

St Alban's Catholic Primary School

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held in the school
at 6.30 p.m. on Thursday 30 April 2015

No. 2014-2015-4a

Present: Mark Broadbent (MB, chair), Graham Hughes (GH), Mgr Peter Leeming (PL), Sally Livesey (SL), Joseph McCrossan (JMcC), William Merrick (WM), John Moore (JMo), Janet Muir (JMu), Sarah Slattery (SS), Jo Wager (JW), Rachael Beale (RB, clerk)

Absent: Jo Coward

1. Minutes of the meeting of Thursday 22 January 2015

Confirmed.

2. Matters arising

The Internet AUP was circulated again for signatures by all governors. JW queried the point over use of personal cameras; JMcC clarified that this was for personal use only and not for use on social media.

3. Feedback from subcommittees and training

None.

4. School budget for 2015-16 financial year

The carry-forward for this year is £17.5k. This is considerably lower than in previous years, but the school has purchased new touchscreens. There has been an uplift of £50k additional funding in the school budget (for Cambridgeshire schools only), with an indication that this will be repeated next year. This year, the PTA's £4k contribution has been included in the budget. Teachers' pay has increased to reflect the 1% rise, additional points and movement across thresholds. From January, St Alban's appointed an admin assistant to work in KS1, to help with preparing, for example, art materials for classes. This has had a positive impact on staff wellbeing. As a result of the water leak, the school received a reimbursement of £7k from the water company. Contribution to reserves are around £14.7k; this is lower than in previous years. There is decreased spending on curriculum (by about £13k) compared to the previous year. This is due to significant additional resource purchases last year. £31k should be a sustainable curriculum budget. The £26k revenue contribution to capital is as a result of LEA requirements. The school still has £18k in cluster funding which is being held in reserve.

GH thanked JMcC for managing the budget so well, and confirmed that he would recommend the budget to the governing body as there are no major reductions, changes or difficult decisions. The school starts off the year with £17k carry-forward and ends with £14.8k, but this is unavoidable. GH recommends that the school should be cautious about the additional £50k received as a result of lobbying from Cambridgeshire. The formula that stipulates how the money should be distributed is still in existence; however, to give Cambridgeshire more money permanently, other areas will have to lose out, and it is therefore unlikely to be sustained in the longer term. At present, the forecasting anticipates a shortfall of £5k in the following year.

The options for trimming fat from the budget are extremely limited as it is 85% staff costs.

The budget assumes a £10k governor liability order for the conservatory outside KS1. Helen Bates has secured funding and has submitted a planning application. This is an affordable and non-recurring cost, but it does contribute to the projected shortfall.

SL asked for clarification of the LCVAP money. Helen estimated it would be £85k, and was looking for a 10% contribution from the school, with £2k being provided by the Diocese. JMcC feels that this development will substantially improve the learning environment for KS1. JMo asked why the cost was so high. JMcC said the work was estimated at £65k, but the headline sum includes VAT and a contingency amount. GH clarified that if we did not support this project, the budget carry-forward would be £24k rather than £14k. If the school is going to proceed, the decision needs to be made now before it is too late to withdraw. SL felt that the school would acquire a reasonable teaching space for less than £10k, that the LCVAP money availability in future was uncertain, and it was therefore best to proceed.

JW queried the high cost; SL said that if it had to be done during the school holidays, the costs would increase considerably because of the more limited availability of builders. If the work could be accommodated during the autumn term, the costs might come down. MB noted that the LCVAP money is divided up between other VA schools in the region, so the spend has been scrutinised by the Diocese of Ely. GH pointed out that the school had never actually decided to do this building work, yet the planning permission has already been submitted. JMcC said that the Diocese has to take responsibility for ensuring the environment is fit for a good education, and that he had mentioned the conservatory to Helen as a possible project. MB wondered if the school needed a new process to scrutinise school improvement proposals. PL commented that Helen is responding to creativity, and working quickly.

WM commented that if the £50k funding does indeed not emerge in Year 3, the projected deficit will leap to around £70k. GH said that without dramatic change, the school cannot avoid this situation. The only way this could be dealt with would be by slashing curriculum resources and looking at staffing. MB said that the school's discussions about academy status, and with both the Diocese and LA in terms of potential different school groupings, indicated that there was a potential positive impact on the budget from these changes in status, and that therefore the picture was not as bleak as it looked. GH proposed that the GB support the plan to contribute to the conservatory project, WM seconded. All agreed. MB thanked GH for raising the issue.

JMcC noted that those schools in the LA that set deficit budgets are supported with a protected budget; the uplift is offsetting that contingency rather than providing improvement. MB commented that St Alban's is relatively good at balancing its budget, so that if this school is struggling, many others must be in a worse position. SL commented that regardless of the outcome of the general election, it is unlikely that nothing will be done to correct the formula funding issue. WM asked if becoming an academy affected funding? GH confirmed it would not have an effect on the £50k funding. SL explained that the building of new primary schools had also had to be cross-subsidised, which had a big impact on LA funding.

MB recommended that the governing body approves the School Budget Plan for the financial year 2015/2016 total spend of £851,563 (seconded by GH); all approved.

5. Reconstitution of the governing body

The school has to reconstitute its governing body without a non-teaching staff governor, and may therefore reduce the number of foundation governors accordingly. The Diocese has provided a model instrument for the governing body to modify and adopt. This must be done at the next meeting as it has to be completed by 1 September.

ACTION: SS, JMcC, MB and JW to provide governor skills audits to RB.

6. Regular policy review

JMcC proposed a working party be formed to review the statutory policies.

7. Headteacher's Report

30 places have been offered and accepted in Reception; all are Catholic children. Attendance is on track. The number of free school meals continues to drop. Y6 has received significant intervention throughout KS2 to support pupils that have been struggling. Sport has been very successful. The Pupil Premium will be monitored by the St Alban's school improvement advisor. JMcC recommends a task and finish group be created to work on the school's equalities objectives.

Mr Gawthorpe has been considering improvements to the Science curriculum. The school is preparing for its Section 48 RE visit, which is likely to be later this year. Writing is a priority for this year.

JMcC has been very impressed by the way staff have supported each other during some very difficult times for the school, including family bereavements and the Ofsted visit. The administrative assistant's maternity leave is being covered by a midday supervisor. Two non-teaching staff have requested 2 months' leave of absence, one for a family trip and the other for house renovation. JMcC is confident that cover will be adequate. Tina Cappetti has resigned due to ill health; JMcC noted she had been a key member of staff. There is now a counsellor in school, supported by the Pupil Premium.

Two men who have been sleeping rough in the school playground have been removed by the police.

An NQT is presently undergoing induction as part of St Alban's involvement in a teaching schools alliance.

The PFA continue to be a great support. £4k was raised for Street Child. The evangelical Easter crosses attracted positive feedback from the parish. The St Alban's Foundation is aiming to raise £15k to purchase a school minibus. The school hosts the city's music school; it encourages all children to study an instrument if they would like to, and offers financial support to do so to any family that requires it, in line with school policy.

Thanks to Father Henry for his work as school chaplain. The Catholic Walk is not yet finished, but it is hoped that it will be ready in time for Bishop Alan's visit on 17 June.

St Alban's is the only outstanding school in Cambridgeshire under the new Ofsted framework. There has been a lot of interest from other schools and headteachers, which has made for a busy term.

Task and finish groups were appointed for equalities objectives (JW) and policy review (WM, SL - to be completed by the end of June).

8. AOB

There was an item of reserved business.

MB had received a complaint, and responded; the issue had been successfully resolved.

JW and JMcC had met to discuss SRE in light of a new policy to be published next term. Two meetings have been set up to provide parents with information earlier on in the process, in order to allow plenty of time for parents to consider and discuss any queries ahead of the teaching. Some small changes may be made in how the programme is rolled out.

SL has signed up for the termly briefing on 14 May.

MB and JMcC met Joan Whitehead, who chairs the Children and Young People's Committee at the county council, and enquired about the paucity of Catholic schools in Cambridgeshire. The county does not currently have a policy on faith schools, but will be developing one, including reference to admissions criteria. There will be an open meeting held on 30 June.

The Audit of Governing Body Effectiveness will be conducted by a small working group (MB, SL and WM).

JMcC and JW will conduct the Child Protection Review as part of the Equalities Objectives discussion.

SS is eligible for the Tebbutt Award; Julie Dama is also overdue for hers. They will be presented later this year.

Bishop Alan will be visiting the school on 17 June; there is an intention to make it a significant celebration. A working party will be formed to plan this.

INSET days will now be set by schools; the LA has recommended that schools should stick to the existing plans for this year, but already St Bede's has decided to choose its own. St Alban's should aim to liaise closely with St Bede's to try to ensure the days stay in step.