



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BD) OF THE  
RURAL CHURCH SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST (RCSAT) HELD REMOTELY ON  
6<sup>th</sup> JULY 2021  
(Commenced 3:40pm)**

**Directors in Attendance:**

P Bostock	(PB)	Chair of Board of Directors
A Denton	(AD)	
S Loughlin	(SL)	
N Badger	(NB)	Executive Headteacher

**Also in Attendance:**

B Brockbank	(BB)	Observer/Local Governor
M Gate	(MG)	Observer/Local Governor
A Tomlinson	(AT)	Observer/Local Governor
S Waddington	(SW)	Observer/Local Governor
R Alexander	(RA)	Observer
K Appleby	(KA)	Principal of Warmingham
A Goodwin	(AG)	Principal of St Oswald's
H Cummings	(Clerk)	

**PART ONE**

**1. APOLOGIES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB) ITEMS**

Apologies were received and accepted from Anne James and Tim Boote

There was one item of additional business to be considered:

- Hire of temporary swimming pool.

**2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The following conflict of interest was declared in relation to the business to be discussed at the meeting:

- S Loughlin is related to the School Improvement Partner/ External Adviser

General declarations of interest were recorded in full on GovernorHub.

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### 3. PROPOSED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Full details of the proposed new structure, and the rationale behind it, had been uploaded to GH in advance of the meeting. Governors noted the following key points:

- The current structure was not in accordance with the Articles of Association, and the CDBE (Chester Diocesan Board of Education) would not approve any merger or additional schools joining the MAT until this was resolved.
- The alternative to the structure proposed was to have elected Parent Directors, with no control over who they might be.

Areas of concern:

- The current structure created a sense of community across the schools; would that be lost?
- Local governors had enjoyed working across the 3 schools, and would be confined to one school under the new structure.
- Recruitment of governors; each school would be looking for 2 parents, 2 staff and 3 Co-opted governors.
- Communication across the Trust.
- If the current structure was not in accordance with the Articles, why was it signed off by the Diocese originally?
- Workload for staff, specifically the EHT and Business Manager.

The Chair and EHT addressed these concerns by noting that:

- With plans to expand the Trust, the sense of a tight-knit community would be weakened anyway.
- Local Governors would focus on one school, but would be more involved with that school.
- Staff and parent governor elections would be held initially, and Co-opted governors brought in over time. It was noted that the minimum number for an LGC would be 3, excluding anybody employed by the school.
- There would be regular meetings between the Chairs of the LGCs and the Chair of the Board, to maintain effective communication.
- The Diocese had commented that the regulations had been tightened since the Trust had been formed, and lessons learned from the experience of other MATs.
- The EHT and Business Manager would not need to attend every LGC meeting. The structure was already in place to ensure that the school Principals would have the necessary information.

Positives to note:

- The proposed structure was logical and allowed for growth of the MAT.
- Local governors would be more involved and could make some decisions for their school.
- Four years under the current structure had put the Trust in a strong position from which to develop.
- There would be a greater voice for parents and individual schools.
- Staff could present to LGCs on the curriculum areas most relevant to their schools.

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**Governor question:** Would this need to happen straight away?

Response: CDBE will not approve any expansion until this is in place, so the current discussions with another school will not go any further if this is not implemented.

Directors agreed, on balance, that there was little alternative, and the proposed new structure was **approved** for introduction from September 2021.

BB and MG were appointed as Chairs of the LGCs for St Oswald's and Warmingham respectively. SW would consider the role of Chair for Bunbury and respond in due course.

**ACTION: SW to consider role of Chair of Bunbury LGC and respond to PB.**

**ACTION: PB to work on Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation for LGCs and Directors' Committees for September.**

#### **4. MEMBERSHIP**

##### **Directors**

There were no changes to the Board of Directors.

##### **Local Governors**

Directors formally **approved** the appointment of Rebecca Alexander as a Governor linked to Warmingham.

Directors noted that Alison Tomlinson's term of office was due to expire at the beginning of the autumn term. It was hoped that she would stand for election as one of the staff governors at St Oswald's under the new structure.

Directors confirmed that appropriate DBS and Section 128 checks had been carried out for new governors.

**ACTION: Clerk to update GovernorHub as necessary.**

#### **5. PART ONE MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The part one minutes of the following meetings held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were **agreed** as an accurate record:

- Spring term Board of Directors meeting
- Spring term Joint meeting of Directors and Local Governors

All actions from both of the meetings above had been completed.

#### **6. CHAIR'S POWER TO ACT**

No actions had been taken under the Chair's Power to Act.

#### **7. PART ONE REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES AND REPORTS FROM GOVERNORS WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **Pastoral Committee**

The minutes of The Pastoral meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> June were available on GH, and SW gave the following summary of the meeting:

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- Excellent, detailed reports were received from the three Principals and the Pastoral Manager.
- NB had attended SIAMS training and was working with KA as both Bunbury and Warmingam were due to receive SIAM inspections in the coming year.
- The SIAMS training had emphasised the importance of vision and ethos, which would now be on every agenda.
- Following the SEND review, the SEND Manager's role would become more strategic, attending SLT meetings. Each school would have a SEND Champion as their first point of contact.

#### Estates Committee

The minutes of the Estates meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June were available on GH, and PB gave the following summary of the meeting:

- The project to build a new classroom at St Oswald's was waiting for the planning application to be submitted. PB had written to Lancaster Maloney to request an update.
- The plan to build a car park at St Oswald's had stalled as the landowner no longer wished to proceed with the project. An approach may be made in future to see if he was willing to sell the land in question.
- A planning application was due to be submitted for a staff car park at Bunbury.
- Work would begin shortly to try to improve the drainage of the field at Warmingham.

#### Achievement Committee

SL gave the following summary of the meeting:

- There had been no external data due to the pandemic, but the committee reviewed internal data and reports from the 3 Principals.
- SEND children, and those working at 'Greater Depth' were observed to have made less progress than others, on average. The committee had examined the reason for this.
- Writing had seen the greatest negative impact from the partial school closures and the move to remote learning.
- With a young and relatively inexperienced team, Warmingham had seen a decline in the quality of teaching. NB and KA were monitoring the situation carefully and working to develop staff.

#### Finance Committee

All Directors present had also attended the finance meeting held immediately before the Directors' meeting. The minutes would be available to all governors in due course.

#### Safeguarding

The Safeguarding governor had only been able to meet once in-person with the Pastoral Manager, but had been fully briefed. The school Principals had also contacted SL as issues arose. It was noted that the Pastoral Manager wished to step down from the role, and another member of staff was already shadowing in preparation for a handover.

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## 8. ST OSWALD'S PROVISION FOR 2 YR OLDS

Full discussion had taken place at the Finance Committee as to whether St Oswald's should accept 2 yr olds into the nursery in September. Directors had agreed that it was not feasible for September 21, but they would review the position in the early part of the autumn term.

## 9. FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE

Directors confirmed the following:

- a) The School Resource Management Self-Assessment had been submitted by the deadline of 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021.
- b) Audited financial statements had been submitted to Companies House by the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2021.
- c) Arrangements were in place for completion of the combined Budget Forecast and 3Yr Budget Forecast. Director approval would be sought by email prior to submission by the deadline of 27<sup>th</sup> July.

Approval:

- d) The Draft budget for each of the three schools was **approved** by Directors.
- e) The staffing structure for 2021/22, detailed in section 5 of the EHTs report was **approved**.
- f) There were no annual contract purchases to approve.

Review:

- a) The Monthly Management Accounts, up to and including May 2021, had been reviewed and verified by the Audit & Risk Committee.
- b) Directors had reviewed the outturn forecast for each school at the Finance Committee meeting.
- c) Reports on the use and impact of the Sports Grant would be circulated to Directors for approval before being published on each school's website.
- d) The use and impact of the Pupil Premium Grant had been discussed at the Achievement Committee. Reports on the use and impact of the Pupil Premium Grant would be circulated to Directors for approval before being published on each school's website.
- e) The use and impact of the Covid Catch-up Premium had been discussed at the Achievement Committee. Reports on the use and impact of the Covid Catch-up Grant would be circulated to Directors for approval before being published on each school's website.

## 10. PART ONE EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER'S REPORT AND MATTERS ARISING

The EHT's report had been circulated on GH in advance of the meeting and questions were invited.

**Governor question:** Have there been any bubble closures, given the recent spike in infections in the area?

Response: There have been 2 positive cases at Warmingham, leading to the closure of 1 bubble. Similarly, St Oswald's had 2 positive cases in the same bubble. Bunbury has not had to close any bubbles. We expect the bubble system to end from September.

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**Governor question:** How has pupil performance held up across the Trust?

Response: We have seen the greatest impact on SEND children and those working 'at Greater Depth'. Online learning is largely uniform and does not allow for much differentiation, so has to cater for the majority. We have also seen an impact on writing as this is an area that is difficult for parents to support. Handwriting, spelling and punctuation have deteriorated as children have typed and not self-checked their work.

The EHT noted that RAG rated versions of each school's School Development Plan were available in the folder for the summer term Achievement meeting. Directors were pleased to hear that progress had been made despite the pandemic, and that areas for development had been identified for the coming year.

**Governor question:** How far behind expectations are we on the plans?

Response: Everything we wanted to achieve is in place, the aspect that is missing is the time for things to embed.

A governor wished to commend staff on the plans for the new connected curriculum to be implemented from September.

In conclusion, Directors and governors congratulated NB and all staff at Bunbury on Schoolsfest. It was felt to have been a superb event with which all the children actively engaged. A similar event was planned for next year at Bunbury, and St Oswald's and Warmingham would hold their own events.

## **11. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER REPORT**

The SIP was due to visit the school on 20<sup>th</sup> July, and the report would be available for review in the autumn term.

## **12. EHT PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REVIEW**

Brian Padgett was re-appointed as the external adviser for the Executive Headteacher's performance management review.

## **13. GOVERNOR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT**

SW had attended training on handling admissions appeals, and PB had undertaken training on joining and merging Academy Trusts. However, it was generally agreed that the move to online training, while more convenient, was less effective, and the training link governor noted that governors in general had not done as much training as previously.

All Directors and Governors were encouraged to look at the training offered by the Diocese, Cheshire East and the NGA. In particular, the following courses offered by the Diocese were highlighted:

- SIAMS training in Feb22 and May 22
- Being a governor of a church school – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2021
- Preparation for OfSTED – 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

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The training link governor had received 7 completed skills audits, which showed a good balance of skills. Areas where individuals felt they lacked experience/knowledge included:

- Structural organisation
- Financial planning
- Chairing a committee
- Knowledge of Estates.

It was noted that in addition to specific training, governors were welcome to attend meetings of committees of which they were not a member, in order to broaden their knowledge.

**14. CONFIRM TERM DATES AND HOLIDAYS FOR 2022/23**

Dates had been approved previously and were available on the schools' websites.

**15. DIRECTOR'S REPORT – SUMMER 2021**

The Director's report had been circulated at the beginning of the term, and matters addressed at the appropriate committee meeting.

**16. SCHOOL POLICIES**

Directors approved:

- RCSAT-PR-012-01 Complaints procedure

**17. PLANNED RESIDENTIAL VISITS**

Governors heard that dates had been agreed for Schools Fest in 2022 (w/c 16<sup>th</sup> May). KA had provisionally booked 2 residential trips for Key Stages 1 and 2 at Warmingham, in March and April respectively, and governor approval would be sought in due course.

**18. MEETINGS**

In light of the new structure agreed for September, PB and the Clerk would suggest meeting dates for 21/22 for approval.

**ACTION: HC & PB to agree dates and circulate for approval.**

**19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Swimming Pool

The Finance Committee recommended acceptance of the proposal to hire a temporary swimming pool, to be erected at Bunbury for use by all three schools over a 2 week period. Financial information relating to the proposal had been available for review on GH.

It was noted that there was a backlog of children who had missed out on swimming lessons due to Covid. The temporary pool would allow for intensive courses for years 4, 5 and 6, without as much disruption as visits to a local pool over an extended period.

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Directors agreed that swimming was an essential life skill, particularly in an area with so many rivers and canals, and were pleased to **approve** the proposal for the autumn term.

**20. IMPACT STATEMENT**

- Governors had reviewed the governance structure to ensure that it was fit for purpose and reflected strategic direction of the Trust.
- The ongoing focus on staff and pupil wellbeing demonstrated governors commitment to the ethos of the Trust.
- The EHT and school Principals had been held to account at committee meetings through careful analysis of available data and scrutiny of measures to support all pupils' wellbeing.
- Rigorous financial scrutiny ensured that Directors had clear oversight of Trust finances and ensured value for money.
- The Safeguarding link governor received regular briefing around ongoing issues, and procedures were carefully monitored.

The part one meeting closed.

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