

HITCHIN GIRLS' SCHOOL

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Trustees held at 7.00pm on Tuesday 19 March 2024

Present:

Mr. K. Balfe	Mrs. M. King
Mr. J. Crowther (Headteacher)	Mrs. N. Job (Chair)
Mr. G. Edwards	Mr. S. Lucas
Dr. S. Eisenhandler	Mr. S. Mills
Mrs. S. Franklin	Mr. D. Roberts
Mrs. S. Frost	Mrs. K. Rowe
Mr. C. Hall	Mr. T. Scott
Ms. A. Holden	Mrs. A. Thornber

In attendance:

Mr. T. Hankin	Clerk
Mr. A. Jones	Deputy Headteacher
Mrs. J. Shaw	Director of Finance & Resources
Miss. A. Pryle (Items 1-5)	Head Girl

1. Welcome & apologies for absence

Mrs. Job welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Board of Trustees. Apologies were received and accepted from Mr. K. Down. Mr. T. Fitzakerly was absent.

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

None.

3. Declarations of interest

Trustees were reminded of the need to declare any pecuniary or other interest in the items for discussion. There were none.

4. Minutes of previous meeting

4.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2024.

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

4.2 Matters arising.

None.

5. Head Girls' report

Miss Pryle gave a report on life in school this term. She referred to:

- Diversity activities, including the Diversity and Awareness Board, Culture Day and the many events and celebrations taking place
- Workshops and guests, including a Holocaust talk, Year 11 careers event, Year 9 communications workshop, Safer Internet Day
- Charity events, such as the thrift sale for Herts Young Homeless, sponsored walk by Years 7 & 8 for Hearing Dogs, and the termly Food Drive

- Trips
- Sixth Form news, the Pride of HGS Award, Cole Swinburn Cup, EPQ Presentations, Live from the hill concert, Classics play. She also referred to the new Teacher and Support Staff of the Year awards where students nominate and vote for the winner.

Trustees thanked her for providing a great overview of school life. She was asked whether the Head Girl role has worked out as she thought. She responded saying that it has been busier than expected but very rewarding. She then explained the process for the nomination and appointment of the new Head Girl.

6. Headteachers' report

Mr. Crowther invited questions from Trustees on his report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting. It is a lengthy report with content provided by members of the Senior Leadership Team.

He was asked about the further round of 1:1 discussion with staff. He advised that these have been very helpful, and topics raised included workload, staff wellbeing, improving communications and making staff more aware of processes relating to finance.

A Trustee noted the positive feedback on the Thrive & Fly initiative and asked if this will be repeated. Mr. Crowther confirmed that there have been significant leaps in progress by many of the participating students and that repeating the programme will be considered for next year.

A Trustee asked about the increase in requests for students to be removed from a subject. Mr. Jones informed Trustees that he attended a Deputy Heads meeting recently and this is an increasing issue in schools. Parents are more demanding about students withdrawing from a subject and there is also increased pressure from some professionals. The school tries to make adjustment where appropriate and possible.

Mr. Crowther was asked about the level of consequences gained by SEND students. He replied that this is being analysed and actions to try and reduce this will be included in the new School Improvement Plan. He was also asked if there is anything that he would like to do, but cannot, to support behaviour initiatives. He replied that the policy is working well and provides clear guidance for the actions taken which can be helpful when communicating with parents.

A Trustee asked about the potential need for more Learning Support Assistants. Mr. Crowther spoke about the large increase in EHCPs for next year and the requirement these bring for support. Not all bring additional funding. The current team do an amazing job although this is not always recognised by parents. The need for more LSAs is being considered as part of the budget planning for next year.

Mr. Crowther highlight the data from the recent Year 7 parent survey. 120 parents responded and 100% confirmed that they would recommend HGS to others. He thanked all staff for their work supporting students and this was echoed by the Trustees.

The Chair thanked Mr. Crowther for his report.

7. Committee reports

7.1 Admissions Committee

Mrs. King reported on the meeting held on 13 February which looked at Year 7 and 12 numbers for September and in-year movement information. Sixth Form capacity was also discussed. Mr. Crowther updated Trustees on the budget and timetabling implications of expected changes to funding for Sixth Form students who re-sit Maths or English GCSEs.

7.2 Curriculum and Performance Committee

Mrs. Frost reported on the meeting held on 13 February 2024. Data from the Year 11 mock examinations was reviewed along with the report from the Self Evaluation Review. This confirms that the school remains in a strong position. Progress on actions in the School Improvement Plan were discussed. A long discussion took place on preparation for an Ofsted Inspection and a Key Documents summary was reviewed which Trustees found very useful.

The committee approved the Equality policy and Low Level Concerns policy and this was **NOTED**. The committee also recommended the approval of the Careers education, information, advice and guidance policy and the Supporting students with medical conditions policy. These were **APPROVED** by the Trust Board.

7.3 Finance and Resources Committee

Mr. Edwards reported on the meeting held on 27 February 2024. The monthly management accounts were reviewed and the school remains in a good financial position. The potential funding for the next academic year and the draft budget were discussed. Unless there is additional financial support towards the costs of expected pay awards, there will be a deficit which will have to be met from reserves. Contracts falling due for review and renewal were noted.

An extensive benchmarking exercise against similar schools has been completed and there are no anomalies.

Premises matters discussed included the Health & Safety report, Condition Improvement Fund applications and the vacant cottage.

The Staff Travel policy, Charges, Remissions and Refunds policy, Accounting policies, Debt Recovery policy and Gifts or Hospitality Acceptance policy were reviewed and approved by the committee and this was **NOTED**.

7.4 Audit & Risk Committee

Mr. Edwards also reported on the meeting held on 27 February 2024. The report from the Internal scrutineer was received and no issues raised. A tender process has been completed for the appointment of auditors for a three-year term and MHA MacIntyre Hudson are recommended. The Trust Board **APPROVED** the appointment of MHA MacIntyre Hudson as Auditors for the next three years.

7.5 Personnel Committee

Mr. Lucas reported on the meeting held on 27 February 2024 which reviewed staffing changes and vacancies and staff wellbeing initiatives. It also reviewed and approved the updated Grievance policy and this was **NOTED**.

8. Governance

8.1 Skills Audit

The Chair informed Trustees that a Skills Audit questionnaire will be circulated, along with a Diversity Indicators form, to support the review of the knowledge, skills and composition of the Trust Board. Trustees are asked to complete and return these as soon as possible.

8.2 Trustee Training

Mrs. King encouraged Trustees to complete Prevent training via the online Modern Governor module, or by attending a Herts for Learning workshop. Trustees were also asked to ensure exclusions training is up to date where relevant.

9. Link Department visits

9.1 Department links.

Dr. Eisenhandler agreed to become link Trustee for Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI).

9.2 Trustee visit reports

Mrs. King reported on her meetings with Mrs. Mills and Mrs. Cole to discuss Safeguarding and SEND. The safeguarding procedures and processes are all sound. As mentioned earlier in the meeting, the increase in students with an EHCP will put a strain on the Learning Support team.

Mrs. Frost reported on a wellbeing meeting with Mrs. Cole. They discussed student and staff wellbeing and she visited the Pastoral Hub and Behaviour Hub. She was impressed by all she saw and spoke about the care and calmness she witnessed when two staff were dealing with a student who did not want to come into school.

Mr. Hall spoke about a meeting with Mrs. Foster to review Learning for Life. He was very impressed by all that is offered to students in these lessons, and the resources available to the staff who deliver the subject. He saw how issues faced by students today are covered in the lessons. Mrs. Foster referred to the excellent support she receives from the Senior Team.

Mr. Mills visited the Classics department and saw all three teachers in action. An excellent Early Career Teacher (ECT) was leading a session and the provision and support for ECTs in school is very impressive. He also met the new Head of Music earlier today and will report at the next meeting.

Mr. Roberts spoke about his termly Health & Safety visit and time spent with the site team. He remains impressed by the number of repairs and fixes undertaken by the site staff which saves the school money.

Dr. Eisenhandler has visited the Mathematics department where she saw Year 7 and Year 12 lessons. She was able to see how sequencing of teaching is used and students taught the same topic at different levels. She saw positive use of Chromebooks and the BenQ boards. She also highlighted the additional support available to students provided by the department including Maths Lunch Club, Thrive and Fly and the Times Table Club led by Sixth Form students.

Mr. Edwards has visited the new Head of Geography. The department are linking with a Junior school for the first time and they all value the CPD opportunities available.

Mrs. Job reported on the EPQ presentation evening and said that she was very impressed by the presentations and reports given by the Year 12 students.

Mrs. Job thanked all Trustees for their reports and for the time spent in school.

10. Any other Business

None

11. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 4 June 2024