

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body
held in the school at 6.30 p.m.
on Thursday 27 September 2018

No. 2018/2019 - 1

Present: Gregory Burke (GB), Lia Campos (LC, chair), Canon Eugene Harkness (EH), Graham Hughes (GH), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Bill Merrick (WM), Janet Muir (JMu), Sarah Smith (SS), Jo Wager (JW), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

Apologies for lateness: Patrick Coughlin (PC)

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

LC offered to stand as chair, and was also nominated by SS. She has been involved in the governing body for three years now, has really enjoyed participating and would like to help. No other nominations or self-nominations were received.

In the discussion that followed, it was noted that LC had a genuine interest in the role, would provide good continuity, and always took the extra time to drill down and ask probing questions. Her deep commitment was also commented on. It was observed that her extremely regular attendance at mass and language skills were particular assets. LC was unanimously elected as chair, initially for one year, and the governing body collectively thanked her for taking on the role.

Regarding the vice-chair role, JW had some concerns about travel and also about a potential conflict with her desire to follow up the decisions made by the RSE working party, which she had found very disappointing; however, in the absence of other candidates, she was willing to put herself forward. She has been a governor for several years and has a legal background. WM commented that he was happy to deputise to run meetings if it proved necessary as a result of the distance issues; sub-committee chairs will also need to be elected following the departure of two foundation governors, who could also step in if necessary.

Governors made brief self-introductions for the benefit of GB, who was attending his first meeting as a governor rather than an observer.

2. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Monday 9 July 2018

There was a concern that perhaps some of the discussion of the MAT issues at the last meeting should be reserved given its potential sensitivity. The GB agreed, though, that it was important to demonstrate that there had been a great deal of careful thought, scrutiny and challenge going into the decisions that will have to be made. The minutes were therefore confirmed as circulated.

3. Matters arising

ACTION: RB to send first draft of November's meeting minutes to LC for review.

RB is still following up safer recruitment training with the LA.

The governing body self-audit did not take place; the governing body agreed to examine at its next meeting the possibility of carrying one out.

4. Reports from termly briefings/training/subcommittee meetings

LC will attend the termly briefings next week; no others had yet taken place.

5. Meeting dates for 2018-19

- Wednesday 7 November
- Thursday 7 February 2019
- Thursday 4 April 2019 (budget)
- Thursday 11 July 2019

Thursday 18 October was provisionally set for the first Performance & Standards subcommittee meeting; a Doodle poll will be sent out for the first Resources meeting.

6. MAT update

The school has received correspondence to inform it that the MAT is functioning, and focusing its efforts on the schools already in it. St Alban's has been invited to join, but cannot yet influence anything. St Laurence's has passed a resolution to join and is establishing a working party; St Alban's has been asked to do the same. The priorities are to focus on the Ipswich schools and the recent headteacher resignations.

The governing body agreed that it was supportive of collaboration for the MAT, and that the best approach was to initiate a working party and liaise with St Laurence's. The MAT currently has an expectation that the school will join in April 2019. There are concerns about the financial/budgetary side, and the frequency with which the aims and objectives seem to have shifted. The aim of the working party will be to create a path for St Alban's to join the MAT, by scrutinising the details and determining an ideal date. It was noted that more frequent meetings would be necessary to make this possible.

It was asked what the school could do if it transpired that it would be worse off as a result of joining the MAT, from a budgetary perspective. The school's budget is very difficult, and a deficit is forecast in future years. In reality, the services the school buys are a very tiny proportion of the budget, so the savings possible are similarly very small. The governing body did not have a great deal of confidence in the figures that had been provided so far. The working party should therefore try to explore different scenarios and their financial implications. It was suggested that St Alban's could look at St John the Baptist MAT to ascertain what benefits they have seen, or even go to a school outside the Diocese that seemed similar to St Alban's, and find out what their experiences had been.

It was agreed to establish the working party via email; it was felt it should meet regularly, and also needed to carry some weight. This is an internal working party before joining a working party with the MAT such as that proposed to St Laurence's.

Although the governing body has made an in-principle decision to support the MAT, it was not specific to this structure, and does not carry the formal weight of a resolution. Recruitment in Cambridge City is a real issue; the MAT would at least offer development potential, making posts possibly more attractive.

The working group needs terms of reference, an objective, timelines, and should look at finance, process, and risks & benefits (how the school perceives them and how it

can mitigate them). It was suggested that there should be something ready for the MAT in January. It should be possible to carry out the financial analysis without external advice, with some simple modelling using the school's own budget. The MAT is keen for St Alban's to join; the best approach seems to be to carry out due diligence, and ask for the school's concerns to be addressed. It was proposed that the working party should have some sort of report ready for the next main governing body meeting on 7 November.

ACTION: LC to suggest dates via a Doodle poll; those interested to self-nominate.

GH had stated his intention to stay on as a local authority governor long enough to see St Alban's safely established in the MAT. It was noted that there is one further foundation governor vacancy at present, and suggested that PC might consider taking this on given his intention to resign as a parent governor.

GB and EH excused themselves at this point.

8. Headteacher's report

There is currently one place empty in Year 6, but this was due to be filled on Monday. One child in reception has not yet taken up a place as they are not yet 5.

There has been good parental support during Mr Ostler's absence through illness. The cleaner may need to be employed directly because of pension issues; negotiations between Cambridge Cleaning Service and the cleaner are currently ongoing. Parental feedback was provided on some teething issues with the new caterers, Dolce, but portion sizes are better, and the ordering has saved at least 15 minutes on getting children through lunch. The 'green area' in the playground has been updated. New lights will be fitted thanks to a contribution from City Kids.

Rough sleeping is an issue again, with items being left behind in the playhouse. It was noted that if this does get worse, the school perimeter will need to be considered. Another governor commented that it had also caused problems with City Kids in the morning, with people feeling unsafe as a result of the rough sleepers. There is a contact at the council who can come and put up warning notices, but that person has not yet been approached. No damage has yet been done to the school. JMcC has been checking the school each morning in Mr Ostler's absence.

The school is keeping an eye on how the change in first holy communion policy is affecting children making their first holy communion. Only 20 families have registered, a third down on the normal total. Some have reportedly considered self-teaching. St Laurence's still carry out their FHC programme in school, but the new priest at St Laurence's will be transferring this to the parish. The Bishop believes the approach builds parish cohesion. It was commented that the character of the 9.30 mass at OLEM has changed, and no longer feels as welcoming to the children. Another governor noted that the school's programme is excellent, but is more expensive than the parish programme. It was reported that at St Philip Howard, catechists are leaving because they were unable to come to terms with the new arrangements. The Bishop has responded to letters from a cohort of families from Year 2 and to one family from Year 3. A working party of catechists and Canon Eugene had asked the Bishop's PA for a letter to give to parents.

One governor felt strongly that taking the preparation away from trained teachers and giving it to volunteers did not make sense. A teacher was paid overtime to deliver the programme last year. It was agreed that a letter should be sent under the names of those governors that felt able to sign it expressing disappointment at this progress,

as preparing for first holy communion was felt to be such a key part of what the school is about. While the school would of course never seek to prevent the parish from delivering a first holy communion programme, in order to ensure that children who are unable to attend St Alban's are still provided for, there are very strong feelings that the opportunity to receive instruction at the school should still be available. Pupils have greatly enjoyed the lessons, and it has been an important factor in school-community cohesion.

ACTION: JW to draft a letter and circulate for comment.

JMcC offered his thanks to JM and Mrs Rackham for their support during his time at St Luke's. This will continue until Christmas; St Luke's is seeking to join a MAT in February. The net income from school support to Swaffham was about £5k; unfortunately, the company providing Italian classes had collapsed, owing the school about £2k in unpaid rent.

St Alban's had a very successful year last year, and many promising things lie ahead.

LC excused herself at this point; JW chaired the remainder of the meeting.

9. Behaviour policy and protocol

The behaviour protocol has been updated to reflect the 'golden time' system. There was some confusion about the 'flow chart' elements of the new protocol; JMcC agreed to review the design in future. The policy refers to 'partner classes'; classes are paired together and can send misbehaving students to each other if necessary. Very few pupils lose golden time; the children are very well behaved.

10. Draft guidance for RE/RSE and Health Education

This was circulated ahead of the meeting. The guidance is phase-specific for primary; it was felt that it was not necessarily very age-appropriate. It was noted that it was a very important aspect of Catholic education to get right, and that the guidance as it currently stands could be very difficult to translate into lessons. There were concerns also about the working party recommendations that have been omitted. It was agreed to defer detailed discussion to the Performance & Standards subcommittee meeting.

11. Headteacher's performance review

Two governors are required for the headteacher's performance review, usually the chair and one more. LC and WM were both happy to volunteer for this.

ACTION: JMcC to request a date from Anne Fisher.

12. Review sub-committee memberships and link governors

Deferred to the next meeting.

13. Register of pecuniary interests

The clerk reminded governors to provide her with details of any relevant pecuniary interests if necessary.

14. AOB

None.

Meeting closed 21.03