

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the full Governing Body
held **in the school** at 6.30 p.m.
on Tuesday 25 April 2023

No. 2022/2023 – 4

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 No apologies for absence were received.

1.2 Present: Lia Campos (LC, chair), Ruth Burrows (RBU), Stefania Deidda (SD), Frances Image (FI), Tanatsa Jingura (TJ), Joe McCrossan (JM), Keith Menary (KM), John Parrott (JP), Sarah Smith (SS), Jo Wager (JW), Michael Yelton (MY), Chris Wright (CW, observing), Rachael Beale (clerk); Andy Stone, Diocesan Director of Schools, East Anglia; Flavio Vettese, CEO of Our Lady of Walsingham MAT.

1.3 The meeting was quorate.

2. Standing items:

2.1 The minutes for the meeting on Thursday 23 February 2023 were confirmed.

2.2 It was agreed to drop the remaining standing items on the agenda in order to provide more time for the MAT presentations and the budget discussions.

3. MAT visit

3.1 Diocesan Director of Schools Andy Stone introduced himself and presented the Diocesan position on academisation. The Diocese would like all schools in a MAT by September 2025.

3.2 **How many schools are not yet in a MAT?** Four. The Bishop is clear that academisation is his intention, and it's also the direction that the Catholic Church nationally believes education should take. **Is the MAT already seeing the predicted advantages appearing?** Yes - it has been very difficult to find school leaders; the executive headship arrangements bring great benefits.

3.3 Flavio Vettese also spoke. Currently the annual turnover of OLOW MAT is over 19 million, and at full capacity there will be 4700 students. The challenges have been around finances. Most other academy trusts in the country are moving towards a set contribution – 12% as standard, some a bit higher; OLOW operates on 5.7%. This covers CEO, CFO, and standard services such as pensions, payroll, H&S, development. There is not an expectation that the contribution will significantly increase; this should become clear in the next 2-3 weeks. The main benefit for the MAT has been in recruitment. It has maintained staff levels, and staff have stayed within the Trust. The head at St Laurence's (for example) lives in Ipswich, but wanted to stay within the Trust and develop her career. The trustees are appointed by the Bishop so are directly in tune with his vision; governing bodies largely comprise foundation governors.

3.4 **How can we think about school improvement within the Trust?** One school had a very challenging inspection; in a really short space of time, the MAT was able to

procure significant additional expertise from both within and outside the Trust. This gives the MAT, the Board and governing bodies an additional reference to judge progress and quality.

3.5 The MAT thinks it needs to be more proactive and to invest more in the secondaries. SEND is a major concern in all schools; safeguarding is also a top priority. A primary improvement lead works with heads in the primary schools, and has created a good forum for these schools to share intelligence. This is a young group - they are much happier not working in a standalone school. These higher positions are really challenging to recruit to.

3.6 The Trust is developing a very clear staff charter and a Trust charter to make it clear what its mission is. The workforce challenge is key; how do we develop teachers to want to take up the challenges of leadership, in the midst of people leaving the profession? Other challenges may be around student numbers – maintaining quality of provision – but some worrying trends in declining numbers have been reversed.

3.7 **Were these changes triggered by the Ofsted?** No. At the moment, St Alban's gets this kind of support from the local authority. The MAT CEOs are also working on inter-trust collaboration opportunities. It is important to keep the two trusts separate to allow for flexibility.

3.8 **When St Felix's got into trouble, the MAT found capacity to help it; if St Alban's got into trouble, would it find that capacity?** The schools in the Diocese are only as strong as the weakest school, and they have different skills. The MAT would do its best, but once the school is in the Trust, it is hard-wired. If a school like St Alban's received a 'requires improvement' report, Ofsted would ask where the support is. This would be the LA, but the LA would be working with the Diocese. Andy Stone said that there needed to be a better mechanism for ensuring that the trusts were accountable to the Bishop. **If a school felt it had a good reason for the deadline not to be met, would the Diocese be prepared to listen?** No - this has been on the agenda for a long time now. If anything, it would be desirable for this to be achieved sooner, because it is seen as the best method for supporting Catholic education across the Diocese. The installation of a new Bishop might have lost a little momentum. What the Trust can offer can't come to fruition until all schools are part of it. The best way of not increasing the percentage contribution is to have more schools in it.

3.9 Previously, St Alban's was given the impression that it would not be accepted into a MAT because its finances were not robust enough. Having the list of services would help, because the school could see the list of what is missing and work out what needs to be bought. It's also good that the school will be able to have a headteacher rather than an executive head. **As governors, there is a duty to the school. What if a parent consultation results in a 'no'?** In the seven parent consultations done for this trust, there has never previously been an issue with parents not wanting a school to join the trust, Flavio stated.

3.10 It would be good to see the forecasts because the variable costs will go up. The toolkit was what gave the impression that St Alban's would go into the red, but in fact it hasn't. The topslice would be a significant factor, though. There were some concerns, too, about how the budget might be used, and whether the school might lose control of things like staffing decisions. Local measures will always be listened to. The school budget is still delegated to the headteacher and governing body to decide what to do with it, after the topslice. A differential in payscales between schools might not work in the longer term; some work has taken place to work

through these over time. It is expensive to employ people in Cambridge, so local values really need to be considered. The MAT is beginning to do some work on back office staff and consider what variations there are.

3.11 **Back office recruitment at St A's has been very difficult. Can the MAT indicate how it might be able to help across schools?** There are staff that live more locally - it has been possible to e.g. send attendance officers between schools to cover absences. This has developed because the heads have been working together. **How will the MAT carry out its operations - what is the escalation process for any difficulties that are encountered?** Chairs meet 6 times a year with the Trust chair and the CEO - this is an opportunity to raise concerns that haven't come up through GB minutes (which are all scrutinised). There is a heads' operational group which meets 6-7 times a year. Primary and secondary operational groups also exist, and there is a link director for each school. **What about reactive measures?** We're approachable, Flavio said. Most people have his contact details. The potential for St Alban's and St Laurence's to work much more closely is really tangible; the strength of the GB and leadership will allow us to begin to explore this more purposefully.

3.12 In terms of finances, the potential GAG pooling of finance allows schools to really focus on the standards of education. **Has the Trust started thinking about what the GAG pooling plan or strategy might look like?** It has begun thinking about what the central charge increases might be. GAG pooling is a much bigger conversation to be had with heads and chairs - the Trust wants to take a more accountable approach. It would be interesting to see if other MATs have done GAG pooling and what their standards are. **How long would it take, assuming St Alban's agreed to go ahead tomorrow, to get the school into the MAT?** A maximum of 6 months - it's detailed but straightforward.

3.13 **On the question of teacher recruitment, how would this be better within the Trust than as a standalone school?** There is a really strong marketing function, where the staff member is really good at getting the message out about opportunities. Staff are also attracted to join the Trust because they see there may be more development opportunities within it. **Has retention been very positive?** It's varied; there have been pockets of challenge. The secondary school in Ipswich is in a really challenged area but retention of staff has been really strong. Recruiting a deputy head for a high school was a challenge, but there was a really good number of applications for this. **Is the Trust continuing to offer development opportunities to Catholic staff?** Catholic teaching numbers vary. Ipswich St Alban's is low; Bury St Edmund's has 40-odd Catholic staff. In terms of Catholic leadership, the Trust is involved with the new NPQ qualifications that are delivered by the Anglican and Catholic foundations. The new openness from St Bede's is a really positive sign. Catholic & Anglican schools together make up more than a third of schools nationally. Bringing St Bede's on board would be very good for St Alban's because it is a feeder school for St Bede's.

3.14 **There must be an awareness at Diocesan level that one difficulty with retaining Catholic teachers is that the Church is not retaining its young people.** It's really difficult recruiting Catholic staff; there's been a reduction here over the years. It's really important that the Diocese does all it can to foster a vocation. There are staff who are practising Catholics but aren't in the Catholic sector, and the Diocese wants to do more work to bring them back into the Catholic sector. The wide dispersal can make it difficult to further your career without moving - in London that would be easy, but here it's more challenging. It's not going to get any easier in the short term.

3.15 **Do head teachers and deputies still have to be Catholics?** It's not true that there are no exceptions to this. Andy Stone wrote a paper for the schools commission

on reserved posts and school leaders - sometimes it's been time-limited. He thinks this is unacceptable. There needs to be effective succession planning across the Diocese, recruiting and retaining our future school leaders. **What about secondments?** Yes, this could be done. **What about reaching out to Catholics not in the MAT to encourage more Catholics to join?** Each church community knows its parishioners and can encourage them to come forward for roles in education - the church has a role to play there, signposting teachers and children to schools. The Bishop's role is in promoting Catholicity in parishes and schools.

3.16 **On governor roles, within the MAT: do governors from each school sit on a higher level governing body, or is it paid execs?** The directors' body is appointed by the Bishop, but it's not representative of the schools in the MAT. **Would the school's own governing body reduce and its main focus become P&S?** We aren't at the point yet of all finances being driven by the MAT - governing bodies are still driving their own finances. Ultimately the directors are the accountable body. At St Alban's, the financial advisor from the LA scrutinises the budget. The GB would still have a role in scrutinising budgets - a change from what the school was first offered. **Is there a financial incentive to join earlier?** There is direct funding of the conditional allocation as the Trust has gone over 3k students. The Trust works with the GB through the chair to establish the 3-to-5-year plan, in terms of improvements and what the school needs to do. This is automatic by size, but it is possible to bid for conditional improvements. It's very difficult to open new Catholic schools because of the 50% cap, because this isn't acceptable to the Catholic Education Service. A new school in Peterborough was opened after negotiation with the LA to drop the cap requirement; Sacred Heart in Swaffham was taken into the maintained sector. It's a half-form entry school at present, but it will be rebuilt as a new school, and the numbers on roll should come through because of housing projections.

3.17 The chair thanked Andy and Flavio, who then left the meeting. A discussion followed. Governors agreed that at the next meeting, formal plans and timescale for joining the MAT would be discussed.

4. **Headteacher's report (verbal)**

4.1 There are 210 children on roll; the school needs to remain at this number for the October census. There are 13 siblings; the furthest non-sibling is 1.5 miles from the school. Although the school is full with Catholics, there has been a dip in the number of Catholic families applying. Some may not be informed of completing the SIF.

4.2 JM would like governors to think seriously about attendance, which is above the national average but below the target of 96.2%. **Is it higher than pre-Covid levels of sickness?** There is a significant level of unauthorised absence. Attendance is particularly low amongst pupil premium children. The LA can issue fixed penalty notices, but the school has never initiated this before. If the attendance is lower than the national average, it can be a trigger for Ofsted. A governor recommended a greater degree of proactivity about warning parents. Another governor commented that unauthorised absence causes considerable tension in the school community - those that abide by the rules resent those that don't. **Is the increase in absence amongst PP families a safeguarding issue?** Yes, this is flagged on MyConcern for pupils that have dropped below 90%. This will be discussed at the next safeguarding visit. Governors were asked to consider issuing fixed penalty notices.

4.3 A child that has ever been on the SEND register should be tracked even if they are no longer deemed to need SEND support, because this allows for better

measurement of progress amongst the SEND children. A separate line for previous SEND registration would also be beneficial to make sense of this data.

4.4 MyConcern has logged 110 incidents since January, but this is partly a function of the way the new system works - this doesn't represent 110 'logs of concern' but covers e.g. profile updates, attendance letters and correspondence with parents.

4.5 The school is being externally monitored by the Service Level Agreement offer from the LA. Internal monitoring in reading, maths and science has taken place. The school is returning to pre-Covid levels of activity, with visitors and experiences increasing.

4.6 Chris Wright has formally accepted the post of Deputy Head. The Diocese was not involved in the appointment process; JM has now had this conversation with the Diocese and apologises for not having followed the correct process. Mr Hor is working on completing the SEND Award, ready to replace Paula Ray when she leaves at the end of the year. The two ECTs are doing very well; no other staff have said they are leaving. The Office Manager support is being covered by JEM Business Consultants which will be slightly less than having a person in post (she is working part-time and remotely). One TA has had long-term sickness, but the school does not have insurance to cover this. Steve Ostler will be returning in May.

4.7 The installation of the boiler is fully complete and can be controlled from inside the school. Playground works are ongoing; the AstraZeneca grant of £3000 will help with the project as well as a 'No Idling' sign. The school remained open during the strikes as there were sufficient members of staff to at least supervise the children.

4.8 St Alban's has been fortunate to have Father Paul from Fisher House and Father Colin from the Dominicans helping with worship, but continues to struggle to get priests to support the school. This has been logged with the Diocesan Director. There have been no class masses this year. There is no priest for the end of term leavers' mass or for St Peter & St Paul. St Alban's Day will be celebrated on 22 June.

5. SEF

5.1 The SEF has been provided to all governors, who are urged to acquaint themselves with it in detail and ask questions if appropriate. This should work in tandem with the School Development Plan. Much of the SDP has been marked as dark green, for 'completed'; governors were briefly taken through the current status of all items.

6. Budget

6.1 The budget was scrutinised and recommended by the resources committee, and copies have been circulated. This has been tweaked a little since that meeting, as two TAs requested to reduce their hours. The budget was constructed assuming 210 pupils, but there were only 208 pupils on roll at the point of the autumn census; this has impacted the budget by around £9k. Changes in EHCP children have balanced out. Our SEN allocation is low. Staffing costs are high. An in-year deficit of 8.6k is being forecast so this will need to be watched carefully. The budget for supply is high at present; the belief is that supply requirements will reduce. The toolkit predicts future deficits, but this rarely materialises - it doesn't show the real position. The LA will be moving away from its current toolkit - training will be happening before the summer.

6.2 This budget has been recommended to the governing body by the resources committee; the GB accepts this and it can be submitted to the local authority.

6.3 DECISION: The governing body unanimously approved the school budget plan for the financial year 2023–24 with total spend of £1,138,100.

(TJ left the meeting at this point)

6.4 The school business officer had requested it be minuted that as a Group 2 school, the head teacher's pay scale should be within Group 2 guidelines, but it is set at a higher rate. Governors have agreed to extend the payscale to accommodate this.

7. AOB

7.1 Drop-off on Union Road can be challenging. Could there be a School Street here? There has been a lot of conflict with antisocial parking on Lensfield Road, and the problem is getting worse, with arguments amongst parents. It's dangerous; parking sometimes blocks cycle access, and people can be forced out onto the street. The school did have a travel plan, but it predates Covid; it could be revisited. There was a campaign for street monitors that could also be revisited. If the school was opened earlier, children would be unsupervised on the playground for a long time. The unpredictability of traffic in Cambridge causes problems with judging arrival times at school. In general, the narrower window for dropoff has been well observed and the teachers like it. There have been fewer traffic enforcement officers around since Covid. The school can ask them to visit. Traffic management could be a solution - the school could put its own cones out.

7.2 ACTION: JP to contact the highway authority to confirm the legality of the school putting out cones to control traffic at sensitive points.

7.3 A School Street needs a volunteer force and a lot of work to authorise. Union Road is also the only way out of Panton Street at the moment. The area is scheduled for redevelopment in the near future (demolition of the local authority flats). JMcC is happy to supervise dropoffs for a while to reduce conflict.

7.4 KM has moved to Resources from the Performance & Standards committee.

Meeting closed 9.10pm.

ACTIONS:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• JP<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Contact the highway authority to confirm the legality of the school putting out cones to control traffic at sensitive points. |
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