

THE GOVERNING BODY OF ALMA PRIMARY
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE SCHOOL ON
Wednesday 17 December 2019

Present

Ilan Jacobs (Chair and chairing this meeting)
Deborah Brooks (Vice Chair)
David Steadman
Ed Lewin
Emma Davies
Rina Wolfson
Natalie Grazin
David Grunwald
Marc Shoffren (Headteacher)

In attendance:

Colin Grazin - Clerk to the Governors

1. WELCOME

All Governors present were asked to sign the KCSIE statement circulated for signature and did so.

2. ACCEPTANCE/NON-ACCEPTANCE OF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Katie Abrams, Andrew Sutcliffe, Sophie Fenton, Jean Linsky and Samantha Rosehill.

3. DECLARATION OF ANY DIRECT OR INDIRECT PERSONAL INTEREST (INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO ANY PERSONAL FINANCIAL INTEREST), CONFIRMATION OF ANY CHANGES TO REGISTER OF BUSINESS INTERESTS AND RELATED PARTIES

After enquiry and explanation by the Chair to the effect that only changes since the last meeting needed to be notified, there were no such changes declared by any member of the Governing Body.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2019

It was noted that there was no reference to the appointment of the GDPR Governor. James Burns will be asked to become the GDPR Governor when he is appointed. Subject to that matter, the minutes were formally approved.

5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2019

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting, save that references to the Children Committee should now be references to the Children and Learning Committee.

6. APPOINTMENT OF NEW GOVERNORS AND RE-APPOINTMENT OF EXISTING GOVERNORS

The existing terms of office of David Grunwald, Ed Lewin and Ilan Jacobs expired in December 2019. All three agreed to be reappointed. David Steadman proposed the reappointment of Ed Lewin as a Governor appointed by the Governing Body and was seconded by Natalie. **The appointment was unanimously approved.** Emma Davies proposed the reappointment of David Grunwald as a Governor appointed by the Governing Body and was seconded by Rina Wolfson. **The appointment was**

unanimously approved. Deborah proposed the appointment of Ilan Jacobs as a Governor and was seconded by Marc Shoffren . **The appointment was unanimously approved.**

James Burns had indicated his agreement to be appointed as a Governor. After discussion as to the qualifications held by James for this position, including prior experience as a School Governor elsewhere, and the fact that he was not a parent of a child at the school, Ilan Jacobs proposed his appointment as a co-opted Governor (ie appointed by the Governing Body), and was seconded by David Grunwald. **The appointment was unanimously approved.**

Natalie Grazin, who had taken leave of absence, was welcomed back to the Governing Body.

Governors discussed whether there was a need for additional Governors to join the Governing Body. It was agreed that there was no urgency about that issue because Natalie Grazin had returned and Katie Abrams would shortly return. There had been an approach to the school by PAJES and JVN, who had obtained names of a number of people who were willing to act as School Governors. JVN wished to make a charge for this service. The meeting discussed this proposal and concluded that it was not necessary to consider this option at this time.

ACTION: Governors should use their existing contacts to identify potential new Governors, bearing in mind any identified skill shortages within the existing GB. The Strategy Group of Committee Chairs would consider the recent GB Skills Audit to inform the GB's view of where the skills shortages and report back to GB.

7. APPROVAL OF ALMA PRIMARY STATUTORY ACCOUNTS AND TRUSTEES' REPORT 2018/19

The Head presented a summary of the statutory accounts which had been included in the papers sent to members of the GB for this meeting. He explained that the accounts been delivered slightly later than in the previous year, for which the accountants had apologised. He asked Governors to consider the reference to the School Leadership Team at page 5 in the Trustees' Report, the section on Key Performance Indicators at page 9 and the financial information forming part of that paragraph. Revenue for the year had increased by £36,742, largely as a result of greater Gift Aid income and certain expenditure not having been made by the end of the relevant accounting year. There had however been a decrease in Quality Contributions in that year

He referred to the section on "Value for Money" and pointed to the factors set out in the report:

- keeping recruitment fees to a minimum;
- tendering to appoint a new uniform provider;
- avoiding unnecessary expenditure by use of a thorough and detailed purchasing system.

The Chair highlighted the Government requirements that there should be three Governors on any subcommittee. A Governor queried whether there should be four Governors on each sub-committee. That was believed to be beneficial, bearing in mind there are now only two major committees.

ACTION: Committee Chairs were asked to look at this issue to ensure that any committee which had delegated powers to make a decision was appropriately quorate.

Marc referred to the Auditors' Report at page 21 of the document. The auditors had found no major concerns, i.e. there was nothing on which they were required specifically to report.

The Statement of Financial Activities, Incorporating Income and Expenditure Account was at page 25. Those were the main figures but were supplemented by the various notes. The Head led a short discussion on the amount held in reserves. A Governor challenged whether there was a plan to spend any part of the reserves. It was confirmed that the school does have a Reserves Policy, which is kept under regular review. Whatever the technical designations in the statutory accounts, all of Alma's reserves are, in practical terms, only intended for use by the school for the benefit of the education of the children

The Head highlighted an issue on referred to in the accounts as "Defined Pension Scheme Liability". This item related to non-teaching staff only. The cost of this scheme (the Local Government Pension Scheme) to the school has increased significantly due to the official Actuary's calculations. The Head explained the mitigating measure that the school has taken by ensuring that any new non-teaching staff are not enrolled in the LGPS.

ACTION: The Clerk will discuss with the School Business Manager if there was any statutory entitlement to be included in the LPGS in circumstances where a potential new employee insists on it. A Governor suggested that the school should be able to say, in relation to any further recruitment, that the GB had made the decision not to offer the LGPS and that he was bound by it.

The Head pointed out that the auditors' fees, including some non-audit work, carried out over the year, were in excess of £9000. A Governor challenged the existing arrangements and suggested that there might be a case for looking for new auditors (as a "fresh pair of eyes"), the existing auditors having worked with the school for some 5/6 years.

ACTION: Governors were asked to consider if they had existing contacts or experience of other auditors with specialist knowledge of Academies.

ACTION: The process by which this might take place would be considered at the next GB meeting.

ACTION: The Chair will check the Trustees' Report to ensure that references to Chair/Co-Chair/Vice-Chair are correct throughout, bearing in mind the changes during the past year.

The Head referred the Governors to the Audit Findings Management Letter. A very minor clerical error had been noted and rectified within the relevant period. Page 16 of the document set out certain internal control weaknesses. The Trustees' responses were included and the Governing Body was asked to confirm its agreement to those responses.

The GB formally confirmed that agreement

The Governing Body was asked to confirm its agreement to the Trustee's Report as a whole, including the statutory accounts. **The Governing Body unanimously approved that document.**

The Head referred the GB to the Budget document covering the Income and Expenditure for the period from September 2019 to November 2019. This had previously been seen by the Finance and Operations Committee, but the Governing Body as a whole was required

to consider it. The financial position was satisfactory, in that there was a healthy surplus for the period. There were a number of factors causing this surplus

- some parents have paid Quality Contributions for the year in advance;
- fewer staff had been employed than had been expected;
- income from the DfE had been greater than expected;

ACTION: the GB will keep the management accounts under review as they are required to under the Governor's Financial Handbook.

8. PRESENTATION OF NEW OFSTED FRAMEWORK.

The Head explained that any further OFSTED inspection would be under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005, the earlier inspection having been under Section 8 of that Act

As to the timing of any such inspection, it is too early to give any clear indication to when a second inspection might take place. There is a two-year window from May 2019, so any inspection had to be before May 2021. A potential window was Spring/Summer term 2020, but the new OFSTED inspection regime made it difficult to be sure when this second inspection would happen.

In answer to a question from a Governor, the Head said that any inspection would be on virtually no notice and he explained the process whereby a lengthy telephone call was made to the Headteacher on the day prior to the inspection. Inspectors would not normally however attend the school without at least that notice. A proposal to attend on the same day as the initial call had been withdrawn after consultation. The Head had been in contact with other local schools, in a similar position, but he did not think is practicable to draw any conclusions from their situation.

The Head has told his staff to be ready for an inspection. In answer to a Governor, querying how ready the school actually was, Marc said the school could manage an inspection at the beginning of the Spring term, but there were still work to do, particularly in relation to the SDP and the SER. This was a challenging period because the first year 6 class was now in the school. He was hopeful therefore that any inspection would not take place before the end of the Spring term/beginning of the Summer term. He stressed that it was important, however, not to wait daily for a telephone call. He did not want the staff to think "it might come tomorrow."

In answer to a Governor, who enquired whether certain things are being done in terms of teaching, the Head made it clear that nothing was being done or not done because of the future inspection. He wanted the school to continue its present path, rather than concentrate on the potential inspection. He was looking at the curriculum to see that all that was necessary being done. His intention was to show the Inspectorate what was happening at the school.

He then turned to the new framework, which was the subject of a detailed PowerPoint presentation prepared by TheSchoolBus, and which explained how an OFSTED inspection would occur. In particular, he explained details of key changes to the School Inspection Handbook, with effect from September 2019, by reference to the following key factors;

- The quality of education judgement;
- Separate judgements for "behaviour and attitudes" and "personal development";
- A 90 minute preparation telephone call on the day before the inspection;

- Internal data would not be looked at. Rather inspectors would consider actions taken by the school in response to internal data.

One of the major changes, since September 2019, was the focus on curriculum. The Head believed the school curriculum was well thought out and that, although all staff were not yet following all aspects of it, improvements were ongoing. It was important that the school was doing more than just teach Maths and English. He believed that the children received a broader learning experience, and gave various current examples. The school is looking at cultural capital, as well as knowledge. The school was trying to engage children in a broader experience, not just Maths/English.

In anticipation of an inspection, the staff would practice the routine to be followed if and when the call was received.

A Governor queried whether these changes were for the sake of change or as a result of a policy decision. The Vice Chair believed that the changes were designed to make the inspection more useful as the focus would be on holistic education. There was also a greater focus on the well-being of the children and the staff. The Head believed the basic intention was good, but no additional money was being supplied. There was a move away from focusing on year 6 SATS results.

A Section 5 inspection would normally be carried out by two people over two days. Governors will be invited to the school for the final meeting. Schools are required to publish the inspection report within 1.5 months of receiving the formal report.

In terms of behaviour and attitude, inspectors might ask to see those children who were members of the School Council or any random group of children. The Head believed that the children were, on the whole, highly articulate and positive and appreciated the learning opportunities available at Alma.

Inspectors would look at well-being and safeguarding. In answer to a Governor, the Head thought that they would spend some considerable time talking to the children, as well as being concerned about staff well-being, to ensure staff are not overworked.

Inspectors would make a judgement on the school's "overall effectiveness" and on the following four key factors:

- The quality of education;
- Behaviour and attitudes;
- Personal development;
- Leadership and management.

Safeguarding would still be a subject of the inspection, but not its implementation. There would be substantial focus on curriculum, with particular reference to the following factors

- Intent;
- Implementation, and
- Impact.

Apart from the main core teaching areas, there could well be "deep dives" into other areas of the school's activities. Subject leaders were expected to have some knowledge of how the children were doing in each area of the relevant work. The school was able to invest time so that subject leaders were out of the class and able to do this task. This particular issue was harder for a one form entry school than for others and contrasted with the position in secondary schools, which had specialists in each subject.

A Governor was concerned that the folder of Alma Policies should be considered urgently and, particularly, that safeguarding issues were up-to-date. Governors were reminded of the need to undertake regular training.

ACTION: The Head undertook to send details of relevant training Barnet and PAJES courses to all of the Governors and Governors agreed to review and attend training where relevant.

ACTION: The Head will review the Alma policy folder and advise Committee Chairs to review where necessary.

Concerns were expressed about the level of parental expectation. It was important to manage that expectation. The Chair believed that it could be managed by being honest with parents and communicating clearly and openly. He believed parents would give the school the benefit of the doubt.

There followed a general discussion between Governors about priorities within the school. It was suggested that the school should be aiming for the highest level of education, regardless of OFSTED. Other Governors referred to the level of reserves and suggested that the Head should consider what his priorities would be if money was released from reserves to be spent for the benefit of the school and the children.

ACTION: The Head will produce a wish list to assist further discussions

ACTION: It was agreed that the Strategy Group will be provided with further information on this issue and make recommendations to how, if at all, money could be spent to improve the school.

9. DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF NEW SER AND RISK REGISTER

The Governors were urged to consider this document in detail. It was emphasised that Governors had to take responsibility for the Risk Register. The document was part of the evaluation of the school. It was noted that the document has not been reviewed within the last two years. It was necessary to bring it up to date, if only to say that no changes were necessary. A practical way to review the document would be for those Governors present to look at it before all members of the GB arrived at a meeting. Alternatively, 15 minutes of each meeting could be allocated for consideration of the Risk Register.

A Governor pointed out that the GB were Charity Trustees, as well as Governors and Directors of the Company. Obligations were therefore owed not only to OFSTED but to the Charity Commission.

Governors were agreed that the current Risk Register was of the correct length and complexity, but also agreed it required to be reviewed

ACTION: This issue would be considered by the Strategy Group

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 9:30 PM