

**Minutes of a virtual Governing Body Meeting of Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy on Wednesday, 9 December 2020 at 6.10pm**

Governors Present: Chris Smith (Chair), Andrew Fowler (Principal), Guy Currey, Cllr Sheila Gallagher, Claire Godfrey, Joel Greenwell, Dr Jane Halpin, Jayne Hooker, David Horn, Alison Logan, Elena Ovington, Kevin Thompson

Observers: Joe Dicocco (Observer, Deputy Principal), Alex Rayner (Observer, Assistant Principal: School Safeguarding Lead)

Clerk: Kim Ashford

The meeting started at 6.10pm and was quorate.

**1. Apologies for absence**

- Apologies were received from Heather McClean and Mark Surtees. Consent was given for their absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest in any items on the agenda**

- There were no declarations of interest in any items on the agenda.

**3. Minutes of the last Governing Body meeting on Wednesday 23 September 2020**

3.1 Approval of the minutes

- Governors received the minutes of the last Governing Body meeting on Wednesday 23 September 2020, as circulated via e-mail prior to the meeting. The minutes were **approved** as a correct record.

3.2 Matters arising (not appearing elsewhere on the agenda)

- Page 9, Item 10.2: It was noted that the Child Protection Policy, SEN Information Report and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Policy were put back to the Governing Body meeting taking place on 9 December 2020. The Clerk **agreed** to amend the previous minutes to reflect this. **Action: Clerk.**
- Page 9, Item 10.1: The Principal explained that the website is not yet compliant but that this has been allocated to the senior leadership team where it will be decided who will take responsibility

for updating the website. Training on updating the website will be provided to the appropriate persons.

- Page 10, Item 11: The Chair stated that the open letter to the ESFA has not yet been drafted but that this matter is in hand and will be carried forward to the next meeting. **Action: Chair; Clerk.**
- Page 10, Item 12: It was noted that the Chair had responded to the letter from Eileen Milner (Director of Academies and Maintained Schools, ESFA) explaining that the ESFA had based their assessment of the academy on data which was no longer valid. It was noted that the ESFA had responded to the Chair's letter stating that the ESFA will be taking no further action.

## 4. Governing Body

### 4.1 Resignation – Denise Smith

- It was noted that Denise Smith has submitted her resignation as Staff Governor, with effect from 6 December 2020. The Chair has asked Sam Wakefield to put in motion an election for the Staff Governor vacancy.
- On behalf of the Governors, the Chair thanked Denise for her time on the Board and the contribution she has made to the work of the Governing Body.

### 4.2 Link Governors – visit reports and updates

#### 4.2.1 Behaviour and Personal Development – Chris Smith and Claire Godfrey

- Governors received a comprehensive Governors' school monitoring visit report document from Chris Smith and Claire Godfrey, as circulated via email prior to the meeting.
- Chris visited the Academy on 9 November to review the Academy's progress with behaviour, and a follow-up meeting took place on 10 November with Chris, Claire and Paul Walsh, Assistant Principal.
- As set out in the report, it was noted that all Covid arrangements and safety measures were working well with pupils adhering to all guidelines. There was more space for pupils and staggered breaks were in place. The new arrangements made for a better and calmer environment, and a better learning experience for students, resulting in fewer behaviour incidents.

The Principal gave the following response to a question from a Governor:

- *How is social distancing controlled when we have fire alarms?*  
While social distancing is a risk management measure, the greater risk in the event of a fire would be not to evacuate the

building as quickly as possible. During an emergency evacuation, pupils would be expected to wear face coverings. The mingling that would take place during the evacuation would be for a relatively short period of time, until the students are out of the building and away from the danger of fire. All students are moving in the same direction as they evacuate the building.

- Chris also visited the Inclusion base and reported a very calm, quiet environment.
- There was a new Praise and Consequence system in place which was working well, with posters around the Academy highlighting the new approach. It was noted that praise points outnumbered consequences by around 5:1.
- Chris and Claire had posed a number of questions to Paul relating to behaviour and exclusion rate, all of which are documented in detail in the above report.
- It was noted that the Inclusion base was largely populated by pupils who were repeat offenders, and that further analysis would be carried out to establish why this was the case.
- The consequences policy has been tightened up in order to raise expectations around behaviour.
- Regarding the 4 incidents where knives were discovered in the school over the past few years, the Principal stated that this needed to be contextualised. Regarding the 2 more recent incidents, each pupil who was discovered carrying a knife had done so in case self-defence was necessary rather than wanting to cause harm or initiate conflict. It was agreed that knife crime and carrying knives is a serious matter and the phenomenon of knife crime is being addressed within the Personal Development curriculum.

#### 4.2.2 Safeguarding – Dr Jane Halpin

- Governors received a comprehensive Governor's school monitoring visit report document from Dr Jane Halpin, as circulated via email prior to the meeting.
- Jane met with Alex Rayner (School Safeguarding Lead) and Donna Wadely (School Counsellor) on 23 October, focussing on the counselling service and how mental health triage was carried out in the school. The above report sets out in detail how the counselling service operates.
- It was noted that Donna is a very warm, caring and capable person, and is extremely responsive, triaging pupils the same day. In her capacity as counsellor, Donna sees students from across all year groups, both male and female.

- It was noted that the school also has a social worker, Paula Johnson, appointed by the Local Authority, who works on statutory referrals and also in preventative work, attempting to turn pupils around before a statutory referral becomes necessary.
- Jane is planning to meet with the social work team after Christmas, which will enable her to report back to the Governing Body on quantifiable safeguarding activity.

#### 4.2.3 Sixth Form update – Cllr Sheila Gallagher and Kevin Thompson

- Governors received a verbal update on the Sixth Form from Kevin Thompson and Cllr Sheila Gallagher, along with a written report made available during the meeting, following their review of the Sixth Form which had taken place six weeks earlier.
- It was noted that while a number of opportunities are provided to Sixth Form students across both academic and vocational subject areas, focussing to a greater degree on the vocational subjects offered could increase student numbers entering the Sixth Form.
- It was noted that Gateshead College and Newcastle College are the Academy's main competitors, and that both institutions provide a more comprehensive range of vocational opportunities for students, which is pulling some of the volume away from the Academy. To counter this effect, it might benefit the Academy to expand its teaching skills to encompass more vocational subjects in the Sixth Form, when recruitment is possible once again.
- Cllr Gallagher also pointed out that the more relaxed environment associated with the Colleges is a big attraction for students who may wish to move away from a school environment.

Kevin gave the following responses to questions from Governors:

- *What are the statistics relating to numbers of students who enter Lord Lawson's Sixth Form from other schools? As demonstrated in the table on-screen, this number is negligible, which is an area we could improve upon.*
- *Are there students who leave to undertake courses elsewhere that potentially we could have offered at Lord Lawson? Yes potentially, however the pull of the freedom of College is difficult to compete with.*
- *Have we been surveying students as to their reasons for going elsewhere? Yes, we conduct exit interviews, directly and indirectly; however, it may be that students do not always give their real reasons for leaving, for fear of upsetting teachers. However, many of the students cite the attraction of a greater range of vocational subjects that are offered by the Colleges.*

- *If it is felt that students are not comfortable giving the real reasons for leaving the Academy at Sixth Form, could we change the way we conduct the exit interviews and the kind of questions that we ask?* The school is looking at changing the timing of when the questions are asked, how they are asked, and who conducts the interviews. The school will also look at adapting the questions to enable a more open and accurate response.
- It was noted that more investigatory work needs to be undertaken to establish what attracts students to stay on in the Academy's Sixth Form, alongside what attracts other students to leave the Academy and join either of the Colleges. It was agreed that it would also be helpful to examine a 3-year trend in the statistics.
- The Principal will be conducting a strategic review of the Sixth Form, to include a number of the useful points raised during the above discussion, and stated that he would like to involve Sheila and Kevin in this review, to which they agreed.

The Principal gave the following response to a question from a Governor:

- *It is disappointing that there is such a small uptake of the sciences at Sixth Form. To address this, would you consider promoting the sciences further, or promoting the Sixth Form as a centre of excellence for Humanities?* I share your concerns regarding Chemistry this year; however, I encourage you to look at a three-year picture, not an individual cohort. This year, we have a large upper sixth group for Physics, from whom 3 have applied to Oxbridge and 2 are being interviewed.

## 5. Principal's Report

### 5.1 Update on School Improvement Plan (SIP)

- Governors received the Principal's Report to Governors, 9 December 2020, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- The Principal and Joe Dicocco, Assistant Principal, gave a commentary on the content of the report, highlighting certain points as follows.

#### Quality of Education: Teaching and Learning

- Joe stated that he has been communicating with the subject leaders on the matter of using predictions for KS4 students rather than current grades, allowing more accurate reporting of projected progress to all stakeholders. This in turn will enable more informed intervention strategies when required.

- Joe asked subject leaders to come up with individual subject area rationales behind how they are predicting currently, which will be used at the start of the next academic year, altering this process in terms of the systems they have used to arrive at predictions if they have systematically over or under predicted. The school is engaged in a 2 to 3-year process to get to the stage where predictions are as accurate as they can be.

Joe gave the following responses to questions from Governors:

- *How are the predictions going with respect to the current situation we are in regarding children being off school and learning remotely?* The students have missed a good deal of education and there is the chance that they will miss even more. However, conducting mock exams will highlight the gaps, which can then be filled relatively quickly. Therefore, trying to quantify the impact of the pandemic on the predicted grades is not useful. It is better to focus on where the students are now and where you want to get them to, by the time of the exams. This will demonstrate how much progress has been made between the mocks and the actual exams.
- *Will predicted grades be shared with students?* We are in the process of sharing mock grades with the students, which is done by the subject teacher during lessons rather than formally sending out the results by post. It is made clear to the students that this is a practice session which highlights the areas for improvement where work can be done to enable them to reach their potential in any given subject. The predicted grades will go out to students in January and will be dealt with sensitively. It will be made clear that predictions are a measure of current performance only, and are subject to change and improvement. [Note subsequent to meeting: in view of the school closures and the cancellation of summer examinations, pending an announcement from Ofqual and the DfE, the academy's senior leadership team decided not to communicate predicted grades to parents and students in years 11 and 13, in case of confusion and misunderstanding.]

### Personal Development

- The Principal stated that he has asked Janey Stubbs – appointed on an interim basis until Easter to work with the senior team and alongside Paul Walsh – to undertake some work with personal development, as she is experienced in this field.

- Janey is conducting professional development sessions for all Personal Development teachers, assessing current methods and standards, and sharing best practice.
- Janey is focussing on Professional Development, but also on working with disadvantaged pupils.

### Leadership

- As set out in his report, the Principal confirmed that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has been involved in Coaching for Leadership Development training, involving 4 x 1.5-hour sessions, with Rob Thompson of Achievement for All. As the SLT is a relatively new team, it has been particularly helpful that the SLT members have been able to take part in this training together, learning more about one another's personalities and growing as a cohesive team with shared goals.

### Finance

- It was noted that an ESFA Financial Management and Governance Review was completed recently. Of note is the fact that a national reviewer who reports to a parliamentary committee on the use of public money, stated that the Academy's audit was "a pleasure to do" and that he intended to report that the Academy's financial systems are "thorough and secure."

## 5.2 Ongoing impact of Covid-19

- Governors received the Principal's Report, December 2020: The Cost of Covid-19, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- It was noted that the above report and the statistics therein highlight some serious issues, not least the impact that the pandemic has had on student absence.

The Chair gave the following responses to a question from a Governor:

- *In terms of financial costs, Linda has asked whether the temporary admin support costs, that we approved at a previous meeting, can be extended to the February half term. This would cost an extra £1,806. Are we able to approve this? Yes, this would be a sensible idea, considering the additional administrative pressures brought about by the Covid-19 situation.*
- The Principal stated that the Academy is working closely with Public Health Gateshead, adhering to their advice and guidance on

all matters pertaining to the Covid-19 situation. It was agreed that Public Health Gateshead has been extremely helpful and supportive throughout the pandemic, providing schools with all the support and guidance they require to help them in this very challenging time.

#### Emotional costs and safeguarding

- The Principal's Report contains a report from Alex Rayner on the emotional costs of the pandemic. Alex also highlighted the following points contained in his report.
- The number of Encompass referrals increased significantly during the pandemic. The school was party to a lot of information relating to the mental health of pupils, including those who had experienced domestic violence. This information enabled the school to organise staffing effectively in order to be able to deal with the issues that pupils would be burdened with on their return to school. This involved effective coordination of the social worker, the school counsellor and the RISE team (mental health worker) to prepare a coordinated approach for triaging pupils effectively and appropriately, and ensuring they receive the support that they need.
- The Principal stated that the unprecedented level of support from the Local Authority has been instrumental in allowing the school to successfully support the pupils who need help due to the damaging mental and emotional effects brought about by the Covid-19 crisis.

Alex Rayner gave the following responses to questions from Governors:

- *With reference to the table of referrals, are they all referrals that have been initiated from within school?* Many are from within school, but some also come from outside of school, for example the Encompass referrals which also bring matters to our attention.
- *In the absence of team events and sporting activities, how can you facilitate safe team building, which is beneficial for mental health and wellbeing?* PE teachers are preparing some work in terms of trying to encourage pupils to become involved in exercise and team-related activities, which will take place after the work on knife crime.
- *How are pupils who are at home longer term, perhaps due to self-isolating, being communicated with in order to establish potential mental and emotional needs?* In cases where students are not in school, teachers keep in contact with parents and students to establish how pupils are coping with the remote

learning, and also to establish how things are at home for the children in a more general sense.

- The Chair thanked the entire Academy for the deep thinking, strategic response, resilience and dedication that all members of staff, led by the senior management team, have demonstrated in responding to the Covid-19 crisis.

## 6. Statutory responsibilities

### 6.1 Information to publish on a school website

- As covered in Matters Arising, the Principal explained that the website is not yet compliant but that this has gone to the senior leadership team where it will be decided who will take responsibility for updating the website. Training on updating the website will be provided to the appropriate persons. It was noted that this matter is in hand and will be taken forward shortly.

## 7. Policy schedule

### 7.1 Pay Policy – Jayne Hooker

- Governors received the Pay Policy, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- It was noted that the decision regarding pay protection for non-teaching employees had been made in principle at the September Governing Body meeting.
- The Pay Policy has since been approved by the Academy Management Committee. Jayne stated that she had reviewed and was happy with the contents of the policy.
- It was noted that Governors **approved** the Pay Policy.

### 7.2 Safeguarding – Dr Jane Halpin

- Governors received the Safeguarding Policy, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- Dr Halpin stated that she had reviewed and was happy with the contents of the policy.
- It was noted that Governors **approved** the Safeguarding Policy.

### 7.3 Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions – Dr Jane Halpin

- Governors received the Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.

- Dr Halpin stated that she had reviewed and was happy with the contents of the policy.
- It was noted that Governors **approved** the Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions Policy.

7.4 SEN Information Report and SEND Policy – Claire Godfrey

- Governors received the SEN Information Report and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Policy, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- Dr Halpin stated that she had reviewed and was happy with the contents of the Report and the Policy, which should be read in conjunction with one another.
- It was noted that Governors **approved** the SEN Information Report and the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Policy.

**8. Any other business**

Friday 18 December 2020

- The Principal stated that the Secretary of State for Education had sent out a notification to schools on the afternoon of Tuesday 8 December, with no prior notification, suggesting that schools use Friday 18 December as an INSET day, closing early to students. It was suggested that this would enable pupils to have longer to isolate before meeting with relatives over the Christmas period.
- The Principal was concerned regarding the implications for parents, for example having to find childcare at short notice. There was also the assumption on the part of the DfE that schools would be able to arrange training for teachers at short notice, to take place on the recently announced INSET day.
- The Principal proposed bringing forward, in part, the INSET day that was planned for 22 February, and to have this take place on Friday 18 December. Staff could also continue with remote teaching for the remaining half of Friday 18 December. The other half of the INSET day can be taken across 2 twilight sessions during the summer term.
- Despite his reservations on this matter, the Principal stated that this was his proposal for the last day of term. It was noted that the Governing Body fully supported the Principal's proposal, and the proposal was **approved** by all Governors.

The meeting closed at 8.19pm

Date.....

Signed.....