



## Thorner's CE VA Primary School

Minutes of the Full Governing Body meeting in school on **28 March 2022** at **5.30pm**.

Z = via Zoom

**Present:** *Foundation Governors:* John Vercoe JV (Chair); Helen Jones HJ; Anna Morley AM; Caroline Morrish Banham CMB; Heather Goffee HG; Rev. Jane Williams JW (Z)

*Headteacher:* Mike Sitch MS.

*Staff Governor:* Felicity Smith FS (Z)

*Parent Governors:* Lisa Metcalf LM (Z)

*Local Authority Governor:* Peter Strange PS.

**In attendance:** John Alexander JA (Clerk).

Q/C = Question/ Challenge

### 1. **Welcome and Prayer**

JV welcomed all present. JW said the opening prayer.

### 2. **Apologies**

Nicole Forbes Marshall NFM.

### 3. **Minutes of Meeting on 14 February 2022**

These were agreed as a true record.

### 4. **Matters Arising**

- i) JA to amend ToR for Communications and Ethos Committee: COMPLETED
- ii) All Governors to proactively seek nominees for the three Foundation Governor vacancies: ONGOING
- iii) AT to do Monitoring Report for Music: NOT COMPLETED. **ACTION:** AT
- iv) All Governors to keep training record up-to-date: COMPLETED
- v) JA to present analysis report on NGA Skills Audit: COMPLETED

### 5. **Declaration of Any Other Urgent Business**

None

### 6. **Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared in respect of the Agenda.

### 7. **Correspondence**

None

### 8. **Headteacher's Written Report**

MS referred to his written report, which had been included in the meeting pack, and highlighted the following:

*Attendance:* Pupil attendance was currently 93.1%, compared to the national average 92.0%. There were no cases of persistent absence.

*Premises:* Scaffolding was in place for the solar panels, which were due to be installed during the Easter holidays which were due to be installed during the Easter holidays as part of the

Government's Salix Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. Energy saving LED lights were being installed. MS was getting quotes for resurfacing the netball court.

*Teaching and Learning:* Remaining activities that had been curtailed by the Pandemic were now restarting, and there was a sense of the school returning to normality. In particular, the Swimming Pool would soon reopen.

MS then discussed some of the key points in the Schools White Paper which the Government had released earlier that day. He focused particularly on the new proposal that Local Authorities could set up their own Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), enabling currently successful groups of schools that presently work together, such as the West Dorset Collaboration, to form a hub and remain under the auspices of the Local Authority. Although the *status quo* was seen by MS as the preferred option, this new proposal would at least have the benefit of the school continuing to access support from the Local Authority in areas such as Pupil Premium and SEND, in addition to the statutory functions such as transport, admissions and pay. This would provide continuity and a more joined up approach. While details of the proposal would have to be properly understood and discussed with the Collaboration, at this stage MS gave the idea a cautious welcome.

**Q/C:** Governors asked how leadership of the model would work, and if it would entail a Chief Executive Officer and MAT heads, with a specified number of Governors. MS replied that this was likely, but suggested this wouldn't be much of a departure from current arrangements, where Vik Verma, Dorset Council's Director of Education and Learning, was effectively a *de facto* CEO.

**Q/C:** Governors asked what the main drivers were for this policy direction. MS replied that Government continued to prefer academisation as the preferred model for schools, but currently could not force schools to become academies unless they had been rated inadequate by Ofsted. As a result nearly 60 percent of primary schools nationally remained with Local Authorities, and the new proposal was a means to encourage more of them towards a MAT model.

**Q/C:** Governors asked what benefit to the proposals there was for Councils. MS speculated that Council services for school support had been much diminished over the last decade, and the proposal would help give them a continued voice and role in education.

**Q/C:** Governors asked if the White Paper acknowledged the special circumstances of church schools. MS replied that it did, and the ethos and character of schools would remain an important consideration. The Local Authority model would facilitate this.

## 9. Chair's report

JV had attended the Dorset Council Chair's Briefing on 14-03-22. The main areas of focus had been:

*SEND Green Paper:* The special educational needs and disability review would be published on 29 March as a Green Paper for full public consultation. It was intended to improve accountability and boost earlier intervention to ensure that children's needs were better met in local settings, and to deliver reforms to bring financial sustainability to the SEND system. In response, Dorset Council was looking at ways to simplify and improve the way education was delivered for children who were unable to go to a mainstream school. They were seeking to create a new delivery model by September 2022, working with Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council.

*Permanent Exclusions:* The number of permanent exclusions in Dorset had fallen sharply from more than 100 in 2020 to 35 in 2021 and 14 to date in the current academic year. There were no permanent exclusions among primary age children.

*School Funding 2022-23:* The Government's National Funding Formula had allocated more money than had been originally expected for 2022-23. This was due, in part, to a change in the sparsity factor by which additional funding is allocated to schools that are both small and remote. In the past this had only been paid if the average distance to a primary school pupil's second nearest school was at least two miles (the threshold distance). In broad terms, for 2022-23 a distance threshold taper has been introduced whereby schools with a threshold distance of more than two miles could receive some sparsity funding but not the whole amount. The size of the school is also taken into account. Overall, there was an increase of £817,712 in sparsity funding paid to Dorset schools, Thorner's being one of the beneficiaries.

JV also presented the latest Headteacher Performance Review. He said that it provided a good synopsis of progress that the school had made under the leadership of MS over the past year. Governors welcomed the Review and congratulated MS on his performance.

#### 10. **Safeguarding and Attendance Reports (HJ)**

Attendance had already been covered by MS in the Headteacher's Report, and HJ had nothing further to add. She continued to scrutinise the school's Single Central Record (SCR) and there were currently no issues of concern.

#### 11. **Ethos**

*Terms of Reference for Communications and Ethos Committee:* These had been amended at the CEC meeting on 21 March, and were approved by FGB.

*Draft minutes of Communications and Ethos Committee 21-3-22:* These were received and noted.

#### 12. **Governance Issues**

*Succession planning:* There were three potential candidates for Foundation Governor, with one immediate vacancy and two forthcoming vacancies. JW had so far been unable to contact the first of these candidates for an initial conversation, and agreed to try again as soon as possible.

**ACTION:** JW

*Governor Monitoring Reports:* Governors noted the monitoring reports for PE, Bredy and SEND. Monitoring reports for Numeracy, RE and DT remained outstanding, and these would be completed as soon as possible by NFM, HG and LM respectively. **ACTION:** NFM/ HG/ LM

*Governor Training Feedback and Record:* Governors noted the updated training record. There were no additions reported.

*NGA Skills Audit:* JA presented a report analysing the findings of the NGA Governor's Skills Audit 2022. While the Audit suggested strong and consistent skills across FGB, results suggested that consideration needed to be given to how to avoid any issues arising from the imminent departure of some of the school's most experienced and active Governors. In other areas where Governors had expressed a desire to learn more, further training could be considered, and NGA guidance documents on Risk Management and Equalities were also included in the meeting pack. Governors welcomed the report, and asked JA to explore the option of training from Dorset Council on how to effectively scrutinise Budget Monitoring Reports. **ACTION:** JA

#### 13. **Report of the Finance and Premises Committee 22-3-22**

The draft minutes of the Committee were received and noted. JV reported that monthly financial data continued to show a healthy position, with a current in-year surplus of £54k. Planned school improvements as a result of this strong financial management included an ICT upgrade, investment in improved Superfast Broadband and improved sport facilities. MS suggested that, if finances allowed, the appointment of a new Teaching Assistant would be considered, to help with Covid 'catch-up'.

The Schools Financial Value Standard had been reviewed by the Committee and recommended to FGB for approval. It was duly approved and would now be submitted to Dorset Council in time for the end of March deadline. AM and JV had conducted an internal Health and Safety inspection and found no issues of concern. In addition they complimented the school on the excellent condition of the Discovery Area and acknowledged the contribution made by the parent led working parties. They thanked LM for the decorating work she had carried out on the upper floor, and Barney Stevens for the remedial work he had done on the swimming pool fence.

#### **14. Report of Staffing, Curriculum, Pay and Attendance Committee 14-3-22**

The draft minutes of the meeting were received and noted. The following policies had been reviewed by the Committee and recommended to FGB for approval. All were approved.

- Behaviour and Exclusions Policy
- Code of Conduct for Staff
- Grievance Resolution Policy
- Designated Teacher for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children Policy

#### **15. Policy Review**

Governors approved the following policies:

- Statement of Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Abuse Against Staff
- Accessibility Plan
- Support Staff Pay Policy

#### **16. FGB Forward Plan**

Governors noted the FGB Forward Plan. No additions were requested.

#### **17. Clerk's Notices**

JA had joined the virtual Clerk's Briefing at Dorset Council on 10-3-22. The Briefing had focused on procedures and protocols for the joint charring of Governing Bodies, and on Governor and Clerk responsibilities with regard to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). The presentation slides from the Briefing were included in the meeting pack.

#### **18. Any Other Business**

**Q/C:** A Governor drew attention to the Literacy monitoring report that had been presented to the 14 February FGB meeting, which had noted that some parents were not regularly reading to their younger age-group children. This had been followed by an email from the school to Key Stage 1 parents, emphasising the importance of this activity and its impact on their wellbeing as well as their future academic outcomes. The Governor questioned whether this approach had been too judgemental towards parents who were often struggling, and failed to account for the fact that some children were unlikely to ever be high achievers.

This stimulated a constructive debate among Governors that covered the need to balance sensitivity to individual families' circumstances against the imperative of recognising that primary education and attainment was hugely decisive to future academic outcomes, and this brought a responsibility to push children to achieve as best they could and push parents to be part of this. One Governor recognised the school's efforts to provide a happy, safe and comfortable environment for the children, but also noted the shock that the transition to the more pressurised environment of secondary

school could create for them. The school needed to balance how to maintain happiness in children with preparing them for this transition.

MS and FS also made the point that while the email had been sent to all parents of Key Stage 1 children, more individual approaches were also taken, with extra help and support given to children who were struggling, and one-to-one conversations with their parents where issues were understood and help and advice offered.

Governors welcomed the chance to discuss an issue of such importance. Overall, they recognised that the best way to motivate children was through self-belief, while acknowledging that children who read, and are read to, at home tended to demonstrate this characteristic rather more.

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Finally, Governors noted that this was the last Governor meeting for Helen Jones, who had served the school as Governor in several roles for 12 years. They wished her all the very best for the future, and thanked her for her outstanding contribution to the school. She would be greatly missed.

The meeting closed at 7:30pm.

Item no.	Action	Owner	By when
4/ 12	Carry out monitoring visits for Music, Numeracy, RE and DT	Link Governors	Next FGB
12	Contact potential Foundation Governor for initial discussion	JW	Next FGB
12	Contact Dorset Council re. finance training	JA	Next FGB