

**Minutes of a meeting of Governors of Queen Elizabeth Grammar School,
Penrith, held on Thursday 7th July 2022 at 5.30pm.**

Present

Miss R McMann (Clerk)
Mr M Bauer (CoG)
Dr J Jenkins (CoG)
Mr C Hansford (GbS)
Mr G Miller (P)
Mr N Ruddick (P)

Mr P Buckland
Mrs T Boving-Foster (P) (Chair)
Mr J Ray (CoG)
Mr P Airey (CoG)
Mr A Worth (S)
Mr M Worrall (CoG)

SLT present: Mr R Dawson
Mrs J Scott

Visitors: Mr David Marchant
(Headteacher commencing
September 2022)

Governors in attendance: 11 until the
end of item 22 and 10 for the
remainder of the meeting.

Quorum per article 114 – 6 Governors
(one half of the governors holding office rounded up to the nearest whole number)

GbS – Governor by Statute
MaG – Member appointed Governor
CoG – Co-opted Governor
S – Staff
P- Parent

Mr Airey joined virtually by Zoom.

Before the meeting started Mrs Boving-Foster acknowledged that there were some big discussions / decisions to be made and asked for kindness and consideration in order to facilitate an open and honest conversation whereby everyone could comfortably express their view and ask questions.

Additionally, the order of the agenda was changed slightly to enable Mr Dawson and Mr Marchant the chance to listen and offer their opinion in the West Lakes MAT discussion

(they were managing Discovery Day), even though it is noted that neither of them have any voting rights.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were accepted for Ms Mills (long-term absence, illness)

2. Declaration of Interest in Agenda Items

There were no declarations of interest in the agenda items.

3. Any changes to the declaration of Business Interests

There were no changes to the declaration of interests.

4. Minutes from the Meetings Held in May

- 5th May: it is noted that the action point regarding the communication around the parent survey is still to do. It was unanimously agreed that the minutes were a true record.
- 19th May: Mrs Boving-Foster asked for the minutes to include that ASCL did not have any voting rights in the appointment of the new Headteacher. There were no objections to this addition and the minutes were unanimously agreed to be a true record.
- 26th May: page 3 change the term ‘qualify’ to ‘sign-off’ as this is the appropriate accountancy term and add in that the accounts are to be sent by recorded delivery in time for 31st May. There were no objections to this and the Governors unanimously agreed that they were a true record.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Minutes from the June Education and Standards Meeting

Mr Hansford took it that all had read the previously circulated minutes and invited questions and comments. There were none.

7. Minutes from the June Finance and Pay Meeting

Questions were invited from the previously circulated minutes. There were none.

8. Minutes from the June Risk and Audit Committee

There were no questions or comments from the previously circulated minutes.

9. Status Regarding ESFA and Potential CIF Liability

As per the previously circulated email, there are no details about repayment conditions for the £1.5 million. This goes to a new department and there is a vague notion that the report will be ready in three to four weeks. Mr Ruddick asked if now is the time to forget past confidentiality and release information in a format that the school can control. Mrs Boving-Foster said that this will be addressed as the meeting progresses but added that she did not want to create insecurity - presently there is no report or repayment options to discuss, though she is sympathetic to Mr Ruddick's point.

10. SIP

There were no changes to the SIP and all goals have been completed. This would usually be the time to look at a new SIP but given the new Headteacher is starting in September, this will be scheduled for the first meeting and also allows a chance to incorporate the exam results. **Action point: to put onto October's agenda.**

11. Health and Safety

Governors were sent copies of the recent Health and Safety audit conducted by the County Council (this was also discussed in the June Finance and Pay meeting). Mr Miller praised the estates department for all their hard work and that he felt it is good to get an external point of view.

The biggest issue and this has already been identified is legionella. Action has already been taken, with a new company employed to help manage this. A full Risk Assessment will be done on 2nd August. Additionally, Mr Miller explained that PAT testing was identified as an issue. He reassured Governors that this is fairly low risk and the estates team do manage this already but that it needs documenting better. It was noted that it was great to have such nice comments about the school and cleanliness. The Health and Safety Committee will be reviewing the audit at its next meeting.

Mrs Scott was pleased to inform Governors that there was a surprise Environmental Health Audit on Monday and that the dining room got five stars.

Thanks were extended to Mrs Scott and her team.

12. Safeguarding

Mr Buckland wished to note the excellent job that Mr Martin has done as the lead in this area. He will be missed when he leaves, but Governors are reassured that Miss Smith has been fully briefed and is ready to take on the role. Mr Worrall added that the systems in place work really well and are important in ensuring there is a network of support for Miss Smith.

13. SEND

As with Safeguarding, it was reported that Miss Smith will be taking over from Mr Martin. Mr Munro has completed all the training he embarked on and all teachers are trained in SEND.

From a Governance point of view, it was noted that Dr Jenkins will now focus on the Student Voice and cultural element with Mr Ruddick taking over as the SEND link. Mrs Boving-Foster thanked Dr Jenkins for giving SEND a much higher profile.

One more Governor has completed the NGA SEND training. **Action point: Miss McMann to re-send the training information.**

14. Skills Audit

Mrs Boving-Foster proposed that this item be moved to the October meeting, given there will be changes to the Governing Body (a new Chair), a new Headteacher and the outcome of the MAT discussions could have an impact. This would also allow those who have not responded to complete it, though it was acknowledged that this has been a particularly busy time.

Of the respondents the only areas that scored lower was the experiencing of Chairing and of conducting a Headteacher's appraisal. Mr Ray asked that Finance be added to this as he feels exposed being the only Governor with in-depth financial experience.

15. Headteacher's Report

In response to a question from Mrs Boving-Foster, the previously circulated document about contact ratio has been discussed with staff and it was confirmed that the school is back at or below where it was two years ago.

An update was given regarding the recruitment of a new Business Manager. It was deemed that neither of the two candidates interviewed were strong enough. However, one candidate had finance qualifications and so they have been offered a different role. The school is waiting for an answer on this. Rosie could then step up and take on some key roles, such as the audit and this will be a temporary building block with the intention of re-advertising the

position in January 2023. The LA would make more regular visits to ensure that everything is kept on top of.

The next set of items discussed, up to the point of the vote, are in relation to the West Lakes MAT.

16. Background Information, Visions and Results

In addition to the previously circulated documents, Mrs Boving-Foster wished to highlight the nature of the White Paper and that in practical terms schools are reacting to it. She addressed the potential of a Trust Partnership (almost a 'try before you buy' system) but noted that this is mainly for schools which 'require improvement' and Church of England Schools). This was taken up with the CEO of West Lakes MAT but it is not something that they are offering.

Should the decision be made to apply to the RSC this evening, this is not irreversible until the stage of legal transfer. The White Paper notes that in exceptional circumstances 'good' schools can move to another Trust.

With regards to the vision of the two schools, Mrs Boving-Foster said that they were incredibly similar in their attitude of preparing children for tomorrow's world and pushing them forward. The West Lakes vision is the more ambitious of the two.

Finally, with regards to results, West Lakes are just as good as QEGS. It was noted that the attainment is different but this is due to the selective nature of this school.

17. Consideration of Feedback from Consultations

Before opening a discussion on this, Mrs Boving-Foster highlighted the following:

- Must keep in perspective that the 27 signatures on the parents' letter comes from 22 families.
- The staff letter focusses more on the deficit.
- Following up from some negative comments about the leadership of West Lakes, all relevant checks have been made and are satisfactory.

Mr Airey raised a concern that the MAT may well be the right decision but procedurally have concerns as stakeholders were consulted without the knowledge of the ESFA situation, as it was confidential at that time. There have been changes before the due diligence has been completed where stakeholders have not had any input. This becomes a problem in making a decision.

A full and frank discussion took place with all attending given the opportunity to raise their viewpoint to the Governing Body before a vote was taken in item 21.

18. Due Diligence in respect to joining West Lakes MAT

As noted in the June Finance meeting, the due diligence has been much deeper on QEGS as West Lakes are the ones mitigating more risk.

Mr Ray went through the previously circulated report highlighting the following:

- Will be able to preserve selective status.
- There have been a number of meetings and assurances have been made that can maintain and run subjects even if the numbers are small.
- Reserves – cannot protect our own reserves as one set of accounts is produced for the whole MAT.
- Buildings are protected as they are part of a leasehold.
- Governance system is seen to be beneficial. They marry the Trust board to local Governance, for example, all the SEND link Governors will get together. This all makes for a much stronger Governing Board who are better placed to challenge and hold to account where necessary. This is still a work in progress but there has been positive feedback.
- The 6% top slice could potentially mean a negative deficit of £50,000. However, central services team would take care of recruitment costs, HR issues for example but cannot quantify this presently so would have to see if it balances out.
- Very successful with CIF bids and they have more success with IT funding as they are a MAT.
- There is a good financial safety net, though it was noted that one of the primary schools does need significant work to its buildings.
- Rigorous budget process and a different accounting system but should be able to migrate over.
- With regards to maintenance they did a full survey on QEGS which revealed that £2.2 million needs to be spent on buildings and they would apply for funding as part of this.
- Staffing: TUPE would apply and no redundancies would be made. Any recruitment decisions are made in conjunction with the school. It would appear that majority of staff would be better off under West Lakes terms and conditions and pay.

Mr Ray concluded by saying at this stage, no third party assistance is required.

Questions and comments on this section were as follows:

- *What protection is there / assurances that get adequate share of available money (CH)?* Decisions are made as a whole about funding for the schools in the MAT (TBF). Governors meet locally and discuss needs and all of the schools in the MAT get involved. Additionally can appeal above the CEO if necessary. Feel that this MAT Governance structure is better than others (DM).
- SEND money and pupil premium money is not top sliced (JJ).

- Would have access to a lot of specialist H&S support (GM).
- *To Mr Buckland: how much of your time would be saved (JR)?* It would differ at certain times but overall, a lot and the same would be true of the Business Manager role (PB).
- Where the CEO is also the Headteacher is a model which does not work and that is why a SAT is not sustainable (MW).

19. Benefits of Joining Now

It was felt that this has already been covered but it was reinforced that by doing this now, QEGS has much greater flexibility in negotiating favourable terms as well as being at the forefront of forming the change in the educational landscape. There were no further questions or comments.

20. Potential Discussion of implication of ESFA Information

Mrs Boving-Foster introduced this by saying there is no movement on the amount to repay. The best case scenario is with repayments over 20 years and even this presents a dire picture.

Mr Buckland said that he felt this is the right thing to do now irrespective of the ESFA. The school will have a seat of trust and the terms are very fair and positive. Mr Bauer said that it was really important to focus on how this is communicated to stakeholders. Mrs Boving-Foster added that it is an essential decision to make now. Mr Worth said that this has felt forced, stakeholders have been kept in the dark and it is difficult making such decisions amidst all this confidentiality. Mrs Boving-Foster said that the communications and engagement can run alongside the next steps, should the application be approved. If the vote is positive, a staff meeting can be arranged and also a meeting for a small group of parents to talk about this.

Mr Dawson offered his opinion to the Governors as he felt he had not been asked. Whilst he said he could not speak for the whole of SLT, he noted that they have not seen all the information or reports that Governors have. In his opinion, he said that he would not join a MAT at this point if it were not for the ESFA situation. He did not feel that the White Paper was a valid enough reason to progress with a MAT at this stage. With regards to the consultation, whilst acknowledging it is not a legal requirement, he felt that the process was not good enough by QEGS' ethos and standards but did accept there were reasons for this. With regards to West Lakes, he felt that at this point in time it is a good fit. However, to conclude he stated that the security of this school cannot be gambled with and therefore have to take the decision to secure the school to go forward and for that reason alone he was in favour of joining the MAT.

The discussion concluded with Mr Dawson asking if the school was legally bound if the application went forward. It was confirmed that the school is not.

21. Approval of Application to RSC to join West Lakes MAT

A draft of the application had previously been circulated to Governors. There were no further questions or comments on this.

Mrs Boving-Foster proposed to the Governors that there is approval to apply to the RSC to join the West Lakes MAT.

- **Votes in favour: 9**
- **Votes against: 1**
- **Abstentions: 1**

Therefore, the application will be sent to the Regional Schools Commissioner. Mrs Boving-Foster asked for a show of hands as to how many Governors felt they would like to join the MAT irrespective of the EFSA situation. 6 Governors raised their hands.

A letter will be drafted and sent out to stakeholders.

Mr Airey, who joined virtually left the meeting.

22. Elections

As stated in an email Mrs Boving-Foster had informed Governors that she would not be standing for re-election as Chair but would like to stay on as a Governor to help see this process through. Mr Worrall confirmed that he was prepared to stand as Chair and see through the process of joining the West Lakes Academy MAT.

Election of Chair of Governors:

Mr Ruddick proposed Mr Worrall and this was seconded by Mr Miller. **The Governors unanimously agreed to appoint Mr Worrall as Chair of Governors from 1st September 2022.**

Election of Vice Chair of Governors:

As Mr Worrall was Vice Chair of Governors, it was decided to leave this position vacant until next year. Should Mr Worrall not be able to attend a meeting, the Governors would have to appoint someone to Chair the meeting in his absence.

Election of Chair of the Education and Standards Committee:

Mr Bauer proposed Mr Hansford and this was seconded by Mr Ruddick. **The Governors unanimously agreed to appoint Mr Hansford as Chair of the Education and Standards Committee from 1st September 2022.**

Election of Vice Chair of Education and Standards Committee:

As Ms Mills (current Vice Chair of this committee) is due to return in September, this position is currently left vacant.

Election of Chair of Finance and Pay Committee & Risk and Audit Committee:

Mr Ray proposed Mr Miller and this was seconded by Mrs Boving-Foster. **The Governors unanimously agreed to appoint Mr Miller as Chair of the Finance and Pay Committee and Risk and Audit Committee from 1st September 2022.**

Election of the Vice Chair of the Finance and Pay Committee and Risk and Audit Committee:

Mr Worrall proposed Mr Ray and this was seconded by Mr Ruddick. **The Governors unanimously agreed to appoint Mr Ray as Vice Chair of the Finance and Pay Committee and Risk and Audit Committee from 1st September 2022.**

23. Meeting Dates for 2022/23

The changes made to the previously circulated dates were to move Full Governors to 20th October and the Finance Meeting on 7th November will have an earlier start time to accommodate three Governors to look at the appraisals and consequent pay increase proposal in time for the payroll run.

Action point: Miss McMann to amend and re-circulate the meeting dates.

Presentations were made to those leaving at the end of term.

Mrs Boving-Foster thanked Mr Bauer for staying on as a Governor longer than he intended to help navigate through tough decisions. His legal knowledge has been much appreciated and he will be missed.

Mrs Boving-Foster gave her thanks to Mr Buckland for his dedication and perseverance, getting the school good Progress 8 and his steady leadership during the pandemic.

Mrs Boving-Foster gave thanks to Mrs Scott. Whilst her time at QEGS has been short her dedication has been much appreciated and her work during Covid invaluable.

Mr Worrall said that of all the hundreds of Chairs he has worked with, Mrs Boving-Foster has been the most dedicated and hardworking and it has been a pleasure to be the Vice Chair. He added that he is very pleased that she will stay on as a Governor.

The next meeting will be on Thursday 20th October 2022 at 4.00pm.

The meeting closed at 21.40pm