

Colyton Grammar School

Minutes of the Governing Body: Part One

Date of Meeting: Thursday 29 September 2016

Venue: Room 16, Walker Building

Present:

Governors	Dr C Bastin, Mrs Burns-Price, Mr G Davis, Lt Col T J Dyer, Mr A Eaton-Hart, Mr T Harris (Headteacher) Mrs L Linnell, Mr M Marsh, Mr B Merrett (by phone), Mrs M Nickells, Mr R Scott and Mrs V Wells
Staff	Mr S Cook and Mrs J Wainwright
Visitors	None
Secretary	Mrs A Robinson

1. Disclosure of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Rev Dawson and Mr Salter

3. Recruitment of School Business Manager

Dr Bastin drew the attention of the Board to the papers circulated prior to the meeting. These included details of some preliminary work on the recruitment of a new School Business Manager that had taken place during the summer break. He explained that this appointment will be made by Mr Harris, but with advice and support from the Board. Dr Bastin suggested a small group of Lt Col Dyer, Mr Goscomb, Mrs Linnell, Mrs Wells and Mrs Wainwright be appointed to work with Mr Harris as required.

Mrs Linnell emphasised the need to meet quickly, as it is proposed to advertise the post by mid-October, with a view to interviewing and appointing in November. Mrs Robinson agreed to liaise with Mr Harris to make arrangements for the meeting to take place within the next 10 days.

In response to Mrs Linnell's request for any comments on the circulated papers in preparation for this initial meeting, Mrs Nickells queried the following points:

- Whether 'excellent health' specified under 'personal qualities' contravenes the Disability Discrimination Act
- Whether the 'Person Specification' appears biased towards encouraging applications from candidates with a public sector background. Mrs Nickells explained that her previous experience in this area led her to believe that an excellent understanding of double entry finance and education are more important than experience in a public sector role. She added that the preparation of academy accounts by the Business Manager is extremely unusual and may require a candidate from the private sector.

In response to Mrs Nickells query, Mr Goscomb explained that the salary on offer is sufficient to attract a qualified accountant and it was agreed that the candidate should have a minimum qualification of AAT, ACA, SIFMA or equivalent.

4. Governance Review

Mr Goscomb drew the attention of the Board to the Governance Review paper circulated prior to the meeting. As outlined in the Introduction to the Review, Mr Goscomb explained his approach to this work, including:

- The three fundamental responsibilities of a governing board; strategic direction, holding the Headteacher to account for the performance of the school, and ensuring financial health, probity and value for money
- Sources of published information consulted; NGA 'twenty questions'; NGA 'Eight Elements of Effective Governance'; the DfE Governors' Handbook; criteria used by Ofsted Inspectors to judge governing boards and the Academies Financial Handbook published by the Education Funding Agency
- A fact finding stage which involved meeting with individual governors and members of the School's SLT

Mr Goscomb also outlined his qualifications and experience and thanked the participants in his research. He explained that in formulating the report, based around 10 key questions, he had approached the process as an objective, professional consultant and asked that his fellow Trustees remain open minded and objective throughout the discussions.

Each section was then presented in turn by Mr Goscomb and discussed by the Board.

Section 1: Ensuring we have a clear vision, ethos and strategy

Recommendations:

- Define a clear vision for the school
- Develop a clear strategic plan

Mr Harris confirmed that he was very happy with the outlined recommendations and suggested that he works with a relatively small group of Trustees, with the relevant skills, to develop ideas and format. The resulting vision and plan will then be presented to the Board at the next meeting. In response to a query from Dr Bastin, Mr Harris reported that he would be happy with a 5 year plan, as this will be an evolving document, presenting an aspirational vision.

Mrs Robinson and Mr Harris will liaise to arrange this meeting.

Section 2: Ensuring we have effective arrangements in place to provide appropriate support / challenge, monitor school performance and hold school leaders to account for delivering our vision and priorities.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the structured monitoring of school performance, including the achievement of strategic priorities, targets and improvements

- Strengthen visible challenge
- Strengthen oversight of performance management

Mr Goscomb explained that this section is closely aligned to the previous one and suggested that the strategic plan be put in place first. He added that one of the key objectives is for Trustees to feel confident and informed enough to ask intelligent questions at the right time.

Mr Harris confirmed that he would produce a Headteacher's report and would welcome challenge from the Board. This report will focus on the context of school; leadership, quality of teaching and achievements. He reminded the Board of the importance of challenging outcomes generally, not just academic achievement.

As a practical suggestion to support the Trustees in their review of the first, new RAISE on-line performance and Level 3 value added report in November, Mr Harris suggested that a small group of trustees, aided by Mr Stidwell, spend time drilling down to the detail of the data. In the following year the school will stand back, as the Trustees will have the required expertise to question the leadership team thereafter. He added that other systems are now available that mirror these reports through key stage 4 and 5 to enable a real focus on progress.

In response to a query from Lt Col Dyer, Mr Harris explained that although the reports are extremely time consuming, they are relatively straightforward. However, now that RAISE on-line data is based on value added performance, rather than a comparison with national average data, this will be more of a challenge in the future. Of particular interest will be next year, when there will not be any GCSE results.

In response to a query from Dr Bastin, the Board then considered whether they have the skills to actively challenge the school. After a discussion concerning previous examples of challenge, Mr Goscomb expressed his opinion that, irrespective of Trustees' backgrounds, the report offered real opportunities for improving their capabilities going forward and if the recommendations concerning recruitment, induction and training are agreed, all Trustees should be well equipped to effectively challenge. Dr Bastin and Lt Col Dyer concurred that, although current Trustees have a good skill set, this should be developed to allow Trustees to be confident that they are asking the right questions. Lt Col Dyer added that it would also be helpful if performance data, wherever possible, is presented to the Trustees in a format that is easily understandable. Mrs Wells pointed out the importance of both Trustees and the School having a completely open and honest relationship, in which both parties are fully engaged.

Section 3: Ensuring financial health, probity and value for money

Recommendations:

- Responsible Officer
- School Business Manager
- Establish dedicated budget for CGS governance and governance training
- Closely monitor funding and development
- Draft risk management strategy / policy and strengthen risk management oversight

Mr Goscomb introduced section 3 by expressing how impressed he had been with the overall arrangements in place for ensuring financial health, probity and value for money, reporting that a number of areas had exceeded expectation. Although Risk Management

has now commenced, Mr Goscomb queried whether the Trustees have the skills to oversee the risks and suggested that this is an area of work to be considered.

In response to Mrs Nickells' clarification of the roles of Responsible Officer and an Audit Committee, Mr Cook confirmed that although the Board had considered establishing a separate audit committee, it had been decided not to do so. He reported that the Finance Committee will be discussing the recruitment of a new Responsible Officer next week and will report back to the Board.

The Board then discussed the establishment of a governance budget with particular focus on sourcing value for money, quality training. It was agreed that all options should be explored, from Devon and other LEAs, free and paid seminars from private companies and individuals, to bespoke training sessions.

Mr Harris confirmed his support of a budget for Governance. Mr Cook confirmed that a nominal sum of £1000 has been allocated to this year's budget.

Mr Goscomb concluded the discussions by expressing his opinion that no apology should be required for a reasonable amount of money spent appropriately on governance.

Section 4: Ensuring we are open, visible and relevant to the school and our key stakeholders and that governors are appropriately engaged with the work and activities of the school

Recommendations:

- Introduce measures to enhance our engagement
- Make much better use of the school website as a tool for engagement and information provision

After Mr Goscomb's introduction to this section, the Board agreed the importance of raising the Trustees' profile to students, staff, parents and the wider community. A number of opportunities were discussed including:

- Periodic Trustee attendance at students' School Council meetings
- Inviting a student to present information at a Trustee meeting
- Open meetings with parents (for example, when new arrangements for the Sixth Form are launched)
- Improved use of the school website
- Adding to existing surveys

Mr Harris commented that the school website is currently under review and cost effective improvements are being considered.

Section 5: Ensuring we are able to demonstrate that we are having an impact on outcomes for students

Recommendations:

- Adopt planned approach to the identification of specific school improvements

- Support the adoption of a proactive approach to monitoring and tracking student outcomes

After Mr Goscomb summarised his findings and recommendations, Mr Harris reported that the newly appointed Development Officer has started to focus on student careers beyond university. He explained that it is challenging to meet 100% feedback, but the information is now being collated and will be an excellent tool for tracking student outcomes.

Section 6: Ensuring that we have the right structures in place to undertake governance effectively

Recommendations:

- Separate roles for trust members and trustees
- Primary focus of the governing board to become strategic
- Discontinue School Futures Group
- Discontinue Chairs' Committee
- Adopt measures to strengthen the main committees
- Working groups to be 'task and finish' only
- Establish committee to handle senior staff recruitment (on a case by case basis)
- Revise current 'training evenings'
- Introduce system of 'lead governors'
- Rationalise governing board

Mr Goscomb highlighted the key recommendations outlined in the Introduction to the Report.

The Board discussed recommendation 6.1; separate roles for trust Members and Trustees.

In response to queries from Lt Col Dyer and Mrs Linnell, Mr Goscomb confirmed that he is recommending that five current Trustees will become Members. The recommendation is therefore 16 Trustees and 5 Members. He explained that this separate group of Members will be performing an oversight role and will also be responsible for the appointment of Trustees. He suggested that moving current Trustees to a Member role will retain the skills and experience they have gained as a Trustee. Mr Goscomb continued by confirming that he did not envisage long standing Trustees remaining beyond their current period of office.

Mr Cook reported that the roles of Member and Trustee have significantly changed in recent years. He reminded the Board, that Members' powers are set out in the Articles of Association.

The Board then considered how the separation of the Member role from that of the Trustee could work in practice.

In response to queries from Lt Col Dyer, Mr Eaton-Hart and Mrs Wells, Mr Cook reported that he envisaged Chairs of Trustee committees reporting to the Members on a termly basis. Mr Goscomb concurred and also suggested an annual report. Mr Goscomb added that it is not good practice for Trustees to oversee themselves and an annual meeting to receive a clear report on activities and decisions made by the governing body, will enable the Members to have a dispassionate overview. He reiterated that the movement of existing Trustees to the role of a Member, will mean they have the skill sets to have meaningful and

constructive dialogue with the Trustees. Mr Goscomb also explained that the direction of travel legally, is for separation between the two roles.

Mr Cook gave an example of how decisions would be made, citing that the decision to move to five forms of entry would have been made by the Trustees. The members would simply have questioned how this was done. In response to a query from Mrs Linnell concerning the value of having a separate Member group, Mr Cook reminded the Board that the structure of Members and Trustees is already in place, but currently the Members are also Trustees.

In response to a query from Lt Col Dyer concerning the recommended number of Members, Mrs Nickells reported that the Financial Handbook states a minimum of 3 Members, but recommends 5.

Mrs Linnell queried whether Members will be drawn from external sources. Mr Goscomb suggested that although he envisaged the Members initially coming from the existing Board, in future, the Members could decide to recruit externally, particularly to complement existing skills and experience.

Although some Trustees expressed satisfaction with elements of 6.1, it was agreed that it would be beneficial to have a greater understanding of how the recommendation would work in practice. Mr Scott suggested that practical examples of how this is working in other schools would be helpful. Mr Cook agreed to produce and circulate a summary of relevant articles and working examples.

The Board will reconsider the adoption of recommendation 6.1 at the Board meeting in December.

The Board then turned its attention to the recommendations to discontinue the School Futures Group and the Chairs Committee (6.3 and 6.4)

It was agreed that the Futures Group should be abolished. However, Dr Bastin expressed his concern at the lack of interaction between Committees, if the Chairs' Committee were to be abolished, but he did note that minutes of all Committees are available to all Trustees.

Mrs Linnell requested that recommendations concerning performance related pay (6.56), elements of 6.57 and 6.9, Lead Governors, be discussed at the next relevant Committee meeting. In response to a query from Mr Eaton Hart, Mr Goscomb explained that Link Governors will be subsumed by Lead Governors. They will link with both educational departments and specialist areas. The written roles and responsibilities will be updated in the Governance Handbook. New specialist areas were suggested, including an 'Engagement' Trustee, 'Marketing' Trustee and 'Pupil Premium' Trustee, although this last post is currently covered by Mrs Wells' link with the SEN department.

Mr Goscomb clarified that the recommendation to establish a committee to handle senior staff recruitment (6.7.1) would only be established as and when necessary.

In considering section 6.10, the rationalising of the governing board, Mr Cook reported that the government is back peddling on their plans to remove all Parent Trustees from Governing Boards. It was noted that the current election process for Parent Trustees does not fit with the recommendation to maintain a balance of skills on the Governing Board. Mrs Linnell commented that a skills based approach to recruitment is key. Mrs Nickells reported that she had seen examples of schools that had amended their Articles to replace elections with the appointment of Parent Trustees. Mrs Wells expressed her concern at this and Mr

Goscomb suggested that when the invitation for parent governors is issued, it should invite applications from parents with a particular skill set. Mr Cook confirmed that this would be possible as it does not preclude anyone from applying.

Mr Eaton Hart commented that increasing the number of Parent Trustees could be considered in view of the increased PAN. Lt Col Dyer concurred, noting that this would be a good sign of engagement with parents. He added that the recruitment of parents under Article 50 has worked extremely well in the past. Mrs Wells expressed her view that four Parent Trustees should be maintained as they are a valuable link with the views of parents, who are often reluctant to speak with teachers.

Mrs Wells and Dr Bastin expressed their concern that reduced numbers may cause a problem with having the required quorum for Committee meetings.

In response Mr Goscomb explained that his recommendation of a reduction in parent Trustees from 4 to 3, was part of the recommendation that the overall number of Trustees be reduced, to create a flatter structure. He added that he felt that no Board should be bigger than it needs to be, and with suitable training all Trustees should be equally valuable.

Section 7: Ensuring that we have the right people on the governing board with the right balance of skills and the right leadership

Recommendations:

- Trust members to introduce a structured approach to governor recruitment
- Introduce a structured approach to governor induction
- Strengthen governor training and development
- Strengthen arrangements for succession planning
- Improve the provision of updates, guidance and information to governors
- Reach agreed position on governor tenure and the maximum number of terms of office
- Introduce periodic governor reviews to be undertaken by the Chair
- Adopt measures to support the Chair's effectiveness

Mr Goscomb outlined the recommendations, as highlighted in the Introduction to Section 7 of the report.

The Board discussed the roles of the Chair and Vice Chair.

Dr Bastin reported that he would welcome working more closely with the Vice-Chair as he felt the recommendations of the report would result in additional workload. In response to a query from Dr Bastin, Mr Goscomb confirmed that he saw the Vice Chair as a likely successor to the Chair, as they will be ideally placed. However, he reminded the Board that this would remain an elected post.

In response to a query from Lt Col Dyer and comment by Mr Eaton Hart, Mr Goscomb reported that he recognised that some Trustees may hold more than one post, but emphasised the need for the Vice Chair of the Board to have sufficient time to fully support the Chair.

Mrs Wells expressed her concern that if Board numbers were decreased overall and workload increased, it may be off-putting for both current Trustees and future recruits. Dr

Bastin agreed and suggested that workload could be reviewed once plans for the recommendations to be implemented were agreed.

At Mr Goscomb's suggestion and further to the earlier discussion on Section 6, the Board then voted and agreed by majority to maintain Trustee numbers at 18.

The Board then considered the recommendations concerning the maximum terms of office for a Trustee. In response to a query from Mrs Wells, Mr Goscomb clarified that parent governors could serve for a third term in exceptional circumstances, in the same way as recommended for Article 50 Trustees, however, they would need to be elected and still have a child at the school.

He also clarified, in response to a query from Lt Col Dyer, that parent trustees could be asked to join the Board under Article 50, but highlighted his recommendation that the Board should be ambitious in appointing Trustees with specific, required skills, while bringing forward 'new blood' (7.6.3.). Mrs Linnell asked if consideration could be given to whether there should be a moratorium on the appointment, under Article 50, of a previously elected Parent Trustee.

Section 8: Ensuring we receive professional support to our governance arrangements, including legal advice, service meetings and governor training and development

Recommendations:

- Secretary to support the implementation of the review recommendations
- Provide support the Secretary's professional development
- Secretary to address identified opportunities and challenges for the role

After Mr Goscomb outlined his recommendations, Mrs Robinson confirmed that she was willing to adopt these. Mrs Robinson reported that she is registered for the National Clerks' Development Programme. Mrs Wells suggested that Mrs Robinson's remuneration should be reviewed by the Staffing Committee, recognising that the proposals involve a significant increase in the responsibilities of the Secretary to the Trustees.

Section 9: Ensuring that our day to day working practices enable us to carry out our core functions and conduct our business efficiently and effectively

Recommendation:

- Update working practices to enable us to carry out our core functions and conduct our business efficiently and effectively

Mr Goscomb highlighted the key recommendations highlighted in the Introduction to the Review.

Mrs Robinson suggested that the recommendation in 9.1.1. concerning timescales for the circulation of agenda and papers for each Committee meeting, be amended. She suggested that information that is available should be circulated 10 days in advance of the meeting, but no later than 5 days in advance. Where possible papers should be circulated in batches, rather than one at a time.

Section 10: Ensuring a structured approach to self-evaluation and improvement to ensure that our governance arrangements remain efficient and effective

Recommendations:

- Introduce a structured approach to self-evaluation and improvement
- Adopt measures to enhance the policy review process
- Members of the trust to provide oversight of governing body

Mr Eaton-Hart expressed the appreciation of the Board in recognition of the extensive work Mr Goscomb has done on the review and his objectivity throughout. Dr Bastin concurred that the review is an excellent piece of work.

The Board then discussed the best way to implement the agreed recommendations. All of the recommendations were agreed in principle, unless otherwise stated. It was noted that some recommendations could be implemented immediately, whilst others would have a much longer timescale.


Dr Bastin and Mr Goscomb agreed to meet, once the meeting minutes had been circulated, to create a document in which each recommendation is itemised and allocated to a Committee, working group, or individuals. These groups will take responsibility for further discussion of the itemised recommendations and then report their suggestions for detailed implementation and timescales to the Board.

5. Any Other Business

Dr Bastin reported that this would be Mr Marsh's last meeting as a Trustee and thanked him, on behalf of the Board, for his huge contribution to the Board over many years.

6. Next Meeting

Thursday 8 December – Board Meeting and AGM

Signed:		(Chairman of Committee)
Date:	8/12/16	