM needs to go through this document.

Premises

Even though Adrian Crawford (AC), Chair for Finance and Premises, was not able to attend the last committee meeting, using the minutes he updated the Board on what was discussed.

Current projects are progressing well. The MUGA, as mentioned briefly in Item 6, has now been completed.

AC mentioned that some flooring and fencing has been replaced. New car park lighting has gone in at Post-16 and other lighting has been replaced at Love Lane, which has seen a reduction in our energy use go down.

Health and Safety is on track, with the next inspection not due for another three years.

Discussions on the Old Bungalow were had and will be discussed further at this meeting under Item 12.

Finance

Clawback was mentioned at the last meeting and will be discussed in more detail under Item 12.

At present we are on track with the Budget for this year and AC thanked AA for all his hard work to achieve this.

A brief mention was made on pay rises which will be discussed further in Part 2 of this meeting.

Currently the Private Fund is stable as not much movement has happened on this account. AC did mention that there have been some thoughts around a minibus, which AA confirmed will take place later in the year if we are successful with our application.

Friends of Castle (FoC) have a new committee so are now managing that. FoC have produced a form so staff can start making applications for funding.

8. Headteachers Report

Along with the Agenda for tonight's meeting, JH Headteacher's Report was circulated to all Governors. This gave them the opportunity to read the report and to bring up and questions they have tonight. HC asked, for the benefit of our new Governors, if there was anything JH wanted to highlight. JH described the report as being like a "State of the Nation" and highlights some, but not all, areas of the school. For example, staffing and management. It also has a full year analysis of Pupil Progress. However, this will possibly be the last year of it being in this comprehensive format due to more and more Frameworks being introduced and is something that will need to be discussed further this year.

JH mentioned to the board that pupil progress, especially in the Pupil Primum group, are doing well and when compared to others in this group nationally, either mainstream or SEND, are doing significantly better.

Currently pupils who are EAL (English as an Additional Language) have very complex sensory needs so their progress is slower. Having looked at the data on this for the past few years there is no real cause for concern. Unfortunately, the way the school are now having to drill down in different groups is making it more difficult to compare pupil progress data and JH will need to find a way to present this information to Governors going forward. As CF said JH needs to find a way to benchmark the children, when in effect there is no benchmark. Surprisingly JH said that when Ofsted came in earlier this year they didn't want to see the progress reports, even though he and the Senior Leadership Team kept offering the reports for them to look at. All they wanted to do was look at the pupils workbooks to view progress.

Other things in the report JH highlighted was Curriculum and detailed information on Safeguarding, as well as Suspensions and Exclusions. There is also other information which JH adds in to help the Governors understand what is going on, like with the Student Council, Mentor Groups or World of Work (WOW).

William Alexander did mention that he was listening to a podcast which featured the new Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson, and the way she felt education needed to go. WA thought it was very much like our WOW program in preparing older pupils better for the workplace.

AC asked about the staffing levels and the levels of staffing leaving. JH confirmed that we are currently stable with staffing numbers and we are now back to pre-pandemic levels. This is also reflected in the reduction of job adverts we have going out. AA did add that there were a couple more adverts that went out recently as three people who were offered a job didn't start in the end due to various reasons.

NM asked that under Suspensions and Exclusions did the headers mean the number of days, weeks or terms a pupil was suspended for. JH clarified that that it was days, not weeks. He also added that one was from Castle @Theale and two were for Love Lane. JH also explained that any suspensions made are for the protection of the education space or pupil safety. If this happens then the school will work with the pupil and their family to draw up a plan for their return to the classroom.

AC queried what DBV was in the report. JH clarified that it meant Delivering Better Value. DBV has been going on for some time and is due to be completed by the end of the year. At present

there are 70 Local Authorities involved. The objective is to reduce the number of bandings that are currently used across Mainstream and SEND and ensure that fairer funding is given to schools. Every pupil is allocated a band, depending on the type of school they attend and their needs. It is hoped that the number of bands are reduced, and the same amount of funding is paid regardless of the type of school setting they attend. JH mentioned that we are now the only maintained SEND school in WB and that he has some staff to help assist in this review. JH assured AC that he will keep the Board updated on this as and when he has any updates to report back.

JH also took this opportunity to confirm that the LA's plans on Clawback, where schools were expected to return any surplus in their budget above 10%, has now been shelved. This whole scheme was handled very poorly by the LA and they also realised that they were not going to get the level of money they had hoped would be returned. In the end there were only two schools who had to repay funding, Brookfield returned £1.5m and a small primary school who had to return £5k. As a result of the LA's U-turn JH suspects that we will not hear anything on Clawback for at least another ten years.

9. Policies

WA said that he had a couple of queries with regards to direct links to some references in the proposed policies and had emailed JH earlier with them. JH confirmed that he has already updated them and the updated policies have been placed in the Policy folder.

Therefore, the following policies have now been ratified.

Policy	Proposed	Second
Child Protection and Safeguarding	NM	JD
Careers Advice	WA	NM
Exclusions	JD	NM
School Uniform	JD	NM
Social Networking Guidance	WA	AC
First Aid	AC	JD
Pay Policy	See below note	
Private Fund	CK	WA
16-19 Bursary	NM	CK
GDPR	WA	AC
Lettings	AC	CK

The Pay Policy was deferred to Part 2 for ratification.

10. Safeguarding update and Signing the Single Central Record (SCR)

CW and NM met termly so CW can give her an update. One of the big things that has happened was WB doing a complete rewrite of the Child Protection and Safeguarding policy which has now been adopted by the Board at this meeting.

CW is still attending the WB Safeguarding Partnership. However, due to the areas that the different services who attend there is a lot of crossovers with other local LA's. Therefore the one for WB has now been merged into one larger Partnership with Reading and Slough. Obviously, CW will keep the Board updated with information from these meetings as and when.

CW confirmed that there is no change to the way Safeguarding is managed. At present there has been 551 incidents logged on MyConcern. Last year at this stage in the year it was around 500. The increase is that all pupil absences are now logged on the system. For the benefit of CF and EO, CW explained that the system is where information on wellness and health, issues with behaviour or peer on peer incidents are logged along with any safeguarding concerns that have been observed or reported to a member of staff.

CW reported that at present we have four Children in Care (CiC) and one who has a Care Protection Order (CP). CW and James Whybra (JW) are the nominated teachers who attend any meetings that are held for these children.

Since September CW and JW have attended two strategy meeting where multi agency referrals have been made.

11. Governance and Training Update

Following the Suspension and Exclusion course that Nicola attended earlier this year it was agreed that it would be useful for all Governors to attend the next one. Unfortunately, JG advised members that at this time Governors Services have no plans to run another one anytime soon. However, in September Governor Hub released an online workshop for this and all Governors have been sent the link for this. It is around three hours long and can be completed in bite size chunks.

JG advised that as soon as she has the new email address for CF, EO and JS, she will also send them the link for this, along with the online Prevent Training.

With regards to the Universal Safeguarding training JG will get CF and EO added to the list and will check to see if JS can attend the next one being held on the 27th November.

At this time Governor Services have yet to publish the training dates for the Spring Term so JG is unable to let the new Governors know when the next New to Governance sessions will be. As soon as she has that information, she will contact CF, EO and JS.

All Declarations have been received so she is now able to update the relevant document, so JH can get it up on the website.

12. OB Items

Clawback/Delivering Better Value

This update was given in Item 8, and there was no further information to add.

Old Bungalow Rebuild

With the need for the LA to add extra places for SEND children, the site where the Old Caretakers unused Cottage was will be turned into extra classrooms. At present the project is expected to be complete in September 2025. JH feels that it might be ready for then as long as there are no delays to the build. Therefore, to ensure that children have classrooms to go into JH is planning that pupil numbers will increase from September 2026.

At present JH is under pressure to increase numbers due to the increase of applications for a place being made for children with EHCPs. Since July he has received 88 applications. Even though he has not yet been directed to take a child, it is only a matter of time. At present he advised the Board that there are three applications for appeal going before a tribunal. Unfortunately, we cannot say that we are full as a reason for not taking a child.

It is hoped that the new classrooms will give us up to an extra 40 places. However, due to the increasing number going on to Post-16, which is a small site, he might have to use some of the new classrooms for those students.

AA mentioned that a contractor has now been appointed and it is planned that the works will start in January. Which will mean they have 36 weeks to complete the build with absolutely no room for any delays. One of the big issues they will have to deal with is the old Horse Chestnut tree. Unfortunately, this tree is the only one with a TPO on the Love Lane site. If there are no delays and everything does go to plan, it will leave us a very tight turnaround to get the insides furnished ready for the start of term next September.

Other reasons that it will be best to delay till September 2026 is we will need to employ the extra staff that will be needed but also, we need to order all the equipment to fit out the classrooms and we simply don't have the space to store it until it can go in into the new building.

JH added that the other reason this project has been slow going is that there is a shortage of staff, and the knowledge bank that goes with it, as a number of staff have left WB over recent months.

HC asked JH when he would need to start staff recruitment if we are going for a September 2026 start date. JH said that we would start during the spring term 2026. By then he will know what children will be joining in the September and what their needs will be.

13. Date and time of next meeting

Finance and Premises Committee, Thursday 23rd January 2025, 4.30pm, to be held on Teams.

Curriculum and Staffing Committee, Thursday 30th January 2025, 4.30pm, to be held on Teams.

Full Governing Board, Thursday 20th March 2025, 5pm, to be held at Post-16.

14. PART 2

For this Item HC requested that all non-voting members of staff and Staff Members of the Governing Board leave the room. Therefore, the first part of the meeting was brought to a close.