

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body
held in the school at 6.30 p.m.
on Wednesday 8 February 2017

No. 2016/2017 - 3

Present: Mark Broadbent (MB, chair), Lia Campos (LC), Patrick Coughlin (PC), Jo Coward (JC), Canon Eugene Harkness (EH), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), William Merrick (WM), Janet Muir (JMu), Jo Wager (JW), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

Apologies for absence: Graham Hughes, Sally Livesey, Larry Binns (observer)

1. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Wednesday 23 November 2016

Confirmed.

2. Matters arising

None.

3. Reports from termly briefings/training/subcommittee meetings

LC and MB attended the termly briefing. There was an update on Ofsted's planned focus, and also on Cambridgeshire's performance relative to the national averages, which is improving but still lagging behind. An update on Safer Recruitment stated that schools need to improve in this area; an audit revealed that several Cambridgeshire schools had had teachers start work without a DBS check having been completed. The new funding formula was also discussed; this will result in a 40k decrease in the lump sum from next year, but increases in SEN funding. A postcode scale is also being introduced, whereby pupils from areas considered to be more disadvantaged will attract more funding. LC visited the test link that aimed to predict the outcome, and the likely impact on St Alban's is not as great as might be feared. JMcC had also received this information, which suggests that there will be no change in St Alban's funding. The Governors' Hub was also demoed. Other schools in the region are also struggling with teacher recruitment. A charity that pools teacher interviews was mentioned.

JMcC presented a few key issues for resources, that committee having not met since the last meeting. BCR carry-forward looks to be around 36k, a decrease from last year; the school has been instructed to spend 7k from DFC money, which it is intending to spend on 13 refurbished laptops. The conservatory extension was delivered under budget by c.3-4k, so this surplus has been used for resources.

Two rounds of direct recruitment and the use of an agency to identify a replacement for the Year 5 teacher had both proved very difficult. However, a supply teacher has been offered a short-term position until the end of the summer term, with an option to review at Easter (the contract is with the agency rather than the teacher). The school will continue to advertise for a permanent post from September; if a high-quality candidate emerges who is able to start before September, then it should be possible to appoint earlier. An email will go out to parents tomorrow. If the candidate

had not been considered to be of sufficient quality, the backup plan of splitting class teaching between JMcC and JMu would have been employed instead.

JC reported back from Performance & Standards. The current, updated (January) predictions were scrutinised, further informed by Anne Fisher's KIT visit. Unfortunately, the English advisor was unwell and so had not yet carried out her visit. These predictions showed a slight dip, reflecting firmer, clearer data. The subcommittee identified a new group of potentially vulnerable pupils that, while not actively disruptive, were not as engaged with their learning as might be desirable.

In addition, there was a sense that some parents were less engaged with their children's learning than other cohorts; discussion of this aspect centred on a sense that the school's usually excellent results were producing a certain amount of complacency amongst parents. The P&S subcommittee suggested something like the Vision Evenings that have been held in the past, outlining the expected performance by year group and inviting parents' thoughts and input as to how they could support their children's learning more effectively. P&S will be meeting again in March after the English advisor's rescheduled visit. This will be the fourth meeting of the subcommittee this year, and it is expected that at least one, and potentially two, more meetings will take place next term. EH asked whether there were any examples of super-engaged parents who could be drawn on for advice? JC felt it was a fluctuating thing; changes in the maths curriculum had seen a lot of attendance at workshops, and attempts to organise events at times that people are able to make have not made a lot of difference. EH wondered if perhaps such super-engaged parents could be brought into such evenings as 'champions' of a more active approach?

JMcC commented that he had seen a decline in parental attendance at, for example, class masses, Advent services and Friday assemblies. With regard to homework, the homework club was set up because children were persistently not bringing in homework. JC felt that such an evening needed to be planned quite carefully, to ensure it was something that motivated parents to come, especially those beyond the 'usual suspects'. LC asked if it had anything to do with changes in the population? Geographically, pupils are coming from a smaller area because competition for places is so strong. JMcC speculated that perhaps induction of new families had been less stringent than it used to be, and stressed that standards could not become a blunt instrument. WM commented that there was a lot of disillusion with the curriculum amongst parents last year, but JMcC noted he had very poor turnout for the curriculum workshops that he organised. JC suggested that organising such a thing could be delegated to Performance & Standards, to come up with a plan for something to be held in the summer term. Clearer expectations of the partnership between school and home might need to be communicated.

ACTION: Performance & Standards to discuss possible activities to improve parental engagement.

4. Headteacher's report

The intake for admissions is down by comparison to previous years, and includes only six siblings, which is unusually low. There was speculation that this might be a dip in response to rumours of oversubscription. If this continues next year, however, this might be cause for concern.

Attendance is being scrutinised particularly closely by the LA, but the school has hit its target. Letters are being sent out to parents of pupils with persistent attendance issues. There are three children on FSM, the lowest ever.

The LA is conducting an investigation into Health and Safety in community schools. JMcC has used the tool to assess St Alban's performance, resulting in the identification of some areas that need work. This report will be brought to Resources to identify potential action points.

EH informed the GB that Fr Peter Raj is now on staff at OLEM, and will be with the parish for five years. He has been a priest for 18 years, and EH has asked him to take over school chaplaincy duties from Fr Alex. Fr Peter will also be looking after sacraments of initiation, which is a major point of continuity. The Stations of the Cross will be celebrated instead of class masses this term. The suggested changes to recording mass attendance for first holy communicants will not be implemented this year. EH said that he has used it at St Philip Howard in connection with confirmation, where he had observed parents wanting their children to be confirmed without being willing themselves to participate more fully in the church community. WM was keen to clarify that these changes related to OLEM's proposal regarding mass attendance in support of first holy communion, and did not relate to admissions policy. JMcC noted another Catholic school that was considering holding its FHC classes outside school hours. JW felt it was completely appropriate for the school to communicate its expectations of support and engagement (and mass attendance) to new parents as part of 'induction'. EH agreed that it was very much part of the ethos of the school. JMcC has suggested a Friday afternoon mass which parents might be able to attend and get to meet the chaplain etc.

ACTION: EH and JMcC will discuss a Friday afternoon mass with Fr Peter.

MATs are not currently a major priority, with most attention focused on school bids and the diocesan mass. EH noted that on the subject of after-school clubs, the parish is trying to initiate a music school, as part of which there is a desire to start a junior choir. Piano lessons are also being offered.

JMcC is very concerned about the vulnerability of St Alban's. If external support for standards was reduced there are limited backup options; recruitment and retention of staff is concerning. He would strongly urge governors to revisit the question of MATs with a view to joining or creating one to ensure its future. The new school bid includes provision for the new school to be part of a MAT with St Alban's, to ensure its sustainability. JMcC would like the GB to increase pressure on moving this forward. MB felt that until the outcome of the new school bids process was known, it did not make sense to press forward with this. Julie O'Connor feels after discussion with the DfE that this is a critical point for Catholic education in Cambridgeshire. The outcome of bids is not likely to be known before the summer. Other dioceses are seeing their MAT structures being dictated by the diocese itself, although this is not yet happening in Cambridgeshire. LC asked if we should join Newmarket and Haverhill? This would be a viable plan if the bids did not go ahead. JW asked if there was work to be done that could take place regardless of the bid outcome? JMcC said there was a process of parental consultation that needs to be undertaken regardless, and this could be begun now. LC noted that this consultation could be an extra opportunity for engaging parents.

JMcC proposed that the GB invite Flavio Vettese to a meeting to outline the process of consultation. EH suggested we could talk to other schools that have been through the process. LC also pointed out the LA's extensive collection of documents on preparing to become a MAT. JMcC said the formation of the MAT would also strengthen the bids, and it would still be possible to merge the trust with the Newmarket and Haverhill MAT if the bids failed. Jonathon Lewis (Deputy Regional Schools Commissioner) will be speaking at Sacred Heart at 2 p.m. on Tuesday 14 February, and JMcC would be happy to take a party up to attend this. PC commented

that if the statement was included in the bid, St Alban's should accelerate the process of agreeing. MB suggested a meeting to discuss whether St Alban's should form a MAT company, with several possible outcomes (3-5 schools in this area). JC recommended that a working group be put together to organise the paperwork so that everyone was able to feel thoroughly briefed on this. WM emphasised that the parental consultation process should be meaningful and any points raised during that process should be considered carefully. Thursday 20 April was proposed as a potential date for an additional meeting.

ACTION: JMcC to propose some dates to Flavio.

5. Complaints procedure

A completely new model policy has been proposed, which has been discussed at Performance & Standards. It was agreed that a governors' appeal panel for face-to-face discussion with the complainant would not be introduced, and that with that one adjustment, MB would propose the policy; JC seconded, and it was unanimously adopted.

6. Feedback from governor monitoring visits

LC has looked at RaiseOnline data, and has written a short summary.

Other governors are in the process of arranging their visits. JW felt in the area of English, some of the things required by the new curriculum did seem very out of kilter with current expectations, and that there was a sense in which teaching was moving away from educating children broadly towards teaching them to pass tests. A replacement for the science lead will be identified in the summer term.

7. Update on school bids

The New Schools Network says that the Diocesan bids are very good and should go ahead. They are recommending community involvement in promoting the bids, and the Diocese have produced fliers that will be sent out to new parents. Mel Ward and Ian Peck in Cambourne are getting involved, and promotion is stepping up in Cambridge. Julie O'Connor has asked for ambassadors to toddler groups and nurseries to get them engaged and signing up.

There are already 400 free schools established of the government's stated target of 500; a lot of bids are going into this round, which inevitably reduces the chance of success. WM asked if we are successfully engaging the Polish community? JMcC has been in touch with the headteacher at the Polish school. Compared to the last new school bid, a lot more energy, enthusiasm and data is going into this effort. EH noted that the Kerala and Philippines cultural groups at St Philip Howard will also be very interested in these bids. JMcC is happy to offer the services of parents and staff at masses to support this. A batch of printed forms would be very useful. JMcC and EH will liaise and suggest dates when volunteers might be needed. EH noted that Sawston should also be contacted. JW noted that it is not a requirement to have school-age children in order to complete the form; it is therefore still valid for people to support the bids even if they do not have children.

8. AOB

MB is not available for the full GB meeting on 27 April; JC will chair.

MB will be attending the governors' conference; JC will also sign up, and LC is considering attending.

The Governor Advisory Group still has vacancies.

Governors' attention is drawn to the new recommendations that the school consult with the unions if changing any policies that affect HR.

Governors were also asked to consider attending one of the termly workshops to improve governance.