

Academy: The Aspire Multi- Academy Trust
Meeting title: Meeting of the Board of Directors
Date and time: Thursday, 17th September 2020 at 6.30pm
Location: Virtual via Zoom

Membership

'A' denotes absence

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

In attendance

Mrs. S Harrison -Clerk to the Board	Clerk
Mrs H Detheridge – MAT Finance and Business Manager	MFBM/HD
Mrs. K Watson -Headteacher at OTP (left at 7.04pm)	KW/HT

Glossary

ABC	Archbishop Cranmer CofE Academy
ABM	Academy Business Manager
BJ	Brown Jacobson (Solicitors)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DBE	Diocesan Board of Education
DfE	Department for 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
OTS	Oak Tree Primary school

BD/20/51 Apologies for absence**Action**

Apologies from CM. MF was also not present

BD/20/52 Report from Kate Watson, Headteacher, Oak Tree School

KW summarised the actions taken following confirmation that one pupil had tested positive for Covid-19. KW was informed of the test result on the Friday evening and therefore the health departments that were open for advice over the weekend were limited. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) had spent the weekend planning for the school to re-open safely on the Monday morning; ensuring that they communicated proactively with parents, particularly with parents of children who were considered to be

vulnerable. The processes that had been put in place, the work this involved, the challenges experienced including the impact of social media, press reports, staffing, staff wellbeing, the impact on parents and the wider community were discussed.

MS had been involved throughout the process and had discussed with the other HTs that this type of information may not be known until late in the day so communication may need to go out to parents in an evening or at a weekend.

A checklist of action taken/needed had been produced which may be of use to other academies in the future.

Discussion followed which highlighted that whilst this had been a challenging and difficult situation to manage, it was not possible to do anything which would prevent a recurrence of the situation.

MS informed that many MATs had contacted the Government about the issues that they were experiencing in their efforts to keep schools open to all children, and the impact on the rest of the school if one child tested positive for Covid-19. The idea of rotating children for 2 weeks in school (in bubbles of 15 children) and 2 weeks learning remotely at home as an attempt to reduce transmission of the virus was discussed. The advice from Public Health England (PHE) was for the children in an affected bubble to have a minimum of one week at home, however OTP had requested children have two weeks at home to ensure safety. PHE advised that the dinner ladies would not be impacted by these measures due to the type of exposure to the affected child however other guidance contradicted this advice.

KW noted that staff were rigorous with safety precautions within school, all staff meetings were held via Zoom and therefore staff had not mingled which had made a positive impact on the staffing situation.

PG thanked KW on behalf of the Board and requested that their thanks be conveyed to the Deputy HT and all staff at OTP.

KD supported that the proactive communication worked better than reactive measures and that a checklist of action taken/needed would be very useful for other HTs but was slightly surprised that letter templates had not been prepared over the summer break.

KW responded that PHE had said that these would be provided however they were not available when needed and they were not directed to any resources. The information given by PHE was found to be contradictory which had led KW to research how other schools had managed a similar situation. KD noted that this lack of resource and support should be escalated to the local MP and to the Health Secretary.

MS noted that another HT had experienced similar difficulties with PHE advice and this had not been at the weekend, however the guidance from the DfE advised use of the PHE template.

RS and CA commended KW's leadership and management of the situation. CA noted the communication with staff in other Aspire schools but questioned what communication there had been with the wider Aspire community.

MS informed that he was in the process of developing a letter to be sent out to the wider community which would be discussed later in the meeting.

PG asked KW if there was anything the Board or IEB could do to support the SLT and school further.

KW responded that at the moment the SLT were managing and hoped that the staffing situation would improve, as staff who had received negative test results would be able to return to work.

KD noted that despite the challenging situation KW showed great leadership as was both positive yet realistic.

KW noted that it had been a team effort, the staff had worked together and done a marvellous job, and the parents had been receptive.

KW left the meeting at 7.04pm

BD/20/53 Conflicts of interest

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

BD/20/54 Minutes of the last Board meeting –

The minutes of the previous Board meeting held, 16th July 2020 having been previously circulated, were approved and electronically signed by the chair.

The notes of the previous Board meeting held, 17th August 2020 having been previously circulated, were approved subject to the following amendment.

RS and CM were present at the meeting.

PG

BD/20/55 Matters Arising

There were no other matters arising not already covered by items of business on the agenda.

BD/20/56 Covid-19

- Current status and issues in Aspire academies

MS informed that the attendance data for both staff and pupils was looking quite normal. GPS had experienced a drop-in staff numbers whilst staff were awaiting test results. The staffing difficulties at OTP had already been discussed but there were no significant staff shortages within the other academies at this time.

- Future planning and procedures

MS explained that he wanted to get a letter out to parents to share with them that OTP had experienced a confirmed Covid-19 case and the actions that had been taken to address this. Whilst other academies had not yet experienced a positive case, open and honest communication with the rest of the family of schools was very important to reassure them that if bold decisions were needed, these would be made probably on an academy by academy basis due to the wide variation in the academy communities.

MS expressed his concerns that the current guidance related to the full reopening of schools to all children full time was based on facts that were no longer true; these being that the incidence of Covid-19 cases since July was decreasing when in fact the incidence in recent weeks was rising, and that it was quick and easy to get a Covid-19 test when some people were having extreme difficulties accessing tests. All academies had reported difficulties in getting local tests and there were reportedly no postal kits available. Each school had been allocated 10 test kits to use if they were unable to access tests in the usual manner which were being used for staff. More kits were ordered yesterday but the number of tests that will be allocated is unknown and then a repeat order cannot be placed for 21 days. Parents had been informed that if they were concerned and were

unable to get a test that they could contact the school who would help if they were able to. As children do not always experience the same Covid-19 symptoms as adults, if a child has a sore throat parents can keep their child at home and this would be classed as authorised absence.

MS highlighted the moral and ethical dilemmas he faced in his leadership of the academies when applying government guidance which had not been updated to take account of the fact that the incidence of Covid-19 infections is rising again, and the implications of this for the safety of staff and pupils.

PG empathised with MS highlighting that if something was clearly unsafe for the staff and children, as an organisation they had a responsibility to address this.

Directors discussed the issues further agreeing that each academy and the community it served was different, and therefore decisions would need to be considered on an individual academy basis, as and when a situation arose. The possibility of having to reduce school attendance to 50% of the time and home learning to 50% if either the staffing or infection levels indicated that full time attendance for all children was not safe, or any other indicators was discussed. MS informed that he had spoken with HTs and informed that if such a decision was required then the Board would need to be consulted.

RS expressed his support for the letter to parents as thought that this would inspire confidence in parents that the MAT was prepared to deal with issues.

KD commended MS for sharing his dilemmas with the Board, noting that if the situation arose where the Board had to make difficult decisions which were contrary to the political decisions, then the safety of staff, children and trying to do the best for all children in the circumstances would be the priority.

CA supported that the MAT is ultimately responsible for its own academies and he would support decisions to protect them if needed, even if this involved not following government advice.

Further discussion followed about the wording of the letter to parents. MS agreed to clarify the geographical location of OTP within the letter and to consider the points discussed when finalising the wording.

MS

BD/20/57 MAT expansion

- Winthorpe Primary School – conversion status

MS and PG had attended meetings earlier in the day with trade union representatives, staff, and council representatives, to launch the formal stage of consultations. MS reported that the questions asked by staff were what would be expected at this stage, and the meeting had been very positive. The conversion was on track for completion on 1st November 2020.

- Future plans/options

MS explained that future expansion was likely to come from a sponsored academy but as Ofsted inspections were not currently taking place schools were not being identified as being in special measures, therefore a sponsored academy was unlikely to be allocated until inspections resumed.

BD/20/58 CEOs report

MS highlighted that he had been reassuring HTs that due to the demands of managing the ongoing pandemic situation he would not yet be expecting them to produce School

Development Plan (SDP) or setting targets, however some of the HT's had started to work on them.

MS had been providing advice to HTs who were responding to emerging issues, he had delivered Safeguarding training via Zoom, had been working towards facilitating the deputy HT group and subject leaders' groups, and had been updating policies during this period.

BD/20/59 CIF update

HD reported that one CIF bid at SJS had originally been successful. Three more bids were successful in the second round of allocations. The scores for those that were not successful had now been received, OTP and EBSP were planning to appeal, the deadline for appeals was 12 noon on 18th September.

PG noted that the MAT had done extremely well to achieve four successful bids. An appeal had to be on process alone and therefore may not be successful, but the MAT had achieved a successful appeal in the past.

HD noted that due to the time delay in the process this year caused by the pandemic the next round of bids would be requested in the near future.

BD/20/60 Finance update

HD reported that it was too early in the year for the year-end figures but assured Directors that she was working alongside the accountants and progress was on track.

BD/20/61 Workforce update

HD and MS had discussed the possibility of a bailout fund for schools to pay for supply staff in order to ensure that the staffing levels were not a reason for the school to close to some year groups given the impact of the pandemic on staffing figures. MS had spoken with some supply agencies and there were currently staff available and agencies were trying to send the same staff to a school each time to support the pandemic bubble concept.

Directors questioned if the academies would be expected to use their own reserves before applying for funds from the central pot, and if it would be a loan that needed to be repaid.

HD noted that the suggestion was that applications for funding would go to her and they would only be eligible to apply if their own reserve funds went below the 3% reserve limit previously set by the MAT, as whilst some schools had healthy budgets it was acknowledged that others would struggle with this extra unexpected cost. HD noted that the central fund could allocate around £10,000 to an emergency fund however if this pot was depleted, they would then have to go to another academy for a loan and this would then need to be repaid.

CA questioned if there was £10,000 in the central pot that had not been allocated and where the figure of £10,000 had come from. HD explained that Winthorpe was joining the MAT in November, and as non academised schools were not allowed to be included when the budget was set, there would therefore be some savings in the first year, however this action would make the following year's budget more difficult. The plan had been to allow these funds to build, however it was now thought that if the schools were struggling now, then the current situation would need to be addressed. The figure of £10,000 was an estimated maximum figure, but this would put the MAT in a worse position financially the following year.

Directors discussed the proposal of an emergency fund further, taking into consideration the financial situation of the different academies, the fact that staff absence insurance would not pay out for Covid-19 related absences, the availability of supply staff, and that academies would need to use their own reserves first unless this meant that they went below their 3% reserve.

Directors unanimously

APPROVED

an emergency fund to the maximum value of £10,000 to which schools could apply for funding to support the payment of supply staff once their own reserves had reached the 3% reserve level.

BD/20/62 CEO Performance appraisal

MS informed that this is still a legal requirement for teaching staff this year. Governors had already approached him for advice as the appraisals cannot be data related due to the absence of data, therefore they have been using the HT response to the Covid-19 situation as a format for the appraisal.

PG noted that the process of the CEO appraisal was valuable however this could not be data related and following the same format as the HT of management during Covid-19 would be appropriate. Following discussion CA and KD agreed to be appraisers for this academic year.

**KD/CA/
MS**

KD noted that this would be the third year that he had been involved in the CEO appraisal and therefore the following year CA should lead with a new Director to ensure good governance. Directors unanimously

AGREED to this arrangement.

BD/20/63 Annual Report 2019/20

PG informed that the report will need to be completed by the end of October which reflected on the period up until the end of the summer term. He suggested that requesting that the schools do a report on achievements was not appropriate this year due to the pandemic and the lack of data, and therefore a report from each HT on their perspective of the 2019/20 academic year with the acknowledgement that this will be driven by the Covid-19 experience would be requested.

MS

CA highlighted that there was the whole of the autumn term and part of the spring term prior to the pandemic, during which time many positive things may have happened which they may wish to reflect on.

BD/20/64 MAT policies

All the relevant policies had been available to view on GovernorHub prior to the meeting.

Safeguarding policy – MS informed that there were no substantial changes made to the policy following the consideration of the KCSIE 2020 document. There was a new appendix which listed the changes in the 2020 version of KCSIE document and a new flow chart from the MASH.

Directors unanimously

APPROVED the Safeguarding Policy.

Pay Policy- MS noted that the policy was not due for a formal review until 2021, but the new pay scales had been added to this. PG noted that the version would be 2.2 rather than version 3, MS agreed to forward the front page to PG. KD queried point 5.5 which MS explained.

MS

Directors unanimously

APPROVED the amendments to the Pay Policy.

Risk Management Policy & Register -PG noted that the same risk matrix had been used however some risks had increased and some decreased. He highlighted the importance of how the risk was being addressed, existing control measures in place and the actions required, giving examples of some of the risks identified. Timescales were required for the identified risks which needed to be discussed with MS but would all be within 12 months.

MS/PG

Risks related to policies were discussed further, covering whether policies were a legal requirement, and whether they were MAT or academy policies. Recruitment and Business Continuity of the MAT policies were identified as needing further consideration.

MS/PG

Directors agreed that PG would approach the LGB Chairs through the Chair's group, to look at ongoing risks specific to their academies with the academy SBMs that were not Covid-19 or site related. This information would then formulate an appendix to the policy. Directors felt that a template would be needed to facilitate understanding and consistency which PG agreed to provide.

PG

Directors unanimously

APPROVED the Risk Management Policy & Register

Finance Policy -PG highlighted that there had been three minor changes to the policy which he had sent out via email for consideration. Point 3.8. Responsible Officer (RO) - The DfE requires a RO to be appointed to ensure that checks and balances are put in place to ensure that the financial management arrangements within the MAT are monitored. PG agreed to send this out via email for consideration and approval via email so that it could be approved and uploaded to the website.

PG/HD

Other policies- There were no other policies to discuss.

BD/20/65 Approval of new LGB members

PG explained that there were no new LGB members to approve. PG informed Directors that the Diocesan office had put forward two prospective candidates for foundation governor positions at GPS, however the school had not been consulted and therefore Board approval had been put on hold until correct procedure had been followed with the school and governing body.

BD/20/66 AOB

KD noted that HT's attendance had been a positive addition to the meeting and suggested that telephone calls to the HTs from the Directors be made again to continue to offer support.

RS acknowledged that continuity was useful however it was also good for all directors to get to know all the HTs.

PG agreed to circulate a rota allocating schools for Directors to contact.

PG

BD/20/67 Confidentiality

Directors **AGREED** that there were no confidential items.

BD/20/68 Date of next meeting

Directors discussed the potential need for a meeting to address Covid-19 issues prior to the next planned full meeting.

Wednesday 21st October at 6pm was set as a provisional date to be held via Zoom.

Future Full Board meeting dates-

- Thursday 3rd December 2020 at 6 pm- (auditors in attendance)
- Thursday 4th February 2021 at 6 pm
- Wednesday 28th April 2021 at 6 pm
- Tuesday 20th July 2021 at 6 pm

Meeting closed 9.03pm



Signed

.....(Chair)

Date3rd December 2020.....