

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 24 April 2019

No. 2018/2019 - 4

Present: Gregory Burke (GB), Lia Campos (LC, chair), Michael Birdsall (MB), Patrick Coughlin (PC), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Janet Muir (JMu), Sarah Smith (SS), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

Apologies: Bill Merrick

Absent: Canon Eugene Harkness, Graham Hughes, Maria Goodall, Jo Wager

1. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Thursday 7 February 2019

Confirmed.

2. Matters arising

JMcC has not heard from Helen Bates regarding school liability; the Diocese paid for the drains work that took place. Liability rests with the LA until the school joins a MAT; it would be useful to have this formally confirmed, though.

ACTION: JMcC to confirm liability with Diocese.

JMcC has not been able to get hold of Rosemarie Sadler to enquire about Section 128 checks for governors. The inclusion co-ordinator has resigned; the new inclusion co-ordinator will be working Mondays only until next term.

3. Budget

The Resources subcommittee had been unable to formally meet prior to the full governing body meeting, but several drafts of the budget were discussed informally in non-quorate Resources meetings, with the final draft being presented at this FGB. It is very hard to set a budget early (before month 13). Month 13 showed a carry-forward of approximately £13k in the most recent draft. JMcC, Mrs Monument and the school's financial advisor have worked together to balance the budget. Month 13 shows actual figures of what was spent; this influences what is allocated to various cost centres.

Revenue income figures do not change much (if at all) year on year. The Pupil Premium is likely to go down in the next couple of years as the number of children on free school meals will decrease. It was asked whether the contributions towards school trips matched exact costs? The school has made a commitment of £1k towards these. The Sports grant might not be awarded next year, but has been retained in the budget for the time being. This pays for professional coaches, part of the swimming lessons, the Schools Sports Partnership (tournaments), sports equipment and a proportion of personnel.

The PFA could potentially increase their donations or reconsider how they spend their money. It is also worth considering the possible expansion of City Kids into school premises, or even St Alban's taking it over, to generate more income. This discussion was adjourned to the Resources committee. It was queried whether the dual role of governors that are also on the board of City Kids might produce a conflict of interest? This was believed not to be the case.

Funding is always based on the previous census, but cannot increase further as the school is at maximum capacity on roll. It was asked why the pension figures (16% and 22%) were different to the 11% standard contribution? These calculations are received from EPM, which populates the budget toolkit with these figures. Most of the school's budget (87%) goes on salaries. There is little that can be done about these costs without redundancies, which would be the responsibility of the school (including redundancy pay).

'General curriculum' includes, for example, textbooks – materials that can be used to develop the curriculum. This is controlled via scrutiny from the head, office manager and resources committee. Lines in the budget can be restricted at a certain point in the year in order to balance it; this tends to happen around February. It was felt that budget scrutiny was useful to reassure all concerned that there would not be an overspend at the end of the year, and if (for example) decisions need to be made around increasing teaching assistant cover. The first £6k of an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP), for example, has to be covered by the school, so the school might choose to re-deploy existing TAs rather than hire a new one in the event of a new EHCP being issued for a child. Office managers have had a key role to play in developing the budget and taking some of the administrative load away.

Subject budgets have been affected; these pots are subject-specific to cover e.g. subject-specific training or teacher release. Music is such a significant sum because of the additional activities that take place: MX Band and the Shakespeare Festival. The sum for computers was queried; current computer equipment is ageing and will need replacing in the not-too-distant future. Devolved Formula Capital funding could be used for this; this requires approaching the Diocese.

Photocopying costs have gone down thanks to Mrs Monument re-negotiating the contract; this sum covers in the region of 6 copiers. Financial advice has been limited for the last 6 months, down to one individual as the company had not recruited.

Educational visits costs are greater than the contributions received; the school cannot rely on parents all being able to pay. The FSM charge needs to be verified as this should be Dolce, not CCS. Some pupil premium children receive music lessons out of the pupil premium fund. Gas and electricity costs have come down significantly as a result of the investment in solar panels.

The aim is to keep the budgetary carry-forward at around £13k. However, next year the school's projected spend is £40k higher, all of which is associated with staffing costs. This can only really change with staffing changes, but turnover has been relatively low at St Alban's (until the last few years). Reducing staffing profile to core staff alone only saves £26k. It was suggested that increasing the top-line figure was the only way to go to ensure sustainability. This is the bare-bones necessary to give each child the experience that all children have had. This has been the picture for the past 8 years, but the worst has not yet come to pass regarding a budgetary shortfall; circumstances and policies change over the course of the year, and funding can unexpectedly materialise. The carry-forward 12 years ago was £45k.

JMcC will keep an eye on the predicted carry-forward, monitoring cost centres for overspend. If a TA resigns, replacement will be unlikely; existing staff will have to be intelligently re-deployed. Redundancy still implies costs and is very bad for staff morale. Not much money goes towards school trips, so cutting this is not a realistic option. Generating additional income seems the most fruitful possible route. Heading straight into the MAT to access shared services is unlikely, as the MAT does not have capacity. The 'top slice' might be negotiable, though, based on the recent experience of St Laurence's. The teaching expertise at St Alban's is superlative. A governor commented that he would not support the hiring of NQTs for purely budgetary reasons; they would have to be the best people for the job.

It was suggested that a proper discussion of revenue generation should be deferred to a resources sub-committee. The revival of the St Alban's Foundation is another possibility; it is currently dormant. This is a pure vehicle for donations, not active fundraising. Parents do not necessarily appreciate the school's financial position, and might be willing to donate more if they were aware. It might be possible to discuss with the PFA the re-deployment of the funds that they are trying to raise for the playground redevelopment. If communication is as clear as possible from the governing body to the PFA, it seems likely that they would be willing to work with school priorities. The School Development Plan and strategy need to be discussed. The School Development Plan did include the refreshment of the playgrounds. A date for the Vision Evening (organised by the FGB) that is as early as possible would seem to be a good idea; the Vision Evening involves parents, teachers and interested parties helping to identify priorities that will lead to the setting of a new strategy for the school and the design of a school development plan. Working with the PFA requires establishing their buy-in for a joint vision, and they are to be commended for what they've achieved in terms of fundraising. The school could look at innovative ways forward, such as sponsorship (look at the American university example).

The LA will accept this budget, but a MAT would not, because it would require the budget to be balanced over three years.

The governing body approved the school budget plan (proposed by LC, seconded by PC) for the financial year 2019–20 with total spend of £967,600.

4. Reports from termly briefings/training/subcommittee meetings

SS attended safer recruitment training.

The Performance & Standards meeting had scrutinised the results data. It was commented that the skills of the teaching assistant in compiling the data were invaluable. Governors would like to be able to make a qualitative judgement in addition to quantitative.

ACTION: JMcC to circulate St Alban's High School in Ipswich's proforma for governor visits; LC to circulate the NGA guidance.

JW is monitoring RE & PSHE changes, and will likely feed back at the next P&S meeting.

The MAT working party was informed that St Laurence's will join the MAT on 1 September, and met with Flavio and Julie O'Connor. JMcC shared an update from the last meeting with Our Lady of Walsingham MAT and head teachers, which projects St Alban's will join in September 2020. St Laurence's joined primarily because of the reduction of the top slice from 5% to 3%. There will be no financial

benefit to St Alban's from joining the MAT, and the concern is that standards will drift towards the middle ground.

SS and LC will be attending the termly briefing in May.

5. Safeguarding audit/update

The child protection audit still needs to be done with JW and Anne Fisher. The school has until October to complete this.

6. RE inspection feedback

The RE inspection went very well. Governors passed on sincere congratulations to the rest of the staff.

7. Vision Evening date

Wednesday 22 May was proposed as a date for the Vision Evening. MB may be away in NYC. The same format as previous years should be used, with 5–6 areas set up for discussion, including the school improvement plan, teaching & learning, and community. GB, LC and MB are happy to be in a working party to devise the programme. There was some discussion of the best time to begin the evening to ensure maximum participation.

8. Head teacher's report

30 reception places have been allocated, with 31 on the waiting list; the total on the waiting list across the school is 57.

Letters have gone out to parents of children whose attendance is under 94% (34) - this is not all families, as some persistent absence is due to illness. EAL status may not be being accurately collected, which does have an implication for budget.

Miss McEwan has resigned.

ACTION: JMcC to circulate Catholic Cluster notes.

Canon John Minh comes into the school but is only available on Monday, and 'belongs' to St John Fisher at Cambourne. There is currently no participation from OLEM in school activities. It was suggested that perhaps priests from other less busy parishes might be able to help with the school faith life?

Cambridgeshire Primary Heads have issued a statement on lack of funding. Successes for the school have included Year 4's Sing for Your School and netball, where the school is city champions with both A and B teams. The pupil chaplains have been doing excellent work in leading worship.

9. Schools Financial Value Standard

This has been completed and signed. There are a couple of actions for which volunteers might be needed (checking invoices).

10. AOB

Is it possible to set sub-committee meeting dates a year ahead as well?

ACTION: LC to propose a timetable for sub-committee meeting dates.

JMcC and LC can use the Outlook shared calendar to make sure all these dates are captured.

The school needs to make sure it is compliant ready for Ofsted (for example, including policies on the website).

LC is taking part in an NGA course for Chairs and would like to adopt the Vision Evening as the FGB project.

ACTION: RB to circulate the link to Outlook 365 and details of governor emails; passwords to be requested from Flower.

Meeting closed 20.39