

SANDFORD ST. MARTIN'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

1.1 Extraordinary Full Governing Body Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 16th November 2023, 18:30, via Zoom

Present: Mary Appleton (Associate Member, MA);
Paul Beveridge (Head Teacher, HT/PB);
Melanie Bolt (Foundation Governor, Chair of Governors, MB);
Vikki Britt (Local Authority Governor, VB);
Donna Eite (Foundation Governor, DE);
Richard Heard (Parent Governor, RH);
Mick Holloway (Parent Governor, Vice-Chair, MH);
Jackie Jeanes (Foundation Governor, JJ);
David Kimble (Foundation Governor, DAK);
Diane Kimble (Foundation Governor, DIK);
Colin Logan (Associate Member, CL);
Rick Nash (Foundation Governor, RN);
Fiona Okai (Foundation Governor, FO);
Clare Pampin (Deputy Head Teacher, Associate Member, DHT/CP);
Deborah Smith (Associate Member, DS);

Quorate

Attending: Katherine Keen (School Business Manager, KK);
David Macbeth (Clerk, DM).

No.	Agenda Item	Tasks
1.	Welcome: The meeting was opened by MB, and then led in prayer by DAK.	
2.	Apologies for Absence: Rachel Elford (Associate Member, RE); Peter Gale (Staff Governor, PG); Tim Hoare (Co-Opted Governor, TH). Apologies accepted.	
3.	Absences: None.	
4.	Declarations of business and/or any other conflicting interests for this meeting: Rick Nash said he had a child in Early Years, and Vikki Britt a child in Year 1.	
5.	Case for Unmixing Reception and Year 1 – Nov 2023¹ and Summary Budget Figures²: The HT had posted his business case for this proposal a few days earlier on GVO. Everyone confirmed that they had read them. There were	

¹ For Business case and questions and replies; see: [Sandford St Martin's GVO | Business case for unmixing R and Y1 Nov 23 | GVO \(thegvoffice.com\)](#)

² For Summary Budget Figures, see: [Sandford St Martin's GVO | November 2023 EYFS Y1 and pastoral TA Summary figures | GVO \(thegvoffice.com\)](#)

	<p>already quite a few comments made on GVO, and replies from the HT to them. The three options being proposed were the baseline, i.e. remaining as they were, with some tweaks; Model 1, employing a new full-time teacher and part-time teaching assistant in the Early Years Foundation Stage; or Model 2, employing that teacher part-time with some other changes.</p> <p>A governor said they were disappointed that they were in the position of discussing the matter again, when they had only spoken about it at the FGB meeting the previous month, and that their direction of travel was to reduce teacher numbers via resignations to avoid redundancies later.</p> <p>The HT agreed that had been the plan, and there was a lot of logic to reducing staffing; it was only being proposed because of the dissatisfaction of the current set-up, being voiced by both parents/carers, but also seasoned staff members. The truth was, the new cohort had behaviour and learning issues, in depth, that they hadn't expected. As a staff, they had never felt that much concern about their youngest children's start into their school life. But they did have the finances to deal with the problem differently, hence the proposals being put forward. It wasn't just the children's issues, either; there were lots more at play, including staff sickness and staff retention.</p> <p>The Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee agreed, saying they had no control over the sickness situation; their supply teaching budget was already overspent by £7K at the last outturn, with another £15-20K likely spent before the end of the school year. Or they could employ another teacher, and help to protect their reputation, which was at risk if they didn't act.</p> <p>Another governor said, whilst what the HT was proposing was understandable, they couldn't keep throwing money at it, leaving a difficult legacy for future governors. They needed to act strategically to solve it instead. These additional staff would be paid for, not with spare cash, but money that should be being spent on buildings and I.T. etc. for all the children.</p> <p>The Chair of FRC said they had a choice; did they carry on delivering as now, or spend some money to fix the problem. They would still have a carry forward surplus figure, and the following year's projections were already in the red, it was just uncertain by exactly how much that would be, the projections being notoriously vague. How could they build up the school numbers if the current entry level didn't look attractive to prospective parents? They agreed that the numbers did not really stack up regards class sizes, and they did have a general policy to not make staff redundant, but if they didn't fix it, they wouldn't attract new pupils.</p> <p>The DHT offered to share a typical day's experience of a Reception and Year 1 child in a mixed age class, to help the governors understand the issues and uncertainties the current experience was delivering. The disparity between the learning needs to the two age groups, and their curriculums, and the constant coming together and then splitting apart again for various parts of the day, was adding further challenges to a cohort who were already struggling with a range of problems. This cohort was unique; they had a child in Reception with an Emotional Learning Support Assistant, need, others with Special Educational Needs; and a lot of other schools</p>	
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were reporting similar issues. If they didn't get it right for them now, it would carry with them, through their school life.

At this point in the meeting, DIK and DAK had to leave (19:00).

A governor asked what it was that the teachers wanted to see happen. The DHT said that the teachers and TAs were constantly reviewing what they were doing to try and make it work better, the request for a further teacher had not come from them.

Another governor said they were quite concerned about the current situation; it needed to be a happy and workable environment, for both the staff and the children, and this was impacting on the staff's wellbeing. This was a cohort of "Covid" babies, who simply didn't have the social skills of previous classes, due to lockdowns etc. during the last few years. Extra support was going to be needed, and being split up all the time was unsettling them.

The HT said that the Senior Leadership Team had also been in a constant cycle of review and reflection over the issues, and looking at other solutions, wondering what else they could do from January onward; they needed a future proof solution, so had been looking at the finances as well. They had gone back over the last seven years, looking at their forecasts but also where they had actually ended up, and this was never near the County forecasting figures, which usually looked quite dire; often they'd been looking towards a future deficit and then it didn't come true. They had the money and they should be spending it on the children that needed it, now. He asked the SBM for her take on the numbers for the governors.

KK said the numbers going forward did look scary, but the proposed £30K spend was only actually 2% of their overall budget. They currently were not spending their contingency funding, but this was there to cover unforeseen problems, so they could use it for that very purpose; they wouldn't be short-changing the children. The projections were acknowledged by County as being overly pessimistic, and were therefore more of a guide or general trend. However, a fall in Number on Roll did mean less income in the future. The two main areas they could impact as a Governing Board were NOR and staffing; there were not many more savings they could make on buildings, equipment, etc. as they had already been harsh there in their savings. Funding for Year 2 in the forecast was already fixed by the October census. Reputation was where the school could grow its numbers and therefore its income.

A governor said the birth rate was just not there to support that. The SBM said that if they were not there, then reputation was the only thing that would poach children from out of catchment.

The HT said the legal limit for the class size at Reception was thirty children. If the numbers continued to drop they would have to look eventually to one form entry. The fact was, mixing Reception and Year 1 was not working; trying to run two curriculums out of one base wasn't working. If they weren't going to employ, they would have to work really hard over the Christmas holiday to alter the rooms around, as well as making other changes.

A governor was concerned; although they agreed that a good start in school life was really important, trying to balance where those hard decisions would be made may lead to other discontents later.

PB said that he still hoped they would be able to avoid job losses later; they had some ambitious staff who were likely to want to move on to other

challenges in the coming years. There were no guarantees, but he would be surprised if they didn't. They would have to replace them with lower main scale pay-grade teachers. Currently, government funding was not supporting schools sufficiently; the fact they had a surplus put them in a minority. If their September 2025 intake was low again it would require a class to be dropped and restructuring to occur. **This led another governor to say that seemed to mean they needed to live within their means; education was currently underfunded. If they were going to live beyond their means they needed a clear action plan going forward, and not just be reactive when the time came.**

The HT replied that one key member of staff leaving could have a significant impact on their budget. If he was in charge of the decision, this is what he would do, for the sake of the teachers, the children and the parents/carers. Very experienced practitioners of education were telling him that the current situation was not working, for the first time in years of trying different things to make difficult situations work. Yes, it was a gamble, but one that was set up for success; it was very confusing trying to explain the current situation in marketing terms to prospective parents/carers. The current situation felt very different to previous years; they needed to make a decision, leaving it any longer meant it wouldn't be worth doing.

A governor felt their reputation would be enhanced amongst the current parents and carers, simply by the fact they weren't ignoring the problem but were actively talking about it, looking for solutions. Another governor asked what was the SLT's preferred option. PB said Model 1; they would then have a consistent four adults across four classes. Model 2 was slightly cheaper by £15K but had other consequences. **The governor asked, if they did go ahead with the model, but couldn't find the right quality of members of staff, they needed to be clear they would not go ahead with the plan.** PB agreed, saying the recruits needed to fit right into their teaching team immediately, if not they would rather carry on with the current quality teaching that they had.

The governor said they wanted to press the plan, so that had something to refer to later on, when the school got to that point. The Chair of FRC then summarised the position; they would vote to accept either the baseline (with other changes in school), Model 1 or Model 2, but only go through with either of the models if the right calibre of candidate/s applied; also, they would not look to replace like for like higher pay-grade members of staff.

The full governors duly voted on the proposals, and with the addition of proxy votes cast by those unable to be there to vote, there was a strong majority in favour of adopting Model 1. Motion carried.

A caveat was also agreed that, if presented with a range of candidates, the best of whom could not work full-time, the HT could go with Model 2 instead, if that worked better.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 19:40hrs.

Date and time of next FGB meeting, 2.0: Thursday 7th Dec 2023 at 17:00