

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 11 September 2019

No. 2019/2020 - 1

Present: Michael Birdsall (MB), Lia Campos (LC, chair), Patrick Coughlin (PC), Maria Goodall (MG), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Bill Merrick (WM), Janet Muir (JMu), Sarah Smith (SS), Jo Wager (JW, by phone), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

Apologies: Gregory Burke, Canon Eugene Harkness, Graham Hughes

GH's term as local authority governor expires in November, and he has expressed his intention not to renew for a further term. He will join the MAT meeting on 2 October, however.

1. Chair and vice-chair – confirmation of term

LC confirmed her intention to remain as chair for a maximum of 3 years. JW felt that she should step down as vice-chair for this year given how difficult she was finding it to attend meetings at present, although she would be willing to stand again once she was back in Cambridge full time (likely at the end of this academic year). PC is willing to step up as vice-chair for the next year, but no longer. LC offered her thanks to both JW and PC.

2. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Thursday 11 July 2019

Confirmed.

(Amendment subsequent to the meeting: JW had in fact sent apologies for the July meeting, but this had not been noted in the minutes.)

3. Matters arising

Link governor reports were circulated.

GB's letter of thanks to teachers on behalf of the GB was excellent, and LC offered particular thanks to him for producing this.

LC will circulate the MAT working party precis before the meeting on 2 October.

MB had offered to look into Raspberry Pi devices as a possible replacement for the school iPads. The 3b seemed suitable, but has recently been superseded by the 4b. MB will continue to investigate, and discuss with JMcC and Flower. The school has offered a code club run by students from local universities (based on Scratch); it would be good to revive this given it had previously been praised by Ofsted.

4. Reports from termly briefings/training/subcommittee meetings

Dates for the September termly briefing have been circulated. Several governors had recently met to conduct the governing body self-evaluation exercise, RAG-rating each question and taking note of the 'actions needed to improve'. Overall, the working

party felt that the GB was doing a good job. Recommended improvements included, for example, review of the school development plan; potentially creating a development plan for the governing body; centralising a record of governor training; and so on. The long-term vision of the school and how that ties in to the development plan is a central focus of the evaluation framework. Governors need to be looking at the vision and judging the development plan, and ensuring that the latter supports the former. Regular RAG-rating of the development plan would be a simple way of quickly monitoring how the school is progressing.

The evaluation will be circulated to the full GB. It was felt that certain questions should form standing agenda items, to be reviewed at every meeting. It was suggested that the three core aims of a GB of 'vision, finance, standards' should form the framework of each meeting agenda, and it was also proposed that the sub-committees should be re-organised.

5. Meeting dates for 2019-20

It was asked whether the GB would need extra meetings to handle the MAT transition? It was proposed that this should be discussed on 2 October after the MAT team's elements of the meeting have been concluded.

2 October - FGB meeting regarding the MAT, with Flavio Vettese and Teresa Selvey attending (no ordinary GB business)

7 October - Vision Evening review and presentation back to parents, to be tied to the AGM of the PFA if possible

Full GB meetings:

- Thursday 14 November
- Monday 3 February
- Monday 27 April
- Wednesday 8 July

It was proposed that a discussion of subcommittee membership should be held before setting dates. A new chair is required for the Resources sub-committee as GH is stepping down. MB was willing to take this on, but noted that he would not have much availability in the next month. LC proposed and MG seconded his appointment. SS was willing to switch committees to step up as vice-chair of the Performance and Standards committee, with WM continuing as chair. MG offered to join the Resources sub-committee. Sub-committee memberships are therefore as follows:

Performance & Standards: GB, LC, JMcC, JM, WM (chair), JW, SS (vice-chair)

Resources: MB (chair), LC, PC, JMcC, MG

Sub-committee meetings:

- Performance and Standards - Monday 28 October, 630
- Resources - Tuesday 29 October, 630

Dates for the remainder of the year will be set at the first meeting of each sub-committee. It was proposed that dates of the GB meetings should be shared with parents.

ACTION: JMcC to include governing body meeting dates for the year ahead in the parents' newsletter.

It was agreed to prepare collectively a short precis at the end of each meeting for speedy circulation to parents (to become a standing agenda item).

6. Schools Financial Value Standard

It was proposed that the Resources sub-committee should decide at its first meeting how to divide up the scrutiny of the SFVS across its meetings, with a corresponding shorter debrief to each full GB of the discussion.

7. MAT update

The meeting on 2 October with Flavio and Teresa Selvey, as well as one of the directors of the MAT, is confirmed. It was proposed that the GB should have a clear idea of questions to bring to this meeting, to avoid re-treading the same ground as previous meetings of this type. It was proposed that questions should be collected ahead of time, so that any that have already been answered can be dealt with, and so the MAT is aware of the GB's requirements. It was felt that in particular the GB needs detailed data: for example, exactly how much the school would be paying, and what they would get for it. What evidence can be provided of the impact the MAT has been having so far on standards and finance? An example of a school's budget has previously been shared, but was inconclusive in terms of demonstrating the impact of the MAT. It is likely that the GB will be told that detailed information on financial impact is difficult to provide because the MAT is still young.

It was noted that a school that required improvement that had then improved as a result of joining the MAT would not be a suitable analogue for St Alban's. If there are no high-performing schools in the MAT, what evidence can the MAT provide that the high performance of St Alban's will continue to be maintained if it joins? A governor asked if it was known why St Laurence's had suddenly joined? The agreed drop in the top-slice percentage requested may have been a factor, as was St Alban's high school joining the MAT, since it has a large budget. Previously, there have been concerns about collaboration across the different regions combined under the MAT.

What is the process for de-merging from the MAT if it proves to be a mistake? There is none, and the Diocese has stated that St Alban's should join the MAT. It is not believed, however, that there is a legal reason that the school might be compelled to join. The landscape is likely to be subject to considerable change in the coming year: there will be a new Bishop soon, and likely a new government; MATs have suffered from much bad press recently. The GB requires robust evidence that standards will be maintained. Until the MAT can demonstrate satisfactorily that standards won't drop, the school should be wary of joining; given the changing climate, might it be possible to remain in this holding position for the year ahead? How sustainable is the staffing structure? How does the school maintain the confidence of parents and the performance of the pupils? The MAT currently takes up a lot of GB time; is there a way that the GB's position can be made clear after the meeting on 2 October, and no further discussion to take place over the course of the academic year? Financially, the GB needs clarity on the size of the top slice, and where that money is going to come from, in detail, with real numbers attached. None of the other schools in the MAT have outstanding status, as St Alban's does. It was suggested that the MAT should be asked what advice it would offer to St Alban's to improve, and what, in detail, could it bring to the school to allow it to do so?

What vulnerability does the school have right now? If the head teacher were to leave, and there were difficulties in recruiting a new head, the MAT would be able to put in place a head of school. But without joining the MAT, St Alban's has already recruited very successfully; if the school joins the MAT, it would be subject to the MAT's recruitment policy. One governor felt that the timing was critical; the option of joining is a good insurance policy, but if the reasons for joining now are not clear, the school could potentially delay. What would be the consequences of not joining the MAT this year? The only way standards would drop would be if the MAT tried to impose a framework for pedagogy that differed from the usual St Alban's approach. However, it was noted that the financial plans were significant, in that it might have staffing implications that had a knock-on impact on standards. When the school's budget was sent to the MAT's financial director, it was informed that the St Alban's budget was not sustainable. Since joining the MAT, have any schools had an enforced staffing restructure? What guarantees remain that St Alban's will be allowed to retain the same staffing structure? St Alban's has the barest of management structures. MAT savings derive in part from the change in headship, with head teachers with reduced powers and corresponding reduced salaries. Leadership cannot be accomplished exclusively by policy. Any executive head that was imported as a result of JMcC leaving would be an unknown quantity; the GB would lose any influence over the appointment of management of itself. The MAT could draw on its senior leaders from other schools within the trust, but the post would still be open to those senior leaders if St Alban's were not in the MAT.

To summarise, the GB's questions for the MAT focus on standards, collaboration and finance.

ACTION: all governors to forward questions for the MAT team to RB for collation by 25 September, to allow for possible circulation ahead of the 2 October meeting.

What the school needs to see is evidence of positive impact. It was noted that not all Dioceses are going down the route of MATs (Liverpool has been particularly vocal about not creating MATs).

(JW left the meeting at this point due to technical difficulties.)

8. Headteacher's performance review

Two dates have been suggested by Anne Fisher: 17 October or 13 December. The 17th would be preferable. A working party of LC, WM and SS will attend this (1 p.m.).

9. Review sub-committee memberships and link governors

All link governors were happy to continue in their roles. It was clarified that Environmental Studies also included responsibility for Geography and History, but subject leadership for these areas was still to be confirmed. As MG's link governor responsibilities also take in Art and DT, she will in future liaise with Mrs Paul as well as with Mrs Burrows (for performing arts). Link governor responsibilities are therefore as follows:

- English - JW
- Maths - PC
- Science - LC
- Child Protection - SS
- Inclusion – GB
- Early Years - SS

- Assessment & Planning - WM
- Environmental Studies - PC
- Geography and History - PC
- PE - GH
- MFL - LC
- Computing - MB
- Performing Arts - MG
- Art and DT - MG
- RE - JW
- PSHE - JW

JMu will ask teachers to contact their link governors to set up entitlement meetings, at which governors should update the entitlement document in collaboration with the subject leader. At Monday's self-evaluation meeting, setting up a rubric for monitoring visits had been discussed. It was noted that the NGA offers useful templates for these visits. It was felt it would be good for governors to also observe lessons if at all possible. The entitlement meeting should offer a framework to steer future monitoring visits.

10. Register of pecuniary interests

Governors were reminded to inform the clerk of any relevant pecuniary interests, which need to be posted on the website.

11. Safeguarding policy

The framework policy was circulated ahead of the meeting. Red text indicates changes to the policy from last year, and blue were questions asked by staff. No objections were raised to these changes; JMcC will re-format the text ready for formal adoption.

All governors need to sign the register to indicate they are aware of it.

ACTION: JMcC will bring the register to future meetings in order to gather the relevant signatures.

12. New guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education

This was circulated ahead of the meeting. All governors need to sign the register to indicate they are aware of it.

ACTION: JMcC will bring this to future meetings in order to gather the relevant signatures.

13. School Development Plan

The draft SDP, for the financial year from April 2019, was circulated ahead of the meeting. It is proposed that summarised priorities, previously RAG-rated in the headteacher's report, should now be rated by governors in full GB meetings. Reading is a priority under teaching and learning because reading is an Ofsted priority - particularly reading for meaning. How is reading tracked across the curriculum? The English co-ordinator will look at the curriculum maps that are being produced to determine what materials are being used to strengthen reading across subjects. The English subject leader is doing drop-ins to other subjects to see where reading is being promoted. There is a new team in Year 1 and Year 2, so maintaining

performance in phonics during this transition is a priority. It was asked who was the lead for KS1 and early years? This is still to be determined; it will be important to have someone in the post that has a clear understanding of the end-of-key-stage expectations. It might be that the school decides not to have a KS1/Early Years lead. It was noted that the question had previously come up.

The improvement of the KS1 playground was also mentioned at the Vision Evening, and should this not be included in the school priorities? This has not yet been formally agreed, and there is no funding available for it as yet. A similar list of priorities from last year included the refreshment of KS1, however. Is it necessary to specify KS2, or could it be left as 'refresh the playground'? Should the priorities only include things for which there is funding, or also include items that there is a need for even though no funding is available? It was argued that it did not make sense to make a priority of something for which there is no funding. As a result of the reduction in scope of the KS2 plans, might there not be some money available for KS1 after all? The development plan could include both playgrounds, but the priorities should include the immediate targets only. It is important that the school also has a clear framework for things for which it would like to raise money, and for which it currently does not have funding, so that there is a clear set of targets for fundraising.

JMcC has begun constructing a document for these priorities that can be quickly reviewed and RAG-rated. What resources are required to achieve these goals could do with fleshing out, as it is currently quite general. At present, there is only a one-year development plan, but the ambition is to build this into a three-year structure. The Resources sub-committee could take an action to fill out the resources section of the plan. From the Vision Evening, the school can extrapolate broad targets for the next three years, despite the uncertainty of the coming year.

It was proposed that the RAG-rated priorities should be circulated ahead of each full GB meeting, and scrutinised at the sub-committee meetings.

14. Pupil Premium report

The template received from the LA had been worked through, and circulated to governors ahead of the meeting. The school has only a small number of Pupil Premium pupils in the school, which makes it unfortunately easy to identify them, so an effort has been made to keep feedback vague. The plan needs to be approved and uploaded to the website. All governors consented. A brief narrative to support how the money had been spent was also supplied.

15. Capital Plan

JMcC ran through the action plan for capital spend:

- refurbishment of the staff room
- improvement of the KS2 playground
- replacement of the server
- replacement of iPads with new devices
- development of the play area in the wooded area/KS1/pond
- improving the lighting in the KS1 area

iPads are not currently being used to a sufficiently educational extent in everyday practice. The school needs to investigate devices that will meet a wider range of needs. The cost column is a rough estimate of money that might be needed to achieve this rather than an indication of the actual funds available.

16. AOB

The behaviour policy will be discussed at the next meeting.

The future of City Kids needs to be explored in the near future, and a working party established. SS and LC both volunteered to be on this. PC is also willing to be involved, and JMcC will contribute.

The PFA is now liaising with JMcC about the playground; they will be meeting once a week for no more than an hour. Future plans are currently unclear, but the initially suggested designs were not suitable.

Had the school received additional funding as recently announced in the Cambridge Evening News? This would not come in until April 2020, and is also not confirmed.

The NGA offers a skills audit tool, which it might be of interest for governors to complete. It was suggested that this could be completed by all governors before the November meeting, in particular given Graham's impending departure.

ACTION: RB to circulate the skills audit tool.

There will be a 360-degree evaluation of the chair as part of her NGA training programme - governors will receive an email.

There is a need to create an induction pack for new governors, and LC will investigate this.

Meeting closed 2107.