



MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF ABBEY COURT SCHOOL

MINUTES

Date	7 th July 2020
Time	11.00 am
Location	Remote conferencing
Clerk	Philip Matson

David Blease
John B (Deputising for the Headteacher)
Sam Franklin
Jane Heyes (Vice Chair)
John Huntingford
Jean Kerr (Chair)
David Lane
Tim Walker

A. Standard Items

1. Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed governors to the remote meeting. Apologies were received and accepted KJ. MP's absence was noted.

The Chair notified governors that KJ was absent due to ill health. Governors expressed their commiseration.

The Chair welcomed JB to the meeting and thanked the leadership team for its hard work during KJ's absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in regard to any item on the agenda. There were no declarations of any hospitality or gifts received or given.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting (17th March 2020)

JHu informed governors that he had not received the minutes of the last meeting before the meeting. The Chair noted his remark and asked JB to contact the office regarding this.

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings. The Chair informed governors that she would sign off the minutes when she was next on site.

4. Matters Arising from previous meeting

There were no actions arising from the previous meeting that were not addressed in the agenda.

5. Virtual meeting Protocols

Governors agreed to adopt the protocols circulated prior to the meeting by the Chair.

B) Governing Body matters and Statutory Responsibilities

6. Membership

The Chair explained that there were currently vacancies in the following committees

- Pay Appeals (currently comprising JK and JHe)
- Staff Disciplinary.

JHu volunteered to join the Pay Appeal Committee. *Governors confirmed his appointment.*

Governors agreed to ask MP to join the Staff Disciplinary Committee.

7. Meeting Dates 2020-21

Governors agreed to the calendar of FGB meetings for 2020-21. DB flagged up a potential clash in December. The agreed dates were as follows

Date	Venue
Terms 1 and 2	
Tuesday 13 th October	Rede Court Road, Strood
Tuesday 1 st December	Cliffe Road, Strood
Terms 3 and 4	
Tuesday 26 th January	Rede Court Road, Strood
Tuesday 16 th March	Cliffe Road, Strood
Terms 5 and 6	
Tuesday 11 th May	Rede Court Road, Strood
Tuesday 6 th July	Cliffe Road, Strood

8. Governor Action Plan 2019-20 Review and Setting the Governor Action Plan for 2020-21

JHe reminded governors of the action plan priority for 2019-20 – ensuring governors were fully cognisant of the various sources of information available to governors to enable them to scrutinise effectively. She explained that the priority would be achieved by September following the sign-off meeting with KJ.

JHe invited governors to consider action priorities for 2020-21. They should be informed by the three core strategic responsibilities of governors; JHe recommended that governors that parent engagement should also be considered. JHe proposed that governors consider three top priorities and feedback their views via email.

DECISION Governors agreed to comment on the appropriateness of the parent engagement priority and to identify up to three top priorities for the Governor Action Plan for the next academic year; they accepted a deadline of three weeks' time for any submissions.

9. Governor Monitoring Plan Review of 2019-20 and setting Monitoring Plan for 2020-21

Papers were submitted concerning both monitoring topics.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

SF described the implementation and impact of the recent training on Health and Wellbeing. She referred governors to her report. The Chair commented that the approach should be used

to foster parent engagement. JB responded that the school had adopted the approach with parents during the lockdown.

ENGLISH MONITORING

JHe thanked JB for his participation in her recent English focused monitoring visit.

Governors discussed priorities for the monitoring plan for 2020-21. The Chair proposed that governors continue to focus on the curriculum. JHe identified Mathematics, the Wellbeing Award, NQT support, Reading, Attendance and development of the Farm as possible areas for governor monitoring. JB explained that, currently, the school would not be employing any NQTs in 2020-21. He stated that Reading was not an area of concern. JB suggested that governors look at the school's review of Behaviour, the Wellbeing Award (with a particular focus on consideration of the pressures placed on staff and pupils by the lockdown) and Mathematics.

DECISION Governors agreed that governor monitoring in 2020-21 should focus on Curriculum, the Wellbeing Award, Mathematics and Behaviour. It was agreed that JHe should lead on the Curriculum, JK on Behaviour, SF on Wellbeing and TW on Mathematics.

DL offered to lead the on-going monitoring of the school farm over the next academic year. SF agreed to work alongside DL. The Chair gratefully accepted DL's and SF's kind offer.

DECISION DL and SF to monitor development of the school farm and to report periodically to the FGB.

10. Annual Safeguarding Audit and Safeguarding Checklist

JB confirmed that the school was compliant in all areas of safeguarding.

Governors noted its contents with satisfaction.

11. Chair's Correspondence and Actions

11 a) Capital expansion

This was considered a confidential item.

11 b) Compliance arrangements for return to school in September

The Chair informed governors that the school had sought clarification of the imposition of fines on parents who did not return their children to special school settings in September.

12. Policies for Review

Governors approved unanimously the following policies

- Recruitment and Selection
- Complaints
- Grievances
- Whistleblowing
- Safeguarding

Prior to the meeting KJ informed governors that the school would customise the Safeguarding Policy to suit the particular needs of Abbey Court School.

13. Finance

DECISION Governors unanimously ratified the school budget for 2020-21.

C) Leadership Matters

14) School Development Plan

This item was addressed in the Headteacher's Report.

15) Headteacher's Report

Governors submitted questions to the Headteacher prior to the meeting. The Headteacher responded in writing.

Q1 DB asked that, given the major impact of the current national crisis (ref page 11 etc), DfE's relaxation of data requirements and other accountabilities, likely postponement of Ofsted's in the Autumn, etc, is the significant time spent in preparation of this report the best use of time? How could this best be reviewed and rationalised?

Response There needs to be a discussion by Governors on their needs and the requirements in regards to reporting in the next academic year.

The Chair asked governors what format for the Headteachers' Report they preferred. Governors agreed that the required format would be determined by the outcome of JHe's forthcoming meeting with KJ regarding the Governors' Action Plan. TW suggested retaining the current headings, but addressing only those of relevance at that point in the year. He recommended that the Headteacher produce an exceptions report that included signposting to other information sources.

Decision Governors agreed to the adoption of the exceptions report format for 2020-21 and to review it for the following year.

Q2 JHu asked, as the school has remained open, are there any specific concerns arising from the backlog of maintenance work?

Response Yes, we do have concerns regarding our ability to carry out our programme as originally proposed. The delay with the budget setting and ratification process means that some big expenditure has not, as yet, been approved – e.g. new flooring at Rede Court Road at a cost of £25,000. Following the Governing Body meeting today and the assumption that the budget is ratified, we will be hard pressed to find a contractor to be able to replace the flooring during the summer holiday. Although we will try to fit this in at other times of the year, it may well prove difficult to complete this part of the programme. Governors should be reassured that all of the legal compliance management regarding maintenance will take place, but our concerns going forward are around our ability to find contractors able to work within the time slots available.

Q3 JHE asked how will Governors continue to confidently monitor attendance during the pandemic and does the school think there will be fines for parents who do not return children in September?

Response This has not been easy as things have changed during the pandemic and Government requirements have changed along with it. At the beginning, we had to monitor the attendance of the children attending the childcare provision we were offering. We made monitoring calls daily to any children that had places that did not attend. Unfortunately, some parents did not appreciate the pressure on places and used the childcare service as respite, and some of the children did not attend 100% of the time. This was frustrating for the school, as these children were taking up valuable places, which were in great demand. The difficulty was that where these were the children of key workers, we were unable to terminate the placement because they had priority. When school re-opened, we continued to monitor attendance in the normal way. Throughout the period there have been additional pressures on the school because we have not only had to do our own attendance monitoring, but also make daily returns to the DfE and the Local Authority. Initially there were huge issues with the DfE reporting software, which made it very difficult for us to provide them with the data. Following this week's updated guidance for special schools from the DfE, I am concerned that there may be fines for parents who do not return their children in September. For most parents this would be appropriate, but for some whose children are particularly vulnerable, it would of course, be inappropriate. I have e-mailed the local NAHT Rep, Jon McCarthy, and asked him to raise this as an issue between the NAHT and the DfE

(Since obtaining this answer from Karen Joy, there has been a response from the NAHT. This has been forwarded to Governors via separate e-mail.)

Q4 JHe said the school has an outstanding record in staff development. She asked is the school satisfied with statutory arrangements for NQTs during the pandemic?

Response Although we have not been satisfied with the statutory arrangements for NQTs during the pandemic, fortunately this has not impacted on Abbey Court. The NQTs we currently have are strong and we see no issues with them moving forward in the ways suggested. We have had one NQT about whom we have had concerns, which have been raised formally. However, this NQT has terminated her placement at the school and will move to another school to continue her final terms placement.

Q5 JHe asked how have the phone calls home been received and what impact has this had on home/school relationships?

Response Generally, phone calls home have been well received and parents have felt very supported by them. We have heard from some parents, however, that they have been bombarded with calls from all of the different agencies. For example, speech and language therapists, advisory teachers for sensory impaired, the nursing service, social workers, etc. I did raise this matter with the Local Authority, because it seemed that some parents were being overwhelmed during the early stages of the pandemic, and I highlighted that there should be better co-ordination. What was of particular concern to me was that information gleaned from parents, was not being shared by agencies and therefore the intelligence received by different agencies, was of limited impact. Jacqui Rudden has undertaken a parent's survey with regard to remote learning and homework and Governors have been sent a copy of the outcome of this survey via separate e-mail.

Q6 JHe asked, in the current climate, how will the school go about recruiting a teacher with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage the farm or are there opportunities to train someone into the role?

Response Our intention is to advertise this internally in the first instance, to see if any of our existing senior staff might be interested in this position. If we get no response, we will then have to advertise externally and put in a training programme to ensure the requirements of the post can be fulfilled appropriately.

JB congratulated Karen Joy and Linda Taylor for successfully obtaining charitable funding for the second phase of the farm (The Classroom) and that this work had begun last week and was due to be completed by the end of November.

Q7 JHe asked how will the accreditation targets in the SDP be revised to reflect the fact that children have not been in school?

Response JB explained that teacher assessment was an important part of the accreditation process. Teachers would use the data from the autumn and spring terms to assess P levels this year. Some other accreditation had already taken place. Accreditation of portfolios was moderated outside the school, though the school had been allowed to undertake some internal moderation this year. External moderation would take place in the Autumn Term.

D) Other Matters

DB asked governors how best the board could demonstrate its appreciation of the staff's outstanding dedication and pro-activity during the national crisis.

KJ replied (in writing prior to the meeting) that the staff were very grateful for all of the various e-mails received thanking them. They felt valued by the Governing Body. As restrictions were lifted, it might be appropriate for a small group of Governors to come in to school to express their thanks to staff during a briefing meeting before the end of term. Alternatively, they might wish to thank the staff in person during one of the training days in September. She did not think staff were expecting any further expression of appreciation than this.

The Chair told governors that staff received encouraging communications from the Chair and other governors at least weekly. She reported that 41% pupils attended school during the lockdown (the highest attendance of any special school). The Chair recommended that governors consider how they should show their appreciation at the next FGB meeting.

ACTION governors to consider how to show their appreciation of the dedication of staff at the next FGB.

Governors discussed the desirability of employing a suitably qualified teacher for the school farm.

16. Term dates 2020-21

DECISION Governors agreed the term dates for 2020-21.

17. Any Other Business

JHe asked governors how they would like to proceed with the planned briefings held at the end of the FGB meetings.

DECISION Governors agreed that briefings should continue in 2020-21 as planned for 2019-20. They agree that briefing topics should be as follows (in order of priority); Code of Conduct, Competency and Working with Parents.

DECISION Governors agreed to the proposal by the Chair that in preparation for all subsequent Full Governing Body meetings governors should submit questions regarding items on the agenda prior to the meeting. Governors approved the revised agenda template.

SIGNED _____ DATE _____