

# ST ALBAN'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

*Love one another as I have loved you*

The meeting opened with a Prayer for, and in tribute to, the many key workers who continue to work and support the community in the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

## MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BOARD

THURSDAY, 28 MAY 2020 at 6 pm

### PARTICIPANTS:

Pat Duprey [Chair of Governors ]  
John McDonald [Headteacher and Host of meeting]  
Nicola Boyd  
Claire Connor  
Kevin Doogan  
Colette Haig  
Pat Higgins  
Lucy Lowe  
Teresa Marnell  
Peter Matthews  
Bridget Pullen  
Marie Wolfe

Non Participant: Bernadette Mooney

In attendance: Ann Evans, Deputy Headteacher  
Fleur McAlavey [Assistant Headteacher]  
Eileen Coyle, [Clerk to Governors]

**PAT DUPREY in the CHAIR**

### **1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chair welcomed and thanked everyone for their participation in the virtual meeting of the Governing Board. She especially welcomed the new Headteacher, John McDonald, to his first full Governors' meeting and thanked him for hosting the virtual meeting.

The non-participation of Bernie Mooney was noted.

## **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Governors confirmed that there were no changes to their Declarations of Interest completed and signed in the Autumn Term 2019.

Having reviewed the agenda, the Governors confirmed individually that they had no personal, pecuniary, contractual or prejudicial interest in any item on the agenda for this evening's meeting.

## **3 HEADTEACHER'S UPDATE**

**3.1 THE SITUATION SINCE THE SCHOOL CLOSED IN MARCH 2020 TO ALL BUT THE CHILDREN OF KEY WORKERS ON THE ORDERS OF THE GOVERNMENT:** The Headteacher commented that he appreciated very much the warm welcome he had received when he joined the school as Headteacher at the start of the Summer term in April. The work and organisation that already been done under the leadership of the Acting Headteacher had made it very easy for him. The staff had been amazing in overcoming the many difficulties that have prevailed during this particular time, and they have done a fantastic job throughout. The current unique situation had given him the opportunity to get to know the staff and the families in the school, and he had an overwhelming feeling that it was a place he will be very happy to work in.

New technology introduced included on-line assemblies, ways of keeping in contact with the children and families, and on-line learning which had been a particular challenge. Everyone is working hard together and according to the feedback from parents the new way of working is the best of both worlds. In his second week in post, the Headteacher had expected the staff to go from zero to full implementation of the new systems in five days; and they did not let him down.

Snapchat is a messaging tool which works really well. It helps the parents by enabling them to upload their children's work for the staff to see and to contact the class teacher whenever they need advice or support; resulting in considerable communication between teachers and parents.

With support by the Local Authority, the school has received a grant of £1,500 for training which will be provided by RM Education and will strengthen on-line learning. Plans are in hand to further develop the school's website.

**3.2 THE SCHOOL'S PLAN TO RE-OPEN THE SCHOOL TO MORE PUPILS:** The Prime Minister had announced this week that schools would re-open to more pupils, on a phased basis, from 1 June 2020.

As reported in the Press, the teaching unions have differing opinions on how that might happen and they want to see risk assessments first. Wirral Council is trying to reach a consensus between all schools not to re-open schools until all five safety requirements set out by the Government are met. A letter sent to parents on 15 May referred to the Council's approach. This approach appears to be consistent with other North West authorities, including Liverpool, Trafford, Halton and Newcastle. In Wirral, a further meeting between the LA and the unions has been arranged for 29 May.

To date, the average daily attendance in this school is about 20. At the last count, the number will increase to 62 during the course of next week. The current plan is

to continue to open the school to key workers' children and vulnerable children and then assess the capacity to open up to other year groups on a phased basis. The staff have made a very good contribution to a process that will ensure a smooth transition.

Wirral wanted agreement on opening to year 6 children first, followed by Reception children, then year 1 children. The Headteacher had queried this stance, because it goes against DfE advice, which suggests the order, early years, reception and year 1, and then year 6.

The Governors raised the questions/comments:

**Are the key workers' children attending on five days a week, and how are they socially isolating?**

**A lot of the children are coming in next week, and many parents are asking the same questions. I think many are happy to send their children in if they can keep them off on the days they are not working.**

**Would key workers' children be integrated into year groups when they return?**

**Would children go in a bubble with their year group, or sit with the key workers' children's group?**

The Headteacher outlined the school's plans for re-opening on a phased basis over the next four weeks, whilst making sure at each stage that there is sufficient capacity in the system.

The Government's idea is that all children would return for at least a month before the end of term, but it is unclear how schools will be able to organise that return. The dynamics are constantly changing. The next half term would be particularly challenging with many changes happening very quickly. Advantage has been taken of the Deputy Headteacher's organisational skills and, amongst other initiatives, she had drawn up and maintained the weekly staff rota. Detailed practical planning had taken place to ensure that the school is as safe as it can be as children return.

Each child will be given a packed lunch with their name on, prepared by the kitchen staff and filled according to their preferences and allergies, which they will eat outdoors or in their classroom.

**3.3 RISK ASSESSMENTS:** The risk assessments are very important and were the primary reason for convening the virtual extraordinary meeting this evening. An email received earlier in the day from the Director of Children's Services asked schools to make sure they use Wirral's risk assessments. This school was already complying with that request.

It would be helpful at this meeting to nominate a Governor with the relevant experience to review the risk assessments and act as the liaison person between the Governors and the Headteacher.

**With the Chair of Governors approval, Kevin Doogan volunteered to oversee the risk assessments on behalf of the Governing Board.**

The Headteacher gave an undertaking to liaise with Kevin Doogan, initially on the risk assessments for early years, and to discuss the particular problems associated with socially distancing the younger children. The early years' curriculum is based

on touch and play, but what happens when the things they can touch and play with are removed?

Kevin Doogan commented that the risk assessments are very thorough and the school has planned extremely well. He referred to the track and trace system recently introduced by the Government and enquired what would happen if a child within a bubble tested positive.

The Headteacher replied that as he understood the guidance if a child is sent home with symptoms, the advice would have for the child to be given a swab at the back of their throat and nose, which can be painful and uncomfortable. A spit test is being looked at as an alternative.

If a child arrives in school with a high temperature the child would be placed in the isolation room with a member of staff who, if necessary, would wear personal protection equipment. The parents would be contacted and asked to collect the child. If necessary, the whole bubble, including the staff, would self-isolate.

Kevin Doogan stated that the possibility of cross-contamination in bubbles is a problem. He enquired about the arrangements if a member of staff tests positive and when first-aiders would go into the playground, given that the school would have a limited number of qualified first aiders who would be in bubbles.

In an initial response the Headteacher indicated that he would take the question back, and would arrange for the staff to receive additional training.

**The Chair agreed to email the Headteacher confirming that she was satisfied that all the Governors had read and were happy with the risk assessments, or that they needed to change.**

**3.4 PARENTAL FEEDBACK ON THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR RE-OPENING THE SCHOOL:** The responses indicated that the parents were very clear about what they wanted to happen.

The focus had been on facilitating social distancing for parents when they bring and collect their children from school. Following a site visit by a Council road safety officer to-day, some of the barriers would be moved tomorrow to enable the parents to walk through. Signs have been provided and hand sanitizers have been ordered. The caretaker would be in attendance during the key times and residents would be free to move their vehicles as they wished.

The Headteacher would assess the responses of local residents to the Council's arrangements to close off roads when leaflets are delivered to households tomorrow.

**FOOTNOTE: At 13.08, on 29 May 2020, the Headteacher forwarded to all the Governors, via email, the document, St Albans Catholic Primary School Risk Assessment, Final 29/05/20, incorporating Wirral updated BAME.docx., together with a copy of the letter to residents from the Council dated 29 May 2020, headed - Temporary Road Closure – Ashburton Road, Overton Road, Acland Road and Liscard Grove.**

#### **4 DELEGATED FINANCIAL AUTHORITY**

The Headteacher proposed to update the scheme of delegation and present it for review by the Finance Committee and ratification by the Board at its next meeting. Meanwhile, the Deputy Headteacher who, presumably had been granted delegated financial authority as Acting Headteacher, would be available until the end of the current academic year.

**RESOLVED: To approve the proposed arrangements for dealing with the revised Scheme of Delegation.**

#### **5 ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE RECRUITMENT OF A NEW DEPUTY HEADTEACHER**

The Chair reported that applications from three candidates had been received in response to the advertisement for the vacancy for Deputy Headteacher. The process had paused due the lockdown and the three applicants had been advised that their applications would be kept on file.

She suggested that given the circumstances for one or more of the three applicants may have changed in the intervening period, it would be prudent to re-advertise the position when the Diocese advises it would be appropriate to do so. Responding to a query from the Assistant Headteacher, she confirmed that full or part-time existing members of staff would be free to apply for the post.

Meanwhile, consideration needs to be given to the interim arrangements for Deputy Headteacher from September.

**RESOLVED: To ask the Headteacher to discuss with the Personnel & Pay Committee the situation concerning the post of Deputy Headteacher, to deal with any outstanding contractual matters, and to recommend the staffing structure for 2020/21.**

#### **6 DELEGATED BUDGET**

**6.1 BUDGET OUTTURN 2019/20:** The Headteacher reported that the school's bursar predicted a carry forward to the current financial year of over £80,000. Wirral's low birth rate in recent years had impacted on many schools' budgets and in this school only 41 children would be joining Reception in September. The resultant potential loss in income of around £60,000 would require a very cautious approach to be taken to managing the budget in future.

The Governors indicated that they had no objection to the Headteacher's suggestion to consider appointing a newly qualified teacher as a replacement.

**6.2 BUDGET SETTING 2020/21:** In discussion with the Finance Chair, it was -

**RESOLVED: To convene a virtual meeting of the Finance Committee at 5 pm. on Tuesday, 16 June 2020, to deal with budget setting.**

#### **7 POLICIES FOR RATIFICATION**

Information had been added to certain policies to reflect COVID-19. The Headteacher had sent the documents electronically to the Governors for reading and feedback. The input of parent governors at the meeting, who described their experiences with their children on Remote Learning, had been particularly helpful.

**RESOLVED:** To adopt the additions/amendments to the documents –

- Behaviour Policy
- Home School Agreement
- Remote Learning Policy
- Child Protection Policy

## 8 CHAIR'S ACTION

**RESOLVED:** To grant the Chair of Governors authority to use Chair's Action as appropriate in the current circumstances, and to report the actions taken to the next meeting of the Governing Board.

## 9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

In accordance with the Chair's recommendation, it was –

**RESOLVED:** To convene a virtual meeting of the Governing Body on Tuesday, 23 June, at 6 pm.

## 10 OTHER BUSINESS

**10.1 FREE SCHOOL MEALS:** The Chair commented that some families are already struggling and they will not be given free school meal vouchers during the holidays. She asked the Headteacher if he had any idea what would happen to these families during the Summer break.

The Headteacher replied that he would find out. He continued that he was fully aware that this school has been doing great work during the time the children did not have access to a school meal. He would not expect that schools would operate in the summer break to give the staff a break; although some provision may be made on a funded basis. He would ask the question at the Wallasey cluster meeting tomorrow. He hoped this school would be able to continue what it normally does to help people, plus a bit more, perhaps by contacting the big supermarkets to see if they have any spare capacity.

The Deputy Head commented that the school's success to date has been due to the generosity of the staff, although Tesco and the local butchers' have been amazing. She said she would be happy to become involved in the Summer break if the Governors wished to do something to help out local families who are struggling.

The Chair asked to be kept informed on what the plans are as soon as possible when she would report back to the Wallasey Gap Hub.

The Assistant Headteacher reported that the Food Bank in the Hub is still running as it was. The food in the Parish Centre has been sent to the Hub. If the school needs space to do something it could use the Parish Centre.

The Chair suggested that, as the numbers returning increase, it might be possible to use the Parish Centre if the school lacks the space to accommodate all the bubbles it requires.

The Headteacher thanked the Chair for the suggestion; he would speak to the Diocese if the need arises.

The Headteacher continued that there are many children with undiagnosed needs. However, children forget things quite quickly and they would soon get back into some normality.

**10.2 SOCIAL MEDIA:** The Headteacher reported that the Facebook page was well received by parents. He realised the particular difficulties for parents whose children are not in school, and some are probably working from home as well as coping with child care. Some parents had said it was all very well being directed to go to this or that App, but they did not necessarily know where their child was on the curriculum. The teachers are trying to keep the curriculum going for the children as if they were in school. He asked the parent governors if it would be helpful if the teachers direct parents to some of the other resources that are available to parents, or whether it would it complicate matters.

The parent governors replied that they thought such an approach would be well received and recommended that it is given a try.

The suggestion that Twitter might be something that could be used further down the line prompted discussion on the practice of certain people who use social networking sites to post inappropriate and damaging comments on other people.

The Headteacher explained that this could be avoided by opening an official account when 'admins' and 'moderators' within the group would monitor material before it is posted. He suggested that perhaps a group of staff could explore further and give assurance before moving forward.

The Headteacher commented that it was great to see everyone this evening and they would have the opportunity to talk to each other on line when the meeting ends. He urged people to stay safe.

On behalf of the staff, the Deputy Headteacher expressed appreciation to the Headteacher for everything he is doing; it is absolutely wonderful.

The Chair echoed the sentiments.

The Chair thanked the Governors for their contributions to the discussions, and for their useful suggestions and ideas.

**SIGNED AS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BOARD ON THURSDAY, 28 MAY 2020.**

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**CHAIR**

**DATE: 23 JUNE 2020**