

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 19 February 2018

No. 2017/2018 - 3

Present: Mark Broadbent (MB, chair), Lia Campos (LC), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Janet Muir (JMu), Sarah Smith (SS), Jo Wager (JW), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

Apologies for lateness: Patrick Coughlin (PC), Jo Coward (JC), Bill Merrick (WM)

Apologies for absence: Graham Hughes

Absent: Canon Eugene Harkness

1. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Thursday 23 November 2017

It was felt that it was important for the minutes of the last meeting to reflect the full details of the discussion that took place concerning MATs. The Diocesan stance had come as a great surprise, and it was felt to be not clear enough from the minutes that their decision, as delivered to that meeting, was effectively a fait accompli; also that it was very different from all the discussions that had taken place previously. There were concerns that it might appear that the GB had not sufficiently scrutinised the proposals. It was suggested to include in the minutes a more complete summary of the discussion, covering the actual concerns raised and the answers, if any, that were provided. It was also felt that minutes needed to be circulated more quickly after meetings, while governors' memories were still clear on what had actually taken place. Some potential rewordings were suggested and discussed. The GB has recognised that there is a degree of inevitability to the decision to join a MAT because of the external pressures on the school, but that decision has not yet actually been made.

ACTION: RB to send JC first draft of minutes, so that JC can prepare a version of the item of business in question to expand on the areas that governors feel need to be more strongly expressed.

2. Matters arising

None.

3. Reports from termly briefings/training/subcommittee meetings

At the clerks' briefing, the point was made that Ofsted had been concerned that some governing bodies were not demonstrating "sufficient challenge" to school management, and that it was therefore important to minute discussion wherever possible. The local authority had also reiterated its recommendation that governors should not be identified in minutes; it was agreed to adopt this approach in future.

ACTION: RB to ensure future minutes are anonymised.

The local authority will be offering a national governance development programme for chairs. The programme is free, and available to chairs of sub-committees as well as of full governing bodies, as well as to those that are aspiring to become a chair. Details will be available from the summer term.

At the termly governors' briefing, GDPR was discussed, and the replacement to RAISEonline (ASP). There is a data 'view' for the school, and also a version for governors that is anonymised.

ACTION: JMcC to set this up and circulate details to governors.

The national update from Ofsted for the spring term stated that the depth and breadth of the curriculum has been eroded thanks to the relentless focus on standards. There are also concerns about a lack of capacity within the self-improving, school-led system; within MATs, leadership is dispersed and financial efficiencies are not being realised. Governance is also a common problem in weaker MATs: the published schemes of delegation are not clear; there is ambiguity between the trust board and LGBs; and boards are overly dependent on school leaders, with too few trustees able to interpret data. These issues could form the basis of key questions regarding the future of MATs in the Diocese.

A performance & standards meeting was agreed for Monday 5 March, 6.30 p.m..

4. MAT update

Two meetings of the Heads' Operational Group had taken place, one before the appointment of the CEO, and one subsequently. The first meeting shared the vision of the MAT (as in the PowerPoint slides circulated previously to the GB). At the second meeting, the focus was more on the priorities of the MAT; contributions to the agenda were invited. The questions of leadership, financial implications, and structure formed the core of the agenda, but no clear answers were given.

Priorities for the MAT have changed. Two headteachers in Ipswich have decided to resign from their posts, and St Alban's in Ipswich received a 'requires improvement' inspection. The MAT needs to focus on ensuring that St Alban's (Ipswich) gets the support it needs; it will now become one of the first schools to join the existing MAT. St Louis, St Felix and St Mary's (all primaries) are now all in the Our Lady of Walsingham MAT. A Catholic head of school had to be appointed at St Felix to replace the departing teacher. Concerns were expressed around having to buy into the MAT without knowing the value of what it would provide, compared to the existing, already established relationships (e.g. school improvement, HR). There is also a lack of clarity over the leadership structure. There is a vision statement, but at present not the resources to take things forward. It was also noted that the agenda may well be changing; the free school bids might become an option once more, and the possible removal of the 50% cap is once again being discussed.

The meeting due to take place at St Bede's on Wednesday, which three governors will be attending, will include a discussion of how other Catholic MATs have been developing; in most cases, MATs have developed from existing clusters, or schools have been asked to join because of poor performance. In the long term, it was suggested, it would be beneficial to join a MAT because of the size and vulnerability of St Alban's (Cambridge); the LA is vulnerable financially, and St Alban's does not have a strong position within a cluster to help with back-office support and recruitment. There is a need for a cluster of schools to work together collaboratively; the 'hub' idea has some potential to develop a network to support staff development

and share resources. A number of schools are still not ready to join. There may still be room to influence the outcomes.

Governors felt that without a definitive statement on leadership structures and the financial situation, the governing body could not recommend beginning the consultation process around joining the MAT. It was agreed to write to Julie O'Connor and Flavio Vettese via email, requesting more detailed information on: the proposed management structure; financial structure/business plan; timescales for putting all this together; an indication of what a typical week might look like for a school after joining a MAT, in terms of its interactions with key MAT positions; and details of what the MAT can provide in terms of services/added value.

ACTION: MB to email Julie and Flavio.

PC had completed his action from the previous meeting to draft an information statement for parents concerning the MAT situation. It was felt by all to be an excellent base to build on when that point is reached, but that the situation is still too uncertain for the school to be able to speak to parents with confidence.

5. Headteacher's report

This was circulated just before the meeting. JMcC highlighted a few items. 95 families had requested a reception place, and 50 SIFs had been received. The number of late applications and electronic correspondence has increased. Attendance at tours has been high. Attendance is at 96.2% against a target of 96.3%. The number of EAL children has dropped to 32%. Anne Fisher had completed her KIT visit.

In terms of target setting, nothing of concern leaps out from the statistics; these will be further scrutinised at the performance & standards meeting. The new staff are settling in well. During the Easter holidays, repairs will be made to the pipes, as well as to the wall. There are some concerns about security after the school day, during afterschool activity. The Health & Safety group were asked to discuss this. The general public are making more use of the car park, which needs to be managed. The arrangement with Thongsley Primary has ended.

The PFA are excellent, and very effective fundraisers; the governors offered their thanks.

There are some concerns that there is not the capacity to give some non-foundation subjects the same coverage as core ones, in terms of monitoring them to demonstrate clear impact. However, JMcC is still confident that the curriculum is being appropriately delivered. School priorities include leadership and management, with a 360 evaluation of the senior leadership team to take place. The Pupil Premium and Sports Grant impacts need to be closely monitored.

The funding picture is changing again. The Schools Regional Improvement Board has access to £100 million taken from the £140 million previously earmarked for building new free schools. The Diocese would apply to this Board for additional funds for MATs in cases of need. Single academies, or schools in other circumstances, would either not be eligible for funding from this pot, or would be extremely unlikely to receive it. Separately, a bid had been made to the Cambridge School Improvement Board in conjunction with St Laurence's to improve reading resources, but this bid was unsuccessful.

For the first time, St Alban's is approaching the end of the financial year with very little carry-forward. The present staffing structure is not sustainable, and

replacements for any staff vacancies that might arise will need to be very carefully considered.

JMcC offered his continued thanks for the support and hard work of staff, parents and governors.

6. General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

These regulations come into force on 28 May. Child protection services and EPM will support the school. At the termly briefing, a simple template was provided to follow, outlining what the sensitive areas are and what to do about them.

ACTION: LC to email template and presentation.

A data protection policy will be needed; hopefully EPM will be able to provide a model.

7. Safer Recruitment training

In total four governors (including two staff) have attended this; there is some uncertainty as to how long it is valid for without needing to be refreshed. The new office manager will also be trained.

ACTION: RB to continue to press the LA for clarity on how often this training needs to be refreshed.

8. Admissions policy

The Diocese has provided a standard admissions policy for us to adapt. Which parishes should be in the oversubscription criteria, since the merging of Sawston and Cambourne? It was agreed to state OLEM, St Philip Howard, and OLOL & St John Fisher.

The option of random selection was discussed as a tie-breaker within criteria, and it was decided to retain 'crow flies' distance for the meantime, with the option to review at a later date. It was noted that there is ambiguity in the definition of the parishes served by the school and this will need clarification if the tie breaker changes to random selection.

9. AOB

Governors were reminded of the annual conference on 24 March, to be held at Swavesey Village College.

The LA's budgeting resources have changed and so the preparation for the budget is not as far advanced as it would ordinarily be at this point in the academic year. Monday 12 March was agreed for a resources meeting, to be held at 630. It was decided to retain the 23 April meeting despite one governor being unable to attend, in order to meet the budget timetable.

Meeting closed: 8.57 p.m.