

**HITCHIN GIRLS' SCHOOL
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY
HELD AT 7.00PM ON TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER 2015**

Present:

Mrs. C. Astill	Mrs. J. Marland
Mr. K. Balfe	Mrs. M. McPhail
Mr. K. Down	Mr. S. Mills
Mr. T. Fitzakerly	Mr. C. Minton
Mr. C. Hall (Chairman)	Mrs. S. Morrison
Mrs. N. Job	Mrs. K. Rowe
Mrs. M. King	Mr. M. Seaman Hill
Mr. S. Lucas	Mrs. K. Smith
Mrs. F. Manning (Headteacher)	

In attendance: Mr. J. Crowther (Deputy Headteacher)
Mr. T. Hankin (Clerk)
Miss. F. Nobbs (Head Girl) Items 1-5
Mr. S. Rouse (UHY Hacker Young Accountants) Items 1-7

1. Welcome & Apologies for Absence

Mr. Hall welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. Apologies were received and accepted from Mr. S. Burgoyne, Mr. G. Montgomery and Mr. S. Sprawson.

2. Student Global Leadership Institute presentation

Three Year 13 students, along with two staff, attended the SGLI conference in Hawaii in the summer and a presentation on the conference was given to the Governors. The theme of the conference was Equity & Equality and the students explained their project, which has the aim of 'Improving the motivation and attitude to learning of students before they reach Secondary School'. They explained their actions to date, which include giving assemblies in primary schools and leading workshop sessions, and their plans for the rest of the year.

The students thanked the Governors for the opportunity they had to represent the school at this prestigious event.

During the conference, the two staff were involved in their own activities and have established links with other schools. An International Dance collaboration project is one aspect of this.

3. Notification of items to be raised under Any Other Business.

There were no items notified.

4. Declarations of Interest

Governors were reminded of the need to declare any interest in the items for discussion. There were none.

5. Head Girls' Report

The Head Girl reported on events that have taken place during the term. These include Classics Week, mock interviews for University places, the Year 12 Ambassador Scheme, Trips, Open Evenings and the Sixth Form Consortium Cup.

The School Council has met twice, and are very appreciative of the new windows and refurbished toilets, which have made a big difference to the buildings. They also welcomed the reduction in the price of fruit in the Dining Room.

Miss Nobbs was thanked for her report.

6. Minutes of previous meeting.

6.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2015.

The minutes were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

6.2 Matters arising.

Link Governor visits (from item 9). It was noted that many Governors are still waiting to be contacted by Heads of Department. This will be followed up.

7. Financial Statements 2014/15

Mr. Rouse, from UHY Hacker Young, introduced himself and explained that the company had undertaken the financial audit for 2014/15.

He explained that the draft financial statements had been reviewed at the Finance Committee in November, and that he would give a summary of the main points.

He confirmed that the school has robust financial procedures in place and that no issues or recommendations have been included in the Management Letter which is sent to the Education Funding Agency. This is quite unusual and reflects the strength of the finance team at the school.

He confirmed that the school is in a sound financial position at present but, like many other schools, increasing costs including pension & national insurance increases will have an impact on future budgets. Revenue funding continues to be squeezed, but capital funding is still available and should be actively sought where possible.

Governors thanked Mr. Rouse for his report and unanimously **APPROVED** the Financial Statements for 2014/15. These were signed by the Chairman and Headteacher.

8. Headteachers' report

Mrs. Manning referred to the report, circulated prior to the meeting. She explained that much of the content has been prepared by the member of the Senior Leadership Group leading on the item. The report should also be reviewed alongside the School Improvement Plan progress review document, which has been updated to show actions completed so far this year.

She highlighted some key areas including:

- The first wave of reformed qualifications at AS/A level and GCSE. This is proving challenging for staff in their aim to achieve best quality teaching from outset.
- Discussions with the other two consortium schools regarding the number of teaching hours for AS & A level courses. After discussing this with Heads of Department, although there are financial benefits in reducing the number of

periods from the current 10 per fortnight, it was decided not to change anything in school until the impact of the curriculum changes was better understood. Governors asked why the other schools had reduced their hours to 9 in some cases. Mrs. Manning explained that this was primarily for financial considerations, and it has been agreed by the three Headteachers that each school will need to explain to parents if asked why there is a discrepancy, especially where subjects are common across the consortium.

- The Government consultation on the English Baccalaureate.
- The very successful Consortium Teachmeet attended by all teaching staff from the three schools.
- A staffing update.
- Changes to the safeguarding team.

Governors asked whether there is an increase in the number of students being identified with Disability and Special Educational Needs. Mrs. Manning confirmed that numbers are broadly in line with previous years, but an increasing number of Year 7 parents are contacting the school about stress and mental anxiety, especially related to examinations. Some work needs to be done with students and parents regarding resilience and coping with exams. The Year 11 Revision workshops, launched last year, have been very well received by students and parents.

Governors also asked about fixed term exclusions and whether they were successful in addressing behavior issues. Mrs. Manning advised that in some cases, improvements in behavior were quickly seen, but this is not always the case.

9. Committee Reports

9.1 Admissions Committee

Mrs. Job reported on the meeting held on 3 November 2015. She highlighted the issues raised by two parents regarding the use of the distance measurement and the request to add a parish to the Priority Area. Whilst sympathetic to both situations, the committee agreed that there has to be a cut off point when criteria is applied, and this does need to be adhered to.

The committee discussed the admission criteria for 2017/18 and agreed to recommend to the Governing Body that no changes are made to the current arrangements. The Governing Body overwhelmingly **APPROVED** the Determined Admission Arrangements for 2017/18. Mrs. Manning abstained.

9.2 Asset Management Committee

Mr. Seaman Hill reported on the meeting held on 20 October. The committee had received an update on the summer projects and it was pleasing to note that the new windows and doors are having a big impact, and reduced energy consumption is already being seen.

He had attended the recent Health & Safety Committee and reported that regular fire practices are being held.

Mrs. Manning gave an update on the Local Authority expansion requirements. Consultants instructed by the Local Authority have identified possible areas of expansion for all three schools and these are being costed. Proposals will be considered by the Council Cabinet early in 2016.

Governors noted that any expansion at HGS will require a consultation, with Governors making the final decision on whether to amend the published admission numbers. However, it is important that any consultation is part of a town wide consultation that seeks to address the shortage of spaces, and the school will need input into the information that the Local Authority releases to the town.

Mr. Hankin updated Governors on progress with the bids to the Capital Improvement Fund for 2016/17, for a new fire detection and alarm system, and a sports hall. Bids must be submitted this month, with the decision due by the end of March 2016.

9.3 Curriculum and Performance Committee

Mrs. Morrison reported on the meeting held on 20 October 2015, the main focus of which was a presentation on summer examination results, and an explanation of 'Buckets' and how these relate to the new performance measures.

The committee agreed to reduce the frequency of the Parent Questionnaire to every two years, as feedback is also sought from parents at consultation meetings.

The Committee had reviewed updated versions of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy, and the Child Protection Policy, and recommended these for approval. The Governing Body unanimously **APPROVED** these two policies.

9.4 Finance Committee

Mr. Down reported on the meeting held on 3 November. The financial statements for the year ending 31 August 2015 had been reviewed. The committee also considered financial benchmarking data assessing the school against other local, similar sized, academies. It confirmed that teaching staff costs are high, due primarily to the number of staff at the top of the pay scale, whilst support and administration staff costs are relatively low. Energy and premises maintenance costs are low when compared to the others, although examination costs are higher. Ways to reduce this cost are being considered. The introduction of limits on the amount of free printing available to students was noted.

The Schedule of Financial Delegation was reviewed and two minor changes made. The updated version was recommended for approval. The Governing Body unanimously **APPROVED** the schedule.

9.5 Personnel Committee

Mrs. Job reported on the meeting held on 13 October. Three members of the committee had reviewed the performance appraisal process and undertaken a sample exercise which confirmed that a robust procedure is in place and recommendations regarding pay and progression have been appropriately applied.

A number of policies were reviewed by the committee. All were based on model Hertfordshire County Council documents.

The committee had approved the Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling at Work Policy, and the Flexible Working Policy, and this was **NOTED** by the Governing Body. Updated versions of the Safer Recruitment Policy and Staff Health & Attendance Policy were recommended for approval and these were unanimously **APPROVED**.

The committee had reviewed the updated Code of Conduct for Staff which was also recommended to the Governors for approval. Mr. Balfe informed Governors that in addition to being a Staff Governor he was also the NUT representative in school, and a number of members of the Union, and also some in the NASUWT, have concerns

about being asked to sign the new code. They have no objection in principle to a code, but require clarification on a number of the specific items included in it, in particular relating to the use of social media. Staff in school have not been consulted on the policy, and Union recommendation is that they should not sign the new code..

Mrs. Manning advised Governors that staff were informed of the draft code at the start of term, and asked for ideas on how it relates in practice to HGS. Consultation did not take place, as guidance from the Local Authority was that the policy had been discussed and agreed by regional Union representatives, and the usual practice for the school is to adopt these model policies. It was therefore presented to the Personnel Committee for review and recommendation. The information regarding the delay in the meeting to sign the model policy only recently became known.

Governors discussed the matter and felt that the ambiguity over whether or not the Unions have approved the model document has caused some confusion.

Mr. Hall confirmed that the basic principle followed by the Governing Body is to adopt model Local Authority policies when available. He recommended the updated Code of Conduct was referred back to the Personnel Committee for clarification of the position regarding approval by the regional Union representatives, and this was **AGREED**.

10. Link Governors

Mr. Hall advised that he had recently spent three days in school meeting many Heads of Department. It had been very useful and illuminating. Their main areas of concern related to the new curriculum, AS/A2 examination changes, teaching time for the new curriculum and, in some cases, class sizes.

Mr. Mills reported that he had met with the Classics department and would feed back their concerns at the next curriculum and performance committee.

Mrs. King reported that she had met with the safeguarding team. A change to roles for a number of the team will help spread the work and benefit students as contact with them will be easier.

11. Governors Safeguarding Training

Governors were reminded of this training in January, which all should attend.

12. Any Other Business

Mr. Hall reported that he and Mrs. Morrison had attended the recent Hertfordshire Governors Conference. There had been some very useful sessions, and he encouraged other Governors to attend future events.

13. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 15 March 2016