

**THE GOVERNING BODY OF ALMA PRIMARY  
MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING HELD BY ZOOM ON  
WEDNESDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2020**

**Present:**

Ilan Jacobs (Chair and chairing this meeting)

Deborah Brooks (Vice Chair)

David Steadman

Emma Davies

Jean Linsky

Ed Lewin

Katie Abrams

Samantha Rosehill

Andrew Sutcliffe

Natalie Grazin

David Grunwald

James Burns

Marc Shoffren (Headteacher)

In attendance:

John Twomey – Sessional Clerk

**1. WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed all attendees.

**2. ACCEPTANCE/NON-ACCEPTANCE OF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies.

**3. SIGNING NEW REGISTER OF GB INTERESTS & DECLARATIONS 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**

The Chair asked Governors to sign and send in both forms to the school and reminded Governors that the school was required to publish the Register on its website.

No changes were declared by any Governor.

**4. MINUTES OF THE GB MEETING HELD ON 15 JULY 2020**

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

**5. REVIEW OF MONTHLY ACCOUNTS**

Governors reviewed the monthly accounts for September 2020 which had been sent to Governors prior to the meeting. The Chair reminded Governors that the school's accounts were monitored on a monthly basis variously by the Accounts Committee, the Governing Body or him. Academies are required to monitor monthly.

The Head talked through the September accounts.

Governors found the accounts to be satisfactory but raised a number of questions and challenges:

- It would be desirable if an element of seasonality could be built into the accounts so that whole term or whole year payments could be apportioned to monthly accounting periods. Perhaps the school could consider this next year.
- Governors asked how the school would recognise emerging financial problems and issues. The Head advised that he and Rebecca Doctors, the School's Business Manager, regularly scrutinised predicted expenditure against actual.
- Governors were pleased to note that there had been an upturn in the use of direct for Quality Contributions among Reception parents, as a result of the revised information pack that went out to the new parents at the end of the Summer term .

## **6. HEAD'S REPORT + COMMITTEE CHAIR'S AND CHAIR'S REPORTS**

A comprehensive set of reports dealing with all leadership and management issues had been sent to Governors prior to the meeting. These were amalgamated into a single document for ease of consideration. Governors were led through the reports by the relevant leads who highlighted a number of points as follows:

### **Leadership & Management (per Head)**

- The school's first Year 6 cohort had transferred successfully to secondary last year. This was an important milestone for the school.
- He wished to pay tribute to the school's staff for their commitment and endeavour in enabling the school to negotiate the challenges of COVID19. He has been meeting with teachers to reflect on their experiences and to identify the positives and negatives.
- The school had successfully moved all its management systems online after lockdown to enable its operations to continue.
- Staff absences are generally very low at Alma and have been lower than usual this term.

### **Chair's Report (per Vice Chair)**

- The parent governor election is underway. There are five candidates.
- The current Staff Governor's term is due to expire in December. The Chair intends to join the staff's regular Tuesday meeting to invite nominations. The candidate should not be a member of the SLT, per the school's revised Articles.

- The Chair and Vice Chair meet with the Headteacher fortnightly. They have been sending a readout email from these meetings to Governors. Governors found these valuable. The Vice Chair advised that it was a two-way process and governors should feel free to suggest issues that might be discussed at the meetings.
- Pupil and staff wellbeing remains a key focus area.

### **Finance and Operations Report**

- The deficit was likely to be marginally smaller than expected.
- CityAxis have agreed to remedy the leak issue in the library after much perseverance on the school's part.
- Quality Contributions had increased so far this year and more parents were paying by direct debit. The two Committee Co-Chairs were thanked for their significant efforts on this, in particular, with the formulation of a very effective letter to parents.
- The FOP Committee had convened a fundraising sub-committee which had identified the need for a Development Lead. This role was presently being recruited. Governors were encouraged to use their contacts to spread the word among potential candidates.
- In its work programme, the FOP Committee has been considering how the school would withstand major operational challenges e.g. large scale absences occasioned by COVID19.

### **Meaningful Learning and Excellence for All**

- Becky Wetton has been appointed as the new Computing Lead.
- The role of PE/Sport Lead is still open.
- Sammy Rosehill had introduced a text for school-wide reflection for a two-week period at the beginning of term.
- Rachel Clark has resumed her Inclusion Lead role on returning from maternity leave.
- The school has been working to establish children's learning progress. Governors asked if any significant gaps in learning had been noted by staff. The Head advised that a fall-off had been seen in writing and, to a lesser degree, maths. This is being addressed. Class teachers have been asked to assess children's support needs. A programme for children identified as needing support will begin after half term. In response to a Governor's question, MS confirmed that the school will be availing of the Tutoring Fund and other government resources for this.
- A Pikuach inspection is expected this year, which the school has been preparing for.
- Unlike many other comparable schools in the borough of Barnet, Alma has a very low vacancy rate. Many spaces across all year groups have been filled.
- Advance preparation is being made for the possibility of having to offer remote learning.
- Safeguarding: Staff have been teaching children to understand and recognise safeguarding issues.

- Numerous children's activities and clubs have resumed but it has not been possible to return to pre-lockdown levels due to bubble limitations.
- SEND: A survey has been conducted among parents of children on the SEND register. It is planned to examine the results in detail at the next committee meeting. Parents have reacted very positively to the one-to-one support that has been offered to children.

## **7. PAY AND PERFORMANCE INCLUDING APPROVAL OF ALMA PAY, APPRAISAL AND CAPABILITY POLICY (ATTACHED) APPOINTMENT OF PAY COMMITTEE & HT PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Governors considered the draft policy which had been sent out to Governors in advance of the meeting.

The policy had been worked on for the past year and a half. It offered well-defined and improved processes. It incorporated the transition for to the upper pay range where appropriate which was an important milestone in the development of the school. The Head paid tribute to the work done by the Chair, Ed Lewn and Ruth Nyman on the policy.

**Governors approved the policy unanimously.**

### **APPOINTMENT OF PAY COMMITTEE**

The following governors were appointed: EL, IJ and JB. In addition, it was agreed to appoint FOP committee member, Rachel Brody.

### **APPOINTMENT OF HT PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

The following governors were appointed to the committee, along with Alma's School Improvement Partner: IJ and AS. It was recognised to be prudent not to appoint the Vice Chair to this Committee in case an Appeal Committee had to be convened.

## **8. SCHOOL COVID MANAGEMENT PLAN AND CONSIDERATION OF REVISIONS TO THE RISK ASSESSMENT – SEE COVID LONDON SCHOOLS RESOURCE PACK & REVISED RISK ASSESSMENT**

Governors considered the school's comprehensive updated Risk Assessment (RA) document which had been sent out to Governors in advance of the meeting. The RA set out and measured the relevant risks systematically. The Head led Governors through the document, highlighting certain issues and taking questions as follows:

- There is now clear guidance from the London Coronavirus Response Cell (LCRC) that defines what schools are required to do in COVID cases.
- The school has a contingency plan to cover the closing of a bubble, a class or the whole school. The school won't be publishing it as it necessarily functions as a live document.
- The school had opted for a three-bubble system, rather than one bubble per class, as this offered greater staff flexibility and mobility. The Chair explained that this

change to a three-bubble system had been introduced to make it easier for the school to manage its staff resources, while not significantly increasing the risk of contagion. This had been done without a GB meeting and recent changes to the DfE's guidance on how to manage a confirmed COVID case in school, should give the school some flexibility to assess the number of children that need to be asked to isolate, despite these larger bubbles.

- Lunchtimes are staggered and each class is socially distanced from any other.
- In response to a Governor's question, MS confirmed that the school had not had any positive cases among staff or pupils but there had been one involving a family member.
- Staff absences: 8 staff had been absent for periods ranging from 1-7 days. The school has put in place a clear protocol for absences. Where a staff member is absent on a precautionary basis and not ill, they are expected to teach from home.

The Head sought the views of Governors on three proposed changes in the Risk Assessment document as follows:

### **1) Reintroduction of "Drive & Drop" from November**

The school has been operating a "Walk & Drop" policy since the beginning of term but this has resulted in complaints from local residents. After consultation with the Travel Lead, it was being proposed to reintroduce "Drive & Drop" from November.

**Governors agreed with the proposed change.**

### **2) Reorganisation of classrooms**

Presently all classes have their desks set out in forward-facing rows. While this works well for years 3 and upwards, for younger children it is not feasible because they are constantly interacting with one another and this is integral to their learning experience. It is impractical to expect them to sit in rows; hence it was being proposed to revert to a traditional grouped desks arrangement.

In response to a Governor's question, the Head confirmed that the "Talk Partners" technique was used during carpet time but in younger classes, much of the learning work was based on working in pairs.

**Governors agreed with the proposed change.**

### **3) Reintroduction of Muted Singing**

It was proposed that muted, calm singing in classrooms might be permitted for short prayers etc. where children are sat facing the same direction, with good ventilation and when it can be done quietly with limited exhalation. The reason was that singing was felt to be an integral element of a child's learning experience. It was

acknowledged that this would carry a small risk but the potential benefits to children were significant.

The proposal was debated extensively, with all Governors making contributions. A brief summary of the points and questions raised in the debate is as follows:

- Indoor singing is not yet explicitly approved by Public Health England. Some schools are known to permit it, albeit discreetly.
- Can the appropriate level of exhalation be effectively managed? The repertoire would have to be carefully chosen.
- Are the risks reasonably measurable? Is an evidence-based measurement approach available?
- Was it feasible to offer regular singing to children in an outdoor environment? It was thought not due to winter weather.
- Might it be feasible to only sing in the school hall? It was thought not because the hall is often reserved for other school activities.
- Would it expose staff members e.g. teachers to risk in the classroom?
- Should staff members have the right to opt out?
- Would staff members feel free to voice any objections they might have?
- What special risks may arise for vulnerable groups e.g. BAME staff?
- Singing would help to restore the sense of normal life school.
- Singing had been implicated in the spread of infection in other countries.
- Some shuls had researched the possibility of congregational singing in preparation for the recent High Holy Days. Could that research be instructive for the school?
- Could it be trialled for a limited period as a precaution?

After the debate ended, the Chair sought the views of Governors. It was agreed that for the proposal to be affirmed, a broad consensus was desirable rather than a mere majority. Governors were polled and it quickly became clear that many had reservations on safety grounds and felt that they could not support the proposal at this time.

**The proposed change was not approved by Governors.**

The Chair asked Governors to keep an open mind about the possibility of singing in school being revisited by the GB at a future date and urged the Chair to follow any developments in government guidance on the issue.

**The Chair will remove the relevant clause in the Risk Assessment.**

## **9. POST COVID LOCKDOWN GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

(Per Vice Chair) It has previously been agreed that the GB would review the lessons to be learned from the school's initial COVID experiences and bring them forward into its future practice. Alastair Falk has kindly agreed to lead a process to do this with the Chair, Vice

Chair and Headteacher. He will write a report which can then be brought back to the Governing Body for further consideration.

All Governors will be invited to submit views and comments. If Governors wish to speak with Alastair, it can be accommodated but Governors should be mindful of the generous commitment of time that he is already making to the project.

The Review was warmly welcomed by Governors. It will commence after half-term.

Governors were asked to let the Vice Chair know if they wished to meet with Alastair as part of this review or if they had thoughts they would like to submit in writing.

#### **10. DEEP DIVE INTO WELL BEING - INCLUDING FOR CHILDREN NOT IN SCHOOL**

This item was postponed to a future meeting due to time constraints.

#### **11. SAFEGUARDING POLICY – FOR APPROVAL + KCSIE: ANNUAL SIGNATURE**

Governors were asked to approve a revised Safeguarding Policy which had been sent out in advance of the meeting.

The changes had been necessitated by COVID and KCSIE. A lot of extra material had needed to be added. The draft had been discussed and approved at Committee level. Staff had also been able to scrutinise it at an INSET day. It was a lengthy document but it needed to be.

**Governors approved the policy and expressed their thanks to the staff and governors who had worked to draft it.**

The Chair reminded governors of the need to undertake Safeguarding Training every three years. Governors who have been sent training invitations were asked to complete the training and send in their completion certs to the school.

Governors were also reminded that they would soon be sent a form which they needed to complete and submit confirming that they have read the KCSIE document.

#### **12. TERM DATE APPROVAL FOR 2021/22**

Governors had been sent a list of the proposed term dates for 2021/22 in advance of the meeting. In line with previous years, the school planned to offer 185 days of schooling over the year. The schedule at the beginning of the school year was unusual because the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur fell soon after the beginning of the Autumn term. However, the schedule was in line with other Jewish schools.

**Governors approved the term dates.**

### **13. DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS**

The following dates were agreed for meetings of the GB:

- Wed 9<sup>th</sup> Dec (7-9 pm)
- Wed 10<sup>th</sup> Feb (7-9 pm)
- Tues 9<sup>th</sup> March (all day)
- Wed 14<sup>th</sup> July (7-9 pm)

Governors were reminded that these dates together with the meeting dates for committees and work groups appeared on the list of dates which had been sent to Governors in advance of the meeting.

### **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

A Governor made the point that some meetings generated a large volume of material to be read and considered. The Chair acknowledged that this could be the case. It was something that could be considered in the context of the governance review and he was open to suggestions about how the volume might be minimised.

The meeting ended at 9:25 pm.

#### **ACTIONS LIST**

<b>ITEM NO.</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>ASSIGNED TO</b>
4	Approve the minutes of the GB meeting of 15 July 2020 for submission to the next GB meeting.	Chair
6	Complete the parent governor election process.	Head/Chair
6	Meet with staff to invite nominations for the upcoming staff governor vacancy.	Chair
8	Remove the proposed singing clause from the RA.	Head