

THE GOVERNING BODY OF ALMA PRIMARY

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING HELD BY ZOOM ON THURSDAY 23 APRIL 2020

Present:

Ilan Jacobs (Chair and chairing this meeting)
Deborah Brooks (Vice Chair)
David Steadman
Emma Davies
Sophie Fenton,
Jean Linsky
Ed Lewin

Katie Abrams
Samantha Rosehill.
Rina Wolfson
Natalie Grazin
David Grunwald
Andrew Sutcliffe
Marc Shoffren (Headteacher)

In attendance:

Colin Grazin - Clerk to the Governors
Louise Mitchel (from partway through item 6 only)

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed all members of the Governing Body and noted that in these unusual circumstances it had been possible for all Governors to attend this Zoom meeting.

2. ACCEPTANCE/NON-ACCEPTANCE OF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

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

There were no such changes declared by any member of the Governing Body.

4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2020

These had not yet been approved by the Chair and will be submitted to the next GB meeting.

5. ALMA PRIMARY FINANCE UPDATE.

Meetings had taken place between the Head and various Governors to consider the financial position in advance of this meeting. The Head presented summaries of the income and expenditure for the year to date against budget, and on a proportionate basis for the relevant period. He explained the basis of the various calculations. The vast majority of statutory income had been received but the worrying factor was the drop in non-statutory income, principally QCs from parents. There was also a loss of income from the lunch and after-school clubs.

The school had taken measures to preserve the financial position by not spending money from reserves approved for capital expenditure. Overall, there was still likely to be a significant shortfall of income against expenditure of some £54,000 over the full year.

The consensus view of the Governors was that the school should be frugal in its spending. The Head summarised the position by saying that the school would be relatively stable financially during the current year due to its reserves but he was very concerned about the financial impact of the current lockdown in the following financial year.

6. REPORTS ON LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The Head explained that this would not be a full report because it was necessary to focus on the effects of the coronavirus outbreak on the school and the closure of the school over the last four/five weeks. DfE guidance is that that schools and Governors should not be expected to conduct business as usual during this period.

The Head tabled took the GB through his leadership report, emphasising various issues including

- Due to the deteriorating financial position of the school, the potential to furlough various staff. Further discussion is to take place with non-teaching staff, four of whom had expressed interest in that arrangement.
- Whether the furlough programme was applicable. It was agreed that a proportionate approach in line with the proportion of the school income received from non-statutory sources, as other community schools were pursuing, was the right approach. Formal advice was being taken.
- Any site issues were dealt with in detail in the report. The school was still open but security costs had been reduced.
- Catering costs had been covered by an agreement with Norwood for it to use the school's kitchens to serve its various homes. This was beneficial both to the school and Norwood and was in accordance with Alma's ethos of "Kindness". Thanks were expressed to the Vice-Chair for making these arrangements with Norwood.

The Governing Body formally approved the Leadership and Management Report

7. PROVISION FOR CHILDREN AND SAFEGUARDING: ON-SITE AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

The Head explained that the change in circumstances due to the pandemic required changes to Alma's safeguarding policy. The Safeguarding Policy had been written on the basis that children were at school. It was necessary for it to be re-written to cover the fact that children were not at school.

Swift action had been needed to amend the current Safeguarding Policy to cover remote learning and virtual lessons. This action had been agreed between various members of the staff and various Governors. Appropriate training had been given to staff and would be provided to parents.

Governors confirmed that they had read the revised policy which had been circulated prior to this meeting and, in discussion, were satisfied that the revised policy was entirely appropriate.

The school had stayed open to provide for vulnerable children and the children of key workers (VKW). They had been a very low level of uptake from key workers and no vulnerable children had chosen to attend the school. There were no more than four children on any one day and, where only one child attended, alternative in-school provision was provided by Wolfson Hillel.

Governors discussed why there was such a relatively low take-up of the opportunity for vulnerable children to attend school and agreed the school was treated by many parents as a “last resort”. There were clear differences between the needs of children of key workers and of vulnerable children.

The Head observed that we were in a very rapidly changing environment. Governors agreed that changes might be necessary before the next formal GB meeting and, subject to approval by delegated Governors, gave authority to Marc and the leadership team to make whatever changes were thought to be necessary by reason of changed circumstances. It was emphasised that any changes would require to be approved by one of the relevant named Governors:

- the Chair of Governors,
- the Vice Chair,
- the Safeguarding Governor and
- one of the Co-Chairs of the Children and Learning Committee.

The GB formally approved this proposal.

A Governor was concerned about how children would relate to each other during online learning. The Staff Governor said staff had looked at this issue and were considering it in detail. Guidance was being sent to parents to try and minimise problems.

It was thought there were two groups of children who were particularly affected by the school closure

- Year Six children who had no opportunity properly to leave the school
- Vulnerable children including those with mental health or SEN issues

Governors were asked to volunteer to the Chair, to join a Return to School Working Group which would consider how the school would manage the return of children in due course. It was agreed that there would be two stages in the planning of any return. Children would attend on alternative days and the opening of the school be staggered. In the longer term, pending any vaccination solution to Covid 19, the school would not be able to return to normal because staff would be absent and school days would be interrupted. These matters would be considered by the Working Group.

Governors raised the issue of children who had previously received free school meals. A scheme had been put in place whereby school funds were used to provide payments to those relevant parents, pending payments from the Government.

8. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT – TEACHING AND PARENT SURVEY

The school had received feedback from parents on the arrangements that had been made. Very many of the comments were useful. Many parents did not think that the online provision was sufficiently challenging and this had been considered at a staff INSET day. It was intended to provide a more challenging programme. The Head reported that the Kabalat Shabbat service had been particularly well received

9. SITE, CATERING UPDATE INCLUDING NORWOOD LUNCHES

This item has already been covered earlier in the meeting

10. STAFF TEAM – FURLOUGHING AND WELL-BEING

This item has already been covered earlier in the meeting

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS – RISK REGISTER

The Chair noted that the possibility of a pandemic had not been included in the current risk register. It was also necessary to consider contingency planning if the Head was unable to attend work and if either or both of the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors were unwell. In those circumstances one or more of the Committee Chairs ought to be available to take their place.

Another GB session specifically devoted to the effect of the lockdown would be held after half term.

The meeting concluded at 21:39 PM