

CBAT BOARD MEETING

Minutes of the Trustees' meeting held on 24th March 2021 at 4:30pm via videoconference

Present: Nigel Riglar (Chair), Graham Ayre, Debbie Bird, John Gilbert, Emma Gray (Finance Director – FD), Barbara Green, Ruth Hollier, Stuart Wilson (Chief Executive Officer – CEO).

Apologies: None.

In Attendance: David Dale (Clerk). Joining the meeting at 5.00pm for items 11, 12 and 13 were Alex Robbins (Headteacher, Berkeley Primary School), Helen Cerullo (Co-Chair, BPS School Development Board); Louise Bennett (Headteacher, Cam Woodfield Junior School), Nicola Evered and Emma Irvine (Co-Chairs, CWJS SDB); Glen Balmer (Associate Headteacher, Marling School), Muir Mathieson (Chair, MS SDB).

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies received and accepted:

None.

3. Declarations of Interest:

There were no new general declarations.

4. Minutes of the meetings of 3rd February 2021 and 3rd March 2021

Trustees considered the two sets of draft minutes, and there being no issues as to their accuracy it was **proposed** by JG, and **seconded** by GA, that the minutes of these two meetings be approved and signed, to be published on the Trust's website. This was **agreed** unanimously.

5. Action point checklist

The Clerk reported that all actions from the last two meetings have been completed or are in progress, and all appear elsewhere on the agenda for today's meeting.

6. Matters arising

None.

7. Trustee appointments and resignations

(i) Appointment

The CEO, NR and RH had interviewed a potential new Trustee. Trustees asked questions about the candidate's employment history, her motivation for applying to become a Trustee, and her references. Having received satisfactory information on these matters, it was **proposed** by RH and **seconded** by NR that the Board make a recommendation to the Trust's Members that Judith Taylor be appointed as a Trustee. This was **agreed** unanimously.

(ii) Resignation

The CEO reminded the Board that this would be EG's last meeting as a Trustee. The Board had agreed on 2nd December 2020 that the Finance Director post be re-designated as Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO) with effect from 1st April 2021, and that at that time the postholder ceases to be a Trustee.

On behalf of the Board, the Chair thanked EG for her valued contribution as a Trustee for the last 4½ years, as well as for her ongoing professional support in her role as FD/CFOO. This was warmly endorsed by all. **Action: EG** to inform Companies House of her resignation as a Non-Executive Director of the Trust.

8. Health, safety and wellbeing

The FD noted that all staff and secondary pupils are being tested for Covid-19, as reported previously. All staff have been risk assessed. There have been no reportable health and safety incidents. One unusual incident is the recent discovery of a badger sett at BPS, health and safety advice is being sought to manage the situation.

9. Data protection and privacy (GDPR)

The CEO reported that there had been no data protection breaches. The CEO reported that a Freedom of Information request had been received from the National Education Union concerning data about teachers' salary progression: the information had been collated and will be reported to the Board at its next meeting. This data will be collated annually in future.

10. Finance

The FD presented the revenue forecasts and actuals report to the end of February (Month 6). Income and expenditure are in line with forecasts, there are no concerns. All schools are awaiting lump sum funding in April/May. Covid test costs will be reimbursed automatically. This was all noted.

The CEO said that having looked closely at the CWJS budget he is content to run operate with 8 classes again in 2021/22. Trustees commented on the high staffing costs at CWJS (93% of total income), the CEO said that this may reduce as we refine the budget and would fall if the school reverted to 7 classes. In response to other questions, he explained that a S175 audit referred to a self-assessment of safeguarding policies co-ordinated by the Local Authority.

11. Reopening of schools

At this point the Heads and Chairs joined (see attendance list above) and the Chair welcomed them to the meeting. After brief introductions, he invited them to reflect on the challenges of the past six months and to inform Trustees of the main issues going forward.

BPS: AR reported that although the latest lockdown had been hard for everyone and parents had had a lot to do, they had been very positive about the remote learning provided, had engaged well, and were now very positive about their children returning to school. Teachers are assessing gaps in learning and developing catch-up plans to be incorporated into the School Improvement Plan. Some children will need help to rebuild their confidence and independence, teachers will focus on resilience as a basis for learning. There are higher pastoral and behaviour needs, including managing some friendship issues. AR said that the school is now in a very strong position in terms of its staffing, with a Deputy Headteacher and newly qualified teacher having joined recently. HC and NE endorsed AR's report and commented that the school has responded very well to the challenges faced.

CWJS: LB reported that the school had worked hard through the autumn to support children needing to catch up on learning basic skills following the earlier school closures. In January, the school was well prepared to deliver a full timetable through remote learning. Some parents had needed support, there had been positive feedback on remote learning. The senior leadership team had monitored this and seen high-quality teaching. Staff wellbeing had also been monitored. Since returning, there has been good pupil attendance, most pupils are settled and concentrating on learning but a few are anxious. School development priorities are now being reviewed and there will be additional training on phonics. EI commented that the school has a strong staff team, it has been ahead of the game in terms of remote learning and communications, this had been confirmed by the great results of the recent parental survey and backed up by further informal comments.

MS: GB reported that there are some different challenges at secondary level. A full curriculum had been delivered remotely, there had been a positive response from parents. Advance notice of reopening on 8th March had helped MS prepare for the return to school. Pupils were happy to be back, and there are no significant gaps in learning. Mass LFT testing has been a big practical challenge but a great achievement with some 4,000 tests in 9 days. DB noted that pupils had been very impressive in taking the testing regime seriously and making it work well, with the help of a committed support team. A number of positive tests have meant that some pupils have had to self-isolate and continue with remote learning. Most pupils have been happy to wear masks in the classroom, only a small number have exemptions. There will be no external exams this summer, alternative assessments will be done and the guidance on this is expected soon. MM added that the SDB has been impressed by the professional approach shown by the senior leadership team and have passed on their thanks to GB and his colleagues.

Trustees asked a number of questions including:

- Can the schools continue to run as they are at the moment if the pandemic situation does not improve over the next 6 months? The CEO said he is confident that the schools will respond well to whatever challenges they face, although it is still too soon to understand how reopening will affect Covid-19 infection rates and how Government guidance will change in future.
- What has been the impact on staff? The Heads reported that staff have been resilient, positive, and made a great collective effort.
- How can the schools support the mental health of pupils? The Heads reported that pupils had been very positive about returning to school. A lot of support measures are in place. BPS and CWJS are working together to share ideas such as wellbeing sessions and pet 'therapy'.

The Chair said that the Trust is responsible for some 2,000 pupils and staff, the Trustees have been very confident in the efforts of the Heads and their teams and would like to ensure that their thanks are conveyed to all concerned.

12. Gloucester Free School

The CEO reported that work on the Gloucester project is moving forward steadily. An initial meeting has been held with the DfE, including their capital and site leads. The aim was to have the new school ready to open in September 2023 but this cannot be confirmed until the site has been identified and approved and is likely to move back at least one year. There may be little opportunity for innovation in the design of the school, such as future-proofing against another pandemic. A project plan has been developed and a project manager will be appointed after Easter. JG is on the project team; other Trustees are welcome to become involved too.

Other matters being looked at include the proposed 'fair banding' admissions policy to give the school a comprehensive intake profile, the Trust will consult other Heads, parents, and the local authority about this in due course. There were no questions from Trustees.

13. Other growth opportunities

The CEO reported that CBAT has submitted a bid to sponsor a new primary school at Bishops Cleeve and is hoping to be shortlisted in what is expected to be a very competitive process. Even if this bid is not successful, the work undertaken will stand CBAT in good stead for future bids in those parts of the county where further growth in the primary sector is expected such as the M5 corridor around Whitminster. The CEO is continuing to hold informal discussions with other primary Heads and Chairs as opportunities arise. There has been no further movement on potential opportunities with Diocesan schools.

HC and NE left the meeting at 5.45pm.

There was a wide-ranging discussion with contributions from Heads and Chairs, covering the value of seeking staff views on the benefits of being part of the Trust, the development of the Link Trustee role to support SDBs, the value of having experienced local Governors to support SDBs in new schools, the need to retain good staff and provide development opportunities for them, and the need not to lose focus on the operational needs of current schools while the Trust is pursuing its growth ambitions. NR summarised the conversation and said that the Board had found it invaluable having Heads and Chairs present for this part of the agenda, he thanked them for their contributions and said that the Board would arrange to do this again in future.

GB, LB, EI, MM, AR left the meeting at 6.00pm.

14. School updates

CWJS: RH reported on her recent visit when she had found the school organised, calm, welcoming and bright. The pupils were busy and purposeful. Although it is still too early to see the full impact of closure and lockdown, improvement plans are in place and staff are committed to the continued improvement of the quality of education. There were no questions from Trustees.

MS: DB reported on her recent meeting with GB when they had discussed assessment plans for Year 11 and 13 students – further DfE guidance is expected soon, it will be important to have a robust process based on work produced at school, and to avoid any parental pressure around grades. There are challenges for new staff having started during closure and missing out on the usual opportunities for meeting their colleagues, and for Year 7 and 8 pupils who have had limited access to specialist rooms.

Trustees asked about potential parental pressure on grades. The CEO said that any grade appeals will only be possible on process, not the assessment, and we will follow exam boards guidance and regulations. The Chair noted that Trustees would be willing to hear appeals if requested. Trustees also discussed the bubbling arrangements and other safety arrangements at MS and asked about the wearing of masks in classrooms, the CEO reported that the school had taken legal advice when communicating with parents but in practice students had complied with the guidance and there had been no concerns.

BPS: There was little to add to the thorough report given by AR under item 11 above. The CEO noted the point about higher pastoral and behaviour needs, including managing some friendship issues. There would be further discussion with BPS and CWJS about opportunities for sharing business support services. There were no questions from Trustees.

15. People Strategy

No further information to report. BG is meeting tomorrow to develop some ideas.

16. Trust policies

Violence to employees at work policy: the FD explained that this is based on the NEU model policy, and had initially been discussed at the Board on 2nd December 2020. The policy has since been sent to Headteachers and trade unions, and it was explained where some minor changes had been made to reflect comments received. In response to questions from Trustees, the FD explained the proposed amendment to the wording on risk protection arrangements, and clarified that incidents should be reported to either the Headteacher and/or the school's Business Manager (where applicable). It was then **proposed** by RH and **seconded** by JG that the violence to employees at work policy be approved, this was **agreed** unanimously.

The FD referred to three updated policies she had circulated on 23rd March – Management of sickness absence, Discretionary leave of absence, and Health and Safety statement of intent. She explained some minor amendments now proposed, particularly in relation to removing some detailed procedural requirements for parental bereavement leave. **Action: Trustees** are requested to consider these updated policies and confirm their approval by 19th April.

17. Mentoring

The CEO advised the Board on progress with the Trust-to-Trust development plan with Lionheart Academies Trust, focussing on people and partners, quality assurance and accountability, and governance capability. He said there is a good match with the other Trust, work is underway, staff have been assigned to work on issues including IT strategy, central finance functions, and governance. The Chair said that he would be happy to speak to the other Chair if this would be helpful.

18. School Development Board minutes

The Board noted the draft minutes of the SDB meetings at CWJS and BPS on 15th and 17th March respectively. There has been no recent meeting of the MS SDB, the next is on 29th March.

19. Trustees' decisions under Scheme of Delegation

The Clerk reported that since the Board's last meeting Trustees had approved the updated Adoption and Data protection policies.

20. Risk register

The FD presented the risk register and reported that there were no changes since this was reported to the Board last time.

21. Any other business

The CEO advised Trustees on the recruitment of School Improvement Leads.

22. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 19th May 2021, time to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 6.42pm.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'G' followed by a horizontal line that ends in a small arrowhead pointing to the right.

John Gilbert
19th May 2021