

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the full Governing Body
held remotely at 6.30 p.m.
on Thursday 7 October 2021

No. 2021/2022 – 1

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Cristina Alves Martins

1.2 Present: Lia Campos (LC, chair), Edward Acton (EA), Patrick Coughlin (PC), Fr Alan Hodgson (AH), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Keith Menary (KM), Janet Muir (JMu), Sarah Smith (SS), Michael Yelton (MY), Jo Wager (JW), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

1.3 Apologies for lateness: Tanatsa Jingura (TJ)

2. Appointment of vice chair

2.1 No new volunteers had come forward. JW was willing to stand as vice-chair for another year; and noted that it was difficult to hold these elections when we were not meeting in person, and that perhaps it might be easier for people to come forward once this was in place. The chair noted that there were other chairing structures that it might be possible to implement to make the structure more resilient and succession-proofed. JW's self-nomination was seconded by LC and unanimously approved.

3. Pupils' behaviour policy presentation

3.1 JMcC introduced two pupils from Year 6, who described how the behaviour policy had been presented to the pupils, and then discussed by them. Pupils looked at how they followed the Ten Commandments in school, and how they could incorporate them into everyday lives – for example, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' could translate as 'Be caring, polite, friendly, sensible and helpful to others.' House points and golden time are available as rewards, as well as stickers for the younger children. There are also headteacher's awards every week and writer of the month. Being rewarded for trying their best helps the pupils to feel proud of themselves and try even harder, they said. There is a system of warnings and losing golden time, but firm rather than stern.

3.2 A governor asked if the pupils had found the discussion useful? Did it help with understanding of the aspects of good and bad behaviour? The pupils said it was good to be reminded of what we do and why we do it; to know that actions have consequences. Pupils thought that perhaps observation could be improved in the playground. The pupils also talked about their class rules and how they are posted in the classroom. This year because the classes didn't come together for this discussion, the behaviour policies will be posted around the school. KS1 hadn't been in school much so weren't involved in the consultation. A governor asked if pupils felt there was a behaviour problem at St Alban's? They thought not, and that if there was, it would be small, and dealt with quickly and well. Everyone is polite and behaves well usually, and pupils feel safe and happy at school. Pupils also felt that under the lockdowns, most children had improved their behaviour and kept up their learning

standards. Some children have got used to a less pressured standard as a result of home-schooling and needed to re-acclimatise, but when they returned from the first lockdown, they adjusted quickly. A governor commented that because the school is relatively small, it is clear what is going on; if there is a behaviour problem, everyone can see it straight away and it can be dealt with. The head and chair both thanked the pupils for contributing.

3.3 Is the problem with recruiting midday supervisors part of the playground supervision issue? There is a combination of PFA volunteers and paid midday supervisors, as well as someone from Premier Sport who comes in to monitor the KS2 playground. It is still a challenge, but it has been a lot easier with the end of staggered lunches, so there isn't such a long period to cover. Are behavioural issues discussed as part of induction training for volunteers? This can be a particularly difficult thing to grasp if you don't have formal teaching training. There are one or two pupils who need to have an eye kept on them, and they have TAs assigned to them; the rest is very low level bad behaviour and there really isn't a behaviour issue at the school.

3.4 The governing body agreed to approve the behaviour policy.

4. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Wednesday 7 July 2021

4.1 Confirmed.

5. Matters arising

5.1 New governor visits to the school still need to be arranged.

5.2 The data for the Pupil Premium review has now been circulated.

5.3 The catchup plan will be published soon; it has been discussed with Mrs Richardson and is ready for review.

5.4 The annual child protection and safeguarding review needs to be submitted by the end of October. To discuss under the link governorship agenda item.

6. Reports from termly briefings/training/sub-committees

6.1 TJ has signed up for some training this term, JW is trying to register. A governor noted that the LA and NGA were offering good sessions this term. JMcC and Mrs Richardson had undertaken designated child protection training with the LA.

7. Meeting dates for the year

7.1 Meetings for the year were agreed as:

- Tuesday 16 November
- Tuesday 1 February
- Tuesday 26 April
- Tuesday 12 July

8. Sub-committee memberships

8.1 Resources:

- Lia Campos (chair)

- Patrick Coughlin
- Tanatsa Jingura (vice-chair)
- Joe McCrossan
- Sarah Smith
- Michael Yelton

8.2 Performance & Standards:

- Edward Acton
- Cristina Alves Martins (vice chair)
- Lia Campos (chair)
- Fr Alan Hodgson
- Joe McCrossan
- Keith Menary
- Janet Muir
- Sarah Smith
- Jo Wager

8.3 First meeting dates for each subcommittee were agreed for:

- Resources: Wednesday 3 November
- Performance & Standards: Tuesday 2 November

A governor asked if it would be possible to have some sort of report on those who have struggled most as a result of Covid, to help with understanding who needs most help with catchup, in terms of numbers and years. There was a little data at the end of the previous academic year, but more can be produced. Is there an issue with pupils losing their social skills in the school? The school were given the opportunity to work with the Botanical Gardens over a 9-week project; this involved some pupils who were struggling through various life factors rather than because of Covid, and the school felt they would benefit from it. Vulnerable children will be scrutinised anyway and the impact of the catchup programmes discussed.

9. Link governor responsibilities

9.1 Link governor responsibilities were assigned as follows:

- English – Tanatsa Jingura/Jo Wager
- Maths – Patrick Coughlin
- Science – Lia Campos
- Child Protection & Safer Recruitment – Sarah Smith/Michael Yelton
- Inclusion – Cristina Alves Martins
- Early Years – Sarah Smith
- Assessment & Planning – Cristina Alves Martins/Keith Menary
- PE – Keith Menary
- MFL – Lia Campos
- Computing – Cristina Alves Martins/Lia Campos
- Performing Arts – Tanatsa Jingura
- RE – Jo Wager
- PSHE – Jo Wager
- Curriculum development – Edward Acton

9.2 The school has an ECT (a newly qualified teacher) who won't have a subject specialism, and two teachers who are job sharing, who are both new. A TA (Tessa McLeish) is now supporting PE; English is overseen by Michele Seebeck. History and geography won't have subject leads, so it would be more appropriate to have someone working with the school on curriculum development to address this need, liaising with JMcC and JMu. It is anticipated that it will require a termly meeting. EA agreed to take this on. The chair commented that curriculum enrichment, taking in history, geography, design and art, was very important.

10. Headteacher's report

10.1 This was circulated ahead of the meeting. The school is short of 5 pupils on roll numbers for the first time in a long time at the point of the census. The implication of this is £15k off the budget. These vacancies are due in part to Covid (people not wanting to move in to the city), Brexit (by contrast, people moving away because of visa/work issues), and also because housing nearby is expensive. People are living further and further out of the city; this will become an issue.

10.2 A few new families have been concerned by the staggered start. It was explained that as the school does not have a nursery or a true catchment area, and not all pupils are in Cambridge at the time of applying, there is a need to bring the pupils together. In the past, the teacher would have done a home visit over the summer. Families are invited back in to get to know how the children have been over the summer to support the baseline assessment. It is felt that pupils settle very well as a result of the slow start. Mrs Paul has built up a picture of the pupils, and will then carry out a baseline assessment of maths and English.

10.3 One governor contrasted this with the daily reports provided by nurseries - this is an expectation management issue. Reports from nurseries have not disclosed everything to the school in the past, and this can mean it's difficult to establish the correct provision. There needs to be a process to allow the teacher and the TA to get to know the children. The governor who raised the issue felt that this should not be linked to the gentle entry because it raises parental expectations regarding teacher communications.

10.4 A governor was concerned to hear about the steep rise in the charge for City Kids. The church is making the charging structure equal for all uses of the parish centre. It had been hoped that there would be some understanding that the centre was being used by a key organisation in the school, and therefore the parish community. Collections have remained stable at the church, so it is not an immediate cashflow problem. Charges need to be increased because of the operating costs of the hall: the church was paying £20k to keep the hall running, but receiving income from City Kids of only £8k. OLEM's rates were adjusted to reflect the prevailing rates, benchmarked against local halls in the area. The hiring of the hall has to pay its way. However, it was pointed out that it represents a 17.5% rent increase. OLEM felt that it was necessary to put it on some kind of parity: other halls in the area separate out all of their facilities and charge separately; City Kids use the hall the most, and therefore hire charge changes will affect it the most. The school depends a lot on having wraparound care; there is a risk that the school is failing to serve Catholic families, and losing pupils because of these limitations. A governor asked if the hire increases were a reflection of income that has been lost during the Covid period, and that therefore once Covid measures were relaxed, there wouldn't be such a need to recoup this? It was suggested that this was not the case - that if the hall was only being used by the parish, it wouldn't need to be cleaned as regularly or require such a high level of maintenance. During the Covid period, it has been costing £800 in contractors to service; the church is actively trying to reduce costs so it's not all being passed on to

City Kids. If the hall's usage does increase, then they would be able to look at reducing costs to organisations like City Kids. A meeting was due to take place on 8 October to discuss. AA used to use the hall and no longer does; a couple of other agencies used to make use of the space and no longer do. The church's view was that there are certain things that are only being done because City Kids are using the hall, and that it could not continue to subsidise the group at the expense of the parish. A governor noted that if the City Kids rate goes up, the organisation will have to increase its charges. This could make it unaffordable to some families, which might mean their children could not attend a Catholic school. Is there a way that the parish could look at the most vulnerable children and offer support to ensure this doesn't happen? Children that currently attend breakfast club and therefore are eating well that might not otherwise were particularly highlighted.

11. School priorities

11.1 Last year's priorities document was circulated, which looked ahead a little to this year. These are more curriculum-focused than resources-based.

11.2 The school has suffered in the past with the lack of chaplaincy, but is very grateful to have Fr Alan on board now.

11.3 It will be important to keep a careful eye on finances. The school will always be underfunded because it has low SEN numbers and low numbers of free school meals.

11.4 A Vision Evening needs to be held as soon as possible during the spring term, once it is safe for the school community to gather again.

12. MAT Update

12.1 Flavio Vettese will become the permanent CEO of the MAT in September 2022. A meeting was held with him not long ago, and with the financial officer, to look at the MAT budget, and for them to look at St Alban's budget. The conclusion was that the school's budget is not fit for the MAT's purposes; because of the school's budget projections, the MAT would not be interested in having the school join. The 5-year projection from their toolkit puts the school £250k in the red. Flavio will be sent a monthly report for the next couple of months, and regular meetings will take place to reassure them. St Alban's was also advised that it was unlikely to make any savings as a result of joining the MAT. St Benet's is not joining yet because it is trying to stabilise its position. St Alban's in Ipswich was invested in heavily to get it out of 'inadequate' status; effort was made to promote the sixth form, which has lost a lot of pupils – down to 80 pupils, but now projected to reach 137 in 2-3 years' time. The school is still not reassured by the governance structure either; St Alban's has yet to see benefits in terms of communication and collaboration at the educational level. The position for the meantime is to continue to 'wait and see'. Flavio's appointment leaves the Diocese empty; Julie O'Connor is retiring, so the Director and Assistant Director posts will be vacant, meaning that there will be no one from the Diocese to represent on headship interviews (for example). Hopefully there will be a contingency plan from the Diocese and something from the MAT to provide reassurance. If things were a little more stable, there might be more pressure from the Diocese for St Alban's to join; however, the MAT is rethinking its whole approach, and this was openly shared at the meeting on 28 September. In the long term, it is probably beneficial to the school to be involved in the MAT, but not in the short term. Support and sharing of responsibilities did not come to the fore during Covid, and the CEO resigned/retired, while two executive heads were made redundant and a lead appointed. Heads of schools will now be becoming headteachers. The St John the

Baptist MAT generates income: it has a teaching school alliance and a research school, and can contribute meaningfully to staff CPD, but OLW MAT cannot match this, and has no income besides the schools' top-slice. It is to be hoped that communication with Flavio will offer some improvement.

12.2 Is the Diocese looking into the potential for expanding St Alban's? A desktop financial analysis of the school has been done; the Diocese cannot afford to either extend the school or to move/relocate. The assets around the area also don't amount to enough to build a new school. It has been taken to the schools' commission, which wanted more information; Helen Bates has been asked to refer to the local authority to look at the basic need as well as the Catholic need. There is not much hope of achieving expansion unless there is a generous benefactor. The school is not fit for purpose moving forward; there is no nursery, and no reliable wraparound care; numbers are falling in-year. The building is not in a good state: there are now 4 male members of staff and only one toilet; there are no breakout/intervention rooms, so children have to sit in corridors; temperature control in classrooms is erratic. Other schools have more modern buildings and greenery. The school is precious to the Diocese, but it won't last another hundred years; it is more likely that families will be going to new schools in the new developments. St Laurence's is no longer attracting Catholic pupils – around 30 out of 45 in each class. This should be a priority. Building upwards on the existing site would need foundations. There had been an idea to approach St Matthew's and find out about their costings for a similar strategy – build a new building on the playground, and then knock down the existing building. It's now out of the school's hands, and with Helen Bates and the schools commission, but should stay on the St Alban's agenda for ongoing discussion and monitoring. It's very important to look at the future a few years from now, not just in the short term. It would be at least 10 years before new premises could be completed.

13. Headteacher's performance review

13.1 A meeting with Sue Blythe, JMcC and SS had taken place. The process is ongoing and the report needs to be discussed.

14. Register of pecuniary interests

14.1 Governors are reminded to complete the pecuniary interests register if appropriate.

15. AOB

15.1 A governor asked if the next full GB meeting could take place face to face, perhaps in the Parish Hall if we can't use school property for safety reasons? The LA has asked the school to take a step back instead of opening up further. Perhaps there could be a socially-distanced governors' social outside (before it gets too cold)? Jonathan Lewis's letter referred to three areas that aren't near Cambridge; this is preventative caution rather than reactive.

Meeting closed: 8.31 p.m.