



Powerstock CE VA Primary School

Learning together to be the best that we can be

Minutes of the Full Governing Body Meeting held in school at 4:30pm on 17 September 2024

Present: David Jones DJ (Chair), Wendy Morris WM (Vice Chair), Nick Harris NH (Headteacher), Elizabeth Rutherford ER, Sam Van Zyl SV, David Bligh DB, Laura Scarlett LS, Barbara Poole BP, Sophie Bull SB.

In Attendance: John Alexander JA (Clerk)

Q/C = Question/ Challenge.

1. Welcome and Prayer

DB welcomed all to the meeting, and LS gave the opening prayer.

2. Apologies

Rev. Chris Grasske CG, Baffy Turner BT.

3. Minutes of 25-6-24 FGB

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising and Action Plan

- i) *SB/ BP/ ER to lead on organising the Love Your School day:* COMPLETED. The day had been a great success and real progress had been made.
- ii) *All governors to contribute ideas for how to address the financial situation to the sub-committee:* COMPLETED. The school's financial situation would be discussed at Item 6.
- iii) *NH to express attendance figures without the data for the two children with very low attendance:* COMPLETED. The revised data was included in the Headteacher's Written Report – although one of the two children now had greatly improved attendance.

5. Declaration of Interests and Annual Review

There were no interests declared in respect of the Agenda. All governors completed and signed a new Business Interests form and these were collected by JA who would prepare a summary sheet and then pass the forms to the school office for storage. **ACTION: JA**

6. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

DJ offered to continue as Chair and was unopposed. He was duly re-elected. WM offered to continue as Vice Chair and was unopposed. She was duly re-elected.

7. Finance Briefing

DB, the Chair of the Finance, Environment and Premises Committee (FEPC), presented a summary of the school's financial situation and some options available for addressing it.

At its June meeting, the FEPC had resolved to convene a sub-committee that would meet during August to consider options for addressing the projected deficit in the school's budget from 2025-

26 caused by the falling number of pupils on roll. The sub-committee – made up of DB, DJ and NH - had met twice during August. In addition, the Sub-committee had met with John Sale, the Dorset Council-appointed independent resource management advisor who had been looking at the school's resource management, and Vanessa Eddy, Schools Finance Manager for Dorset Council. These meetings had been very positive and helpful, and while John Sale's written report would not be available until October, it had been clear that support would be provided as the school sought to resolve its financial challenges.

In essence, the projected budget shortfall was caused by a combination of falling pupil numbers, following several departures towards the end of the previous academic year, and relatively high staff costs – the school was fortunate to have some very experienced teachers, who had therefore accrued relatively high salaries because of their length of service. The budget year ran from April to April (the financial year, not the school year) and most of the grant budget for 2024-25 was based on the number of children in the school in October 2023, when the number on roll had been higher. The income for 2024-25 was therefore c£511k. However the budget for 2025-26 would derive from the October 2024 census, when only 39 pupils were expected to be on roll. As a result the anticipated income for 2025-26 would fall to c£430k. Furthermore, costs would increase between 2024-25 and 2025-26 because of inflation (e.g. staff pay rises). Expenditure for 2025-26 was therefore expected to be at least £100k more than grant income. This deficit had now been slightly reduced to £86k by not replacing a TA who had left. For 2025-26, the existing surplus would reduce the deficit to £47.5k. Beyond that, the deficit would rise because the surplus could only be used once.

Staff costs represented over 80% of the budget and were the only area where meaningful cost cutting could be made, so it was proposed to review staffing levels accordingly. The other priority was to strive to increase pupil numbers by at least five in the next year in order to offset the 2026-27 deficit. Other funding options considered were wraparound care to attract more pupils, and lobbying the diocese for grants and loans. Joining an academy was considered unlikely to be successful as the deficit would not make the school attractive.

The timescale for making final decisions on cost reduction measures was as follows:

- Develop options during Autumn term based on confirmed pupil numbers in October 2024 and the government budget at end of October 2024;
- Further discussions with Dorset Council during the autumn term about funding and balancing the budget over a longer period;
- Confirm the 2025-26 budget in January 2025 and make any necessary staff changes required from April 2025.

Q/C: Governors asked if there was likely to be sufficient demand for wraparound care to make it viable. NH replied that he had canvassed the views of parents and it appeared there may well be enough demand to cover the cost of the two staff required and still generate some profit.

Q/C: Governors asked, in view of the recent change to Ofsted judgements, what the grading would be when Ofsted returned to the school later in the academic year. NH replied that for this year, there would still be one-word judgements, but separate ones for each of the inspection criteria, rather than a single judgement for the whole inspection.

Governor discussed how to best organise a campaign to attract parents to the school and improve the number on roll. They acknowledged that this had been discussed numerous times by governors, but the lack of a properly managed approach had led only to *ad hoc* and short-lived interventions. A more professional approach was needed. The school had multiple selling points, including: Seedlings; Forest School; small classes; a friendly and inclusive environment; good SAT results; able and experienced staff; and a new, energetic leadership. Increasing the

school roll needed to be managed as a project, with clarity of roles and a well communicated vision focused on celebrating and publicising the special benefits the school had to offer. They agreed that a small project team should own this, which LS agreed to lead with SVZ playing a central role. Governors agreed to send their top three ideas to LS by the end of September, with a view to having a team and project plan in place by mid-October. **ACTION: All Governors.**

Q/C: Governors emphasised the importance of retaining children currently in Burton class. Burton needed to be outstanding, enjoyable and successful for children and staff alike.

Q/C: Governors asked if staff profiles could be added to the website. NH confirmed that this was a priority, as were many other improvements to the website, which felt dated. Gaining proper control of the website was proving to be a challenge, but he was focused on doing so.

Q/C: Governors asked if the school sign on the bus could be reinstated. NH agreed to ensure this happened. **ACTION: NH.**

8. Headteacher's Report

NH's report had been placed in the pack some time before the meeting and governors had had time to digest it. The following points were discussed:

Staff morale was reportedly high and staff were positive, energetic and motivated. It had been a remarkable start to the term with many staff members commenting on the calmness and focus of the pupils. ***Q/C: Governors welcomed this and commented on the importance of children feeling that staff liked working at the school.***

Q/C: Governors asked why attendance awards would not take place this year, with the introduction of a Pupil of the Week award for each class for pupils who worked hard, embodied the school values and had attended well. NH replied that the attendance awards had failed to have an impact and were unpopular with parents. Governors congratulated NH for his responsiveness to the views of parents.

Q/C: Governors asked why friendship and truthfulness had been removed from the school values. NH replied that they were implied within the other values. Four values were more digestible for the children than six. Also it was now possible to name the four houses after the four values.

9. Safeguarding update

WM and NH gave the safeguarding update.

Governors were asked to confirm that they had read Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE). All but one of those present replied that they had done so and signed a copy of KCSiE to confirm this. The one governor who had not read KCSiE had not been able to access the governor Sharepoint system. WM agreed to follow this up with Louis Van Zyl (LVZ). **ACTION: WM.** NH agreed to bring the signed copy back to the next FGB so that absentee governors could sign it at that point. **ACTION: NH.**

WM, NH and LVZ were looking into implementing new internet safety software called RM SafetyNet to augment the school's online safeguarding practices. By default, this would block illegal websites based on input from the Internet Watch Foundation, the Home Office, the Counter Terrorist list and security intelligence, including radicalisation content. The school would also be able to add its own filtering preferences and adjust access for different users, and alerts could be set up of any attempted access to harmful or sensitive content.

There was currently one Child in Need at the school. There had been a further incident of the unauthorised absence of a child previously discussed at FGB, which necessitated NH calling at their home. As on previous occasions there was no answer. On contacting Children's Services, he was told to inform the police, who then informed him that they no longer responded to such

incidents, and he would have to report to the ambulance service and the Fire and Rescue Service. NH had escalated the issue to the furthest extent possible. The family's circumstances were very difficult, and online learning was also now being offered.

10. Policy Review

The following policies were reviewed by Governors and were approved:

- Governing Body Standing Orders 2024-25
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy 2024-25
- Governor Visits Policy 2024-27
- Code of Conduct for Governors 2024-25
- Instrument of Government 2024-25
- Uniform Policy 2024-25

Governors had a discussion about the 'Learning Walk Checklist for Governors' which was an appendix to the Governor Visits Policy. NH argued that a number of the questions included, such as 'Are the pupils given opportunities that challenge their thinking?', 'Can they work together to develop solutions?', and 'Are layered targets evident in the teaching?' were pedagogic and operational in nature, exceeding the governors' role which was to assess whether progress was being made against the strategic priorities of the SDP and to check on the safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff. This, alongside the use of the word 'observation' as a column heading, was more akin to an Ofsted inspection than a governor visit.

Some governors felt that - particularly in view of their experience of trying to hold the previous headteacher to account prior to the recent Ofsted inspection, they needed to be able to make broader judgements of progress, so that they could be assured that Ofsted's 'Areas for Improvement' were being attended to.

Governors agreed that there needed to be a clear distinction between those aspects of school life that were their remit, and those pedagogic and operational responsibilities that were solely the remit of the headteacher. However, it would be a mistake to 'throw out the baby with the bath water' – to have a detailed checklist for governor visits was helpful. Although the one being discussed had been provided by the National Governance Association (NGA), the NGA's role was one of support and advice, rather than governance. They therefore agreed that NH and ER would work together on the checklist, finding an alternative to the word 'observation', and ensuring that the questions appertained to areas of school life that were part of the governors' remit, and did not impinge on those which were the responsibility of NH alone.

ACTION: NH/ ER.

11. Governance Issues

Governor committees: DJ circulated the list of memberships of: the Quality of Education and Wellbeing Committee; the Finance, Pay and Environment Committee; the Policy Management Committee. These were approved unanimously.

Governor link roles and monitoring schedule: DJ tabled the revised list of roles and the new visit and monitoring schedule for 2024-25. He asked governors to check these schedules and confirm acceptance of them to him by half term. **ACTION: All Governors.** SB volunteered to look at culture and creativity at the school. She also agreed to evaluate the school website from the perspective of a parent user. **ACTION: SB**

NGA Skills Audit 2024 and Governor Training: JA presented the results of the NGA Skills Audit, which were in the pack. Following some changes of personnel to the governing body over the previous year, with at least one experienced governor moving on, it was unsurprising that some

average scores had fallen slightly. Nevertheless, governors were clearly confident that they understood the school's strategic priorities and the core functions of their role. Governors also brought a lot of skills and experience to the governing body, including educational, SEND, project management, data analysis, financial and business skills. Governors had a strong appetite to maximise the efficacy of their roles through visits, governor days and post-Ofsted improvement. JA reminded governors that if they had any specific knowledge and skills gaps they wanted to address, there was a range of online training available, particularly from the NGA.

12. FGB Forward Plan

This was in the pack and was noted.

13. Clerk's Notices

None.

14. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

26 November 2024, 4:30pm.

The meeting closed at 6:30pm.

Item no.	Action	Owner	By when
5	Prepare a Business Interests summary sheet and then pass the forms to the school office for storage.	JA	Next FGB
7	Send top three ideas to LS by the end of September, with a view to having a team and project plan in place by mid-October.	All Governors	End September
7	Organise for the sign on the school bus to be reinstated.	NH	Next FGB
9	Follow up governor's Sharepoint access issue with LVZ.	WM	End September
9	Bring the signed KCSiE back to the next FGB so that absentee governors could sign it at that point.	NH	Next FGB
10	Rework the governor visit checklist.	NH/ ER	Next FGB
11	Check link roles and visit schedules and confirm acceptance of them to him by half term.	All governors	Half term
11	Evaluate the school website from the perspective of a parent user.	SB	Next FGB

Item no.	Summary of Governor Questions & Challenges
7	Governors asked if there was likely to be sufficient demand for wraparound care to make it viable.
7	Governors asked, in view of the recent change to Ofsted judgements, what the grading would be when Ofsted returned to the school later in the academic year.
7	Governors emphasised the importance of retaining children currently in Burton class.

Item no.	Summary of Governor Questions & Challenges
7	Governors asked if staff profiles could be placed on the website.
7	Governors asked if the school sign on the bus could be reinstated.
8	Governors welcomed the report on staff morale and commented on the importance of children feeling that staff liked working at the school.
8	Governors asked why attendance awards would not take place this year, with the introduction of a Pupil of the Week award for each class for pupils who worked hard, embodied the school values and had attended well.
8	Governors asked why friendship and truthfulness had been removed from the school values.