

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the full Governing Body
held remotely at 6.30 p.m.
on Tuesday 1 February 2022

No. 2021/2022 – 2

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Fr Alan Hodgson.

1.2 Apologies for lateness were received from Cristina Alves Martins.

1.2 Present: Lia Campos (LC, chair), Edward Acton (EA), Cristina Alves Martins (CAM), Patrick Coughlin (PC), Fr Alan Hodgson (AH), Tanatsa Jingura (TJ), Keith Menary (KM), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Sarah Smith (SS), Jo Wager (JW), Michael Yelton (MY), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

2. To confirm the minutes of the meeting of Thursday 7 October 2021

2.1 The minutes were confirmed.

3. Matters arising

3.1 SS and MY had still been unable to visit to confirm the safeguarding audit due to Covid measures, so this still needs to be arranged. LC still needs to circulate minutes from the Resources sub-committee meetings. JMcC and TJ have met and done some work on the SFVS; this could potentially be reviewed at the next meeting. There is a plan for TJ to complete an internal control statement, but this has been delayed as a result of Tanatsa also having Covid.

3.2 ACTION: SS/MY to arrange visit with JMcC

3.3 ACTION: LC to circulate minutes from Resources meetings

3.4 ACTION: TJ to complete internal control statement for the SFVS

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

4.1 Minutes have not yet gone out for the Performance and Standards subcommittee. The last meeting took place on 2 November, and discussed performance data, safeguarding, and the catchup plan - this last was discussed extensively, with reference to the tuition recovery plan, and the difference between the two. At the next P&S, it will be appropriate to ensure that the agreed divisions have been implemented. There were also discussions about Mrs Muir's replacement and the admissions policy. Link governor visits are still a challenge given limited access to school as a result of Covid measures. The action point on safeguarding – discussion of the policy – was carried out. All agreed to ratify this. Minutes will be circulated in due course. JMcC will publish the safeguarding policy on 2 February and include it in Friday's newsletter.

4.2 The Resources subcommittee met on 18 January; there were some actions to be completed on the SFVS before further scrutiny can take place. JMcC updated

everyone on the complexity of the deputy head appointment process. There is also a need to appoint a KS2 teacher, and this is the most critical focus. The budget was examined, and **it was suggested that additional information on variances that exceed 15-20% might be provided to identify areas of focus**. There was a Covid update, and on the admissions policy (to be discussed later on the agenda). The school has received an email from the LA showing that birth rates in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough are in dramatic decline, which affects intakes across the region. There was some discussion of the MAT; not a lot is happening here besides a meeting scheduled for 10 February to discuss the budget with Mark Wilkinson (CFO). There was a short update on City Kids, about a brief visit arranged with City Kids and with Sue to find out whether it might be possible to use the school facilities to host the club. JMcC gave a premises update, with reference to some problems with the solar panels, and some other buildings issues. There is around £11k in the Devolved Formula Capital budget; it would be important to use this for priorities like new laptops and iPads, and the meeting agreed this was a good idea. There will be a significant carry-forward, probably the same as last year - around £40-50k. This did not take into account spending that happened in December and unpaid invoices. The finance officer is currently on maternity leave, and will not return until 31 August; in the interim, an ex-LA person is supporting the school finance requirements. The covering of supply teachers is going to have a significant impact on the budget.

5. Budget allocation

5.1 JMcC shared the LA's budget benchmarking tool (released 18 January). The school's numbers are down by 6 in the budget tool; there were 209 children at the census, so hopefully this will be updated. There is an increase of just over £3k compared to the previous budget, but there is a National Insurance rise to cover, as well as inflation. The carry-forward is therefore going to be very necessary; hopefully another £16k-18k per-pupil funding will be added with the updated census numbers. Other similar schools are in very difficult positions - St Paul's has lost £50k compared to last year as pupil numbers are dropping; St Laurence's is down by nearly £47k, as they have been unable to fill their 1.5-form entry. A lot of local schools of a similar size to St Alban's are showing big drops, but St Matthew's is oversubscribed at present, the knock-on impact of which will affect some of the other schools. Although JMcC is not overconcerned for St Alban's, it does prompt the question as to whether 2-form entry would be at all sustainable.

5.2 The tabs at the bottom of the tool shows how the funding is made up. Once this is more fully populated, it will be possible to look at things like topslicing, and what the likely impact of joining the MAT would be. The sheet does not include children with EHCPs. A lot of money has been spent on TAs to support children that didn't have EHCPs but merited them; since then, one EHCP has come through and another is expected soon, with a third also anticipated down the line. It also does not include (for example) sports grants and pupil premium. Given the anticipated additional costs in 2022-23 (e.g. heating), this could be a struggle.

5.3 JMcC also demonstrated the supplementary grant information (to cover the rise in National Insurance); St Alban's will received £24k based on numbers of 205. There are worrying declines in pupil numbers at other schools. Other grants will need to be monitored. If the 209 on-roll figure does not apply in April, it will definitely apply from September. No additional money has been offered against the anticipated energy bill rises. Once the final version of this document has been received, the Resources subcommittee will begin work on the budget. Tutor-led money has already been distributed.

6. Staffing structure including deputy head

6.1 JMcC had met with 2 experienced deputy heads in recent weeks, one from a school in Bedford and one from Cambridge, both former St Alban's pupils. Both on paper are high quality candidates. The first had only recently been appointed to her position in Bedford, and had not yet had an opportunity to develop within that school, and so has reluctantly withdrawn; she was on a significantly higher salary, but had been willing to take a cut to come to St Alban's. However, she decided it was too much of a professional 'hit' to take. The other applicant was Catholic on paper, but had not provided a priest's reference; she stated when she met JMcC that she was not a practising Catholic, and in fact no longer has any belief. JMcC took advice from the Diocese, who said this applicant could therefore not be supported. There are no other candidates for this position at present.

6.2 JMcC believes that there is capacity to develop existing staff towards a deputy headship capability. If the school does not have 2-3 applicants by the closing date of Friday 4, a Plan B should be enacted, in order not to be hasty in such a significant appointment. The attention needs to be focused on getting a KS2 teacher for September, and maintaining the structure of the interim deputy head until January 2024. This would demonstrate a commitment to Mrs Richardson, who is willing to continue carrying out this role. It is likely that teachers will move between now and 2024, which could provide another opportunity to appoint.

6.3 A governor commented that this made sense, but it would be important to make sure that existing staff understood that they would still be applying in competition with others for the deputy headship in 2024. Another governor agreed that retention is key, and also clear pathways for career progression. In terms of budget, there are the national qualifications for senior leadership which often provide grants; it would be good to open that up to staff, as it could be beneficial to both them personally and to the school. The chair commented that this sounded like a strong plan on which the governors should support JMcC.

6.4 JMcC also felt it was important to discuss succession planning, because it seems likely that other staff may move on in the near future. A governor commented that there are high potential teachers already within the school. If teachers can see how they might progress, then that might help avoid the constant need for recruitment, and might also make it possible to bring new teachers in. In the past, the school had been a hub for NQTs - a training school. There are still connections with Homerton, but numbers have diminished because of teaching school alliances and the apprenticeship approach. It will also be important to be thinking about governors' future roles. There were 4 applications for the new school headship in Peterborough; one was not accepted, and JMcC had previously mentored the other two; this was despite a nationwide recruitment campaign, so this is not a problem local to Cambridge but across the country. The school needs to retain good staff when it finds them.

6.5 LC said it was a good idea to create a group to consider succession planning, and making it very clear as to how the pathway might be open to staff; the school is very small, so it can be difficult to offer that.

6.6 ACTION: JMcC, PC and CAM to form a group to consider a strategy for succession planning.

6.7 ACTION: JMcC to articulate 'Plan B' in writing to governors (to recruit a KS2 teacher, with Mrs Richardson continuing as interim deputy head).

7. **Covid update**

7.1 This was included in the HT report.

8. Headteacher's report

8.1 JMcC apologised for the lateness of delivering this report; the recent Covid changes and outbreak were largely responsible as JMcC had to cover a class for a week and a half.

8.2 There are 209 pupils on roll; there are 31 children in Y6 as there was a new child in Y2 with a Y6 sibling. Attendance is very low as a result of Covid. There are 2 EHCPs in Year 1 and Year 5

8.3 An update had been received from Richard Snowden regarding unhappiness with the sibling statement in the new admissions policy.

8.4 Nothing has come through from the LA regarding school performance. Monitoring of curriculum priorities is now up and running, looking specifically at the time it takes to implement the catchup programme, and the content. It can be quite time-consuming. It has been suggested that an RE lesson might be dropped to fit in RSE because it is challenging to deliver.

8.5 The school will be spending more than the allocated grant on school-led tutoring (about 1.5k) because of the number of children who it is believed will benefit from it.

8.6 Two TAs (Mrs Slattery and Mrs Gollin) have both resigned. It has been very difficult to get supply cover recently; Teaching Personnel, the MAT's preferred agency, have found it very difficult to get staff. Schools are booking teachers for block periods and then asking for only a couple of days at the last minute.

8.7 The church is going ahead with a barrier system in the car park. The school has asked a number of questions about implementation but has not yet received answers. This is a concern.

8.8 The solar panels have been registering faults when there is heavy rainfall; the quote to repair was too high for it to be worth correcting, however, and the Diocese recommended leaving it as-is.

8.9 The PFA have been amazingly supportive.

8.10 The Diocese is advertising for Julie O'Connor's replacement; Julie has agreed to stay on until June. At the recent headteachers' meeting, consultation took place on what was needed from a director. A new school head was appointed at Peterborough.

8.11 Covid cases in Cambridge rocketed in w/c 24 January. It is hoped that parents might be back in the playground after half term. Thanks to all the staff; it has been a very challenging time.

8.12 The main focus needs to be on Ofsted now. The Parent View survey will be a key tool here. JMcC is beginning to RAG-rate the framework and will be working on this over the next few weeks with staff. **A governor asked if the data that comes out of the Ofsted preparation could be discussed at the next P&S meeting?** It's important that governors start to look at the framework. Ofsted plans were put on hold as a result of Covid, but can now be resumed. 24 hours' notice is given. All policies on the website are currently up to date. Ofsted was mentioned at the termly briefing that SS attended. It's important to have a centralised bank of evidence; declarations of

interest and safeguarding must be signed; monitoring must be carried out even if it's virtual. There is also interest in the teaching of religion. There have been 4-5 inspections since the start of term; these can be deferred if there are staff absences. Ofsted will also look at arrangements for covering pupil absence; extra credit is given for livestreaming, which is the preferred online delivery method. The school needs to be able to show that livestreaming has taken place. **Could Class Dojo invitations be retained as evidence?** It is likely the policy will be cross-referenced with evidence from pupil interviews.

9. Admissions policy

9.1 It was agreed to reinstate the siblings clause in order to alleviate any issues.

10. Ofsted update

10.1 This was discussed as part of the headteacher's report.

11. SFVS

11.1 The SFVS is not yet ready for discussion. There is an internal control statement of which there is a version; this needs to be approved. They must be submitted by the start of the financial year.

11.2 ACTION: JMcC to distribute the updated version of the document, for discussion at the next meeting.

12. MAT update

12.1 There were no updates from the MAT.

13. AOB

13.1 No date had been set for the next P&S meeting; Wednesday 9 March was proposed.

Meeting closed 8.03 p.m.