**Springfield School and The Meadows School**

**Minutes of the Virtual Meeting of the Full Governing Board held via Teams**

**on Thursday 5 November 2020 at 5.30pm**

**Present:** Mr C Best (Executive Head Teacher), Mr M Sproat (Chair), Miss A Chappell, Mr C Pearce, Mr D Davies, Mr S Hambleton, Ms D Willshaw, Ms A Whitfield

**In attendance:** Mrs A Buick (Entrust Clerk), Mrs J Wright (Head of School, The Meadows), Mrs D Finney (Head of School, Springfield School), Ms S Searle (Head of Governance, Manor Hall Academy Trust)

**1 Apologies and Attendance**

Apologies were received and accepted from Ms R Buckley and Mr D Hilyer.

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. The meeting was being held virtually using Teams, due to the coronavirus pandemic. The agenda and paperwork had been issued in advance. Governors confirmed receipt of paperwork.

An introduction was made to Ms S Searle, the new Head of Governance at Manor Hall Academy Trust. Ms Searle explained that her role was to work across the Trust to support governance practice and local Governors. One early priority was to review the reporting structure between the local Governors and the Trust.

**2 Election of a Chair**

As there were no other nominations for the position of Chair, it was agreed that Mr Sproat be re-elected for a further one-year term of office.

**Resolved**: That Mr Sproat was elected as Chair for 2020/21.

**3 Election of a Vice Chair**

It was noted that the previous Vice Chair had resigned for personal reasons and that Angela Whitfield had been nominated as Vice Chair. As there were no other nominations, this was agreed.

**Resolved:** That Ms Whitfield was elected as Vice Chair for 2020/21.

**4** **Governing Board Matters**

Governing Board Meetings

No meetings had been held since the last full LAB meeting.

Membership

Mr Wright, Parent Governor, had recently resigned. However, the Chair confirmed that as Mr Pearce was also a Parent Governor, a replacement for Mr Wright was not needed.

Membership Website and GIAS

The Clerk confirmed that GIAS was a website that required Governor information to be kept up to date. The school office staff should be undertaking this role.

Business and Pecuniary Interests

Governors were reminded of the need to declare any business or pecuniary interests in items on the agenda for this meeting and to ensure that their annual declaration of interest was kept up to date. No interests were declared.

Persons of Significant Control

It was understood that this was a matter for the Trust Board and not the LAB.

Code of Conduct

It was confirmed that all Governors had signed the Code of Conduct.

Confidentiality

Governors were reminded that all discussions that take place at this meeting should remain confidential to the meeting. Minutes would remain confidential until signed off at the next meeting. Any matters to remain confidential would be recorded in a Confidential Appendix.

**5** **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 9 July 2020, having been circulated were taken as read and approved.

**5 Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes**

The actions agreed at the previous meeting were set out on the back page of the minutes.

The Chair noted his action to provide feedback from a question and answer session he had attended. However, as the information had been made available on the Staffordshire education website he had not needed to do this.

**7 Review of Committee Structure**

Committees

The Chair reported a meeting he had attended with the Executive Head Teacher and the Trust’s Head of Governance. It was proposed to retain the three existing committees (being Wellbeing, Teaching & Learning and Leadership & Management. Ad hoc committees or working groups would be arranged if the need arose. Governors agreed that the existing arrangements worked well, and it was **agreed** to retain the committee structure.

It was further agreed that there would be no changes to the committee membership, other than to fill the vacancy created by Mr Wright’s resignation. The Chair would review this after the skills audit had been completed. Action: Chair

Link Governors

The following Link Governors were agreed:

Pupil Premium – Mr D Hilyer

Safeguarding – Mr D Davies

The Chair thanked Mr Pearce for his work in having oversight of the Covid working party.

**8 Reports**

Chair’s and Vice Chair’s Actions

The Chair noted that he had participated in discussions with management as and when requested to do so. Some of these discussions related to recruitment of staff across the Trust. The Chair had also been involved in the performance management meeting for the Executive Head Teacher, along with the Trust CEO, in October. A one increment increase in pay was recommended, backdated to 1 September 2020. This was **unanimously approved**.

Committee Reports

The Chairs of each committee were invited to comment on their recent meetings, and the following were noted:

Teaching and Learning Committee

Ms Whitfield confirmed that the meeting had been online.

There had been much discussion about support for staff in the challenging circumstances brought about by the pandemic. It was clear that all teaching staff felt that they had been well supported by the senior management team.

Some of the actions agreed from previous meetings had stalled due to other priorities.

The recovery curriculum was being followed. At present, there was a clear focus on re-establishing routines and positive behaviour.

The Executive Head Teacher commented on engagement during the first lockdown, which at 60% was high. He felt that the schools were well prepared from their previous experiences if there was a need to do remote learning again. Staff were risk assessing their classes to see what they may be able to do differently and better if needed.

There was a discussion about the level of engagement of parents, as this clearly affected the engagement of pupils. A survey of parents was suggested and would be considered. It was noted that the lack of access to sufficient and suitable IT devices was a barrier to learning for some families. Mrs Finney explained that a parent survey had been issued to find out what access families had to devices, and that this would be used to help teachers plan. Mrs Wright expressed confidence that staff knew pupils well and could plan accordingly.

Staff Governors confirmed that pupils had shown resilience in returning to school and an understanding of the pandemic situation.

The Executive Head Teacher gave further details of the recovery curriculum, which had been carefully planned. There was a focus on English, Maths and Phonics. Baselining for all pupils had been completed, so progress would be able to be measured in year. Progress for social and emotional development would also be measurable.

Wellbeing Committee

Mr Davies confirmed that the committee had met in September, and that the following areas had been discussed:

* Remote learning;
* The operation of ‘bubbles’;
* How staff were coping with new demands and circumstances;
* How staff and pupils were able to celebrate success;
* The activities of the School Council, which it was hoped would be able to resume soon;
* The excellent work by staff in supporting families in lockdown and during last term;
* Attendance, which was high;
* Bullying and complaints, which had no incidences recorded;
* Staff attendance and wellbeing.

Mrs Finney confirmed that there had been no positive cases of Covid-19 in either school to date, which was excellent.

Mr Davies noted that the committee had agreed that the Chair of the LAB would write to staff to express thanks for their hard work. Both staff governors reported that this had been much appreciated by staff. Staff were feeling happy to be back in school and were being well supported by the SLT. The current bubble arrangements were working well. Pupils and staff felt safe in school. The Parent Governor agreed with this, stating that his son was happy to have returned to school.

Leadership and Management Committee

Mr Sproat explained that the committee had received updates in the following areas:

* Safeguarding, where governors were assured that the caseload and challenges were being well managed;
* The final accounts for both schools, which showed that the financial position was healthy. Staff were thanked for their rigorous financial management;
* Health and safety matters. Issues were being addressed at both schools, including access at The Meadows;
* Refurbishment works at both schools and the potential procurement of an additional classroom from the high school.

It had been agreed that Governors would complete a skills audit and that Mr Sproat would collate the responses. A strategy meeting of governors had been planned and it was expected that the skills audit feedback would be covered at this. It was agreed that the effectiveness of the LAB was very important. There were no specific concerns about this at this time, but it was important to be reflective and keep this under review.

The Executive Head Teacher was invited to comment on staffing. He reported that the committee had approved the awarding of increments due to teaching staff as noted in the committee minutes. It had also been agreed to appoint a teacher at Springfield to cover an expected long-term absence and to advertise for a new teacher at The Meadows with effect from January 2021.

**9 Executive Head Teacher’s Report**

The Executive Head Teacher referred to his written report, which had been circulated prior to the meeting, and commented on the following:

* That this was another extraordinary report, so would cover the key things that the Trust had determined should be monitored;
* The breakdown of pupil data was included at the front of the report;
* Attendance was very good and was high relative to other special schools, both in Staffordshire and nationally;
* There were some parents that were understandably concerned about sending their children in to school, especially during the second lockdown. However, local authority advice was that schools were not required to provide home learning where the decision not to attend was due to parental choice;
* There had been no positive cases in the schools so far;
* The bubbles in operation were working well. They may be expanded at a later date, but staff did not feel that this was appropriate at this time;
* The Covid response team meetings were continuing. Mr Pearce was thanked for his contributions to this group. It had been found to be a useful forum through which to communicate with staff and to listen to their views. It would continue for as long as necessary;
* Staff wellbeing was being carefully monitored. It was clear that staff were tired, and some were extremely anxious. This was the same in many workplaces. The SLT was not complacent in being aware of this and providing support. It was important that the LAB understood this.

There was a discussion about staff wellbeing. It was acknowledged that staff had responsibilities and anxieties not related to school, but which could significantly impact on their performance at school. The Head Teachers knew their staff well, so were able to identify those who were vulnerable. The Wellbeing Committee had met six weeks earlier, and circumstances had changed since then for many people. Some staff had noticeably higher anxiety levels. The biggest risk to the schools was having high future levels of staff absence, as this would adversely affect the teaching and learning provided.

The Executive Head Teacher resumed his commentary on his report:

* Development plans would be shared with Governors prior to their next meeting;
* It had been confirmed that the Hollies PRU would join the Trust in January 2021;
* The Trust may merge with another MAT in Cheshire East, but discussions on this were ongoing and for information at this stage;
* The Trust planned to set up an SEMH free school in Stoke-on-Trent;
* The Trust’s new Head of Governance was leading a review of Trust reporting, and a new LAB report format would be trialled next term. This aimed to reduce paperwork and duplication, and hence improve efficiency. The reports would still include a narrative element.

The Chair confirmed his wish that the LAB committees should continue in the revised reporting format.

Governors resolved to receive the Executive Head Teacher’s Report.

**10 Entrust Governor Information Pack**

The Clerk reported that the Pack had been produced for information. Entrust had again advised schools to focus on key issues this term as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, as Head Teachers had needed to prioritise their efforts on responding to this. The Pack included a great deal of information, so the Clerk highlighted the following as likely to be of interest to the LAB:

* Updates to Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020;
* The regular updates to Government guidance for schools to follow on Covid-19;
* That there would be no official data published for Phonics, SATs and other national testing/exams in 2020. However, schools could choose to analyse and publish their own data if they wished;
* That training and development for both staff and governors continued to be important, and that Entrust would be publishing a new governor training programme for 2021 shortly;
* The County Council was recommending that schools carry out audits to assess the risks of finger trapping by pupils;
* The need to retain a sharp focus on staff wellbeing, and the particular responsibility of the LAB for monitoring the wellbeing of Head Teachers and senior staff;
* The resources available to teaching staff via the Oak National Academy;
* The importance of regular self-evaluation of governors individual and collective skills.

It was confirmed that the schools had approved their Safeguarding Policy for 2020/21, that the finger trapping audit had been completed and that the Governors were completing their skills audit as discussed earlier in the meeting.

**8 Any Other Business**

The Chair wished to set a date for the self-evaluation meeting, and following discussion, this was agreed for Thursday 3 December at 5pm.

**9 Date and Time of Future Meetings**

The next full LAB meeting would be held on Thursday 25 February 2021 at 5.30pm.

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**Chair Date**

The meeting closed at 7.15pm