

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body
held in the school at 6.30 p.m.
on Monday 23 April 2018

No. 2017/2018 - 4

Present: Mark Broadbent (MB, chair), Lia Campos (LC), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Bill Merrick (WM), Janet Muir (JMu), Sarah Smith (SS), Jo Wager (JW), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk), Paul Bergin (Vice-Chair of Our Lady of Walsingham MAT), John Tuttle (Chair of Our Lady of Walsingham MAT), Fr Simon Blakesley (Director of Our Lady of Walsingham MAT), Teresa Selvey (CEO of Our Lady of Walsingham MAT)

Apologies for lateness: Jo Coward (JC)

Apologies for absence: Graham Hughes

Absent: Canon Eugene Harkness

1. MAT presentation and Q&A with Teresa Selvey & MAT representatives

The governing body welcomed Teresa Selvey (TS), CEO of the Our Lady of Walsingham MAT, and several of her colleagues, each of whom briefly introduced themselves. There are nine founding governors of the MAT. John Tuttle (chair) stated that he saw the role of the board as providing governance, but very much informed by the heads' operations committee; the directors expect a strong dialogue.

The trust proposes to evolve towards financial efficiency and clear lines of accountability, with additional funding released due to economies of scale. The directors recommended that schools do not take on long-term contracts if they are considering joining the MAT, so that they can benefit more rapidly from buying in to centralised contracts.

The board is conscious of the need to think about succession planning and staff development. A strategy session took place in Newmarket over the summer, looking at creating a rounded approach. An audit of staff development is proposed, with Catholic leadership development a priority.

In terms of proposed structure, executive heads are strategic and hold the head of school/headteacher to account; the head of school/headteacher is the parent-facing role. The executive head is also held to account for Ofsted. The trust is currently recruiting a Financial Operations Director, who will be responsible for finance, premises, operations, HR and GDPR. Finance managers within the schools in the trust will report in to that person. They are working with a consultancy at present for payroll services.

The board noted that it was necessary to remain a voluntary aided school in order to access LCVAP funding to amalgamate sites. TS then presented some confidential figures concerning budgetary projections, included the expected top-slice from member schools. Licence fees are high due to buying into an expensive finance system, PSFinancial; the MAT expects this cost to balance out as more schools join.

There are also professional fees for financial and HR support. This financial support will no longer be required from September, but HR will take longer to provide; the board would like to bring someone CIPD-qualified into the trust. They are expecting the in-year surplus to be “quite large”.

The projections presented to the GB did not include executive head salaries as this is a longer-term plan. Schools will pay a third-share of an executive head salary on top of the 5% slice. The “head of school” in this scenario earns a deputy head’s salary; there is no deputy in post (although the deputy head would need to be replaced with a class teacher), so the overall cost to any individual school is assumed to be reduced. If there is a headteacher in post, there will be no executive head. TS offered to model this for St Alban’s to demonstrate how the staffing costs might change under the different scenarios. Saving on staff costs is interlinked, giving staff professional development opportunities.

The first step towards joining the MAT is to pass a resolution to do so. This does not absolutely commit St Alban’s to joining, but would, the board members said, allow it to begin modelling with ‘real’ figures.

It was asked whether overall contact hours between heads and children would decrease? The initial position is a head and a deputy, evolving (under the proposed structure) to a third of an executive head and a head of school. The board members said that contact hours would increase, because the deputy would be replaced with a class teacher, so there would be a net gain of the one-third executive head contact time. This should be addressed in the proposed modelling. It was asked if the question of how long the MAT could be sustained with the current level of staffing before action needed to be taken could be addressed in the modelling? From the MAT’s point of view, it is necessary to focus on supporting schools that are furthest along in terms of being ready to join, otherwise there is a risk of resourcing issues.

The largest surplus in the trust at present is supplied by cost savings year-on-year from the school that has been an academy the longest. Schools in the MAT are not in deficit, and the smallest anticipated surplus is £38k.

Further comments from the MAT board included:

- Most of the members have been governors, and have worked through these questions themselves in the years leading up to this point
- There is a key obligation to the board to be able to demonstrate that each school is a net beneficiary as a result of the arrangement
- The MAT does not want joining to feel like a corporate takeover, but instead approached in the spirit of partnership, forming a family of schools, each with its own identity.

The MAT board stated that some costs (4.5k LA top-slice, 2.5k HR costs) would disappear as a result of joining the MAT. However, St Alban’s expressed the concern that if some services can’t be provided straight away, the school might be double-paying – through the top slice to the MAT that can’t offer services, and to a service provider to obtain that service that isn’t on offer. Board members stated that the MAT would work with schools to put together a realistic recovery plan if it looked as if any might be in deficit.

The board outlined an example of positive benefit to schools as a result of the MAT arrangement. St Louis academised as a single school in April 2013. St Felix went through the process in November 2016. At that point, it would not have been able to

pay its staff bill; St Louis had a surplus, and the board agreed a transfer across to cover this.

The chair noted that the full due diligence process would have to answer these questions, modelling the financial consequences of joining both for the school and for the MAT. The possibility of a reduction in school income had also been modelled (for example, the reduction in education services grants).

At the moment, the MAT has a finance committee, and is procuring an internal audit (by an external company). As the trust grows, it will establish an audit committee that has the expertise to do this without buying in (external audit is costly, but the cost per school will come down as more schools join the MAT).

The importance of the shared Catholic ethos was discussed. This is a decision not just for present children within schools, but for the future. There is expertise and commitment at St Alban's not just to this school, but to Catholic education across the Diocese. Fr Simon agreed that the MAT wants to provide continuity, but with a specifically Catholic ethos, and to develop within itself all the expertise required to support each other, encouraging teachers to stand alongside each other and offer peer support. This is already done within the LA (recognising common experience) but the MAT offers the opportunity to do so with a Catholic ethos. The difference of scale between the LA (210 schools) and the MAT (11 schools) was noted; also that St Alban's had never felt its Catholic ethos to be threatened as a result of support from the LA.

It was asked whether the MAT would have the power to close down a school (as the LA currently can)? Yes, this would be down to the Members – the Bishop, David Bagstaffe and John Tuttle. (There is currently a desire to expand to 5 members, but these need to be nominated by the Bishop.) The Scheme of Delegation will be explained at the meeting at St Benedict's. One of the governors thought they might be able to attend this.

TS discussed what St Alban's might offer the Trust: its excellent results, its faith commitment. The importance of school-to-school support, a lot of it under the guidance of the LA, was highlighted; this could potentially be accomplished in a similar fashion within the Trust.

It was asked who had the power to make decisions about numbers on roll? A consultation would take place: if there were money to fund an expansion and the space to do so, the proposal would go to the board, then out to consultation with the LA, and with other schools in the area. The Diocese was very interested in the Free Schools Project. Governors have a strategic responsibility to Catholic education. The importance of having clergy members involved in school government, because of their immediate knowledge of levels of baptism within the parish, and therefore likely demand for places, was highlighted. Being in a MAT would provide slightly more influence over the possibility of expansion, because of the relationship with the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Accessing grants and funding streams is specific to MATs in a lot of cases. Two MATs are being created because this gets past the magic number of 4,000 pupils in each Trust, meaning there is an automatic annual capital grant rather than having to bid for it; schools do not have to pay the 10% to the Diocese that they currently pay.

The opportunities for staff development for non-Catholics was queried. There is a limit: the head of school and any new deputies must be Catholic. The board members stated that this shouldn't stop schools identifying leadership development and

helping staff who are not Catholic to move in that direction. In the case of a non-Catholic deputy, for example, when a headteacher moved on to a new role, other models might be explored; it is conceivable that at this point, the decision might be taken *not* to appoint an executive head, but instead to replace the headteacher and continue with the existing model. This would be a Board decision. In general, the aim is to follow CES guidelines, which are supported by the Diocese. TS also noted that it was possible that a senior role in the MAT that didn't require a practising Catholic might arise, which would create an opportunity for non-Catholics to progress. If schools are not in a MAT, this might be imposed in a different way, but the MAT has been able to offer flexibility.

St Alban's clarified that in terms of modelling, it wanted to know, assuming its present staffing structure, and in the transition period towards full membership, what the finances as a whole would look like, and what the school would be working towards. TS proposed to present the results of this exercise to the next St Alban's full GB in July.

2. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Monday 19 February 2018

Confirmed.

3. Matters arising

ACTION: JC to re-draft minutes of November's meeting, based on the clerk's original draft.

As a result of GDPR, enquiries have been made to try to identify a service to support the school in ensuring it is compliant. The advice from the LA is that schools' existing practice stands a very good chance of being compliant.

ACTION: RB to doublecheck that information on safer recruitment training had been circulated to everyone.

4. Reports from termly briefings/training/subcommittee meetings

The Performance and Standards subcommittee met in March and received an update on targets and on the KIT. It discussed how curriculum resources are allocated between different subjects, and explored the setting up of case studies. The Resources committee had not met; an apology was issued for a lack of clarity regarding the cancellation. A new date was set for Tuesday 1 May, at 7pm, to scrutinise the budget. Performance and Standards agreed to meet again on Wednesday 2 May at 6.30.

5. Budget 2018-19

The budget has been circulated, but the Resources sub-committee has not yet scrutinised it in detail. The issue concerning a teaching-staff saving of 0.1 required to balance the budget was highlighted. It was proposed to carry out this scrutiny at the Resources subcommittee meeting, and then hold a full GB (for the meeting should be quorate) immediately afterwards to officially approve it.

6. Headteacher's report

The headteacher's report was tabled at the meeting.

ACTION: JMcC to circulate report after the meeting.

Key headlines for the meeting were: standards are looking good at KS2 level, phonics at foundation; KS1 standards are in line with national levels.

An EHCP statement is currently being applied for; if this is successful, it will be possible to hire a new TA.

A request was made to receive the headteacher's report more substantially ahead of the meeting, to allow for proper consideration in advance.

7. LLE Role

JMcC became a Local Leader in Education (LLE) about five years ago, which involved interviews and accreditation, as a result of which he has supported a range of schools. He enjoys this role, but does not want to feel that he is undertaking it without the support of the GB. It was suggested that the 'forward thinking' nature of this approach could stand the school in good stead during the MAT joining process. However, others felt that the main concerns were about the very late nature of requests, and the communication to the parent body. If it is likely to be a regular occurrence, it might be better to be upfront about it with the parent body at the start of the next academic year.

It was felt that there were flaws in the GB consultation process undertaken for this latest appointment; it was also felt by some that events of recent school years had caused upset and unease amongst the parent body. It would be more constructive to try to avoid being in a situation where such a change isn't all being communicated at the last minute. It was felt that if there was indeed a real shortage of LLE resource, it would be reasonable of the LA to agree to wait a little to allow for consultation; the GB would like to maintain the option to draw breath and consider these requests properly, especially when they are made at a point when governors are not necessarily available. It was also felt that the payment ought to be higher, as it currently covers only the days per term actually worked, and is not figured as a proportion of the school year. No parental concerns have yet been expressed to JMcC over this most recent appointment. It was noted that the GB has a duty of care to the headteacher; stress levels should be considered. The appointment does generate income, which is important in the current climate.

Governors agreed that while they supported JMcC's LLE role in principle, there might be limits to the specific arrangements the GB would be willing to endorse – particularly in reference to the particular time commitments and financial settlement – and it would like the time to consider each proposal on its own merits. It was proposed that in the case of future requests, the LA should be told that there will of necessity be a delay to JMcC taking up any such position, in order to allow for this consideration. JMcC noted that he felt confident that the school would be stable during any absence of his, and therefore usually felt comfortable accepting.

8. Safeguarding review

The online survey audit takes place on 5 May, with the governor with responsibility for child protection. Anne Fisher has also been asked to look at this as part of her KIT visit, and her recommendations are being followed through.

Meeting closed: 9.55pm