

MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY
18:30 on Tuesday 29 September 2020 by Zoom

MINUTES

1. Apologies

All governors present, though apologies from deputy head teacher Helen Rees.

2. Appointment of chair of governors

Mike Hawthorne was unanimously appointed as chair of governors (proposed by June Willis; seconded by Tom Powell).

Governors and the head teacher in particular expressed their huge thanks to Tim Stiles for all his work as chair of governors over the last six years, and for the invaluable support and dedication which have made a crucial contribution to the school's progress.

3. Head teacher's update

Current situation

School life is dominated by Covid-19, making sure that all arrangements that have been put in place for the safe running of the school are working, and making any necessary adjustments to the plan; this is especially true for the senior leadership team. Governors expressed their thanks to Helen L and Helen R in particular for how well the staggered school and lunch times have worked. On average, 3-5 children have been sent home every day because of symptoms (which includes the siblings of any child affected), and there no-one has tested positive, though on 29 September 2020 there were no children sent home. Each time this happens, a new routine needs to be instigated immediately until a negative result has been confirmed. Tim M has written to parents to remind them of the importance of informing the school when a child has tested negative and can return to school.

Staffing

A number of staff members who had been off because of clinical vulnerability have now had individual risk assessments, and Helen L and Helen R have begun to work on how best to deploy these staff on the interventions required. Their return will start from the middle of w/c 5 October, once protective screens have been delivered. One class teacher remains off awaiting further guidance and the outcome of medical consultations.

Pregnant staff have not been brought back to school, as to do so requires the school to guarantee stringent social distancing, which the government guidance says is not possible with younger children. This is consistent with what some other schools are doing; the question of liability has not been confirmed, and will not be guaranteed until it is tested in a court. Other staff have had to self-isolate for short periods, including Tim M for two 3-day periods as well as Helen L and two others in the week of 28 September. Governors recognised that these numbers are likely to rise as autumn and winter approach.

This impact on staffing availability has a practical and financial impact, and some schools are beginning to close whole year groups because there are insufficient staff to maintain year group bubbles. At the moment, none of the emergency funding available covers staffing, despite the considerable additional cost of paying simultaneously for staff and supply staff more frequently.

Finances

Governors queried the financial help available and it was confirmed that £10,469 has been reimbursed for the costs of opening during the Easter holidays (including electricity, gas & water) and Covid-19-related purchases including social distancing markers. Governors appreciated Sandra's efforts to make further claims, including £6k for screens – as well as to replace the windows in the nursery which do not open, limiting ventilation – and noted that schools are generally expected to pay for the additional costs from existing budgets.

In addition, the UIFSM (Universal Infant Free School Meals) census will be conducted on 1 October, and it is likely that as fewer children are having lunch this will result in a reduced grant – although some of this will be offset by increases in those who are Pupil Premium as a result of

their family's changed circumstances. Governors asked about the opportunity to advertise Thursday's lunch and it was confirmed that while too late for this census other ideas have been put forward to incentivise school lunches.

Parental feedback

Feedback from parents is positive. The external markings (red dots and green dots) are working well, there is sufficient space to manage, and arrangements and guidance have been provided to parents in a way that is clear, prudent and easy to follow. This was hugely appreciated by parent governors. The school acknowledged that prams remain a challenge, and that winter ice etc. could present an additional obstacle at the start and end of the school day.

Governors welcomed the really good press on Herefordshire websites and Facebook of how the school has adapted to the new arrangements. Some parents had been very apprehensive but have reported and posted that they feel very safe, the majority of parents have followed procedure and kept their distance, and the children are coping well.

Teaching & learning

Governors questioned the impact on teaching and learning, and it was confirmed that coverage of the full curriculum is not possible given that the staggered start and end times shorten the teaching day. Some children have also not been as ready for their return to school (in particular the new Reception classes), and some of the curriculum cannot be delivered as it used to be (e.g. any group chanting of sounds or words while learning phonics is against guidelines). Governors acknowledged that for now there has not been time for the senior leadership team to assess the impact on teaching and learning.

A recently confirmed Covid-19 catch-up grant of £42,560 will help to plug the learning gap.

4. Any other business

A query was raised about possible improvements in how many books can be taken home, and how the system best operates, and it was confirmed that there will shortly be a new stock for distribution. Governors welcomed the possibility that the PTA may be able to help fund the supply of more books.

Governors agreed that as the governing body meets statutory requirements any decision to appoint additional governors would be deferred to a later meeting.

5. Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the current system of ad hoc meetings as required by the evolving Covid-19 circumstances remains an appropriate modus operandi, with meetings more frequently than half-termly. A further meeting will be called within the next few weeks. Any governor is invited to call for a meeting if there is something specific and urgent for which discussion and decision by the governing body is required.

[ends]