

Minutes of a meeting of Trustees of Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Penrith, held on Thursday 5th January 2023 at 9.00am.

Present

Mrs S Denyer (Clerk)
Mrs M Robson
Mr N Page
Mr C Pyle

Mr D Marchant
Mr N Ruddick
Mr M Pannone
Mr D Sargent

SLT present: Mr R Dawson, until item 11
Mrs R Rourke, from item 12

Trustees in attendance: 7

Quorum per article 114 – 4 Trustees
(one half of the Trustees 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

1. Tour of the school

Mr Marchant invited the new Trustee board to a tour of the school.

2. Apologies for absence

No apologies received.

3. Co-opt new Trustee

Mr Marchant shared the CV of Mr Pannone and nominated Mr Pannone to be co-opted as a Trustee.

The Trustees unanimously voted to co-opt Mr Pannone as a member of the Trustee Board.

Mr Pannone joined the meeting

4. Declaration of interest in agenda items

There were no declarations of interest in agenda items.

5. Level 1 Safeguarding

Mr Marchant asked all Trustees to read Part 1 of Keeping Children Safe in Education and sign the declaration, which is to be returned to Mrs Denyer at their earliest convenience. Trustees were asked to forward any safeguarding certificates from the previous 12 months to Mrs Denyer for the school records. An online level 1 safeguarding course for Trustees is available from the NSPCC and a login will be made available to those who need to complete this.

Action – All Trustees to read part 1 of KCSIE and return the signed declaration to Mrs Denyer.

Action – All trustees to return level 1 safeguarding certificate to Mrs Denyer if completed within the last 12 months, or request a login to complete the online NSPCC course.

6. Election of a Chair, agree meeting structure and link Trustees

Mr Marchant asked for nominees to take up the position of Chair of Trustees. Mrs Robson volunteered herself to become Chair of Trustees. Mr Pyle nominated Mrs Robson for Chair of Trustees. Mr Pannone seconded Mrs Robson.

The Trustees unanimously voted to elect Mrs Robson as Chair of the Trustee Board.

A discussion then took place to decide on the meeting structure and subcommittee structure. Mr Marchant proposed that full trustee meetings include all previous subcommittees; Education and Standards, Risk and Audit, Finance and Pay, rather than run these as standalone committees. Discussion took place as to whether this was compatible with the Academy Trust Handbook. Trustees agreed to carry out an assessment against the competency framework, as well as a skills audit of the Trustee Board.

The Trustees unanimously voted to have a single Trustee meeting to include all agenda items.

Action – Carry out assessment against Competency Framework document within the ATH.

Action - carry out skills audit of the Trustee Board.

Mr Marchant explained that each Trustee should have a link to a part of school, comprising of SEND, Safeguarding, Curriculum, Sixth Form, Health & Safety and Finance. It was noted there is currently no Trustee on the board with specialist financial experience and this should form part of the parent Trustee recruitment. Mr Page explained link Trustees will speak to lead staff to question and challenge what the Head is saying and support the school to meet its strategic aims within that specific area. For trustees without an education

background there was discussion in relation to support to ensure trustees were effectively fulfilling this role.

The following was agreed:

SEND – Mrs Robson

Safeguarding – Mr Pannone and Mr Sargent

Curriculum - Curriculum

Sixth Form – Mr Pyle

Health & Safety – Mr Ruddick

Finance – to be recruited through parent Trustee recruitment – until then we will instruct internal auditors.

7. Agree next meeting date

The Trustees agreed to meet once per month and the next meeting will be scheduled on Wednesday 25th January at 6.30pm via Teams.

Action – ensure all Trustees have school logins

8. School Development Plan

The SDP had been circulated prior to the meeting. Mr Marchant felt the plan reflected where we are currently and a good starting point. A number of aspirational points have been included and a priority list for the year will be determined.

A number of points in the plan have emerged from the recent KS4 teaching and learning review and will look to tackle the under performance of some high prior attainers and unlock student autonomy in learning. A KS5 teaching and learning review will commence in the coming weeks.

A summary of Question and comments were as follows:

Is the gap in boys / girls attainment an issue at KS4 only? (NP) Mr Marchant explained that the teaching and learning focused initially on KS4 to give a better perception of the current status, but it is assumed a relatively similar issue at KS3.

Is the SDP too generic or should it have more detailed input, such as owners, implementation detail and deadline? It is difficult to establish risk and priorities, and if this is the most important document, how much scrutiny is required? (MP) Mr Marchant agreed to look to provide further context. It was agreed to provide progress reporting and RAG status of each line. The document will be reviewed by Trustees once per term.

It is not clear which items are within budget? (MP) Mr Marchant explained RR has taken up the role of School Business Manager on a temporary basis and the plan is to define SLT structure this year and review the budget. As the consultation into joining a MAT is to be restarted, Mr Marchant is cautious about making any permanent appointments or commitments.

Why do we have to join a MAT? (MP) Mr Marchant confirmed it is DfE policy for schools in financial trouble to join a MAT. Mr Page added that standalone academies are becoming

unsustainable financially and leadership wise. There is little structure of support above you, but with a MAT the benefits of a bigger organisation provide that support, especially financial which is one of the biggest challenges facing standalone academies. MR suggested she meet with the DFE and ESFA to fully understand the school's position.

9. Headteachers Report

Mr Marchant will plan to circulate the report prior to Trustee meetings and ask for questions to be submitted in advance so full responses and follow up can be followed in the meeting. Mr Marchant highlighted a number of key areas detailed in the report.

Attendance is currently at 95.7% which is lower than where SLT would like this to be. The recent train strikes do not seem to be causing any major issues, but are causing lateness. One of the issues is the number of students taking term time holidays. Mr Marchant may look to revisit the attendance policy to re-introduce fining protocols after a local school has had recent success in this practice. Our attendance is above national average.

Are attendance challenges a risk to the school? (MP) Attendance is above the national average and not deemed a risk to the school. Mr Marchant confirmed the Risk Register will be shared with Trustees

Is there comparative data for Grammar schools? (NP) Mr Marchant confirmed it is not available. Persistent absence is a focus as we do have a small number we are struggling to get in and a small number of school refusers.

Mr Marchant moved on to highlight CPOMS and where we are tracking a small number of issues and trends. Behaviour logs show a higher than previous number of suspensions. This is due to a small number of significant incidents that have led to longer suspensions of individual students.

10. Curriculum Consultation Outcome

The consultation was issued to staff to explore views on changing the curriculum model to 5 or 6 lessons per day or another suggestion. Mr Marchant explained that staying with the current curriculum model of 4 double lessons per day is not an option. The rationale for change includes some sixth form students having lunchtime lessons and where subjects only see students once per fortnight and school closures occur, it can mean some subjects only see students once per month. This is not sustainable and does not allow some students to take part in wider school community.

The consultation has now closed and there have been mixed responses from staff. Some legitimate concerns have been raised - the science department have concerns in relation to health and safety of having no breaks between lessons where experiments are being carried out. Computer science also raised concerns around increased lesson content as they currently have 1 hour lessons per fortnight with KS3, and this would change to 2 hours per fortnight with a new model. SLT will now review the consultation in the following week.

Question and comments were as follows:

Have you engaged with unions? (MP) Mr Marchant confirmed unions have been informed, and there is relatively low concern from them. There is an understanding of the reason for change.

Is there a best practice to follow? (MP) Mr Marchant and Mr Pyle agreed the standard nationally is a 5 or 6 period model. It is recognised that double lessons are not effective. Mr Marchant also explained he would like to address how many GCSE subjects are studied as he feels that studying 10 GCSES is too low for a grammar school. He feels the standard should be 11.

Mr Dawson added that the initial review also looked at other local schools and the standard seems to be a 5 lesson model. SLT are unable to shift the start or finish times of the school day due to shared school transport with UCC. They have looked at Kent Grammar Schools as a comparative model and although there is no absolute right way, a 4 lesson model is not the norm.

Will you collect the views of students? (MP) Mr Marchant confirmed students have not been consulted as this is a professional decision to make.

What is the timeline? (NP) Mr Marchant confirmed agreement on the model will be in place by the end of January. SLT will then look to match staff to the model taking into account staff leavers and considering recruitment where required. There is no expectation of redundancy, but the school will look to make efficiencies where possible.

11. OFSTED preparedness

The school was last inspected in 2009 with an Outstanding grading. Mr Marchant explained to the trustees he believed the school was no longer in an Outstanding position, and would be graded Good. He believes even with the financial situation, the school can still be graded as Good due to having a new trustee board and new Headteacher. SLT have moved quickly to ensure the school is compliant with all statutory information and policies updated and there is now a timetable in place to update non-statutory policies.

Questions and Comments were as follows:

Are you confident the pace of change will get us a Good grading? (MP) Mr Marchant explained the OFSTED process. SLT are clear about strong and weak areas across the school and curriculum planning has been launched but this is a years worth of work. The culture and communication required for an Outstanding grading cannot be created overnight. Mr Pyle added that safeguarding has to be rock solid and Mr Marchant agreed and explained he will be bringing in an external auditor to review this area.

Will Trustees be involved in an OFSTED inspection? (NR) Mr Marchant expected Trustees to be involved as they are a new board and OFSTED will review the approach to holding the school to account.

Mr Dawson departed the meeting due to teaching commitments.

12. Update on progress toward Notice to Improve

Mr Marchant confirmed the school are already doing the vast majority of the points raised. The deadline for joining a MAT has now been delayed due to the new MAT consultation about to take place, and he has received written agreement from the DfE on this point. A new deadline will be set once terms have been agreed for a new consultation.

Mr Marchant updated the trustees on other restrictions from the NTI and how the school is managing them where it needs to.

Questions and comments were as follows:

The Notice to Improve requires a repayment plan to be agreed by 23rd December – has this happened? (MP) Mr Marchant confirmed the ultimate liability will sit with the receiving trust and as this has been delayed, the ESFA have agreed a date will be set once a MAT has been agreed by Trustees.

13. Agree approach for consultation

A proposal document was presented to Trustees from EPI who have quoted services to research, review and present suitable MATs. Mr Marchant proposed that we use this service and then launch a consultation on joining a named trust. He felt this company have the expertise and independence to carry out the research quickly and provide value for money. There was discussion about whether to appoint EPI complied with the Financial Handbook and procurement processes. It was also felt that the cost provided really good value for money. He confirmed the ESFA have had notification of this approach.

The Trustees unanimously agreed to ask EPI to proceed with the works as quoted and once agreed by Trustees, to consult on the joining of a named MAT.

Mr Marchant asked the Trustees to agree a list of priorities to be agreed with a MAT and shared a number of points he had considered. All trustees agreed the list of priorities was not just fundamental to joining a MAT, but needed to tie in with a clear vision for the school. It was agreed this needed more time for consideration and an additional meeting will be held in a weeks' time to discuss and agree a vision for the school and associated priorities when joining a MAT.

Action – Trustees will meet on Wednesday 11th January at 6.30pm via Teams to agree the school vision statement and hierarchy of priorities when joining a MAT.

14. Confidential item

15. Update on capacity issues

Mr Marchant explained the school's current funding agreement accommodates for 840 students and we have 1040 currently on roll. Mr Marchant authorised a survey to take place before Christmas to assess the capacity of the school and a 1065 limit has been established. Mr Marchant will submit a significant change request to the DfE to change the funding agreement to 1065. The increased sixth form numbers expected from the larger Year 11 cohort will take us very close to this number. Although Mr Marchant believes the request will be approved, a number of risks were highlighted to Trustees if the funding agreement remains at 840 students. There would be implications for the number of incoming Year 7 students, and a staff redundancy programme.

16. Admissions Policy Consultation

The comments received from the consultation were shared with the Trustees. It was agreed to defer this item for a decision to the next full Trustee meeting on 25th January to enable all trustees to read the responses fully.

17. Contract Tendering (cleaning and grounds)

Mrs Rourke explained the 5 year contract for cleaning services with Orian is due to end on 31st March 2023. A quotation has been received from Orian and shared with Trustees. Mrs Rourke stated the quote has increased costs of 9%, which she felt was reasonable in the current climate. The school have been satisfied with the service received and the company have long term staff working on the contract. It is now for the Trustees to decide if to accept the quotation to roll over the contract or re-tender for cleaning services. A discussion was had as to the benefits of each option

Mrs Rourke explained grounds maintenance is currently hired on a rolling month contract that should be tendered due to the spending threshold having been met. A proposal from Scrutiny was shared with Trustees who will run the tendering process on behalf of the school. Mr Page noted the school would get a better price and service by going to tender.

The Trustees unanimously agreed to contract with Orian for cleaning services as per the quotation received.

The trustees unanimously agreed to tender for grounds maintenance and Mrs Rourke to agree the terms of the tender with Scrutiny.

18. Any other business

a) Overview of financial information

Mrs Rourke presented Trustees with a summary of finances to August 2022, highlighting the statutory accounts now include the £1.5 million liability as a creditor falling due within 1 year. The catering function is now making a surplus due to increased pricing and cashflow is positive with £264,000 in unrestricted funds.

Mr Marchant thanked Mrs Rourke for the work completed on the budget since joining the school in September.

b) Submission of CIF bids

As part of due diligence carried out by Westlakes MAT in 2022, works accumulating to £3.5 million were identified. Mr Marchant explained CIF bids were submitted on advice from the ESFA who confirmed the school have the right to withdraw the bid up until the release of funds. A full exploration would need to be conducted before accepting any funds and Trustees would need to agree at this point. Given current circumstances, the trustees agreed that this would need to be absolute certainty the right processes were followed before accepting a successful bid.

The meeting ended at 1.30pm

Date of next meeting – Wednesday 25th January at 6.30pm via Teams