



## MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF ABBEY COURT SCHOOL

### MINUTES

<b>Date</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> March 2020
<b>Time</b>	11.00 am
<b>Location</b>	Cliffe Road site, Strood
<b>Clerk</b>	Philip Matson

#### **A. Standard Items**

##### **1. Apologies for Absence**

The Chair welcomed governors to the meeting. Apologies were received and accepted by TS. DL was congratulated on his re-election as a parent governor.

The Chair expressed her gratitude to the Headteacher and all staff for their continued hard work in the face of the particular challenges raised by the coronavirus emergency.

##### **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 (28<sup>th</sup> January 2020)**

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings.

##### **4. Matters Arising from previous meeting**

There were no actions arising.

#### **B) Governing Body matters and Statutory Responsibilities**

## **5. Register of Interest –**

Governors had received the Register of Interests template prior to the meeting. Those governors who had not updated the register, agreed to do so by the end of the meeting.

## **6. Membership**

The Chair informed governors that a potential community governor had agreed to observe at the next FGB. Governors noted.

## **7. Chairs actions and correspondence**

*Governors considered this item as confidential.*

## **8. Policies for Review**

- Workplace Relationships
- Managing Attendance

The headteacher explained that the Workplace Relationships Policy was compiled by Medway Council; there had been no significant changes. Similarly, the Managing Attendance Policy was a local authority policy. There were no questions from governors.

**Decision: Governors approved the adoption of the two policies.**

## **9. Governor Monitoring Visits**

JH told governors that she would be undertaking a monitoring visit of English on 17th March.

SF summarised her report on a health and wellbeing visit which she had undertaken recently. The focus included ensuring all relevant policies were implemented and training undertaken, and looking at their impact. Evidence considered included the feedback from workload surveys. SF informed governors that she had undertaken a course recently on Medway's approach to health and wellbeing. The Chair asked about the provision of Mental health first aid in the school. The Head responded that informal work being undertaken continuously e.g. Care First.

## **10. Governor Training**

Due to the Coronavirus no governor training had taken place since the last FGB.

JH informed governors that she would distribute the updated governors' skills audit shortly after the next FGB meeting. Governors noted.

## **11. Finance Update**

The Chair informed governors that the Finance Committee had met immediately prior to the FGB meeting. A summary of the committee's decisions would be included in the next headteacher report.

The Chair explained that it was important that the full governing body reaffirmed its commitment to the completion of Phase Two of the school farm project. Governors were informed that to date an additional £99,000 was required for completion and that some roll-over funding was available. Two grant applications for £50,000 each had been submitted and a third application for £30,000 would be confirmed shortly. The Chair stressed the fundraising efforts of the headteacher and school's finance department; £250,000 had been raised over the year.

**Decision: Governors confirmed unanimously their support for Phase Two of the school farm project.**

## **12. Term dates 2020-21**

**Decision: Governors approved the term dates unanimously.**

### **c) Headteacher's Verbal Report**

Governors were told that the school had signed up to the national Mental and Health Wellbeing Award. She described the process and timeframe.

The headteacher re-iterated the limited progress made over the last two years in resolving the nursing provision issue. She explained that all CCGs across Kent were to be unified. She reported that the CCG had provided funding for two health care assistants to backfill for TAs whilst they undertook training in administering medication; however, there was no support for implementation post training.

The headteacher reported that there had been no reported Coronavirus cases to date, although 27 children and 6 members of staff were self-isolating. She stressed that the school would continue to operate as normal for as long as possible, though this remained dependant on the staffing situation. The headteacher explained that specifically trained staff were needed to support different children's particular needs; if specialist staff members were absent from school, some children would need to be sent home. Governors considered the mental health implications for

staff and pupils. The headteacher told governors that the school was encouraging parents to behave as normal and was discouraging unnecessary telephone calls regarding Coronavirus from parents. Governors discussed the implications of the situation on pupil and staff attendance. She described the logistical issues around ensuring pupils cleaned their hands when entering and leaving the school site. Governors were assured that the school was behaving in a vigilant manner regarding hygiene measures; the Chair commented the school had no control over the conditions in transport vehicles. The NGA Coronavirus information sheet was shared with governors.

#### **d) Date and Time of Next Meeting**

Governors confirmed that the next FGB was planned for 12<sup>th</sup> May.

Governors were asked to arrive at the school (Cliffe Road site) at 10.00 am on the 7<sup>th</sup> July as the FGB would be preceded by a breakfast meeting with new teachers.

**Decision: Governors agreed that, in event of a school closure, urgent interim decisions would be taken by the headteacher, Chair and Vice Chair. Governors would be kept informed by email.**

#### **e) Governors Briefing – “managing complaints”**

Governors pointed out that, by the time a complaint had reached a governor panel, they should be confident that the school had done everything it could be reasonably expected to do to avoid an escalation of the issue.

The Chair pointed out that it was important that governors understand the historical context of complaints, particularly those of a serial nature and those considered unreasonable. Governors agreed that it was desirable that they should have time prior to the meeting to discuss the context of a complaint.

JH proposed that governors agree a set of protocols in relation to a planning meeting: that governors ensure that they have re-read the complaints policy prior to the meeting; that they meet before the panel hearing to consider any questions for clarification; and that any questions arising from the pre-meetings should be clarified with the school prior to the panel through the panel Chair.

The Chair said it was important that the complainant understood that governors were aware of the process up to the point of the panel hearing.

Governors agreed that it may not always be necessary for the panel to meet the complainant face-to-face.

Governors agreed that it would be beneficial for the mental and emotional wellbeing of the panel members to hold a post-hearing de-brief post meeting.

Governors decided timescale guidelines for hearings – half an hour for pre-meeting discussions and up to two-hours meeting for the entire panel process.

A governor asked how many complaints reached this stage every year. KJ replied that there was an average of 5-6 complaints per annum. The Chair stressed the small number of complaints.

KJ stressed the emotional vulnerability and volatility of some complainants; she reminded them of the pressures inherent in the close relationship between schools and parents over a long period of time (up to 16 years). She described the school as the frontline service provided. She described the different stages of dealing with a complaint against the school.

The Chair commented that, despite the best intentions, it was not always possible to resolve an issue to the satisfaction of the complainant.

Governors discussed the circumstances where staff felt intimidated by complainants.

JH said that it was important that panels comprised a gender balance.

KJ pointed out that, on rare occasions, the school was compelled to escalate a complaint to a panel decision because the issue had become intransigent.

Governors discussed the issue of complainants failing to follow the complaints process appropriately.

JH stressed the need for the panel to demonstrate to the complainant that it clearly that it had considered carefully the complaint.

Governors discussed the process of escalation after the governor hearing stage.

DL suggested that “time-out” adjournments be allowed to give time for panellists and complainants to reflect. Space. Governors considered the practicalities of “time-outs”.

KJ said that most complaints were centred around parents’ expectations of the care given their children in school. Governors discussed the discrepancy between the level and type of care that staff were able to provide and parents’ expectations. They considered possible escalations through safeguarding implications. The lack of any control by the school over incidents occurring during the transport of children was addressed.

Governors considered parental concerns about accidents experienced by pupils in school.

The Chair said that complaints were sometimes the symptom of a cry for help.

Governors were satisfied that effective policies were being implemented effectively and monitored regularly.

The Chair sought clarification regarding representation at a hearing. It was confirmed that the complainant’s partner should be allowed to speak at the hearing. NAHT advice stated that anyone else accompanying the complainant should be made aware that s/he should not speak at the hearing.

**Action JH agreed to compile governors' guidance notes for complaints hearings.**

**Governors decided that the next briefing should address the topic of recruitment interviews.** Governors were asked to read the recruitment and retention policy and safer recruitment policy prior to the next meeting.