



**ST ALBAN'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL
GOVERNING BOARD**

Love one another as I have loved you

**MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING
OF THE GOVERNING BOARD**

29 MARCH 2022 at 1900 hours

PART ONE

ATTENDANCE

Name	Category	Term expires	Designated role/s	Present	Absent
John McDonald	Headteacher	Ex-officio	Headteacher	P	
Kevin Doogan	Foundation	31/08/2022	Chair Governors: Assets	P	
Nicola Boyd	Parent	31/08/2022	Assets: Parish/Community	P	
Claire Connor	Foundation	31/08/2022	Standards		A
Brigid Gribbin-Bartlett	Foundation	31/08/2025	Standards: V/Chair Parish/Community	P	
Colette Haig	Staff	31/08/2024	Standards: Chair Parish/Community	P	
Lucy Lowe	Foundation	31/08/2024	V/Chair Governors: Standards	P	
Teresa Marnell	Co-opted	31/08/2023	Parish/Community	P	
Peter Matthews	Foundation	31/08/2025	Assets Chair	P	
Bernadette Mooney	LA	31/08/2023	Assets		A
Catherine Moor	Foundation	31/08/2025	Parish/Community		A
Bridget Pullen	Parent	31/08/2022	Assets: Parish/Community	P	
Claire Suffield	Foundation	31/08/2024	Standards		A
Vacancy	Foundation				
<u>In attendance/observers:</u> Fleur McAlavey, Assistant Headteacher Joanne Holmes, School Business Manager Eileen Coyle, Clerk to Governors					

The Headteacher invited everyone to join in reciting The Governors' Prayer.

KEVIN DOOGAN in the CHAIR

1 WELCOME/APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the Spring term meeting of the Governing Board.

He was pleased to announce that Father Ramesh had expressed interest in becoming a Foundation Governor at the school and his appointment was being processed by the Diocese. Once completed, the school would have a full complement of Governors.

Apologies for absence were received from Claire Suffield and Catherine Moor.

The Governors declared that there were no changes to the Declarations of Interest made following the Board meeting in Autumn 2021.

Having reviewed the agenda, the Governors confirmed that they had no personal, financial, contractual or prejudicial interest in any item on the agenda for to-day's meeting.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 23 NOVEMBER 2021/MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting on 23 November 2021 had been sent to the Governors in advance.

PROPOSED by Colette Haig, **SECONDED** by Nicola Boyd, and unanimously -

RESOLVED: **To confirm that the minutes of the meeting of the Governing Board on 23 November 2021 are a true and accurate record of the meeting.**

There were no matters arising.

3 MINUTES OF GOVERNORS' COMMITTEES

The minutes of Governors Committee meetings had been circulated in advance.

3.1 ASSETS COMMITTEE: 28 FEBRUARY 2022: The Chair drew attention to the following –

- The Committee had discussed and approved the SLAs for 2021/22, in the context of a report presented by the School Business Manager;

- A decision had been made to change the school's bank account. In future, the school fund would be held in a separate account within the school's budget;
- His offer to draft a letter on behalf of the Governors to thank the staff for their efforts keeping the school running during a very difficult time. Since then there has been a further spike in Covid cases with inevitable staff absences. With the Governors' agreement, he proposed to defer sending the letter until the next predicted Covid peak passes and more staff are in school.
- The successful recruitment of the new business manager, Joanne Holmes, who has proved to be very proactive and to be real asset to the school.

3.2 PARISH, COMMUNITY, PARENTS AND PUPILS COMMITTEE: 15 MARCH 2022: The Headteacher commented that this, the second meeting of the Committee, had been very productive meeting. The Committee had recognised the school's support to the community during lock down, including home learning, attendance, and developing relationships with families. They suggested that the clubs and activities suspended during the lockdown should be re-activated. The useful suggestions put forward by the Committee are under active consideration; for example, a response is awaited from the LA on any support that may be available to run a holiday club. The Committee had considered the initial responses received to the Parents' survey.

3.3 STANDARDS COMMITTEE: 24 JANUARY 2022: The publication of minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee on 24 January 2022, had been delayed due to a technical problem, and would be presented at the Summer term meeting.

The Headteacher reported that work had been ongoing on three main areas –

- Making sure that the curriculum is fit for purpose
- Reading, with a focus on Phonics, and
- Subject Leadership.

Whilst the school had judged itself to be Good in its previous Self-Evaluation Form [SEF], the Headteacher had observed some elements that were less than Good. Some systematic changes were needed, which should be easily rectified, and he was optimistic that they would be good when the next inspection takes place. . For example, it had been assumed that a Handwriting Policy is in place, but there is not.

Within the new inspection framework, there is greater expectation in terms of challenge, particularly for curriculum leaders. The intention is to complete the current SEF in time for the Summer term meeting of the Board to enable the Governors to gain a good understanding of where the school sees itself. It is unlikely that the school would be inspected before September 2023.

RESOLVED: To note the minutes of the meeting of the Assets Committee on 28 February 2022, and the minutes of the Parish, Community, Parents and Pupils Committee on 15 March 2022.

4 REPORTS

4.1 HEADTEACHER'S REPORT, SPRING TERM 2022: The Headteacher's report had been circulated to the Governors in advance of the meeting.

The Headteacher reported that the school had been hit particularly hard with Covid-related staff absences making it necessary to deploy staff to meet the need at any given time. This increased the pressure on the remaining staff, all of whom are doing '*above and beyond*'.

Referring to the benchmarking information on attendance, the Headteacher explained that the school has a method of calculating absences that excludes Covid absences from the statistics. There had been some improvements in attendance following meetings with parents; another round of meetings is imminent. More social reasons for absences are coming forward which, in turn, increases the demands placed on the staff who are supporting those families. The Headteacher would delve more into the social reasons, bring information on the really '*tough*' cases and the support offered by the staff to the next meeting of the Board.

Applications for leave of absence for holidays in term time had increased; despite the families being made fully aware that the absences would be unauthorised and that fines may be issued.

Governors' Questions/Comments and the Headteacher's Responses

SEND children. This school has a relatively high number of children with SEND compared to similar schools and nationally, whilst the number of children with Education Health Care Plans [EHCP] is quite low.

It's a changing picture. The numbers are higher than they have been in the past. Currently, two children have an EHCP, and three applications are pending. There are children who present challenges and the staff are working extremely hard to alleviate the anxieties these children are suffering. Whilst the school is meeting the needs of these children, it has been necessary to employ additional staff on short term contracts. In the past, it would have been highly unlikely that these children would have remained at this school; they would have been offered specialist provision. There seems to be a desire within Wirral's SEND team for every school to be as inclusive as possible.

Currently, Wirral tends to provide funding through parent/pupil agreements [PPAs]. A change in the management of the SEND service combined increased demand has resulted in more early intervention. A Government White paper on SEND has been issued within the past few days, with a consultation document to which Governors can respond.

The section, Characteristics by year group, shows an imbalance between boys and girls? For example, in years 1 and 3, there is a higher percentage of boys than girls. Experience shows that where this is the case class behaviour could be an issue.

Some children, particularly in years 1 and 2, and to an extent in year 3, mainly because of the disruption to their early education during lockdown, have not yet learned how to self-regulate their learning. The staff are trying to plug the gap to

make sure that things improve for these children. In addition, some are summer born, particularly boys, and it is difficult to make provision for them, therefore the focus is very much on outdoor activities. Some children have difficulties with their behaviour and this school is not always in a position to be able to offer them the best provision, but it is building up the evidence, particularly for younger children with moderate learning difficulties, for example, to receive support from Orrets Meadow. A child with speech and language difficulties, who had a place in base at New Brighton Primary School, has returned to this school. The child still needs support, but presumably not as much as other children who need a place in a base. More families than in previous years have 'issues' and they need more support.

What's happening with the School Council?

I've been looking at alternative ways for the School Council to capture the children's views more effectively. A model, called Smart School Council, is being considered which is a pupil-led, inclusive, Ofsted-ready school council which is run by the pupils and involves them all in democracy. There is a communication team, consisting of a small group of pupils and an action team to progress the suggestions, such as create a club, campaign or activity. Every child has a voice, and is more effective than two representatives from each class going to a meeting; it's a more powerful way of doing things. The new system should be in place by the end of the Summer term.

The school needs to look at Behaviour and is developing a professional learning culture amongst the staff. It is part of the School Improvement Plan and is about refining the school's Behaviour Policy, which will be done, with involvement of the parents, over the summer term.

Forty copies of a book on Reading have been provided in the school. The teachers and TAs are reading a chapter a week, and it has already started to have an impact. All the staff will have an opportunity to complete six one-hour training sessions by September.

Some parents are not happy that Golden Time has been removed, but it was not doing what it was meant to do. There's a new smart Behaviour Policy and work is ongoing with Pupil Voice. Different approaches are being made, it's not a quick fix, and it takes time to work on and embed changes.

5 CHAIR'S UPDATE

5.1 LEAVE OF ABSENCE: A member of staff had requested unpaid leave to attend a family wedding. In consultation with the Headteacher, a decision had been made to grant paid leave as a gesture of goodwill in recognition of the additional work undertaken by the staff in recent months.

5.2 APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY HEADTEACHER: The appointment panel comprised the Headteacher, Chair and Vice Chair of Governors and a representative from the Diocese. The unanimous decision of the panel was to offer the post to Kelly Nuttall, who had accepted the position.

5.3 DIOCESAN CONFERENCE: The Chair and Headteacher had attended the Diocesan Headteacher's conference at the beginning of March, when it became

clear that academisation is very much on the agenda again, and this is confirmed by the Education White Paper. No indication had been given of whether or not the Diocese would recognise the original plans for forming academy trusts, or whether schools should start to form new partnerships with other schools, but it is something that the Governors need to be aware of and to keep in mind.

5.4 DIOCESAN BRIEFING: The Diocese would write to any Governor whose term of office is about to end and has asked the schools to keep the Diocese up to date on changes of address. The Chair asked the Governors to ensure that they notify the school office of any changes of address.

5.5 WIRRAL GOVERNORS' NEWSLETTER: The newsletter highlights the issue of Complaints and the fact that schools have received a higher number of complaints from parents than normal, It asks a number of questions, such as, *'Have you got a complaints policy, if so when was it last reviewed?' 'Is the policy on the website?' 'How many concerns or complaints have been received and successfully dealt with?'* The Chair enquired whether it was something that this school needed to look at.

The Headteacher replied that the school's complaints policy is based on the LA's model policy and is on the website, but it can be looked at again. He suggested the need for an additional policy or procedure when excessive complaints from the same person, or complaints about the same thing are received.

The Chair continued that dealing with a complaint is very time-consuming for the school and the Chair of Governors and they don't go away quickly and easily. There had been one complaint recently which had been dealt with successfully, but there were concerns at one point that it might go to the Appeals Panel. This raised the question, *'If to were to go to an appeal, what support would the school receive and from whom?'* There's a lack of information on who could be called upon to guide the governors through the process, if it got to that stage.

The Headteacher reminded the Governors that the Board has two standing committees. Rather than having nominated governors for each committee, any governor who is not 'tainted' by having previous knowledge of the case, can serve on one committee. The first committee is chaired by the Vice Chair; the second committee, the Appeal Committee is chaired by the Chair of Governors.

The Chair continued that in the past the Governors had been supported and guided by a representative from the LA. He asked, *'Who does that now?' 'Does anyone do it?' 'Can we buy into a service for that like an insurance policy, or can we buy support at the point it is needed?'* It is not clear whether support would be forthcoming from the LA and it is something that the Governors need to know about. Making decisions can be traumatic for Governors, but if they follow the procedures and are supported throughout, they cannot go wrong.

The Headteacher gave an undertaking to investigate the questions raised and report back to the Governing Board.

6 OUTCOME OF PARENTS' SURVEY

The Headteacher advised that the proforma for the parents' survey, which had been based on the questionnaire used by Ofsted, had been shared with the Governors before they had been sent to the parents. Thirty-four responses, fewer than expected, had been received.

The Headteacher showed a screen shot of the outcomes of the statements. He stated that he was happy or very happy with most of the responses, but not so with one or two others. One/two parents had disagreed with the statements about their child being happy at the school, whether their child felt safe in the school, and some said they felt their child had been bullied. It's about parents' understanding of bullying. There is no evidence of bullying in this school, but there is evidence of anxiety; clearly, more work needs to be done on what bullying really is.

Some parents had raised questions about what their child would be doing during the year. The parent of a child with special needs had commented that things need to be dealt with properly. Another parent had stated that they did not want their child to be '*always on the screen*' and would prefer more paper documents to be sent home.

The Governors responded -

- *I agree with the sentiment that it might be too much for some parents, especially those who work on a computer all day, and others do not have access to a computer at all.*
- *Something should be sent out to parents each half-term or term saying, these are the things the children are learning about.*
- *The five-minute time constraint with the class teacher at the parents' evening didn't allow time to address the issues raised.*
- *I canvassed parents at the door and a good two-thirds said they would prefer the opportunity to fill in a paper version, and send it back, rather than the on-line version.*
- *There should be a homework club in school where the children can access the staff they don't have at home, whilst trying to ensure that they do things out of school as well. It takes the pressure off the parents, as well.*
- *Is there any correlation between children with special needs and the comments made?*

The Chair advised that when a parent strongly disagrees with a statement, they should be asked to state on their response why they strongly disagree. The school should make an assessment of what it is they disagree with, and take appropriate action.

In response to a comment on Handwriting, the Headteacher explained that the Handwriting Policy was currently being re-written. The Homework Policy would also be revised and updated.

The Headteacher thanked the Governors for the feedback and suggestions, the majority of which he was in favour of and would discuss with the staff.

He would respond to the issues raised in the survey so that the parents are aware that the school is listening to and acting on their comments and views.

Discussion continued on Reading when a governor commented that when the Accelerated Reading programme was introduced, prior to the retirement of the previous Headteacher and pre-Covid, the Board had agreed that the Infants finish at 3.20 pm, and the Juniors finish at 3.30 pm to allow ten minute reading time at the end of the school day. Every class should have a class reader, and each child should have a copy of the book they are currently reading. It would make sense to re-introduce the arrangement in September.

The Headteacher gave an undertaking to discuss the reintroduction of reading times with the staff, and to devise a timetable for homework.

7 GOVERNOR TRAINING

The Headteacher encouraged new Governors to attend a foundation/introductory course for Governors, adding that it is a very useful course.

8 SCHOOLS FINANCIAL VALUES STATEMENT [SFVS]

The Business Manager had shared the suggested responses to the statement with the Chair of Governors. The Headteacher showed the statement and responses on the screen for the information of the Governors. It was noted that each question had been answered in full, apart from question 3 where the reply, 'In part' had been given to the question on whether the governors receive budget reports six times a year.

The Chair commented that he was happy with the very comprehensive responses given to each question, and subject to agreement by the Board, he proposed that the document is forwarded to the LA as this Governing Board's response to the SFVS statement. No objections or comments were received.

RESOLVED: **To thank the Business Manager, and submit the completed SFVS statement to the LA by 31 March 2022.**

9 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

9.1 ADMISSIONS POLICY 2022/23: No changes had been made to the Admissions Policy in place for 2021/22. The Policy had been submitted to the Diocese in accordance with the Diocese's timescale for responses.

9.2 THE LA'S UPDATED POLICY ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: The school had received and noted the policy.

9.3 SCHOOL UNIFORM POLICY: The Business Manager had adapted the current policy to reflect the Government's directive to schools that all uniform items are affordable by making that clear that parents are not restricted to purchasing items of uniform from a named supplier, but have the option to buy from retail outlets that sell competitively priced items of school uniform.

The governors suggested amendments to standardise the colours of uniform items and to adjust the lists of items for boys and girls.

A governor suggested that the school's policy on the wearing of earrings, including stud earrings, is outdated. This was followed by discussion on whether or not the wearing of any kind of jewellery should be allowed in school.

The Headteacher gave an undertaking to check with the LA to ensure that the school is following the recommended guidance on the wearing of earrings and jewellery by pupils in school.

RESOLVED: To adopt the policies –

- **Admissions Policy 2022/23;**
- **The LA's Updated Policy on School Attendance.**

10 PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS: SUMMER TERM 2022

RESOLVED: To confirm the programme of meetings for the Summer term.

MEETING	DATE	TIME
STANDARDS COMMITTEE	TUESDAY, 24 MAY	7pm
ASSETS COMMITTEE	TUESDAY, 21 JUNE	7pm.
FULL GOVERNING BOARD	TUESDAY, 28 JUNE	7pm

11 OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 SAFEGUARDING: The Headteacher had sent information to all the Governors on Safeguarding which offered them an opportunity to watch a ninety minute video by two HMIs, '*Effective culture of Safeguarding in schools*', which explained how Ofsted look at the safeguarding culture in the school. It would be particularly useful to Governors with Safeguarding responsibilities.

The Staff Governor and observers withdrew.

The meeting continued in closed session.

BOARD MEETING: 29 MARCH 2022

ACTION POINTS

As the meeting progressed, the Headteacher volunteered to undertake the actions shown below, and to report progress at Committee/Board meetings in the summer term.

TOPIC/SUBJECT	ACTION
SEF	Complete SEF for presentation at Board meeting in June.
PUPIL ABSENCES	Investigate social reasons for increase in pupil absences, report on the really 'tough' cases, and the support offered by the school.
BEHAVIOUR POLICY	Refine/redraft the Behaviour Policy.
HOMEWORK POLICY	Revise/update the Homework Policy
HANDWRITING POLICY	Revise/update the Handwriting Policy
COMPLAINTS	1. Review/revise the Complaints Policy.
	2. Devise policy/procedure for dealing with vexatious/multiple/trivial/uncorroborated complaints from one person.
	3. Seek advice from the LA and other sources on the governor training and support for Governors when dealing with complaints, staff dismissal, staff discipline etc., and the Appeals process.
DIRECTED READING TIME	Report on the outcome of the consultation with the staff on the re-introduction of directed reading times for Infants and Juniors.
UNIFORM POLICY	Incorporate the suggestions by Governors on the standardisation of the colours of uniform items and adjust the lists of items for boys and girls.
WEARING OF JEWELLERY, including single stud earrings	Check that the school's policy reflects the guidance issued by the LA on the subject and amend the policy, if necessary.

