



Academy: The Aspire Multi- Academy Trust
Meeting title: Extraordinary Meeting of the Board of Directors
Date and time: Thursday 14th May 2020 at 1.00pm
Location: Virtual attendance via ZOOM

Membership

'A' denotes absence

Mr K Daniell	KD
Mr M Skinner (CEO)	MS
Mr P Golightly (Chair)	PG
Mrs C Meese	CM
Mr M Fielding	MF
Mr C Anderson	CA
Mr R Sewell	RS

In attendance

Sue Harrison Clerk to the Board	Clerk
Mrs H Detheridge – MAT Finance and Business Manager	MFBM/HD

Glossary

ABC	Archbishop Cranmer CofE Academy
ABM	Academy Business Manager
BJ	Brown Jacobson (Solicitors)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DBE	Diocesan Board of Education
EBSP	East Bridgford St Peter's CofE Academy
FWC	Finance & Workforce Committee
GPS	Gunthorpe CofE Primary School
KWS	Kirkby Woodhouse Primary School
LA	Local Authority
LGB	Local governing body
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
MFBM	MAT Finance & Business Manager
RSC	Regional Schools Commissioner
SJS	Sir John Sherbrooke Junior School
OTP	Oak Tree Primary school

BD/20/31 Apologies for absence Action

All Directors were present at the meeting.

BD/20/32 Conflicts of interest

There were no declarations of interest, either direct or indirect, for items of business on the agenda.

MF joined the meeting

BD/20/33 Background summary / Current situation within the academies

The DfE had issued guidance for the planned re-opening of schools for reception, Y1 and Y6 children, and issued new briefings on a daily basis. The teaching unions had also issued guidance. MS and PG had attended a virtual headteachers meeting earlier in the week following the initial announcement where they had been informed of the issues that the individual academies faced, and the individual headteacher views were considered.

PG highlighted the unique issues faced by the individual academies which were specific to each setting and each community. Despite these differences all the academies were coping remarkably well in the difficult situation.

MS reported that the general feeling amongst headteachers was that they were coping well with the small numbers of children of key workers and those who are vulnerable but would have to proceed with some caution with the new guidance which would potentially significantly increase the numbers of children.

There was also a varying degree of anxiety amongst staff which would need to be considered. If staff are very anxious about returning to work, they may look to take sick leave due to their anxieties.

MS noted that the science behind the DfE advice created some questions as to why it was safe to reopen primary schools but not secondary schools, and some concern that the guidance had been issued due to economic reasons. The younger children will not be able to adhere to social distancing, and may spit when they talk, or cough on another person. The buildings themselves were not designed to accommodate social distancing in respect of corridors and toilets. The children will not be with their usual teacher and friends will need to be separated across the school. Teachers from different year groups who are not attending school will be needed to teach due to the smaller class sizes, which will impact on their ability to deliver home learning to their own year groups.

A survey by Parentkind had identified that only around 7% of parents would actually send their children back to school, however it is not known how parents will actually react and therefore how many children will attend. The headteachers suspect that the numbers wishing to return will be quite low.

The teaching unions are advising that they do not have to open, it is ultimately the responsibility of the headteacher, and surveys suggest that approximately 90% of headteachers do not feel that it is safe to open

BD/20/34 Aspire 'Wider Opening' Proposal for Board Consideration following the government announcement 4 days ago of a planned re-opening of schools to some year groups by 1st June 2020

PG outlined that the options had been laid out in the Aspire 'Wider Opening' Proposal summary paper that had been previously circulated for consideration by Directors which identified three different options:

Option 1) **Full compliance as far as possible**, with caveats issued regarding the practical challenges of working to the Government's plan.

Option 2) **Partial compliance from the outset** – offering part-time places for children in the eligible year groups in order to keep numbers on site at a lower level.

Option 3) **Non-compliance** – refusing to re-open to any more children until there is more convincing evidence that it is safe to do so; as seen, for example, in the relaxing of social distancing measures in wider society.

PG outlined and discussed the challenges:

-Space available

-The ability to clean the spaces effectively

-Who will do the cleaning/deep cleaning?

-H&S will be the indicator for change, as if numbers grow significantly then it may be necessary to stop offering provision for a year group e.g. Y6.

Feedback from the headteachers had been shared with Directors prior to the meeting.

BD/20/35 Consider the options outlined in the government guidance.

PG asked for Directors to comment on their preferred option:

CM noted that whilst she did not wish legalities to dictate the decision-making process, she asked for clarification of the responsibilities relating to academies within a MAT as opposed to maintained schools.

MS responded that his understanding was that the NAHT state that the core responsibilities lie with the headteacher in academies as they do in maintained schools; as headteachers are accountable they have the responsibility to make the decisions. Under H&S law the headteacher is responsible, however these are unique circumstances. MS planned to attend a webinar facilitated by BJ on these issues the following week.

CM acknowledged the need to continue to protect vulnerable children and care for the children of key workers. She noted that Aspire's aim was to give the children the best quality of education possible and questioned if children would receive a better quality of education in school after consideration of the impact of trying to implement social distancing measures or being home schooled by parents.

PG reiterated the diversity of the issues that the individual MAT academies face, e.g. SJS as a junior school will only have to cater for Y6. Therefore, a MAT wide model is not possible.

CA expressed his respect for CM's comments about quality of education, however noted that there should be an element of parental choice in the decision. He acknowledged that the academies were coping with the small numbers in attendance currently and suggested that a limit in the number of children the school would be able to accommodate under these circumstances be identified and communicated to parents.

CA highlighted the statement in the proposed letter 'the MAT Board will respect and support the professionalism of each headteacher in making operational safety decisions.'

RS questioned if any of the headteachers would be unable to start work on site due to being considered in a vulnerable category, and the consideration that some teachers may not have child care so may not be able to attend on site.

KD noted that teacher staffing levels were a separate issue which could be addressed at a local level. He suspected that many parents would not send their children to school, but the academies should aim to offer the best education that they can, so they should try to implement the plan in the best way they can.

The Board can veto an LGB member being appointed if needed and the same principle should apply in this scenario, therefore the wording will need to identify this.

KD identified that communication with parents was paramount to the way forward, and the letter to parents needed to be non-biased, and objective. They would need to take

one step at a time, dependent on the responses and subsequent actions of parents in bringing their children to school

PG summarised that the consensus of opinion was to ask parents what they would like but this did not mean that individual schools would be able to meet their requests. Once parental opinion has been canvassed, the headteacher will make the decisions considering their individual operational challenges.

The Board have appointed the headteachers and trust them to make the day to day decisions based on what is happening on that day, considering the numbers of children, staff and cleaning required. It would not be practical and would not be necessary for the Directors to be involved in the decision making.

The MAT should offer the best education that they can, which would presumably consist of ensuring education for both the children who choose to attend school and the ones who continue to stay at home.

MS noted that teachers will need to provide learning for both groups of children, and the home learning will replicate what is taught in school as much as possible, and this to be communicated to parents. He supported that the decision making be delegated to the headteachers.

CM agreed that the consensus was that the decision making should be delegated to the headteachers as all the schools are very different and this needed to be informed by parental intention. She highlighted that the degree of delegation may be different where a school has an IEB rather than an LGB. She would support CA's suggestion of a caveat that the Board can maintain responsibility if a situation warranted this.

MF supported that the MAT should be doing what they can to comply with DfE plans as much as H&S regulations would allow. He supported the need for the letter to parents be non-biased, and objective.

PG outlined the critical timeline for communicating with parents, given the half term holiday in 10 days' time. Knowledge of parent's intentions were needed to enable staff to plan and prepare prior to the holiday, in readiness for 1st June.

Following the discussion, it was agreed that minor changes were needed to the draft letter to parents to ensure acceptability with all Directors.

MS informed that he had hoped to get it out to headteachers later in the day, for discussion with them at 9am the next day and then sent to parents later the same day.

KD noted that he felt it was not appropriate to have the personal view of MS on a letter from the Board and discussed alternatives to this format.

He suggested that the issue of re-opening the school to all pupils from the end of June was not an issue that needed to be addressed at this time, as did not feel it was helpful.

CA suggested replacing 'may need to make H&S judgements to will make H&S judgements', in order to communicate that the MAT will comply with government instruction as long as acceptable H&S can be maintained.

MS noted that this point needs to be included, as parents need to be aware of the risk, as the Government has not yet convinced teaching unions that is safe to re-open primary schools.

Further discussion followed around the use of emotive language, personal views, and the need to avoid the use of legal language, in order to produce a fair and balanced letter for parents.

Directors supported that MS include his personal statement, but agreed that it be made clear that the letter was from the Board and the personal statement was from MS.

PG/MS

Directors **AGREED** that PG and MS make the minor changes noted following the meeting, and forward to headteachers without the need for the Board to be consulted again.

Directors **AGREED** to Option 1, however this would be dependent upon the numbers of children taking up the offer of a place in school and the ability to adhere to H&S regulations.

BD/20/36 **Date and time of next meeting -Thursday 21st May at 1 pm to be held virtually via ZOOM**

BD/20/37 **AOB**

CA asked if the changes he had suggested to the Virtual Meetings Policy had been implemented. PG confirmed that the changes had been made and the policy had been distributed to LGB chairs and was on the MAT website

BD/20/38 **Confidentiality**

Directors **AGREED** that all discussions be deemed confidential.

Meeting closed 2.13 pm



Signed(Chair) Date 02.10.20