

# St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the full Governing Body  
held remotely at 6.30 p.m.  
on Tuesday 16 November 2021

## No. 2021/2022 – 2

### 1. Apologies for absence

1.1 Apologies were received from Tanatsa Jingura.

1.2 Present: Lia Campos (LC, chair), Edward Acton (EA), Cristina Alves Martins (CAM), Patrick Coughlin (PC), Fr Alan Hodgson (AH), Keith Menary (KM), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), Janet Muir (JMu), 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 A governor pointed out a typo in paragraph 12.2; subsequent to the meeting, JW decided that as vice-chair she should also attend the Resources sub-committee so will now join that group. The minutes were otherwise confirmed.

### 3. Matters arising

3.1 The statutory annual child protection review has been completed, ahead of the safeguarding audit. The governor visit to the school to review the outcomes of that audit has yet to be arranged.

#### 3.2 ACTION: SS/MY to arrange visit with JMcC

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

4.1 No training had been attended.

4.2 Both the Resources and Performance and Standards sub-committees met in early November.

4.3 The performance and standards minutes were circulated by email just ahead of today's meeting. One of the group's first actions was regarding the terms of reference. The first meeting in the academic year should involve a review of the terms of reference for each body; these need to be identified by the next performance and standards meeting. The safeguarding policy was also ratified. Regarding the admissions policy, some co-ordination with St Laurence's is required. An in-depth discussion of the catchup plan took place. The new tuition recovery plan, based on the Pupil Premium, was also explained; the school needs to top this up to provide 200 hours of extra tuition (of which 120 is funded by the government). The plan is focused on KS2 pupils as KS1 pupils are receiving extra help within lessons. The recovery plan entails additional lessons after the school day provided by St Alban's teachers, due to start in January. 19-20 pupils had been identified for targeted support. The recovery plan money has to be spent; if it is not spent, it is clawed back, and will be a matter for scrutiny during any Ofsted visit.

4.4 The Resources sub-committee began by refreshing the terms of reference. The budget monthly report was scrutinised; there were no major areas of concern, but it was noted that the next BMR will be critical, as it will be half way through the financial year. There is an EPM pay policy to be adopted, once it has been adjusted to reflect the specific needs of the school; this needs to be adopted at this meeting. A summary of Covid-19 status was also covered; there are some concerns that the school might need to re-impose restrictions if case numbers go up. It is definitely preferable for pupils to stay at home rather than come in while waiting for a test result to decrease chances of infection. Staffing changes were summarised, and the suggestions approved. There were some changes in the roles that some teachers had taken on, and recruiting is ongoing for Year 6/deputy head. There was a discussion of premises; there was a possibility of asbestos in the girls' toilets, but this was not proven; it highlighted the shortcomings of the building.

4.5 The restructuring of the Diocese was also discussed, with Julie O'Connor's retirement and Flavio Vettese's move to MAT CEO. Who will look after devolved formula capital and all the other Diocesan support? News is awaited. There were no updates from the MAT. The headteacher's performance management review had been successfully completed. There was a short update on City Kids; subsequently there has been a meeting with City Kids, which the meeting will be updated on under any other business. Some very generous donations have been made to the school, to be used for IT, cricket and music.

**4.6 ACTION: LC to send minutes to RB to circulate.**

## **5. Headteacher's report**

5.1 This was tabled ahead of the meeting. Numbers are going back up; it is interesting to note that all the spaces that are being filled are non-Catholics. Only 6 SIFs for next year's admissions have been received at this point, which is very unusual. Only 23 children and 20 parents are registered for the open day meetings at the end of the month, again unusually small. The three log-of-concern incidents were not trivial, but are being actively followed up and monitored. The implementation of the foundation curriculum has been RAG-rated red as it's not yet off the ground. Homework workshops had had to be postponed due to a shortage of interest. A high percentage of people said they had to support their child in doing homework (58%); to explore this with school council and pupils. JMcC wanted to personally thank Janet Muir for her many years of loyal commitment to the school. It has been a pleasure working with her, and she will be sincerely missed. There are currently no applications for the deputy head position, although two people have looked round the school. The Dioceses of Brentwood and Northampton have put the advert on their websites; Westminster was also suggested. Covering Year 6 is more important; there is a former headteacher who will do a jobshare with supply staff to fulfil this need. Huge thanks were given to Father Alan for the masses in school.

5.2 City Kids is not meeting families' needs due to lack of space. The club is predicted to make a loss; a feasibility study into the school hosting it should take place. With the Diocesan restructuring, Helen Bates is likely to have a role in the MAT, and stay part-time at the Diocese. There was an increase in Covid cases, but the last couple of weeks have been less bad. Schools nearby have been having problems though; one school had a class closed, and another has had real problems with staff absence.

5.3 A governor commented that he was very pleased that an information event on type 1 diabetes had been held. Do governors as a matter of course get sent the school newsletter? Several governors commented that they do not receive it.

**5.4 ACTION: Flower to be asked to update the mailing list to include all governors.**

5.5 How serious is the concern about admissions? St Alban's hasn't needed for a long time to do a serious publicity drive; is that the case now? JMcC is quite shocked at the low level of interest, and it is unclear how many of the very few SIFs received are from Catholic children. Throughout the country there has been a decrease in the number of children in reception classes - down 8% in London and Manchester. St Paul's currently has a reception class of 16. Availability of wraparound care might also be a factor. St Alban's is one of only 2 schools in the Diocese that achieves close to 100% Catholic pupils; others are more like 50-70. Is it becoming too costly to live in Cambridge city? What are the baptism rates like within the parish? Could the school and church work together, and be in touch around baptism? There are around 4 a month; there will be 5 this Sunday. The majority of families seem to be regular parishioners. Home-schooling is having quite an impact. If Catholic numbers across the city are dropping, this could only be identified by discovering how many Catholic families are sending their pupils to non-Catholic schools. St Laurence's numbers have also dropped. Families are not attending mass. The school probably ought to market a bit more actively – could there be a poster on the noticeboard at the back of OLEM?

5.6 There is nothing to be done about the absence of first holy communion preparation within school as this was a directive from the Bishops' conference. But if this is a general problem for Catholic schools, it should be reported back to the Bishops' conference. St Laurence's is actually doing preparation in-school during lunchtime, but the reasons for this are unknown. St Alban's parents are very disappointed about this apparent discrepancy. Some parents don't live in Cambridge but work in Cambridge; some pupils come from e.g. Ely. Having to make an extra trip for first holy communion preparation would put parents in this sort of situation off. The return to normality after Covid will also take some time for confidence to be restored. There is actually only one live class a month - one is over Zoom. It is unclear what is happening with preparation at St Mary's.

**5.7 ACTION: AH to find out more about first holy communion preparation in other Cambridge schools.**

5.8 The school is trying to recruit a deputy head; in the ad, a point was made about looking for a Catholic. If a Catholic deputy cannot be found, can a non-Catholic (Christian) be advertised for? JMcC has asked the Dioceses of Brentwood and Northampton as to whether they appoint non-Catholics, but Flavio was very clear on the need to have a Catholic deputy head, for succession planning and also to step in if the head is unavailable. There are not many Catholic teachers in Cambridge in the primary sector. The bishop would need to have a say in whether this was a necessity; AH is unsure what his preference would be. Some discussion took place of other schools in the Diocese that may or may not have appointed non-Catholic deputies or heads. Schools work even if the deputy is not Catholic as long as they have a Christian ethos; the pool in which talent could be found is limited by this requirement. Could the school take into account people who work in a secondary school, or would they have to have primary experience? This would also open things up. In previous years this wasn't really accepted, but if a teacher had worked with years 7 and 8, then this would be a more plausible transition. A governor said that they understand the bishops wanting the Catholic requirement. It sets a tone for the whole school; if we want a future for Catholic education, we need to somehow recruit Catholics who consider that progression. It was made very clear for JMu when joining the MAT that there would not be progression opportunities for her because of the Catholic requirements, and that has been a key factor in her deciding to leave St Alban's. All opportunities should be explored to ensure the school is reaching out to all possible

candidates. The post was advertised in the Catholic Gazette. If after 6 months or a year, the school has not managed to recruit a Catholic deputy, what next? It's impossible to function with an acting deputy indefinitely. A decision will need to be made about which of the 'ideal' criteria is relaxed first to enable the post to be filled. Bigger group 2 and 3 schools have the capacity to offer better salaries. It will be a struggle to get a Catholic head into St Alban's in future because it will be unaffordable.

5.9 Could the Bishop/Flavio be consulted as to whether there is any flexibility on the need for the deputy to be Catholic? If St Alban's was in the MAT, would they be able to redeploy a Catholic into the position of deputy head? Probably not, as they are also short of staff. A MAT that is blooming might be able to identify other possibilities, but the MAT that we are joining is not there yet. The post has been advertised within the St John the Baptist MAT too. Would a letter to the Bishop from the governors be a good idea? The Diocese needs to understand what is happening inside Cambridge city in terms of family numbers and recruitment. Recruitment in general is difficult in the city - all schools are experiencing this. There is no capacity to expand; there is no capacity to attract for career development because of the size of the school. Could Flavio suggest how to solve this if we cannot recruit? We could have an interim deputy for 2 years less a month, but this is still not attractive to candidates.

## **6. Covid-19 update**

6.1 Parents have been very supportive of the school policy. Cambridge and Peterborough has been declared a high risk area, and entering an ERA position where it might be necessary to revert to pre-summer arrangements. It is important to make sure that opportunities to spread the virus are avoided - parent contact in the playground and events in school have been cut down. Carbon dioxide monitors in school have been installed to monitor airflow. Windows are still being left open to ensure ventilation so the school is very cold. Is it worth putting the heating on at all given it is all flowing straight out? The school has to meet certain temperature standards or will need to be closed. Pupils need to be encouraged to wear lots of layers. St Mary's have windows and doors open and pupils wear coats and hats. The heating is still being used, but some classrooms just turn it off as it makes no difference. Parents in reception class are entering the playground to collect their children, but then leaving.

## **7. School Financial Value Standard – plans for the year**

7.1 The SFVS was last reviewed in June. Is there a volunteer with an interest in Finance to champion the ongoing reievw of this? TJ was going to do this; in her absence, this could potentially be discussed with LC.

7.2 JMCC highlighted again the dashboard tool for benchmarking against other schools. It would be ideal to have a sub-group that provided questions, having scrutinised the data and compared with other schools. The school is well supplied with financial advice, but would like an additional layer of scrutiny. This was discussed at Resources last year; there were lots of questions as to why staff costs were so high. TJ could review, and then the outcome of that conversation could come back to Resources. A governor commented that it was important to ensure that LC was not overwhelmed, and therefore necessary to ensure TJ gets involved. Because she is new to this, JMCC will need to proactively lead on this. There may be governor training available to supplement this; it would be ideal if TJ had been able to attend this course before the conversation takes place.

**7.3 ACTION: JMcC to contact TJ and ask her to come in to school to start this process before next Resources meeting.**

7.4 JMcC had also asked for items from the SFVS to be discussed at future meetings; he would like the choice to come from governors. This will be discussed at Resources, reporting back to the FGB.

**8. School Development Plan update**

8.1 No additional updates are needed aside from the priorities referred to in the headteacher's report. Governor monitoring in the school has not been able to take place because of the Covid policies. It might be possible after Christmas for this to resume. Hopefully things will improve over the next couple of months.

**9. Headteacher's performance review**

9.1 This took place and has been resolved.

**10. AOB**

10.1 A governor asked whether all governors should be using their governor email addresses for governor business? It had been previously agreed that 'normal' emails are fine unless a particularly sensitive issue arose, in which case the governor email addresses should be used - complaints, safeguarding, grievances and so on.

10.2 Outstanding schools are going to be scrutinised in future, so St Alban's should expect Ofsted before too long, and it may be necessary to accelerate preparation activities for this. If the school were to be inspected now, JMcC believes it would achieve a 'good' rating. The Diocese is anticipating it taking 9 years to get back into its own cycle of inspections. A Section 48 inspection is therefore anticipated in 24-25. There are around 4k outstanding schools for Ofsted to inspect nationwide; most are expected to dip. A governor wondered whether it would be good to conduct a self-assessment during this academic year, so that it can then be considered what might be necessary to move the school to outstanding? The data would be one factor. The school could also be seen as vulnerable regarding the quality of teaching and learning - ECT in the school, new teachers in different positions, and no current evidence about the quality of teaching and learning substantial enough to be sure to meet inspection levels. There are many schools that have been outstanding for 12-13 years and have not been approached; their data tells a different story. The happiness, safety and security of the pupils is a higher priority than Ofsted at present. In the unlikely event of the school entering 'requires improvement' status, it would be likely to get out of it quickly. Is ASP still available? The last set of results are from 2018-19, which look good. There is now data from the LA, which has been conducting interim scrutiny; the school advisor has been in to ratify the school's approach. Feedback on the new teachers is very promising.

10.3 A letter from the Bishop had been received in relation to the last governing body meeting, and receipt was formally acknowledged. The chair wrote a short email in reply.

10.4 Regarding City Kids and the provision of wraparound care, a recent meeting took place with members of the City Kids committee. JMcC, SS, KM and LC attended. They discussed the future of the club, which is essential for the school because it provides the care that most parents need, especially in this area of Cambridge. Because of the increase in rent the club might have some issues; they shared that they are predicting a net loss of £5828. They are also concerned about additional expenses

over the winter if external staff are needed to cover for sickness. But they do not want to increase fees for current pupils as this feels unfair. A working party has been organised to try to find out if there are alternative options to relocate City Kids in order to reduce the costs. If the fixed costs go up, the variable costs need to change to allow for this. The only way to do this without raising income is to raise the number of children, but this can't be done given the limitations of space in the parish centre. The other approach is to reduce fixed costs – hence looking at alternative venues. Even if those alternatives do not include increasing the number of children that attend, at least the club wouldn't be going into the red. Increasing capacity would be win-win. A governor asked about the short-term risk while the City Kids problem is being resolved? It is thought that there is no short term risk - it's a long term issue. There used to be funds available to keep the club running for 6 months; it is unclear how much this was eaten into as a result of Covid measures. According to Charity Commission rules, the club needs to have a 6-month running balance; if this gets eroded, then when it is audited that will be a problem. Lack of morale may also mean that staff are lost; a governor close to City Kids thought that keeping the playleader happy was the most necessary as she could easily go elsewhere.

10.5 Mrs Muir is leaving us! All joined in thanking Janet for everything she has done for the school over the years. We want to organise something to mark this. JMu said she had thoroughly enjoyed working here, and it is a fantastic place. It was minuted at the P&S meeting how much she will be missed, and how much she has given to the school; congratulations were offered on her new appointment, and noted how very lucky the new school is to have her. If it's not possible to mark Janet's many contributions this term, it must be done at a later date when it is safer. The children also really praise Mrs Muir as a teacher. WhatsApp is flooded!

*Meeting closed 8.15 p.m.*