

**Minutes**  
**Arbour Vale School Local Governing Body (LGB) meeting**  
**25 March 2021 at 4pm (held virtually)**

**Present:** John Wise [Chair] (JW)  
Neil Sykes [Principal] (NS)  
Prav Bassi (PB)  
Isobel Callaby (IC)  
Matt Downey (MD)  
Motomori Labode (ML)  
David Winkler (DW)

**Also in attendance:** Sarah Brooks [Vice Principal] (SB)  
Kayleigh Franklin [OHCAT Management Accountant] (KF)  
Clarissa Larsen [Clerk]

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all present.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Josie Jones who is away and has spoken to the Chair over the phone. Governors wished her well.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations were made.

**4. CONSTITUTION AND APPOINTMENTS**

Governors noted there remains one vacancy on the LGB. JW and NS will look at this next term including arranging a visit to the school if possible.

**5. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

- i The minutes of the LGB meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed as an accurate record and would be signed by the Chair.
- ii The confidential minutes of the LGB meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed as an accurate record and would be signed by the Chair.

**6. MATTERS ARISING**

- i JW said that he would like governors to see the school Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) and SDP when they are available. NS agreed the SDP should be on agenda for each LGB but due to disruption this term, the SDP has not been updated. He advised that he had recently discussed the SEF with other Berkshire Special School Headteachers and given the disruption of the last year, there was a

suggestion that they follow a similar format. He will consider this over Easter and will share with governors.

- ii JW commented that he is impressed by the school website and would like governors to be alerted when new material is added. NS will try to arrange alerts on updates to the school website, possibly via Twitter, and will ask Rachel Smet to inform governors of new postings.
- iii JW also requested, when they have time, that staff provide governors with one-page summaries of policies. NS confirmed that policy summaries had been raised with the senior team. They are taking this forward and he hopes they will be available early next term.

ML joined the meeting.

## **7. FINANCE AND FUNDING**

KF introduced the management accounts report for Period 5. The following matters were discussed:

Student numbers are currently 320 against a budgeted roll of 325. Income has a positive variance of £69,000 partly attributable to additional income through Covid funding and the teacher's pay grant from the local authority. Other income has a negative variance largely due to reduced money for catering for school meals and after school clubs.

KF reported an overall summary operating surplus of £204,701 against a budgeted £37,502 equivalent to 36 days. With a forecast surplus for the full year of £201,167. She highlighted to governors the school's health grade of outstanding.

NS thanked KF. He referenced the 'depreciation' heading on the summary sheet. OHCAT are concerned that, at end of the PFI contract, such costs and liabilities will fall on the school, but NS pointed out that at the end of this period the school will not be making payments to Pinnacle.

NS said it is encouraging to see reserves are outstanding, but that he will expect governors to ask what plans there are to invest in capital projects.

PB asked when they will be able to see those plans. NS confirmed that investment has been made installing technology including projectors and screens into classrooms. Investment in wifi technology will also take place over the Easter holidays. Future projects will include refurbishment of food technology and the kitchen in Arbour Vale House. Library technology will also be improved, including hand held devices and sensory resources. NS anticipates this would still leave reserves in place.

NS reported he is also looking to increase staffing by 20 to 25 posts which will be a rolling cost. JW commented that he welcomes investment in staffing. He thanked KF and welcomed the very encouraging improvement in finances.

## 8A. PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

Governors received the Principal's report and NS thanked all for their contributions.

NS reported the school had started the January term in lockdown, having planned for school to reopen. Staff had adapted quickly, reaching out to whole learning community. Key objectives achieved included:

Pressures on children and parents had been supported by remote learning. The Government had supplied laptops and supported wifi connectivity and the school had loaned around 45 devices to families. He recognised that these technologies do not work for all young people and the school has used blended learning, including learning materials and sensory resources sent home, often engaging the whole family in the learning.

Schools had been asked to produce Remote Learning Support Plans and staff had worked quickly to develop personalised learning support plans to share with families.

NS outlined implementation of the Recovery Curriculum, reflecting that some pupils have been away from school for almost a year. On return to school on 8 March, they had anticipated and acted to address transition issues for pupils returning to the structured environment. Consequently, very few difficulties had been experienced and the large majority of children have settled back well.

SB reported that the Recovery Curriculum has gone very well. She referenced inspirational innovative work taking place and offered to produce a Power Point presentation to share with governors.

NS reported on the Health and Safety Audit commissioned by OHCAT which awarded Arbour Vale a rating of 98.46%. The assessor had commented that documentation was first rate.

NS referred to media coverage of access to free school meals through lockdown which the school had ensured by sending out or hand delivering vouchers to all of those eligible.

NS reported that there have been no Covid-19 infections in the school since before half-term. In January, the school set up and registered a Rapid Flow Test Centre within 36 hours through a huge staff effort. Home testing kits have now been issued to families who have requested them and all staff have home testing kits.

NS said that all annual reviews have taken place. He particularly commended the work on parent engagement. He confirmed 'wraparound' provision before and after school will be offered on four days over the Easter holiday.

NS outlined the following priorities to drive the improvement agenda:

- Proposed development of the STEM curriculum
- Completion of capital works to the library and food technology areas
- Interviews to recruit after the Easter holidays; NS has already had 45 applicants for 9 Teaching Assistant posts, with several aspiring to be teachers.
- An increasing emphasis on wellbeing of staff, children and the wider community the school serves.

JW thanked NS, the senior team and all staff for all the progress achieved.

### **Ethos, Vision and Strategy**

NS reported that the Portfolio meeting had helped identify the strengths of school. Inspection is now likely to be in the autumn term. They also recognised 'even better ifs' with the aspiration to become outstanding.

NS stated his commitment to successional management leadership and outlined some of the training and development going on at all levels across the school. He commented that he has supported Teaching Assistants in Maths and English for their NVQ Level 3 course as he had not been happy with the training provided via the Apprenticeship Scheme and has made OHCAT aware of this.

NS advised that a risk management meeting had taken place with John Prior and the Slough BC Assistant Director and no concerns had been highlighted.

DW recognised how the school's vision has developed in line with the OHCAT mission statement and acknowledged the good work done by senior management and teachers.

JW referred to 'even better ifs' and the need to keep students at the centre of their thinking, working closely with parents. He reflected on the portfolio visits and observed that the relationship between portfolios is getting stronger.

### **Quality and Provision**

NS reported on the visit of the School Improvement Partner (SIP) to middle leaders, which was successful and reflected their ability to articulate the 3 I's – Intent, Implementation and Impact. The visit also helped middle leaders prepare for inspection. Feedback was positive, with areas for development and an estimation of a solid Good with some even better practice that can be developed.

NS reported that the delivery of teaching and monitoring of assessment has been challenging through Covid but, with remote learning, high

standards have been maintained. In the Autumn term, with minimal disruption, 90% of pupils met or exceeded targets. EHCP personalised targets are constantly tracked with Evidence for Learning showing the personalised progress made.

NS sees attitudes and personal development of children as outstanding, with strong transition systems, interventions and therapeutic support put in place. The return to school on 8 March was a success and attendance was 86%. NS recognised the need to support many families that have continuing concerns especially with the return of Critically Extremely Vulnerable children.

SB said that she was looking forward to the entire school community being back together and awaits any further Government guidance on, for example, social distancing.

JW reported on a good portfolio meeting with an excellent data harvest for the autumn term. He is encouraged by the Recovery Curriculum, especially its focus on mental health and attendance figures are very encouraging. As an 'even better if' he would like to see the strength of senior management team and the middle leadership team drive consistency across the school.

NS commented that getting consistency of practice across the school will be ongoing and something he is constantly looking to develop.

### **Finance, Premises and Resources**

NS reflected, following KF's report, that next year's budget is based on a roll of 335 showing how parents' confidence in the school had been retained as leadership continue to work hard to make improvements.

NS reported that a boiler had failed and Pinnacle had not responded effectively. Temperatures at the school finally forced the school to close for half a day for it to be addressed but this was not successful and he is exploring with Pinnacle what appropriate financial deductions might be made to reflect this.

NS confirmed the IT work planned for the Easter holidays and that Pinnacle had also asked what works are planned for the summer, which will include refurbishment of the Primary sensory room.

NS reported that he will send a copy of the health and safety audit undertaken by Capita to governors as it showed that the operations team have worked with Pinnacle to a very high standard. A recent fire alarm had gone smoothly, with all children evacuated safely within five minutes.

NS said that GDPR training is currently a focus, as breaches can lead to severe financial penalties.

ML commented that Covid control has been strong. The Capita inspection was also very encouraging. He stressed that good communication between staff is important.

### **Child Protection and Safeguarding**

NS reassured governors that there is a high level of child protection across the school, with no significant change caused by Covid due to the proactive work of safeguarding team.

IC said that the Child Protection and Safeguarding lead is excellent. IC had emailed the lead some questions and all had been answered extensively, as reflected in her portfolio report. She had suggested that they meet to take this work forward.

IC commented that the programme of training is strong and being updated to be embedded into induction programmes and a new staff book is also being compiled. Risk assessments are strong and regularly reviewed. IC gave an overview of the main points in her report.

JW said that he is glad to see all governor's portfolio reports coming together and referencing each other, showing how portfolios fit together.

### **Attendance**

NS reported that one child joined the school this week and another is joining after Easter. He explained, given budgetary implications, that it is important to predict pupil numbers as accurately as possible.

### **Engagement**

NS reported that parent engagement is very strong and they are moving towards the Parent Partnership Award in a meaningful way. He explained that students had not joined this LGB because it was virtual meeting and quality of connection was not good.

NS confirmed that there had be no Stage 2 complaints for last four terms.

JW said that the lockdown had shown how vital the partnership with parents is. He commented that the team-run workshops for parents are excellent and encouraged governors to look at these.

### **Human Resources**

NS reported that staff morale has been stretched to the limit with staff genuinely worried about the impact of Covid-19 on them and their family. He recognised that those working with children are in the front line and expressed gratitude to staff who have worked throughout.

NS advised that the exciting developments in the STEM curriculum had involved a number of staff changes. Interviews had taken place for a science lead teacher. He explained that science will not necessarily be taught as a separate subject but can enhance other subjects including art and music. An art design and technology post has also been appointed. The new STEM team will be led by Robert Stephenson reporting to SB. NS advised that the maths lead teacher will benefit from being part of a wider team, emphasising the importance of maths across the curriculum and its role in supporting independent life skills.

NS reported that staff absence has been high but he anticipates improvement after Easter when clinically extremely vulnerable staff return to school.

NS advised that PB has taken on CPD and had a real impact. She had already presented to the senior team a staff handbook as a live document. He extended thanks to her for being a driving force of CPD across the whole school.

PB referred governors to her report. She reported that staff training continues, though Covid has hit aspects of delivery and has involved switching to online models for staff to ensure compliance. She confirmed that staff morale is relatively low but all are working together to get through this.

PB reported some changes to the induction programme. Training is well managed, especially for Teaching Assistant qualifications in which there is a lot of interest. Staffing structures for STEM will have a positive input to curriculum planning. Succession planning is still in discussion and will come to governors in future.

PB advised that performance management is embedded but there is a need for an appraisal plan for Teaching Assistants and support staff. She advised that they are also trying to align CPD to performance management.

JW again welcomed the links between portfolios.

## **8B. DASHBOARD**

Governors noted the data included in the Dashboard.

## **9. GOVERNOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

NS advised that visits to school have not been possible. Governor training will be discussed by JW and NS and any suggestions from governors are welcome.

## **10. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Governors noted the policies and procedures approved by the OHC&AT Board at their meeting 22 January 2021. JW confirmed that they can be viewed on [GovernorHub](#).

#### 11. OHC&AT GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTATION

Governors noted the governance documentation approved by the Board of Trustees, which can be viewed on [GovernorHub](#). JW commented that this was particularly useful to new governors.

#### 12. OHCAT STATUTORY ACCOUNTS

Governors noted that the 2019-20 statutory accounts had been submitted by the deadline and were available to view on the [OHCAT website](#). JW commented that the OHCAT website is a valuable source of information.

#### 13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No matters were raised.

#### 14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Governors noted the following meeting dates:

- Formal Meetings: 24th June 2021 (4pm start)
- Informal meetings: 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021 (4pm start)

The meeting closed at 18:05

Chair----- Date-----

#### **ACTIONS**

Minute	Action	By who
4	Meeting to take forward filling governor vacancy	JW / NS
6	SEF to be shared with governors when available	NS
6	Alerts on updates to school website to be arranged for governors	NS
6	Summaries of policies to be produced for governors	NS
8 a)	PowerPoint presentation on Recovery Curriculum to be produced for governors.	SB
8 a)	Copy of Capita's Health and Safety audit report to be circulated to governors	NS
9	Governors training to be discussed and planned	JW / NS