

THE GOVERNING BODY OF ALMA PRIMARY
MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING HELD BY ZOOM ON
WEDNESDAY 20th OCTOBER 2021

Present:

Ilan Jacobs (Chair and chairing this meeting)	Katie Abrams
Emma Davies	James Burns
Jonathan Levy	David Farbey
Louise Lewis	Ed Lewin
Marc Shoffren (Headteacher)	Vicky Shafran
	Adam Zellick

Also in attendance:

John Twomey – Sessional Clerk

1. WELCOME

The Chair welcomed all attendees, especially the new Governors.

2. ACCEPTANCE/NON-ACCEPTANCE OF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were accepted from David Grunwald who was away.

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 them that the school was required to publish the Register on its website.

The practice at meetings is to declare changes only. No changes were declared by any Governor.

4. MINUTES OF THE GB MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2021

The minutes of the previous Governing Body 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 Leadership Report document and sent to Governors prior to the meeting. The reports were authored by the HT, the Chair and the respective Chairs of the FOP (Finance, Operations & People) and L & C (Learning and Children's) 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 HT spoke to highlight a number of issues and respond to questions as follows:

Staffing: the school has seven new staff members. This is a modest turnover compared to other schools. They are being inducted at the moment. An LSA is training to be a teacher. Approximately two thirds of Alma staff are part-time.

A document setting out the school's staffing structure had been sent to Governors with the papers for the meeting. This explains who's who at the school.

A Governor asked who the ShinShinim are. The HT advised that they are helpers who assist the school with a variety of tasks, most importantly the after-school care. This enables the school to self-manage its own aftercare provision.

A Governor asked how the school manages its INSET days with a large cohort of part-time staff. The HT advised that it was a complex task. Virtual technology had helped and staff were cooperative.

Staff absence policy: the FOP Committee is undertaking a substantial review of this policy following experiences last year that left the school in a potentially highly exposed situation. A new draft policy is being prepared which will go to staff for consultation and then be brought to GB for approval in the Spring term.

Staff stress: school staff across the country are experiencing exceptional stress levels. This was clear from a recent Barnet Headteachers conference that he had attended. The HT sees the effects of staff stress in Alma every day. The issue was not specifically mentioned in the report but he wished Governors to be aware of it nonetheless. It is planned to focus on it at an upcoming INSET day.

Governors asked if there was anything they could do to help. The Chair added that the Governing Body had in the past taken measures to show their recognition of the staff and he would like them to continue to do so. A number of practical suggestions were offered, including a Governors' Staff Breakfast and a Chanukah event. Governors also enquired if more structured input from them might be needed. The HT responded that the fact of Governors' awareness was welcome, and he felt that a Governors' breakfast for staff is a very positive idea, which would have value both as a gesture and practically. The school is looking at the issue of staff responsibilities at the moment in order to assess how they might be more effectively calibrated to alleviate stress.

Governance Matters (Per the Chair)

- **New Governors**

The Chair welcomed the three new Governors who had been appointed by the members and invited each to introduce themselves.

- Vicki Shafran is an accountant and works within the Finance Division at Citigroup. She was previously a Governor at Copthall School for five years.
- Louise Lewis has twenty years experience as a teacher and has recently returned to university to do a masters degree.
- David Farbey has recently retired from a career in the hi-tech sector. He has previously been a parent Governor of Friern Barnet School.

The appointments were noted. Governors warmly welcomed their new colleagues.

- **Admission Governor:** Adam Zellick has agreed to take over the role left vacant by Jean Linsky's retirement.
- **Safeguarding Governor:** Louise Lewis has agreed to take on this role.
- **SEND Governor:** a new Governor needs to be appointed to this role. Anyone interested should contact the HT. Good Barnet training is available. Previous role holders on the governing body would be available to support as well.
- **Terms of reference of and membership of committees:** it is usual to do this at the first meeting of the year. However, in the light of the appointment of a number of new Governors and in order to facilitate a meaningful review of the terms of reference, this will be postponed to a future meeting. It was agreed that the existing terms of reference and membership would continue in the meantime.
- **Former Governor, Rina Wolfson:** Governors expressed sincere condolences to the family of Rina Wolfson who had recently died of cancer. Rina had served as a Governor for many years and had made a wonderful contribution to the development of the school. Jewish learning was a passionate concern of hers. She was extremely well informed and committed.
Governors also expressed thanks to school staff for the support that it had provided to the family. Rina's children still attend the school.

Re-election of Chair (Per the Clerk): Ilan Jacobs was unanimously re-elected as Chair for a further term.

End of year data: this has shown some areas of concern, especially with Year 3. All schools struggled to improve writing during lockdown

Parents' Evenings: as a result of self-reflection and a parents' survey, the school will be making changes in how it explains to parents how their children are doing and where they

may be struggling. It will now report how the child is progressing in terms of age-related expectation.

A Governor asked if help would be given to staff in introducing this new method. The HT responded yes and that an entire INSET day had been held yesterday devoted to it.

SEND: The HT flagged financial concerns about the expectations from the DfE regarding SEND funding for children with EHCPs. He emphasised that Alma is an inclusive school that performs well on SEND and is very committed to it. However, the school is required to provide the first £6000 per year from its own funds for the additional funding for each child on an EHCP. This year, the school will be expected to provide £36,000 towards the additional expenditure on children with an EHCP, to which the DfE also provides additional funding.

A Governor commented that this appeared to be a systemic problem that is shared with all schools and asked if any fund-raising was planned to cover it. The HT responded that this was a great idea and that he would welcome input from any Governor who can offer time and support towards it.

Enrolment/Churn: the school has four vacancies (1.9%). This is far lower than the averages in Barnet and Jewish schools. Eleven children have left and seven have joined over the last academic year, but the school is fully subscribed at Reception level.

Governors asked if there were any lessons to be learned by the school in the movement of pupils. The Chair advised that he had contacted all the parents of the children who had left to ask about their reasons for leaving. In general, the reasons tended to be circumstantial rather than because of any shortcoming on the school's part. However, one family reported that they felt the lockdown provision was preferable at another school.

The HT added that the pandemic and Brexit have been factors in the movement of children. There is evidence of migration to private schools as well. The school's churn rate appeared to be much lower than other schools and the school has very low vacancy rates.

Moreover, the school has had very positive feedback from parents of children who had recently joined, who have compared it very favourably with their child's previous schools.

The HT will confirm the final census roll figure to Governors in due course.

Staff changes: Governors asked if there had been any feedback from staff who had left. The HT responded that all were offered exit interviews to be carried out either by staff or, if preferred, a Governor. Each was made this offer three times but declined to take it up.

6. COVID OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT PLAN AND CONSIDERATION OF REVISIONS TO THE RISK ASSESSMENT

Governors considered the school's Covid Outbreak Management Plan. The HT advised that it was based on a London Borough of Barnet template. In essence, it is a checklist to use in the event of a major outbreak at the school. **Governors approved the Plan.**

The HT added that the school's Covid Risk Assessment had been revised in the light of the return in September. It will be forwarded to Governors in due course.

7. URGENT SPENDING PROPOSAL – GIRLS TOILETS

The refurbishment of the girls' toilets has been under consideration for some time, pending funding. The FOP committee has looked at it in detail. The school has had an unexpected surplus this year and funds are now available. Quotes for the refurbishment were taken up by the school in 2019 which were included with the papers for the meeting. The school is now refreshing these.

Governors approved expenditure of up to £10,000 to enable the works to begin as soon as possible.

8. PIKUACH UPDATE

The HT advised that a Pikuach inspection is imminent as the school had been due to be inspected in the week before lockdown began in 2020. The inspection will be under the new framework which will suit the school. The inspection will focus on three key areas:

- Jewish Education
- SMSC
- Leadership & Management

The inspection will examine these areas under the themes of *intention, implementation and impact*.

Pikuach has been considered at two Jewish Learning and Ivrit committee meetings already and Governors have met with staff to discuss. Governors acknowledged the substantial preparatory work that the school has already done.

The Chair advised that Governors will be have the opportunity to meet with the inspectors during the inspection. The school will get five days' notice of it. Governors will be notified when the dates are known.

9. SUGGESTED CHANGES TO ALMA GOVERNANCE

The Chair introduced this item. The school was now a full school. Its governance needs had changed over the years as it had grown. Historically, governance at the school has been robust. External reviews by the Barnet Partnership for School Improvement and Ofsted prior to Covid confirmed this and commented favorably. Nonetheless, it would appear to be

sensible to now review how the school undertakes governance and, where necessary, refresh its procedures.

At the Chair's invitation, VS gave a presentation to Governors on her observations as a new Governor together with some suggestions for future governance. This was based on a paper that had been sent out to Governors prior to the meeting.

The presentation focused on three key themes:

- Structure of Governing Body
- Committee Meetings
- Governing Body Strategic Direction

The presentation offered a range of suggestions for the achievement of improved procedures and outcomes. These included commissioning a governance calendar, an up to date skills audit, more use of the Clerk's services, the potential use of GovernorHub to manage governance documents, sharpening the focus of committee meetings, an external review of finance and operational functions and a strengthening of the Governing Body's strategic role.

Governors commended the presentation and raised a number of issues in response. For example, how the additional records that might result would be managed, whether additional resources would be needed at school level to implement the changes etc. It was agreed to set up a standing committee to work on a programme of governance renewal. Governors interested in serving on it were invited to contact the Chair.

Post Covid Review: a Governor asked if the planned post-Covid review under Bronwyn Tamini was still scheduled to proceed as it was felt to be important to lock in the lessons learnt from Covid events. The Chair confirmed that it would be proceeding as part of the Review of Governance.

10. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - APPROVAL

Governors considered the School Development Plan for 2021-22. The SDP identified core development goals for the school in the year ahead. It was formulated from a wide range of relevant data with input from subject leaders, the SLT and the strategy group. It is structured in line with the key Ofsted themes. The school has added one further theme, SMSC. Two to four objectives are identified under each theme. The HT said that it remains a dynamic document that can evolve as the need for change arises.

In response to a Governor question, the HT advised that while the Plan did not contain a specific SEND objective, SEND themes are present in the Plan and are built into certain objectives.

Governors approved the Plan.

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

Governors reviewed and approved the school's Safeguarding Policy which had been sent out in advance of the meeting.

The Chair reminded Governors of the need to complete their forms confirming that they had read the latest KCSIE document.

12. 2022-23 ALMA TERM DATES – APPROVAL REQUIRED

Governors considered the proposed calendar of term dates for 2022-23.

The HT advised that the calendar had proved easier to organise because the *chaggim* had fallen more conveniently. The school is proposing to teach 185 days and provide 6 INSET days. 190 days is the suggested national standard. However, the school has generally taught between 183 and 187 days. This practice is in line with other Jewish schools and enables the *chaggim* to be observed.

The calendar proposes a shorter winter break in order to facilitate a full five week summer break.

A Governor asked how the school would meet its curriculum obligations if teaching 185 days. The HT responded that the school, like other Jewish schools, has a longer school day than most. Lessons start earlier and finish later. The school endeavours to work creatively to ensure its curriculum obligations are met.

A Governor pointed out that there would be a number of consecutive weeks in the calendar which were not full teaching weeks. The HT responded that this would always be a challenge with the *chaggim* but it would only occur after the children had settled in to their learning cycle for the year.

Governors approved the proposed calendar.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

The meeting ended at 9:30 pm.

ACTIONS LIST

ITEM NO.	ACTION	ASSIGNED TO
5	Confirm final census roll figure to Governors	HT
6	The HT to circulate the school's revised Covid Risk Assessment.	HT
9	Set up governance renewal standing committee	Chair
11	Governors to complete and return their forms confirming that they had read the latest KCSIE document.	All