

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 14 November 2019

No. 2019/2020 – 2

Present: Michael Birdsall (MB), Lia Campos (LC, chair), Patrick Coughlin (PC), Maria Goodall (MG), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Bill Merrick (WM), Janet Muir (JMu), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

Apologies: Sarah Smith, Jo Wager

Absent: Canon Eugene Harkness

1. Behaviour policy (*standards*) (pupils to present)

The chair thanked pupils for attending. Every year, the children review the behaviour policy and discuss it to make it their own. The values 'kindness, responsibility, respect, confidence and belief' (derived from a Diocesan promotion) were presented in assembly, then taken back to classes, where pupils put together their own rules around each word. Pupils were encouraged to use words other than "don't". In class, positive behaviour is celebrated with half an hour of golden time on a Friday afternoon, which can be reduced via 5-minute sanctions for bad behaviour. These are recorded in balloons. Can minutes be earned back? Not usually. Pupils start afresh each week, and can be given warnings - three before losing five minutes. Pupils can also be sent into another class to calm down if they persist in a particular bad behaviour. The ultimate sanction is the headmaster's office and the Red Book. Pupils do lines for losing five minutes; if pupils are sent to the head three times, they go in the red book, and if they go in the red book three times, parents are contacted. A green book is also used to record warnings when visiting teachers are taking a class (e.g. French, music). No Year 6 pupil has yet lost any golden time this academic year! House captains agreed that generally behaviour was quite good at St Alban's, that pupils felt safe and happy, and that if they felt worried about anything, they could approach an adult, confident of being listened to. A governor asked pupils why they thought behaviour was good? Not many would be intentionally naughty; most bad behaviour is through forgetfulness or carelessness. Pupils know what is expected of them, as it is communicated well by teachers and TAs. If children are persistently naughty, pupils believe that the school should support those children to improve. House captains believe that they are treated fairly. Governors agreed to adopt the amended policy. It was commented that it was lovely to have pupils attending the meeting and to hear from them directly.

2. Apologies for absence

Gregory Burke has resigned as a foundation governor, although he is willing to be consulted on an informal basis over legal matters. Might it be possible to make him an associate governor?

Might one of the new priests at OLEM become involved? It is not expected that the level of support within the school from the parish is likely to increase; a governor has offered to write to the Bishop expressing the board's concern at the need for greater involvement from the parish, and asking for support in finding a member of the

clergy to participate in both governor activities and in chaplaincy duties to the school. Governors agreed to go ahead with this plan. Fr Paul led a mass for pupils a couple of weeks ago and it went very well.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Wednesday 11 September 2019

Confirmed.

4. Matters arising

Governors need to sign the safeguarding policy as they leave the meeting this evening.

5. Reports from termly briefings/training/subcommittee meetings

The last Performance & Standards meeting was principally concerned with the new Ofsted framework. The key difference is that emphasis is shifting away from SATs performance and similar measures towards the overall balance of the curriculum and how well it is taught. There is a strong feeling across the teaching profession that they have been 'teaching for the test', with scores becoming too important. The emphasis is now on looking across the curriculum at overall impact. There are other administrative differences, although these are less significant than this overall change of vision. The curriculum itself has not changed. A chart on how much time is spent on each subject within school has been produced; it was suggested that this should be regularly updated so that change can be monitored. 21.5 hours of curriculum per week is the overall headline figure. Staff believe that they have a balanced curriculum, and this can be demonstrated through their curriculum maps (circulated earlier to governors). Governors need to be in a position to demonstrate to inspectors their awareness of what is being done. This data is also useful in planning monitoring visits.

One governor expressed concern that the timetable she saw at the start of the year did not appear to reflect a broad and balanced curriculum – although the narrative evidence of what actually happens in the sessions suggests otherwise. Some lessons can cover multiple curricular needs, and there could be a need to communicate this more clearly to parents. The skills that are being acquired through the various topics need to be made explicit when communicating study plans - 'I can' statements. Progress can then be demonstrated both in topics and in skillsets. This will be done by the end of November for all classes, and will be collated; it represents a significant chunk of work.

Do we know of any other schools that have been inspected under the new regime? A school known to the head was inspected recently, with a focus on history. The new framework is focusing on reading - how it is being developed through the school. This has been a big target for St Alban's already in recent years. The school needs to be able to demonstrate clearly, with evidence, that the quality of teaching remains outstanding.

A report on the data environment was also produced, to make sure that governors had all the data necessary. What is needed from governors? Governors need to be very well aware of the curricular changes, to carry out their monitoring visits, and to be able to communicate how data has been used to create actionable insights. It would be useful to have 3 or 4 governors present during any inspection who could contribute effectively to the visit. There is a confident senior leadership team, and

INSET days have been organised in order to create this new curriculum mapping without increasing overall teacher workload, to ensure staff wellbeing.

The Resources committee had requested the terms of reference from the full governing body so it could be clear on what its remit was. The 16.48% to 23.46% pension increase impact on the budget is of concern. The usefulness of the Orovia reports had been questioned; MB offered to meet the business manager to devise some more useful reports, including historical data so that current performance can be benchmarked against previous. The software the school is required to use to report to the LA is not ideal. The SIMS system is used for bookwork, and then transferred into Orovia; interworking between the two was supposed to be smoother than it seems to have proven to be. Is there a mechanism for feeding back to the LA? The business manager has a user forum that she attends, but it is unlikely to have much impact. If St Alban's joins an academy, it will be required to use whatever software the academy has chosen instead. It might be possible to feed back on the finance software at termly briefings. Getting the classification of EAL versus English as a first language right was discussed, especially inasmuch as it might have future impact on budgets. Resources also looked at getting the St Alban's Foundation set up again for funding core things. At the moment, there is a chance there might not be a PFA running this year, which in turn would have an impact on fundraising - no one stood for chair or secretary. If no one steps forward by Friday 15, there will be no winter fair. The St Alban's Foundation is currently dormant - trustees would need to be found. Accounts and funds have been transferred but the body still exists; the articles of association should be retrievable from the Charities Commission, if nowhere else.

The committee agreed that there would be two audits of opportunities for capital improvements at the school - a walk-round to view the fabric of the school, and a survey of school technology. In terms of improving communication with the PFA, it was suggested two governors would complete assessments around the Vision Evening and the capital expenditure plan. Governors would then decide what the fund would be spent on, after which areas the PFA might consider if they chose to fundraise could be highlighted to them. If they were to raise more than expected (say, 2k), governors could be updated on plans as they went.

A small core of people is working on wraparound care with City Kids. The school financial value assessment needs to be completed; a collaborative document was proposed so this could be worked on in between meetings. After the Vision Evening, there needs to be work on the school development plan. A salary committee was appointed, and met immediately after the resources committee meeting. No recommendations were made. MB, MG, LC and SS were present; other governors would therefore need to participate if there were a need to convene an appeals committee.

There was some discussion of cloud software tools and whether the governing body should adopt them. Perhaps the SFVS could be a test case to see how this might work for us as a tool. A brief demonstration of Trello as a tool for consultation was given (e.g moving things between columns according to whether things have been commented on). Could the minuted actions be put on a Trello board for action? All governors need to be comfortable with the software, though, for it to be effective. It was agreed that all governors would contribute something - if only writing their names - to the SFVS vi the Google document.

6. Schools Financial Value Standard

A number of action points from the SFVS were discussed.

The governing body skills audit forms had been circulated, but only a couple of governors had responded. This is particularly important given there are now governor vacancies.

An online tool was also demonstrated - DFE.gov > Schools Financial Benchmarking allows the school to compare itself with other schools, so that governors can understand how performance might be improved. This kind of comparison might, for example, reveal other potential sources of funding.

A volunteer is needed to check paperwork to guard against any fraud or irregularities; MG volunteered. It was suggested this might take place quarterly, with the first visit taking place just before the end of term.

Helen Bates will visit to update the Asset Register, as the assets are primarily Diocesan-owned. Does disaster recovery include cyberattacks? This should be reviewed.

ACTION: JMcC to send the LA plan to MB for review.

On the subject of budget, the LA needs to top-slice money from the schools block to the high needs block. Although more money is coming into schools, it will not have as much impact as was hoped. JMcC asked governors to scrutinise this carefully; should schools support the LA's proposal? There is a £9m deficit in the high needs fund – £80m predicted expenditure but only £71m of funding + a £7m deficit from last year. Full details of the consultation will be circulated to governors. This includes an Excel sheet that allows schools to view how their funding is changing. £807k was received this year; £845k is hoped for next year, but money will be deducted from this for a number of factors. The LA is proposing to take 1.8% of this figure to fill the high-needs deficit. This would leave £808k; the effective increase will be only £1k if St Alban's agrees to this. All the big schools are not offering their top slice; the small schools are the ones that are suffering. MFG = minimum funding guarantee; this is a 'floor' that legally cannot be dropped beyond. JMcC will be discussing this with colleagues next week. Schools are suffering; high needs provision needs to be maintained. Why has this deficit arisen? The high needs block has been based on old historical data. 10-12 years ago, Cambridge's statements were low; this has grown exponentially, but the funding has not grown in line with this. Parents will be expecting there is more money to come; the finance committee is already forecasting a deficit, and this compounds that problem. The head of the LA approached the council last year for £10m to plug the deficit, but this is not sustainable. It appears superficially that the approach to solving this financial problem is inequitable to the schools involved. It's not a matter of the size of the school, but how much they need to draw on the high needs budget. The window for consultation is very small; governors are encouraged to attend the meetings, and to go as well informed as they can manage to be. PC offered to go to the Cambridge meeting. JMcC will also circulate slides that were presented at the meeting he attended today. The school loses twice over – both because it has to contribute and because other schools are not. Cambridge has been endemically underfunded over the last decade.

ACTION: JMcC will investigate definitions of terms used in this sheet.

Finance

7. Headteacher outreach work (+ vision)

There is a possibility of the head and deputy head doing some outreach work, both for career development and for financial reasons, to support the budget. Would

governors be willing to support this? There are also increased expenses, but these are currently unclear. There is no immediate urgency, but as a point of principle, it would be good to clarify. JMcC was approached in September to support a local school, but declined; he was also recently approached to support a school in Peterborough, but they are now looking for a local solution. It was proposed that this should be accounted for as a forward career development plan, with the budgetary impact of secondary concern. What is sought here is a decision in principle to support the proposal, so that the head and deputy head are able to choose the opportunities that will be of most benefit to them. Location will be of primary consideration in making these decisions; on principle, at least two governors would be less willing to support this kind of work if it involved a substantial commute. Another governor suggested it might be a good idea to look beyond the local authority in terms of structure - e.g. exam boards. Do these opportunities actually give the SLT what they need? Historically, this has been a controversial topic. The duration of these agreements, the location and the frequency have all been factors. Prior to April, JMcC had done 5 years of this kind of support, but has not been doing so since April. It will be necessary to bear in mind the likelihood of an Ofsted visit in the near future also. If doing this work whets the appetite, and the location and duration are suitable, it seems a good thing. In the past, consultation on specific offers has been conducted via the chair. This school is strong because of leadership across the board; in future, there may be a head of school rather than a headteacher. Finance is really the driving factor from the head's point of view. The lead teacher for IT has generated income in the past by supporting other schools; now all we have is the SLT. The concern of taking this on only when there is a financial need is that it cannot be effectively planned for. It was proposed to agree to this in principle from a career perspective, and to trust the leaders to select the best opportunities. The key to making this work smoothly is good communication - the school needs sufficient notice to allow for proper communication across the school and with the parent body. The school's staff are so talented that the head's absence for a planned time will not negatively affect the pupils.

Vision

8. MAT update

There will be a meeting on 4 December. Documents from a school in Bury preparing to join a MAT were circulated for reflection. The main purpose of this meeting is to make the necessary resolution in order to receive the data the school needs in order to move forward. LC had asked GB for advice on this. JMcC met Julie O'Connor, who stated that the Bishop is keen for the school to make the resolution, but if there is insufficient progress by early February, it is likely that representatives will be invited to see the Bishop to discuss the need to move forward. It is necessary to break the logjam, but in the awareness that ultimately we have little choice about the overall direction of travel. It is always possible that in that February meeting, it might be possible to negotiate a longer transition; the educational climate may change. Union advice given to a colleague at another school was that there was no choice about doing it, but that the union would support that school. The Bishop could remove everyone, but would he? St Alban's needs enough information to be happy to proceed; the school does not yet have sufficient reassurances from the information that has been provided that this course of action would be the best for the school. It should have been possible to answer the GB's questions at the last meeting with a reasonable amount of detail, but the answers received were quite generic. One governor felt that we needed to move quite quickly to this due diligence process, because if it did turn out to be the right thing for the school after scrutiny, we don't want to be rushed towards the final deadline. Another governor felt that the response

we were receiving from the MAT was too generic, and that this reflected the leadership desire for uniformity, which is a concern.

What are governor expectations of the meeting on 4 Dec? Nothing further has been solicited from St Alban's; those coming to speak to us will be presenting their own views, not necessarily with reference to the school's individual needs. The GB needs to be very clear that it has approached this significant decision with absolute integrity, and that if it is challenged at any point, it can state clearly that it has behaved with all due consideration. The general mood is that MATs passed their high water mark sometime ago, and the initiative is losing momentum. Our job as governors is to look after the pupils; this is simply an opportunity to assess. Legal advice would be very useful.

It was proposed that St Alban's should ask for an example of one of the conditional letters referred to, so that if the due diligence is not satisfactory, the GB knows what the process is for withdrawal. Could we have access to the data that has already been compiled, and then we ask our own questions? This seems unlikely. There are now only 4 schools left outside the MAT; the Trust's energies are focused on the activity within schools within the MAT already. If we top-slice 2.5% from our budget, this could be a problem; however, long-term it might be more sustainable, either financially or for leadership reasons. Can we ask to see an example of a resolution? We should ask this at the meeting on the 4th, and agree that we could sign it. Questions should be supplied to LC by the week before the 4th. The example questions circulated earlier would not necessarily be repeated, but they could be tweaked to elicit a deeper response more relevant to our school.

9. Headteacher's report (+ standards)

Circulated ahead of the meeting.

10. Ofsted preparation (+ standards)

Covered earlier in the meeting.

11. Governing body self-evaluation (+ standards)

To be deferred to the next full GB.

12. Governor training plans (+ standards)

A lot of training is on offer from the LA, currently for free; governors are warmly encouraged to take up these opportunities of relevance to the school. LC and SS have attended several courses and found them very helpful.

ACTION: RB to re-circulate the current training calendar

Standards

13. Link governor updates

Some entitlement document discussions have already taken place; some have not yet updated the document, however. These reports should go to JMu. Once this refreshing has taken place, proper visits can be arranged. GB's role as inclusion link governor will need to be covered. MB already sees Mrs Richardson for computing, so could potentially take this on for efficiency. Subject leads should be contacted to arrange visits.

14. New complaints policy

The major area for discussion is as to whether an escalation response from the governing body should be face to face or written. Pros and cons for doing it either way are provided in the policy. What types of complaints are involved? Examples: health and safety; a child with an EHCP is not getting one to one support – substantial, not trivial. Governors were generally in agreement that it would be better if it were written.

ACTION: JMcC to go through the policy, and send it to MB for upload as a Google document.

15. AOB

The Vision evening will take place on 20 November at 630. How will we respond to questions about the MAT? We should be open and clear. MB may be unable to attend, but LC is happy to take on the strategy material. The vision needs to inform the SDP for the next 3 years, but it has only been completed for 1 year at present because of the uncertainty around the MAT. It is expected that this will be quite a short meeting. There has been some good progress since the last event.

Meeting closed 2143.