

**GOVERNING BODY OF ALMA PRIMARY
MINUTES OF THE FULL GOVERNING BODY MEETING
HELD AT THE SCHOOL ON WEDNESDAY 21 JUNE 2023 AT 7PM**

Present:

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|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Ilan Jacobs (Chair) | Marc Shoffren (Headteacher) |
| Jonathan Levy | Katie Abrams |
| James Burns | Yvonne Baron |
| Louise Lewis – <i>joined 8.22pm</i> | Francesca Mindell |
| Adam Zellick | Ed Lewin |
| David Grunwald (<i>Part I only</i>) | Vicky Shafran |

In attendance:

Wendy Kravetz– Director, London Governance joined virtually

**MINUTES
PART I**

The meeting opened at 7:09pm.

Questions were answered by the Headteacher, unless otherwise noted.

1. Welcome

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed all attendees. WK was welcomed on Zoom as she was providing clerking services for the meeting.

2. Acceptance/non-acceptance of apologies for absence

- 2.1. Apologies were received from Stuart Diamond.

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

- 3.1. No declarations were made, and no changes to the register of interests were declared by any governor.

4. Approval of Minutes of previous meeting (22 February 2023)

- 4.1. Governors received the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2023 for approval.
Two Governors DG & EL queried if they had in fact sent apologies and the Chair took an action to check.

ACTION Chair

- 4.2. Governors unanimously resolved to approve the Minutes.

5. Deep Dives

- 5.1. It was noted that there was a change to the agenda. There had been a deep dive planned for Maths. However, due to a full agenda this had been temporarily postponed until the Autumn Term. It was agreed to add this to the Autumn Term agenda.

ACTION Headteacher

6. **Governing Body Updates**

6.1. **End Of Chairs Term**

6.1.1. The Chair reminded attendees of his intention to stand down at the end of the calendar year i.e. December 2023. Governors noted thanks to the succession planning working group.

6.2. **Resignations**

6.2.1. Resignations had been received from Stuart Diamond (SD). Governors noted thanks to SD for his two-year service.

6.2.2. Marion Reiner Escobar is standing down as Internal Scrutineer after many years service (*see next item*). She would provide a full year report next term.

6.3. **Appointment of internal scrutineer**

6.3.1. The GB gave their sincere thanks to Marion Reiner Escobar for her hard work and dedication in the role of Internal Scrutineer for over ten years, having made a huge contribution to the school, including setting up spreadsheets and creating processes for the Finance Team.

6.3.2. The Chair proposed to formally appoint Jenny Levy, an Alma parent, as Internal Scrutineer, their CV had been added to the meeting pack (JL CV 2022), with effect from 1 September 2023.

Governors unanimously resolved to appoint Jenny Levy as an Internal Scrutineer with effect from 1 September 2023.

6.4. **Clerk update**

6.4.1. The Chair reported that John Twomey (JT), the Board's sessional clerk, was standing down for personal reasons. The Board expressed thanks to JT for his support and service for the last few years. The Chair commented that JT had had a brilliant understanding of the Board's terminology and was a great governance support, providing sensible guidance. JT's advice had supported the Board to prepare more strategically focussed agendas and the Board wished him well for the future.

7. **Reports – Heads, Chairs, and Questions**

7.1. **Chair's report**

7.1.1. Apologies were extended for the late upload of the Chair's report.

7.2. **Heads Report**

The Headteacher provided a report, and the following was noted:

7.2.1. The Headteacher commented that the school was still awaiting an Ofsted inspection a year on.

7.2.2. There had been a serious fall in numbers on roll which would be discussed later in the meeting. It was a particular challenge to recruit to Reception but lots of work had been going on with recruitment. Anecdotally, other schools in the Borough were in the same situation with no clear indicators as to why.

7.2.3. There were some changes to staffing. There was widespread media coverage about the challenges of recruiting to schools and this was also relevant to Alma.

7.2.4. A late resignation had been accepted from a Y6 teacher who was leaving teaching. An experienced Y6 teacher had been recruited.

7.2.5. Staff roles were being finalised for September 2023. This had budget implications, to be discussed later.

7.3. **Governor question: Are there schools with full cohorts and waiting lists?**

Yes. Alma was a one form-entry primary school in N20 with a history of ambition for children and it was expected to be a sought after school. It might be that there was a general downward trend in the number of applicants and Alma needed to buck that trend in terms of provision and standards. It was imperative to understand why Alma was not attracting interest.

7.4. **Governor comment:** A few months ago another primary school changed their policy so that children in the Nursery would be guaranteed a Reception place and a few parents moved to that school because of the policy change. It was understood that Rosh Pinah might do the same.

7.5. There was a general discussion over sibling places. It was noted that some schools in Barnet had reduced their PAN (Published Admissions Number) and gone from three form entry down to two. Although there was no hypothesis it was felt that Brexit had had an impact as well as the cost of living, particularly in London. It may be that since Alma opened there were more Jewish school places available, thus more competition between schools. It was felt that it was a competitive environment and marketing could also be a factor. An expert marketer could be considered. A governor asked if the data for Jewish children born in the area was available. It was also suggested to reach out to some of the parents who chose not to send their children/accept a place at Alma for their feedback. It was agreed to research the data on Jewish children looking for primary school places year on year.

ACTION Headteacher/L&C Committee

7.6. **The Headteacher's report continued**

7.6.1. MS said that a caretaker had been recruited and was working on a backlog of some of the premises' issues.

7.6.2. The exterior walls and playground would be improved over the summer.

7.6.3. There was a drop in expected income, particularly the quality contributions which were £63,000 below budget.

7.7. **Question: How much can this drop be linked to the falling roll?**

This could be linked somewhat, but not a huge amount. Some children had dropped out this year and not all had been replaced. If a child joined mid-year it was less likely the families would be on board with QCs. Governors were informed that QCs were carefully explained to parents.

7.8. **Question: When we lose net pupils do we drop the budget?**

They reviewed the budget mid-year but it had not been adjusted.

7.9. The Headteacher continued with his report:

7.9.1. The school was working through several EHCPs which were taking longer than usual to process.

7.9.2. The school continued to work on development of the curriculum.

7.9.3. There were great articles in the Jewish Chronicle and Jewish News both in print and online spotlighting the work of the school.

7.10. **A governor commented** that they were organising a reception for the Alma football team 11th July with the Mayor of Barnet to celebrate their success. **It was suggested that news be added to the website.**

ACTION Headteacher

7.11. **Question: In terms of link Governors there is there none for Art & DT?**

Answer: The Chair and the Headteacher will look at all the Link Governors roles and identify the priority gaps to fill.

ACTION Headteacher/Chair

7.12. **Question: Re wellbeing at Alma, PaJes could offer support and possible funding. Are we utilising this?**
Yes, they were working very closely with them.

7.13. The Headteacher noted that in terms of CPD, not all details of courses had been included on the report. **A Governor noted that Leora Raymond was keen to have some CPD in terms of DT.** The Headteacher responded that there was a very clear process where CPD was available, and he would advise Leora take this up.

ACTION Headteacher

7.14. A Governor noted that the free NSPCC training could added to the CPD offer.

7.15. The Headteacher continued with his report:

7.15.1. There were multicoloured ribbons on the gate to signify Pride week. Keshet UK was visiting the school to undertake activities with the older classes.

7.15.2. The school was taking part in ETGAR, a Jewish inter-school quiz for Y5 children.

7.15.3. A week of arts and sports was planned for the summer term along with a camping week during term time.

7.15.4. A great initiative of digital wellbeing champions had started. The aim was to get more parental involvement.

7.15.5. Attendance data was generally positive. Unauthorised absences had reduced.

7.16. **Question: A Governor safeguarding visit has not taken place since January. Is there meant to be one a term?**

The school had made contact with the Safeguarding Governor to arrange a meeting. Previously visits were undertaken annually.

ACTION Headteacher/Safeguarding Governor

8. Approval of Alma Primary School Budget

8.1. Governors received papers in the meeting pack, including Budget Reduction Considerations. Governors were reminded of confidentiality and sensitivity.

8.2. In terms of providing context, it was noted that there was a discussion at the recent FOP Committee about schools being impacted by significant financial challenges such as falling pupil numbers, unfunded pay increases, and a fall in donations/fundraising. Generally, there was a difference in expenditure of around £1500 per pupil in a Jewish school compared to non-Jewish schools and Alma was in line with this. Without additional funding or spending reductions, the school was unable to produce a positive budget. Considering

the forecast, it was necessary to explore what changes or actions could be taken in order to balance the books and provide for a sustainable financial future. It was acknowledged that staffing was a school's largest area of expenditure and a thoughtful approach to the next five years was being considered in terms of staff expenditure.

8.3. Governors noted the following:

8.3.1. This year approximately £120,000 of expenditure was being met by reserves and this could not be sustained.

8.3.2. The school was spending as if it were receiving an additional £1500 for every child but QC income which is meant to make up this gap were currently £63,000 short.

8.3.3. The school had also budgeted to raise up to £50K from fundraising but had only raised £11,000 to date.

8.4. **Question: How much of a gap in the budget is from a decreasing roll?**

The census was taken every October and that was the number of children that the DfE would fund for in the following year. The school's census roll of 202 in October 2022 would impact funding in the year 2023-24.

8.5. **Question: Are the budget figures predicated on full roll or 191?**

On the lower number of 191.

8.6. **A Governor commented that in two years' time, at the current rate of expenditure, the reserves would be reduced to an unsustainable level of £25,000.**

8.6.1. Governors noted that the proposed budget would impact the school's reserves by reducing them to approx. £100k. However, this did not sit well with the reserves policy, and the proposed budget might need to be reviewed.

8.6.2. It was agreed that reserves would only be used this year as a one-off fix and further measures would need to be taken to preserve the Reserves in the future as there was no overdraft facility for schools.

8.6.3. There was discussion about the use of reserves; that they should be used when absolutely necessary and then replenished. The Headteacher commented that this was effectively what had been done or was certainly the intention.

8.7. **Question: What would a five-year plan look like, rather than a one-year fix?**

For the last six/seven years there had been very little fundraising. It might be possible to secure some large, continuous donations if work was to start on a campaign now. Looking at the projections for year 4, the school would need to raise £125K in a single year.

8.8. **Question: What was the actual number we are aiming to save?**

8.8.1. £56,000.

8.8.2. A governor commented that this was not transparent, as there was no indication of how much the cuts/savings would be or where they would come from.

8.9. Governors were concerned to understand how the proposed changes that would result in savings for the school and whether this would have direct impact on the school and standards. Governors wanted clarity about what had been decided was too important to cut, what would be cut and what savings that would

produce year on year. It was noted that there was no “projected 22-23” line and governors felt this should be added.

- 8.10. The Headteacher acknowledged that governors perceived the budget/finances as not being transparent. The team had worked hard to ensure the budget was as clear and unambiguous as possible. The Headteacher stated that this was a difficult situation and leaders were worried about the long-term future of the school. Efficiencies were being considered across the board and nothing was off the table. A Governor commented that this situation could have direct impact on attracting families to the school. A careful balance needed to be made between making cuts and increasing income; the school needed to be sustainable.
- 8.11. It was noted that the budget presented was as close as could be but still relied on some assumptions. There was discussion about when savings would be seen in the budget, due to notice periods, processes and potential timescales. It was noted that efficiencies were not being considered to make the school unattractive to pupils, current or future, or to increase impact on staff. The school’s actions would have an impact on recruitment and retention. It was agreed that every cut made would have a direct impact, and combined there was potential for a profound effect but the Governors had a responsibility to ensure the continued financial viability of the school.
- 8.12. A governor commented that budget decisions could leave staff feeling stressed and overworked and there needed to be strategy about reducing workload.
- 8.13. **Question: Will the universal free school meals go towards helping reduce costs?**
The school had not yet worked this out. It was noted that this was already received for all children up to Y2. It was also noted that the free school meals would reduce the burden on parents in terms of payments, however, it would not bring additional income for the school unless parents donated what they were saving in school meal costs.

Louise Lewis joined at 8.22pm

- 8.14. Governors discussed teacher workload and work-life balance in light of the budget and long term viability of the school. Governors stated that it would be irresponsible to approve a budget that was not feasible but that this budget was signalling long term future concerns. At this point it could be, Governors and school leadership needed to ensure this was not the start of a downward trajectory in terms of quality of life at the school and for the community, but interim measures on the road to a partial recovery.
- 8.15. The Headteacher stated that, although they were one form entry school, they produced exciting, engaging, and creative work. The school had attracted a Y6 teacher; they knew this was an exciting school to work in, with a great reputation. Anecdotally, it was felt that parents liked one form entry primary schools. The school was in a difficult position that required a sustained, combined effort to resolve.
- 8.16. It was noted that sustained fundraising and investment was key. Fundraising needed to be harnessed in the right direction, with a plan for worst case scenarios. Expectations would be high around fundraising with the school’s 10th anniversary in mind. It could take years to engage big donors, but the effort was worth it. Grant writing should be a priority. It was suggested to spend a small amount of money making the school look better and let that lead into the 10-year anniversary fundraising campaign.

- 8.17. Governors discussed approving the budget with the planned cuts. Governors said that this was the only option presented to them. Without transparency the only options were to approve or not approve. Given the situation, governors felt there was no option but to approve but noted that options could have been something like A, B, C / high, medium, minimal risk. The Headteacher stated that all options did not present the budget in a favourable light.
- 8.18. A governor noted the Board's duty to have a certain level of reserves, and this was now being breached. There was a danger the EFSA would assess whether the school was being operated in the most efficient manner. Another governor said that the Budget should not be approved unless an efficiency and wellbeing plan was to run alongside it.
- 8.19. A suggestion was made that Governors should talk to staff and parents about what was happening. Being visible was important, such as a surgery.
- 8.20. The reserve policy would also need to be changed in the light of the financial situation and this budget.
- 8.21. Governors conditionally **approved the budget as presented**, noting the comments and concerns made during discussions. This was also subject to the reserve policy being changed.

David Grunwald left the meeting.

9. Policies for approval /ratification

- 9.1. **Policies for Information:** Governors noted the following policies (sent with the meeting papers) had been recently reviewed:
- 9.1.1. Communication
 - 9.1.2. Expenses and reimbursement
 - 9.1.3. EYFS
 - 9.1.4. Managing conflicts of interest
 - 9.1.5. Positive handling
- 9.2. **Policies for Ratification:** Governors approved the following policies which had been sent with the papers for the meeting.
- 9.2.1. Safeguarding
 - 9.2.2. Behaviour for Learning
 - 9.2.3. Looked After Children

10. Report out - Governor in Depth Day (Attending Governors)

- 10.1. This Item was postponed for future date due to time constraints.

11. School Development Plan (for noting)

- 11.1. Alma SER (full) 2022-23 v7-1 May23
- 11.2. Alma SDP 2022-23 v7-1 June 23
- 11.3. This item was postponed to a future date due to time constraints.

12. Risk Register

- 12.1. This item was postponed to a future date due to time constraints.

13. Any Other Business

13.1. Governors received a paper “Discussion on video and photo permissions”.

14. Any Other Business

14.1. There was no other business.

MOTION OF CONFIDENTIALITY

That because of its nature, the business to be discussed was confidential and not for publication.

There being no further business, the Chair closed Part 1 of the meeting.

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| Signed: (Chair) | Date: |
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ACTIONS LIST

| ITEM NO. | ACTION | ASSIGNED TO |
|----------|---|-----------------------------------|
| | FGB Meeting of 21 June 2023 | |
| 4.1 | Chair/Headteacher to check whether apologies were received from DG and EL. | Chair |
| 5.1 | Deep Dives for Maths to be included on the Autumn Term 2023 meeting agenda. | Chair |
| 7.5 | Agreed to research the data on Jewish children looking for primary school places year on year (to get an idea about future pupil numbers) | Headteacher/L&C Committee |
| 7.10 | Add to the website the Barnet Council reception for Alma’s victorious football team. | Headteacher |
| 7.11 | Review the Link Governors roles and identify the priority gaps to fill. | Headteacher/Chair |
| 7.13 | Headteacher to advise Leora Raymond of CPD opportunities in terms of DT. | Headteacher |
| 7.16 | The Safeguarding Governor to arrange a visit to the school. | Headteacher/Safeguarding Governor |
| | FGB Meeting of 22 February 2023 | |
| 6a | Liaise with Inclusion Lead, Elena Ttofis, about approaching an educational publisher contact next term for free books for the school. | JB |
| 7 | Liaise in regard to a possible grant application for the proposed cabin. | MS and YB |