

**THE GOVERNING BODY OF ALMA PRIMARY**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT ALMA PRIMARY ON**  
**WEDNESDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> FEBRUARY 2022**

**Present:**

Ilan Jacobs (Chair and chairing this meeting)

David Farbey (via Zoom)

Jonathan Levy

Louise Lewis

Emma Davies

Stuart Diamond

David Grunwald

Ed Lewin

Marc Shoffren (Headteacher)

Also in attendance:

John Twomey – Sessional Clerk

**1. WELCOME**

The Chair welcomed Governors to the first in-person GB meeting in two years.

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

Apologies were accepted from Katie Abrams (Maternity Leave) , James Burns, Vicky Shafran and Adam Zellick.

**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 reminded Governors that the practice at meetings was to declare changes only. No changes were declared by any Governor. DF, DG and EL will be updating their register entries via the school.

**4. MINUTES OF THE GB MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2021**

The minutes of the meeting (parts 1 and 2) were approved.

## **5. HEAD'S REPORT + COMMITTEE CHAIRS' + CHAIR'S REPORTS**

Governors considered a comprehensive set of reports on all leadership and management issues at the school. These had been amalgamated into a single Leadership Report document that was sent to Governors prior to the meeting. The reports were authored by the Head, the Chair and the respective Chairs of the FOP (Finance, Operations & People) and L & C (Learning and Children) Committees. The reports were taken as read and it was agreed that it would not be necessary for their contents to be examined and discussed in detail. However, the Head (and others, where noted) spoke to highlight a number of issues and respond to questions as follows:

### **Impact of COVID on Staff**

A substantial impact had been felt by staff due to the high rate of absence during the Omicron outbreak and the necessity to cover for colleagues. It continues to be felt.

Governors agreed that a note of thanks and appreciation should be expressed on its behalf to all staff for their exceptional service during a difficult period. Governors also suggested that they might sponsor another event such as a staff breakfast to demonstrate their support. The Head responded that expressions of support from Governors were always positively received. (ACTION)

### **Enrolment**

The school has only 3 vacancies presently. This compares favourably with local schools. Some schools in Barnet have a vacancy rate of 7% at Reception level alone.

A Governor asked about the possible drivers for the downturn in demand for places in the borough. The Head suggested that there were a number of factors, including Brexit, the increased popularity of private schools and families moving out of London. The London Plan for Schooling was prepared in 2015 and hadn't allowed for a population downturn.

### **Applications for Reception Places**

There were presently 132 applications for Reception places this year. A Governor asked how this figure compared with other years. The Head advised that it was slightly down but remained a healthy figure. A Governor challenged that it would be preferable to get the year-on-year data on application numbers and patterns nonetheless as it will show if there is any discernible downward trend. The Head advised that this would be available after April. (ACTION)

Governors agreed that it could be then referred to Committee for further consideration. If a critical downward trend became discernible, then the marketing of the school might become a priority.

## **Governance Matters (Per the Chair)**

### **New Governor**

The Chair introduced new Governor, Stuart Diamond, who had recently been appointed by the members. Stuart said he was very pleased to be involved with Alma and had been very impressed with what he had seen so far. He has experience in finance, human resources and politics. He also has previous governance experience with schools in South Africa. He previously worked with the Board of Deputies in Cape Town and is presently the Fundraising Appeals Manager at United Synagogue. His children attend the school. Governors warmly welcomed their new colleague.

### **Policies**

A lot of work is being done on the revision of key policies. The Head expressed gratitude to the Chair for his considerable input in this area, among many others.

### **Finance Report**

This was essentially a summary of the School Business Manager's report to the FOP committee. The school is currently showing a small unexpected surplus for the year to date but this is most likely due to scheduling of payments.

### **Air Flow Issue**

The school has a semi-basement area where the windows are situated at ground floor level. For security reasons, they remain permanently sealed. The school wishes to improve the air flow through this area. It will be a design challenge and the Head would welcome expert input.

### **St Johns**

The Head, AZ and DF have been liaising with the developer on this. The developer has made significant proposals to mitigate the impact of the development works. These have been accepted.

A Governor asked if this had been communicated to parents. The Head responded that it hadn't but would be shortly. (ACTION)

## **FOP Chair's Report**

Fundraising will be a key concern next term. A five year budget plan had been considered by the Committee and found to be acceptable. The projection over five years is for a deficit to emerge in Year 5 but this depends on variables and is sufficiently far ahead to be tolerable. The key years in the projection are Years 1-3. The five year budget plan would be included in the agenda for the summer term meeting for full GB approval. (ACTION)

A Governor asked if the school maintained records of previous donors and donations. DG responded that the school had always maintained an appropriate surplus without over-accumulating reserves. The school had also tried to maximise the economic use of its assets e.g. through renting facilities etc. Hence, the school had been historically reluctant to ask parents for extra contributions and hasn't pursued major donors. However a fundraising committee is now in place.

JL advised that the fundraising committee plans to develop a fundraising strategy (ACTION). A crowd funding event is envisaged for the summer term.

## **Learning and Children**

Last term the school identified children who have learning gaps. A deep dive had been undertaken in reading and in some areas of maths with input from the School Improvement Partner, Michael Larkin. The school is optimistic that it can overcome the gaps. The biggest challenge will be with Year 6 as it's a Key Stage 2 year.

A Governor asked if the school was at a disadvantage by not having done Key Stage 2 SATs before. The Head acknowledged that this would be the school's first group but it has a strategy in place. The whole staff team is working with Year 6 to help them overcome any gaps that have arisen.

## **Behaviour**

Some behavioural issues have been seen in lower years. Some children have missed out emotionally due to Covid. In this respect, the school is no different to any other.

## **Staffing Balance**

The school has a relatively small number of long-serving full time teachers. It has always been flexible in facilitating staff who wish to work part-time. Often this has enabled it to retain valuable staff. It can bring other benefits too e.g. part time staff had stepped in to provide cover during the recent high absence period. However, the school strives to achieve a balance between full and part time staff.

A Governor asked if recruitment was an issue. The Head responded that it is difficult to recruit presently. There is a shortage of teachers.

The school had used its catch-up funding to employ tutors with a previous connection to the school. They have provided interventions at all levels of the school viz. individual, class and whole school. There has been a strong focus on individual support in Year 6.

### **Present and Future Pupil Support Needs**

Governors had a general discussion on anticipated support needs in the future. The Head said that in the long term, it is possible that these may increase and that Governors may need to discern afresh the level of resource it would wish to commit to support provision.

The Head will consider the issue with the SLT and prepare a note for the Governors' future consideration. (ACTION)

A Governor asked if there was a school-wide measure to show how well integrated children were. The Head advised that Spencer well being tests were being undertaken.

### **Feedback To Parents**

The school is now feeding back to parents in different way. In line with official government guidance, more information is being given and more frankly. The school has increased the length of its one-to-one Learning Journey sessions with parents from 10 to 15 minutes. Teachers carefully prepare for each individual session. In the dialogue with parents, they endeavour to be holistic and go beyond the Three R's (reading, writing and maths). It is recognised that the new arrangements can be more challenging for some parents.

This term, it is planned to continue the meetings on Zoom rather than in person. Zoom offers advantages in some respects e.g. timetabling but not in others e.g. Book Looks.

The Learning Journey sessions are running over two days from 2:30 PM to 6:30 PM. This means having to close the school earlier on those days. However, parents are given plenty of notice.

The school has had a lot of positive comments and feedback from parents regarding to the new arrangements.

## **Inclusion**

The school presently has 22 children on the SEND register and 6 children with EHCPs. It has a very good success rate in applying for EHCPs. However, each successful application means the school has to find an extra £6000 in funding every year.

A Governor asked if the extra expenditure can yield benefit to other children as well. The Head said that it can happen in certain circumstances. For instance, in one class, there are 5 EHCPs. It is not feasible for all 5 children to receive one-to-one support simultaneously. Instead the school interweaves support provision through the school day. However, it can be a challenge.

The developer of the St. John's site has agreed to build a structure for the school which will be used as an intervention space. This will help with the management of support provision.

## **Pikuach Inspection**

This remains imminent.

## **Safeguarding**

A full Safeguarding Report will be presented at the next Governing Body meeting.  
(ACTION)

## **Attendance**

Attendance has dipped compared to previous years. This is clearly pandemic-related. There have been an increased number of unauthorised absences. The school endeavours to handle these tactfully with parents. It is up to Barnet to impose fines.

## **Covid**

The restrictions are due to end tomorrow. Some protocols will continue at the school e.g. staff briefings will continue to be run on Zoom but not staff meetings. Staff will be encouraged to wear masks in communal areas but not required to. From next week, the school will work towards whole school assemblies. Presently, they run at class level only.

The DfE are advising that children who test positive for Covid should stay at home and isolate. The question arises of what the school should do if a child displays symptoms in school without having been tested. It is hoped that Barnet Public Health will engage with this issue and give appropriate guidance to schools in due course. In the meantime, the school will have to make the best judgments it can in each individual case. The school has a duty to protect health and is entitled to send someone home if they are believed to be symptomatic. The school is not, however, entitled to run its own tests.

The school will be reminding staff to test themselves regularly.

## **6. MONTHLY FINANCIALS**

Income stands at 104% of its budgeted amount. The main expense is staffing and this is in line with expectation.

The format of the Financial Report is due to change. Rebecca Doctors, the SBM, is working on this at present.

## **7. POLICIES FOR APPROVAL**

### **Complaints**

This draft has been worked on in detail by the Head and the Chair. The previous policy was rewritten from scratch to ensure that it was comprehensively renewed. The school has a very low rate of complaints. The policy is available to all interested parties, not just parents.

Governors APPROVED the policy.

### **Charging and Remissions**

Governors APPROVED the policy.

## **8. ASSESSMENT AT ALMA**

Governors agreed that this item could be deferred to the next meeting. (ACTION)

## **9. ALMA SDP 2021-22**

Governors noted the plan and its contents which had been distributed with the papers for the meeting.

## **10. ST JOHN'S HALL UPDATE**

Governors agreed that this item could be deferred to the next meeting when AZ will be available. (ACTION)

## **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Catering**

A Governor asked if there was an issue with catering. The Head responded that catering at the school is provided by an independent contractor. Provision is carefully monitored by the school. However, it can happen that not everybody is happy with what is offered. The chef is adamant that the provision is correct and maintains written and photographic records.

### **Admissions Criteria**

Governors AGREED that there would be no change to the existing criteria for 2023/24.

### **ACTIONS LIST**

<b>ITEM NO.</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>ASSIGNED TO</b>
5	Send a note of thanks and appreciation to all staff for their exceptional service and arrange an event such as a staff breakfast to demonstrate the GB's support.	<b>The Chair</b>
5	Update parents on the agreement achieved with the developer of the St John's Hall site in regard to mitigatory works and payments.	<b>The Head</b>
5, 8 & 10	Include the following items on the agenda for the summer term meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Safeguarding report</li><li>• Five year budget plan</li><li>• Assessment at Alma</li><li>• St John's Hall update</li></ul>	<b>The Chair</b>
5	Prepare a report for the Governor's consideration on year-on-year data on application numbers and patterns to identify any discernible downward trends.	<b>The Head &amp; SLT</b>
5	Prepare a note for the Governor's consideration in regard to meeting future pupil support needs	<b>The Head &amp; SLT</b>