

**THE GOVERNING BODY OF ALMA PRIMARY**  
**MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING HELD BY ZOOM**  
**WEDNESDAY 24<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2021 AT 7:00 PM**

**Present:**

|   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Ilan Jacobs (Chair and chairing this meeting) | Jonathan Levy               |
| Deborah Brooks (Vice Chair)                   | Ed Lewin                    |
| Katie Abrahams                                | Jean Linsky                 |
| James Burns                                   | Marc Shoffren (Headteacher) |
| Emma Davies                                   | David Steadman              |
| David Grunwald                                | Adam Zellick                |

In attendance:

John Twomey – Sessional Clerk

**1. WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed all attendees.

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

Apologies were received from Natalie Grazin and Andrew Sutcliffe.

**3. 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 declared that Talia Jackson, the School Development Lead, was his cousin. No other changes were declared by any Governor.

#### **4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE GB MEETING OF 09 DECEMBER 2020**

The minutes of 9 December were approved.

#### **5. REPORTS – HEADS, CHAIRS, COMMITTEES AND QUESTIONS**

A comprehensive set of reports dealing with all leadership and management issues had been sent to Governors prior to the meeting. The Chair advised that he would assume that all Governors had read these and that it would not be necessary for the content to be revisited in detail here. Instead the relevant leads could lead Governors through the areas they wished to highlight.

#### **HEAD TEACHER'S REPORT**

##### **Preparations for the Return to School**

The DfE had given two weeks' notice of the full return to school on 8th March and had sent guidance. This has been incorporated into the updated risk assessment.

Pesach falls early this year and so, after returning on 8 March, there will be little time before the school breaks for holidays. The school has to be realistic about what can be achieved in such a short time. Some of the children will have had a very disjointed schooling experience this year. Some will be apprehensive. After the return, the school will focus on wellbeing. It is understood that parents may be concerned in regard to the academic lag but it is vital to also focus on such matters as play and social integration. In-depth assessment can begin in the summer term.

The Chair asked if there were any anticipated complications arising from the DfE guidance. The Head responded that the school is mindful of staff anxieties in regard to the return. He wishes to reassure them as much as possible that they won't face undue risk. Up to now staff have been using off-site testing facilities but from the reopening, these will be available on-site.

A Governor asked if a record was being kept of staff vaccinations. The Head responded that it is planned to be monitored. Presently, about a third of the staff have had although teachers are not in the first four priority groups for vaccination. The school has lobbied officials at the DfE for priority.

A Governor asked if there were any staff with underlying health issues.

The Head responded that the school plans to follow up with some staff. The criteria for clinically vulnerable people appears to have changed. Fewer people are being advised to stay at home.

A Governor asked how confident the school was of maintaining the necessary staffing levels. The Head responded that there would be some gaps but it should be possible to work through them.

A Governor asked if any families had expressed concerns about sending children back. The Head responded that the school was aware that some families were abroad and is assessing whether situation.

On a positive note, the school's two ShinShinim have recently returned to the UK and are presently undergoing the usual 10-day isolation. They have been vaccinated. They will be back at the school on 8 March. The Chair will send them a letter of appreciation.

## **Policies**

The Head thanked Governor ED for the work she has done on policies. They are working through the list of policies at the moment to determine their importance and priority for review.

## **Finance**

### *Covid Catch-Up Funding*

The school was given £16,000 of catch-up funding in Autumn which it will use to create a tutoring programme for children. It will use tutors who know the children and have a relationship with them. It expects to engage 18 tutors to provide sessions to 35 - 40 children each week. The school's previous experience has shown that this type of programme has delivered real impact to children who have been disadvantaged.

The DfE Permanent Secretary had indicated that pupil premium-style reporting rules would apply on the use of the premium. In response to a Governor question, the Head expects that this will be manageable.

A Governor challenged in regard to assessments - when would the school know how far children may have fallen behind? The Head responded that it was hard to say. The school has had good levels of engagement with the children remotely and feels it has a reasonable knowledge of their situations. It is aware, however, that some children have not been doing so well. It anticipates being able to assess from about two to three weeks into the summer term. In the meantime, after 8 March, it will be able to conduct "soft" assessments through

games and activities. This will give an indication of what the needs levels are. It will also be able to avail of some easy-to-generate hard data e.g. times-tables tests.

A Governor suggested that if a significant learning shortfall is found, the GB should look at what it can do to remedy it and consider whether it may need to commit to extra spending. The Head agreed. However it is anticipated that the more complex problems will be social and emotional.

### **Children and Learning**

Regarding EYFS, there has been a lower level of engagement with remote learning. The school has seen the effects among the children of the lack of opportunity of playtime and physical activity.

Regarding Inclusion, there have been some positives. Through lockdown, the school has been able to continue some activities. The HLTA nurture groups are very popular. They have worked very well. There is a waiting list of children seeking to join them.

Two children are the subject of EHCP applications at the moment and it's anticipated that they will be successful. The school is perceived to be doing well with SEND, so is proving a popular choice for parents.

A Governor asked how the additional funding that comes with EHCPs is accounted for financially. The Head responded that it's mostly spent on one-to-one staffing for affected children. Occasionally it can be used for additional therapies such as speech and language therapy or physiotherapy.

There has been a steady national rise in the number of children on EHCP's nationally. The school was asked recently to take a new child with an EHCP into a class where there were already two children with plans. Sadly, the school had to decline because it wouldn't have had the capacity to deliver the appropriate service.

A Governor responded that it's much harder to get an EHCP now. The school is likely to attract more children with special needs.

A Governor responded that the school is in the same position as all schools. There is a wide consensus that there's insufficient money within the school system. Nonetheless, it's highly creditable for the school to have a good reputation for inclusiveness. The school's team has clearly been doing well.

## **Admissions**

The school has had a high level of applications for this year. It has 8 non-sibling places available for which there have been 162 applications of whom 70 - 80 are living locally.

Governors agreed that the Admissions Policy would remain unchanged for 22/23.

## **6. MONTHLY FINANCIALS & FUNDRAISING REPORT**

The Chair reminded Governors that finances were examined six times a year by or on behalf of the GB.

DG, as Chair of the FOP, updated Governors as follows:

- The budgetary situation is a challenging one due to the decline in non-statutory income and extra Covid costs.
- A Development Lead, Talia Jackson, has been recruited. She has been in post since January, working one day a week. This has made a positive difference in regard to QCs. She has been reaching out by email to parents, including those who have been out of touch. This has yielded positive responses. She has recommended improvements to the QC pages on the website. She identified potential funding sources. Gift Aid receipts have increased.
- An emergency fundraising appeal has been prepared in case it is needed. The video for it has already been done.
- The school had overspent by £80,000 last year. If the school has a structural deficit from year to year, it may need to look at longer term options, such as joining a MAT.

A Governor challenged that Covid could be classified as a major external shock and asked if the GB needed to examine what lessons were to be learnt from it. The Chair responded that a mini sub-group had previously looked at the MAT option. The DfE had been pressing schools to move to MATs but political priorities had since changed and the pressure had receded. For the time being, it can be assumed that the DfE have no issue with single academy trusts provided there are no finance problems.

A Governor commented that they had been serving on the board of a MAT for the past 12 months and had seen how a larger structure can offer advantages in some areas.

## **Monthly accounts**

The Head advised that the accounts sent to Governors were based on the original budget. The position is broadly in line with expectation.

Some staffing costs from the summer term 2019-20 had to be carried over in to this year's budget.

A Governor questioned what the overall headline was. The Head responded that a deficit of £66K had originally been forecasted but this may reduce to £50K due to improved gift aid.

As was customary during the school year, the school had prepared a reforecast budget to take account of changing budgetary factors and this would soon be available.

## **7. DEEP DIVE INTO SCIENCE - INCLUDING FOR CHILDREN NOT IN SCHOOL**

Governors were given a presentation from Mark Houghton on the teaching of science at the school. Mark is a Year 6 teacher and the subject leader. He supports all staff in the teaching of science.

Science is taught through both key stages at the school. It was an integral part of the school's learning offer. There was a science curriculum map for the whole school that is designed to help and support teachers. A science questionnaire is used to liaise with teachers. All year groups have their teaching observed. Book looks are undertaken. There is a marking policy, with every third lesson being marked. Staff are appraised of relevant helpful online resources such as the BPSI and Reach Out CPD websites. A Science Week is planned for the summer term. It had been very successful last year. Years 5 and 6 have science Zoom sessions for one hour a week on a Wednesday. Certificates have been awarded for achievement. A *Pupil Voice* exercise not been possible this year but is planned for next year. Numerous science resources have been bought for the school.

The Chair asked what the signs of success might be. Mark responded that these would include all teachers knowing what needs to be taught, being aware of how to do it, having the correct resources and the children being engaged in learning.

The Chair asked what the GB can do to assist. Mark responded that there would always be the need of finance to renew resources but also that he would also welcome visitors to the school who work in science-based disciplines e.g. doctors, vets.

A Governor challenged when the school would be able to carry assessments on the children. Mark responded that the first priority would be to settle the children back into a pattern of onsite learning. It is likely that some foundational work can begin in the summer term.

A Governor challenged if it was the right time to change the scheme of work after the upheaval of the year thus far. Mark responded that he planned to consult carefully with staff in regard to the introduction of any a new scheme. It may suffice to adapt the present one for the time being.

## **8. DISCUSSION AND APPROVAL OF REVISED RISK ASSESSMENT**

This had been sent to Governors prior to the meeting. The Head spoke to it. The assessment was broadly in line with where the school stood in September with some exceptions. It has incorporated provision in regard to lateral flow tests. The Hall is now being for lunch and PE. The ventilation guidance has been updated. Outdoor equipment is now permitted to be used more than before.

The Chair questioned if the school was staggering lunch times as it had from September to December? The Head responded that it was but with renewed vigilance in maintaining separation between year groups and bubbles.

The Chair challenged in regard to any lessons that had been learnt from the autumn with respect to adult distancing. The Head responded that there were two. Certain teachers e.g. Ivrit had previously been allowed to move between bubbles but not any longer. The issue of staff distancing between themselves has also been addressed and no further issues are anticipated.

A Governor challenged in regard to the reference on page 14 to the necessity to close doors. The Head responded that this referred to a fire drill situation where doors must be kept closed.

A Governor asked if bubbles are still part of the guidance and when a return to normality was anticipated? The Head responded that they were. The government wanted the smallest possible groups in school situations. It's expected that the school will need to keep up the bubble and cleaning regimes for the rest of the year.

The Chair commented that a fourth wave is still likely that will include lots of children's cases, so the school needs to maintain vigilance.

Governors approved the RA.

## **9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- It was noted that JL and AZ had recently been elected as parent governors.
- Fran Mindel has joined the Learning and Children Committee.
- A Governor asked about the governors' day planned for 9 March. The Chair responded that this will have to be postponed, probably to late June when, hopefully, it will be an in-person event.

### ACTIONS LIST

| ITEM NO. | ACTION   | ASSIGNED TO |
|----------|--|-------------|
| 5        | Send a letter of appreciation to the ShinShinim. | The Chair   |
|          |  |             |
|          |  |             |
|          |  |             |