

HITCHIN GIRLS' SCHOOL

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Trustees held at 7.00pm on Tuesday 21 March 2023

Present:

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

In attendance:

Mr. T. Hankin	Clerk
Mrs. J. Shaw	Director of Finance & Resources designate
Ms. K. Kwaku (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 Mrs. S. Franklin. Mrs. Job informed Trustees that Mrs. C. Emmings has resigned as a Trustee and she has written to thank her for her time on the Trust Board. The Strategic Planning committee are meeting next week to discuss Trustee vacancies and the diversity of the Trust Board

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 7 December 2022.

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

4.2 Matters arising.

Pay Progression query (from item 7.5). Mrs. Job informed Trustees that the matter was already under review when it was raised and it has since been discussed by the Personnel Committee.

5. Head Girls' report

Ms. Kwaku provided an update on some of the events and activities that have taken place in school this term.

- HGS has won the latest two rounds of the Cole/Swinburn Cup, the consortium competition with Hitchin Boys' and The Priory Schools.
- International Women's Day has been celebrated with a focus on Embracing Equality.
- Students participated in a recycled Fashion Show using sustainable materials and a HGS student was the overall winner.
- The local MP, Bim Afolami, gave a talk to Sixth Form students on how he got into politics and the importance of voting. He also discussed a number of current issues with the A level politics group.
- World Book Day was recently celebrated and each house is organising a charity event before the end of term. The Easter food drive will also take place.
- Student wellbeing remains a strong focus, with Headstrong sessions continuing weekly and Year 13 have a weekly meditation session to help with exam preparation.
- A cultural day is being planned by the prefects for April to celebrate the diversity of the school.

Ms. Kwaku was thanked for her report and the Head Girl team and all Year 11 and Year 13 students wished well for their forthcoming exams.

6. Trustee safeguarding update

Mrs. Cole and Mrs. Mills (Assistant Headteachers and Deputy DSLs) gave a safeguarding presentation to the Trustees. This included information on the HGS safeguarding team, what Trustees need to know about safeguarding, HGS visitor procedures, statutory legislation, Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) requirements for Trustees, HGS attendance procedures and where to find further information. They invited questions and Trustees asked about the DBS process for staff and other service providers in school. The process for completing checks and recording details on the Single Central Record was explained.

Trustees also asked about the use of CPOMS to help manage safeguarding records. The enhancements made to the system this year such as the introduction of more detailed category definitions was explained. This helps to ensure more detailed information is available and allows for improved reporting and monitoring. Trustees also asked about access to the information and the system security and staff access levels were explained. Details of the system audit trail functionality and the restrictions in place for amendment or deletion of information were also discussed.

Trustees thanked Mrs. Cole and Mrs. Mills for the very helpful and informative presentation.

7. Headteacher's report

Mr. Crowther highlighted a number of items in his report which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

He provided an update on the work to redefine the school values and shared the final outcomes. These will underpin the School Improvement Plan (SIP) next year and will be promoted and celebrated throughout the school. Work on the SIP has begun and he outlined the key vision and aims. The plan will be developed and shared with Trustees prior to approval at the meeting in June. Mrs. Shaw has joined the leadership team as the new Director of Finance and Resources and the handover from Mr. Hankin is underway. Mr. Crowther thanked Mr. Hankin for all the support he has provided him with as both Deputy and now Headteacher.

Other items highlighted were the Classics trip to Greece and the ski trip to Andorra over Easter, the celebration of International Women's Day and the many charity activities. All students in years 7 to 10 undertook a nationally standard reading assessment and the outcomes from this were discussed by Trustees. Mr. Crowther confirmed that this valuable research will be shared with parents. Weekly staff teaching and learning briefings are well attended and recent learning walks have focused on SEND and the use of Chromebooks.

It has been a very busy term for careers with a host of activities for students throughout the school. Trustees commented that they were pleased to see that information is provided to the Sixth Form regarding apprenticeship opportunities.

Frustrations and difficulties with the support provided from County SEND services and the impact this has on students, families and staff was discussed. Changes to working space in school to create a Learning Support and Pastoral Hub have been made and the SEND link Trustee confirmed that she has seen the benefit of this during her visits to school. Attendance improvement remains a high priority and, where attendance for a student is low, the school has a good understanding of the reasons behind this.

Work is also underway on tightening up the consistency of practice regarding the managing of behaviour. This is already proving successful with a reduction in consequences. A Trustee asked about the consistency of practice in giving consequences. Mr. Crowther confirmed that this is being tightened up, not just for sanctions but also for rewards as well.

Trustees also asked about staff turnover and any recruitment difficulties. Mr. Crowther replied that there have been good fields for recent vacancies and he is very pleased with the appointments made. So far turnover has been low, although we are now approaching the time when staff may be looking for new roles. Some local schools have had difficulties in filling vacancies for certain subjects.

Trustees thanked him for his report and for highlighting just some of the details in what has been a very busy and productive term.

8. Committee reports

8.1 Admissions committee

Mrs. King reported on the meeting held on 7 February. A discussion was held regarding the maximum capacity of the Sixth Form. The Year 7 allocation process has taken place and address checking will begin after Easter with appeal hearings in May.

The minutes of the committee meeting were noted.

8.2 Curriculum and Performance committee

Mrs. Frost reported on the meeting held on 7 February. The report from the School Effectiveness Advisor was reviewed and discussed and the self-evaluation summary for the autumn term noted. Feedback from the student panels again provided a good insight into how students feel about the school. An attendance report and SEND report were reviewed.

The committee reviewed the updated Careers education, information, advice and guidance policy and the Supporting students with medical conditions policy and recommended these for approval. Trustees **APPROVED** these policies.

The committee also reviewed and approved the Administration of medicines policy, Assessment and feedback policy, Emotional and mental health well-being policy and the Equality policy and this was **NOTED** by Trustees.

The minutes of the committee meeting were noted.

8.3 Finance and Resources Committee

Mr. Edwards reported on the meeting held on 28 February.

The current financial position was reviewed and gives no cause for concern. Following a thorough tender process, a new cleaning contract has been awarded. The grounds maintenance contract has been awarded to a new contractor following the closure of the current incumbent. The school remains in a healthy financial position.

Work on the budget for 2023/24 has begun. Whilst this looks positive, there is still uncertainty relating to pay awards for staff. The school has a high level of reserves and Trustees agreed to restart the preliminary work looking at the cost and practicalities of building additional classrooms to support the enlarged Sixth Form.

The premises and Health and Safety reports were reviewed. Work to re-seed the main field was due to start this month, but has been postponed to the summer due to the weather conditions.

The minutes of the committee meeting were noted.

8.4 Audit and Risk Committee

Mr. Down reported on the meeting held on 28 February. The Internal Scrutiny and Responsible Officer reports were reviewed and there were no issues raised. The School Resource Management Self-assessment return was reviewed and approved for submission. The committee received an update on the plan for the transition of the Chief Finance Officer role from Mr. Hankin to Mrs. Shaw. The Risk Register was reviewed and updated and then approved.

The minutes of the committee meeting were noted.

8.5 Personnel Committee

Mr. Lucas reported on the meeting held on 28 February. The committee received an update following the first day of industrial action. A staffing update was received and a wellbeing report given. An updated Grievance policy was approved and this was **NOTED** by Trustees.

The minutes of the committee meeting were noted.

9. Governance

9.1 Company Secretary

Trustees accepted the resignation of Mr. Hankin as Company Secretary and appointed Mrs. Shaw as the new Company Secretary effective from 21 March 2023.

9.2 Trustee Training

Mrs. Job and Mrs. King reminded Trustees of training requirements and obligations and referred to the online modules available from Modern Governor as well as the training provided by Herts. For Learning.

10. Link department visits

Mr. Mills spoke about the recent Classics Play and GCSE evening of dance that he recently attended. Both were outstanding.

Mr. Scott visited the Philosophy and Ethics and the Business and Computing departments and had a very information session in each department. There were no major concerns raised by the departments. Each had mentioned a change in student perceptions regarding low level behavior issues. The focus on improving consistency and tightening practices and procedures will help address this.

Mr. Scott also referred to the recent EPQ evening where he was very impressed with the quality of work and presentations from the students.

Mrs. Frost has met with Mrs. Cole and was impressed, as always, with the work undertaken by the Learning Support, Pastoral and SEND teams. There is a very caring environment in school. There is still frustration regarding the level of support available from external services.

Mr. Roberts has visited school as the link Trustee for Health and Safety. Sound practices are in place and record keeping is very good. A H&S audit by the Hertfordshire County Council Advisor has been arranged for June.

Mrs. King has completed a safeguarding review in school. She noted the success of the new Pastoral and Learning Support hub.

Visits to the Mathematics and Modern Foreign Languages departments are scheduled.

11. Any other Business

Mrs. Job thanked Mr. Crowther for all he has done as he has completed his first 100 days as Headteacher. She also thanked all staff for their work this year, and for the wide-ranging support and opportunities they provide to students.

12. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 6 June 2023