

## LONDON BOROUGH OF REDBRIDGE

### Governing Body of Gilbert Colvin Primary School

#### Minutes of the Meeting of Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2021 Held at 6pm by Teleconference

**Present:** Mark Hemsley Headteacher  
Fatima Bibi-Mannan  
James Clements Chair  
Marianne Agwada  
Kerry Simpkins  
Nandia Fytraki  
Russel Wilson  
Ilyas Natha

**In Attendance:** Anne Fitzpatrick DHT  
Greg Robbins Clerk

**Apologies:** Rajpal Padam (Resigned)

#### **366) Declaration of Interests.**

There were no new declarations of interest.

#### **367) Welcome and Apologies for Absence**

Rajpal Padam sent apologies that he could not attend for his final meeting and resigned from the governing board.

#### **368) Membership**

##### **a) Expiration of Term of Office**

Kerry Simpkins' term of office was due to expire on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021. She said that she was prepared to stand again.

**Agreed: Kerry Simpkin was appointed a co-opted governor**

##### **b) Co-opted Governor Vacancy**

Discussions were ongoing with another candidate who would be invited to the next meeting. They have a background in H&S and compliance.

##### **c) Resignation of a Governor**

Rajpal Padam resigned as governor with effect from the end of the meeting. The chair expressed his thanks to Rajpal Padam for his contribution and support as vice chair. This created a vacancy for vice-chair.

##### **d) Election of Vice Chair**

Nominations had been requested in advance for the position of vice chair and there was one nomination. The meeting was asked to approve the appointment of Nandia Fytraki. She works at the Redbridge Institute of higher education, has clerked meetings, provided governance training and has experience of writing reports as well as having taught IT.

**Agreed: Nandia Fytraki was appointed as vice-chair.**

### **369) Minutes of the Meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

The minutes were approved and would be signed by the chair when it was physically possible.

### **370) Matters Arising**

#### **a) Independent Advice – Summary**

The school receives advice from a number of sources as there is not a full governor support service in Redbridge. The chair has been talking to the head of school improvement in Redbridge, Neethu, and Sarah Beaumont from NPW. Last week on Tuesday morning he had received ninety-six emails within two hours from governors and he felt that this would need some control, so he sought advice and was told this level of messaging was unacceptable. There should be some streamlining of communications within the governing body. There was no concern about questioning or holding to account, but this must be manageable. A code of conduct would be agreed this evening. It could be useful to have some filtering about queries if there were questions about what governors should already know or that had already been shared.

- i) Governors asked what would be the best way to respond to chain emails. This would depend on the topic of the email. Some should be restricted to the person whose responsibility it was, though in some cases it was useful to keep everyone in the loop with an answer. It was not useful to copy all governors in to wider discussions, however.

#### **b) Director of Finances at Newham**

Dena Aly had just been appointed as finance director for Newham CYPS. The chair hoped to invite her to a future meeting to discuss the budget and give her insight.

#### **c) Adoption of Code of Conduct**

The school is now a member of the NGA (National Governors' Association), which is a good source of training and advice. They also provide a nationally accepted code of conduct.

**Agreed: The NGA model code of conduct was adopted.**

- d) Governors asked when face to face meetings would be possible. It was hoped that these would be allowed from June, so this might be possible for the meeting in July.

### **371) Headteacher's Report**

The headteacher shared key points from a detailed report which had been shared.

#### **a) Pupil Roll**

The student roll was increasing again after some families who had elected for home education wished to apply to return again. There would also be five new students.

#### **b) Attendance**

Attendance in the autumn had been 96.9% against a target of 97%. There was a period during which all those not required to be in school were marked as present. Attendance since 8/3/21 when the full complement of children returned had been 96%.

#### **c) Staff Absence**

There had been a total of over 300 days' absence due to Covid since September. This had made it challenging to consistently maintain bubble security at times but school had achieved it.

#### **d) Health and Safety**

There were two unplanned evacuations following the alarm being set off. One fire drill was

planned.

**e) Asset Management**

A boiler for the nursery and water heaters in the main building had required replacement. Quotes would be sought to update the wifi network.

**f) Catch-Up Premium**

The school had been awarded £30,160. This was to be used across all year groups and a plan of some of the work planned was shared (approx. cost £38K). This task would be ongoing for some time. This included NTP, which was a national tuition programme sponsored by the government. If the school did not use its own staff for 1-1 tuition that might save costs to bring the interventions within the £30K budget. If a teacher was appointed (0.4 fte) it might be from September to Easter. Year 6 tuition might be outside the school day.

The accelerated reader programme (ARP) had been used successfully for many years in other schools and was recognised by EEF (Education Endowment Foundation). The school has already used some of its catch up premium to put into this. There had been an assessment of year 3. The library books had been recoded to help children select books within the right band. Most of the books have an online 'quiz' to check their comprehension, which was the important difference in KS2. A £3K budget would boost the school's stock to support the accelerated reader programme.

- i) Governors asked how gaps in reception, such as in oracy, would be supported by things like NELI. NELI was based at nursery level, early literacy at reception. Teachers would identify the students who required help. It would not be needed for everyone.
- ii) Governors noted that the school would prefer to use tutors rather than ask teachers to support 1-1 and asked how any surplus money could be used. While there is a benefit to using staff the children know, it could put too much pressure on staff. A tutor might work with three students remotely or within school, but this would need a decision about where this took place. The headteacher's preference was for three children to be together in school.
- iii) Governors asked why the ARP appeared twice on the expenditure list. £2,100 was the subscription to the programme, quizzes, assessment and additional support. The £3K was to purchase more books that matched the programme. If a teacher was appointed for two days per week this would release a teacher to lead on ARP.
- iv) Governors asked where the £7,540 already received had gone. This had gone into the budget, but it would need to be ringfenced and reported on separately.
- v) Governors asked if any of this money had been spent yet. Only the £2,138 had been spent subscribing to ARP for fifteen months. The school was still assessing and identifying students' needs.

**372) Financial Matters**

**a) Budget Update**

A finance meeting was held in the early spring. A presentation was shared setting out the headlines, though the difference between savings and cuts was emphasised. Some significant savings had been made during the past year, with the leadership team reduced from 4 to 3; admin staffing reduced (0.6fte), the cancellation of an IRIS subscription, reduced spending on curriculum resources and the non-replacement of 2 MDA positions, saving £41K, mostly since September.

The predicted end of year balance had been £68,953, whereas the unaudited final balance was £102,607, which was a positive position. The borough had unexpectedly provided extra funding as a result of the bulge class the school might have expected to receive to the tune of £78,204. The final balance was therefore £180,811.

The school had always known its budget would be tight, so the school had been cautious throughout the year, making savings where possible. The additional £78K had been quite unexpected. In financial reporting it is usual to presume that all the expenditure budgets would be spent, but now those sums were released. The school was in a much more secure position than envisaged at the last finance meeting.

**b) Projected Budget for 2021/22**

Using the £180K carry forward, the projected surplus at 31/3/22 would be £122,589. That would still be a healthy balance, though it was not clear whether the additional grants would be needed again, so some of the difficult discussions might still need to be made.

Possible approaches might be to not replace a teacher and instead ask two part time teachers to job share and stop external CPD/training for both staff and governors. Losing part time staff would reduce the interventions available or internal cover flexibility. Stopping CPD could deter recruitment, such as for NQTs. Other median or low impact cuts were shared, though these included fewer LSAs (TAs), using senior staff for absence cover or reducing specific support staff's hours. Restructuring teaching staff would not achieve significant savings due to salary safeguarding. The various support SLAs for governors each have a fee and should be reviewed as part of the discussion.

- i) Governors observed that paying for individual training could be expensive and that the training SLA could offer value for money. The school does have an SLA with NPW, but not for training.
- ii) Governors asked if any of the headings overlapped. They do not – these were national over-arching headings from the DfE.
- iii) Governors asked if a greater break-down of the figures could be shared. This presentation was to give governors an over-view – it would be the finance committee that would look at the sub-headings in much greater detail and make recommendations to the full board.
- iv) Governors asked if all of the SLAs, such as GovernorHub and NPW had been investigated. GovernorHub is a national scheme and the school bought into the NPW for another year in February. Before making a change it would be necessary to look at the other alternatives to establish what gave best value.

**c) SFVS**

The school financial value standard dashboard had been shared on GovernorHub.

- i) Governors asked about the discrepancy between the SFVS on roll figure and the on roll figure reported in the headteacher's report. These figures fluctuate continually.
- ii) Governors observed that compared with other schools Gilbert Colvin had high levels of spend on teaching staff and supply staff. There are three staff who are agency staff which makes that figure high. The school needs to recruit NQTs to balance other staff who are higher on the pay scale.
- iii) Governors asked how many NQTs the school had. There were two, though one had given their notice. That was out of 16-17 teachers though.
- iv) Governors asked if admin staff had been working from home. They had been.

- v) Governors queried whether that level of admin support was needed if the school was short of 60 children. The level of admin was not affected by the number of vacancies. The school was not allowed to furlough staff.
- vi) Governors reflected that some other larger schools had fewer staff or had shed staff during the Covid pandemic and asked why the expenditure was high for clerical staff. These were the issues that the school had to review. Each school was different, however.
- vii) Governors asked why the pupil:adult ratio was high. This was not only teachers, as the pupil:teacher ratio was much lower. Some of this was reflected by the additional support as there were 18.5% of children eligible for free school meals.
- viii) Governors queried whether the school had appropriate mechanisms for approving purchases (Q19) or whether the governors had seen audit reports (as the last audit was in 2018). Governors also stated that they do not see the budget six times each year and that they had not seen quotes for some expenditure. Some of the detail of these matters would be considered by the finance and audit committee.
- ix) Governors noted that the report had been completed in the week beginning 1<sup>st</sup> February in time for the finance committee (uploaded 17 days ago), but it had only been uploaded to the FGB page three days ago. It was due to be submitted with the close of accounts data produced today.

**Agreed: The SFVS document would be added to the agenda for the budget setting governing board meeting – all governors were asked to consider it and provide questions in writing to the chair.**

#### **d) Use of BACS to Pay Suppliers**

Schools are being encouraged to move away from using cheques for payment to avoid fraud. The bank do not regard the current form of cheques to be safe and so the school might need to purchase new books. In moving to a BACS system the school financial procedures would need to be revised to ensure the current level of safeguards remain in place.

- i) Governors asked how it had worked when PPE had needed to be purchased rapidly. Ideally goods are ordered and the school invoiced for the goods. There are other cases where goods are purchased and a refund made by cheque against the receipt.

**Agreed: Governors approved a move to BACS payments.**

#### **373) Compliance Calendar**

This calendar sets out the list of statutory tasks that must be completed, whether annually or every two or three years. It records when tasks are completed and when they will require review, set out by each term. The document reflects when tasks are completed in Newham, so there may still be some tweaking required for a Redbridge school, but this would provide a basis from which to set the annual calendar.

**Action: The chair and vice chair would review this, discuss it with link governors and bring a proposal to the next meeting.**

#### **374) Safeguarding Report**

This had been shared on GovernorHub. A telephone conversation between Neena Begum and Marianne Agwada took place to confirm that she would be receiving the report. There was a concern that it was not possible for all staff to attend training at the same time, so this did not allow for improvement. Marianne Agwada asked that the report state clearly how many new

staff had been trained, not just 'all new staff'. Governors training should also be checked regularly. The headteacher explained that the SCR (single central record) should be signed off termly. The SBM would normally manage the register and the headteacher checks this monthly. In the absence of the SBM (due to her maternity leave) the headteacher updates any changes to it immediately and this is recorded on the log. Separate numbers could be set out in the report and that could be part of a discussion with Neena Begum. Ms Agwada said that 8% persistent absentees was very high. The headteacher responded that this was why the school was having link governors and this should improve communication. Governors can then scrutinise the data the school produces in a 1-1 session which fully informs discussions at governing board and subcommittee meetings.

### **375) Relationships, Sex and Health Education**

The local authority had employed a person to lead on this policy over the past year and a draft syllabus for primary and secondary schools had been produced. They also lead on parental consultation across the borough, providing support to each local school. This consultation began a year ago, though it was set back by Covid. The Local Authority has produced a draft policy which the school would use. The government had been under pressure to delay the statutory requirements, though the controversial elements would not be introduced until summer 2022. The school requested that there be a link governor to liaise on this matter, so governors fully understand what schools are required to teach.

### **376) Curriculum and Standards Feedback to FGB – Covid Recovery**

The committee met on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021. Key discussions had been recovery planning after Covid and the SDP. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) research the effectiveness of strategies to promote the learning of disadvantaged children. Their website is free to look at and is very valuable and it supports teaching practice.

### **377) School Development Plan and SEF**

This had been shared on GovernorHub. The focus had been on remote education and recovery. The SEF had been started last year following a meeting with Anita Harvey and would now require review. This is intended to be a succinct document.

### **378) Reviewing Purchase Orders, Kerry Simpkins**

Two quotes for the televisions (£43K) were now on GovernorHub, but not the one the school chose, and Ms Simpkins had not seen the successful quote of £18K for the outside canopy. The school business manager said she had not seen them either. There was some audit carried out via Zoom, but the SBM confirmed there had been no full audit since March 2018. Kerry Simpkins was not able to see receipts for purchases of PPE, though this could be because there was not one single heading of the budget where this would be recorded. This did not make sense to her as head of finance and audit.

Regarding staffing, there were 15 classes, but 16 teachers and LSAs. Not every single class would need an LSA – only nine children should need an LSA. She listed other staff and queried whether savings could not be made. It was suggested that this could be discussed with the director of finance.

There were other things that the school could do which had not happened, such as a virtual tour of the school on the school website or a second gate to the school site for security.

Ms Simpkins observed that the cleaning contractor had said that £10K could be saved per year if

the school committed for three years, but this did not seem to be reflected conclusively in the previous figures. The headteacher clarified that all figures had included VAT and the saving would be £10K and he had checked that would be the case.

- i) Governors queried whether this would mean running on the bare minimum of LSAs and if that would not inhibit recruitment. This was in a context where three weeks ago the school was looking at being £70K in deficit. This was an example of where savings could be made, while still keeping some extras, such as music lessons.
- ii) Governors queried whether LSAs were only for the specific students who need them. LSAs work with every child within their class, whether they are designated for one child or not. During Covid those staff had given additional emotional support in a number of ways.
- iii) The chair reminded the meeting that it was the responsibility of the headteacher to determine staff deployment and when he had visited, the LSAs had been working with all children. The headteacher had said that these staff were required. The quotes etc were issues that should be clarified further within the finance and audit committee.
- iv) A governor reported that he had visited the school on the preceding Friday and observed that some of the trees could be pruned, though security seemed satisfactory. Premises could be on the compliance calendar.

### **379) School Calendar Dates 2021/22**

These had been shared. Everything red and blue had been set by the local authority, but the school could set five INSET days, though some had already been lost this year.

Five INSET days were being set for next year, which would leave 190 student days:

1/9/21

4/10/21

19/11/21

4/1/22

11/3/22

- i) Governors asked if the calendar had taken account of government suggestions about lengths of holidays. This had come from the borough – if there was a national decision then it might need to be revised. The requirement was for 190 taught days each year and there were no proposals to change that. Any change would require a change in contracts agreed with the teaching unions.

**Agreed: The proposed dates were approved.**

6<sup>th</sup> May 2021 will be polling day for London elections. The authority had asked for schools to not be used, but there was no alternative venue locally. The nursery would therefore be used as a polling station, closing the nursery, but keeping the rest of the school open.

### **380) Chair's Action**

There had been no chair's action.

Job descriptions had been added to folders in GovernorHub.

### **381) Governor Training and Annual Governor Audit**

An audit would be discussed at the next meeting.

The chair was on Introduction to Being a Chair training and had completed headteacher performance management and audit training.

**382) Appreciation**

The staff governor thanked the SLT for their support through the year as staff felt supported and children were pleased to be back.

**383) Agenda Pack Documents**

Governors asked if there could be hyperlinks to documents on the agenda.

If governors had been particularly requesting specific documents they requested to be informed when they are uploaded.

**384) Time and Date of Next Meeting**

This would be circulated.

The meeting closed at 9:20pm.