



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 5:00pm on 25 June 2024

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

In Attendance: John Alexander JA (Clerk)

Q/C = Question/ Challenge.

1. Welcome and Prayer

DJ welcomed all to the meeting, in particular new Foundation Governor BP and new Parent governor SB, and LS gave the opening prayer.

2. Apologies

Rev. Chris Grasske CG.

3. Minutes of 26 March 2024 FGB

These were agreed as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising and Action Plan

- i) *LS to supply NH with information about how to contribute to Eggardon News:* COMPLETED. One item had been published and another submitted.
- ii) *NH to consider if the new admin officer could have PR initiatives included in her role:* New admin officer Emma Rae had impressed all with how helpful, observant, imaginative and proactive she had been, and similar comments had been received from parents. Governors had no doubt that she would contribute good ideas for PR initiatives.
- iii) *All governors to submit comments on revised template for governor visit reports:* To be covered at Item 13.
- iv) *DJ to summarise revisions and additions to link roles by the end of April and circulate them to governors:* COMPLETED.
- v) *All governors to submit all visit reports to NH immediately on completion for actioning.* COMPLETED.

5. Declaration of Any Other Urgent Business and Declaration of Interests

None.

6. Correspondence

None.

7. Introduction from the Chair

Team Around the School (TAS): NH, DJ, WM and ER had all attended the first TAS meeting in March. This was the multi-agency group that had been set up to help the school meet the challenges presented by the recent Ofsted inspection. It included the new Dorset Council Education Challenge Lead Thyrsa Pickering and Finance and SEND representatives from Dorset

Council, and a representative of the Diocese. Part of the purpose of the group was to protect NH's workload by bringing all these agencies together at the same time and place so that the views and expertise of all of them could be aired in the most constructive way. The meeting had mainly focused on areas for improvement, in line with the SDP. The SEF and Spiritual Development Curriculum were also discussed, along with a review of SEND provision. Thyrsa Pickering had stepped in for Sheila O'Donnell who was unavailable for the foreseeable future. Ms. Pickering had inherited a substantial workload on top of her existing duties, and was clearly very busy – no minutes had yet been received from the meeting – governors were concerned that while the TAS provided good support, they needed to see evidence of outcomes, and would need to chase them up. ***Q/C: Governors asked if there was a paper trail of progress on proposals made.*** NH confirmed that there was, mainly because Linda Rowley from the Diocese had followed up on things said at the meeting.

'Love Your School Day': DJ introduced a proposal from the Curriculum Committee for a 'Love Your School Day', at which children, parents, friends of the school and other volunteers would spend a day mending, decorating and improving the premises. All governors were enthusiastic about the idea. It was agreed that the best time would be the middle of the school holidays, to avoid clashing with other scheduled events, and after the classes had changed round and potentially after the new stud wall had been fitted. 17 August was chosen. It was also agreed that a schedule of tasks was needed, and a full day set aside so that people could come in at different times and help. SB and BP agreed to lead on organising the day, and ER would organise a crèche. Other governors said they would be happy to help out on the day. **ACTION: SB/ BP/ ER.**

8. Report of Committees from the Chairs:

Curriculum and Wellbeing Committee 11-6-24

The minutes were in the pack, and ER focused on the following:

School Development Plan (SDP): The current SDP would run until the end of the school year. It was based on four priorities, each of which was accompanied by a more detailed rationale, and a set of objectives for the Spring and Summer Term. To demonstrate how much progress was being made, these objectives were RAG coded, and a commentary was provided which focused – largely by exception – on those objectives where more work was needed. Governors had praised NH for the clarity of the SDP report and the way in which the RAG coding helped them hold him to account for progress with the SDP.

A new SDP would be in place from September. The new plan was organised around three 'key priorities':

- To implement a well-planned and sequenced phonics curriculum
- To ensure that all subjects have a clear progression of knowledge
- To ensure that assessment is used effectively

Attendance: Average attendance was currently still too low, at 94%. NH had reported that he would shortly be receiving Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) training from Dorset Council in order to explore further strategies for challenging this. The attendance figure was acutely affected by two persistently absent pupils who were currently being provided with multi-agency support. A particular issue was caused by one of these pupils, as when they were absent without the school being informed, NH would have to travel to another village to ensure they and their family were safe – NH was geographically closer to the home than the representatives of the other agencies, but this was still disruptive to his planned activities. Governors had sympathised with NH for this situation and thanked him for his patience and professionalism.

Sequencing: Work was ongoing to organise and sequence the curricula of all subjects, including the Foundation subjects, into 'Front Burner' (highest priority subjects), 'Middle Burner' (medium priority subjects), and 'Back Burner' (lower priority subjects). The priority levels did not reflect the perceived importance of those subjects; rather, it reflected the level of maturity in the sequencing that had already been achieved – those subjects in most urgent need of attention being given the highest priority. Governors had asked if the Literacy Tree curriculum, in particular, was now sequenced. NH replied that this was only partially the case, as proper investigation had revealed a great deal of work to be done. The full curriculum had not been purchased as it was prohibitively expensive, and the school had been purchasing individual units in a somewhat *ad hoc* manner. NH and the Subject Leader were working hard to rationalise the scheme with help from the Somerset Literacy Network and using the Skills Tracking Grid. The work would get easier as further progress was made.

Staff wellbeing: NH had acknowledged that staff morale was low at the moment. It was almost the end of a long, challenging year and the staff could see there would be no respite next year as the push to improve quality of education continued. Staff understood why the changes were being made and although they were enthusiastic, they often did not sustain the interventions once they had been put in place. They unquestionably worked hard, but often this was in the wrong areas, and consequently there wasn't enough added value to all of the 'busyness'. The issue was one of long-established culture, and although the culture was showing some signs of change, there was still some way to go. ***Q/C: Governors asked NH to assure staff that they fully supported them and were concerned for their wellbeing.***

Bullying: NH had reported that there had been two recent incidents of bullying at the school, both of which were being addressed. One had been a case of online bullying, and the family had been spoken to and the age limits of social media sites had been reinforced. The other case was still ongoing but was being addressed. A strong talk had taken place with the whole class.

SEND: NH had reported that there was one new child with an EHCP. Governors had thanked Angela Oxenbury for her work on the application, which was a long, difficult and burdensome process.

Finance Environment and Premises Committee 26-3-24

The minutes were in the pack, and DB focused on the following:

Outturn and budget: The Committee had recommended the Outturn for submission to Dorset Council by 30-6-24. FGB accepted this recommendation and duly approved the Outturn.

The principal factor affecting the school's financial outlook in the near and medium term was the number of pupils on roll (NoR). The NoR in early October of each year drove the budget for the following year, as this was when the census was taken. While the NoR at October 2023 census was 58, which had informed the main delegated funding for April 2024, the forecast pupil numbers for Sept 2024, which would inform the budget for April 2025 through the October census, was 39. Dorset Council was aware of the situation, and had therefore appointed an independent resource management advisor who was looking at the school's resource management. These sessions were free and would take the form of a deep dive into the financial information / deployment of resources for the school and result in a report with recommendations for efficiencies. The report would be received in early September at the latest, but it could be before the end of the school year in July. He had been provided with all of the relevant financial information, along with the SDP and minutes of Finance Committee and FGB meetings for the last two years.

Governors had had a frank discussion about the situation. They had agreed that something radical would need to be done – the £20k carry-over from this year would barely dent the £100k deficit for next year, and tinkering with minor elements of the budget would not solve the

problem. They agreed to set up a sub-committee, comprised of DB, DJ, NH and SD, to meet as often as necessary between the current meeting and September to identify options to be presented at the round of committees in September, so that decisions could be made to feed into budget setting for April 2025. DB said that all ideas for how to address the situation from governors would be welcomed by this sub-committee. **ACTION: All governors.**

Q/C: Staff Governor LVZ confirmed that staff morale was low and that falling numbers were causing great stress about the future. She reiterated the importance of avoiding speculation about what would happen if and when the need to restructure arose.

Q/C: One governor pointed out that there were a number of large family homes on the market nearby, and expressed the hope that more children might move into the village at some point. NH pointed governors to the recent letter to parents from himself and DJ, and emphasised the importance of challenging negative narratives about the school.

9. Headteacher's Report

NH's written report was included in the pack. At the meeting, the following issues were discussed:

NH reported that another child had left the school the previous Friday, bringing the current NoR down to 49. ***Q/C: Governors asked if he was recording the reasons for children leaving.*** NH replied that he was – the reasons were mainly logistics and the lack of wrap-around care. Wrap-around care was a difficult issue – while it would be desirable to offer it, it was expensive to provide, and although a grant of £21k was available, this was one-off, and the cost for the future was currently unaffordable. Only two parents in the parent survey had actually mentioned wrap-around care as one of their priorities. The school was looking to provide more after-school clubs as an alternative.

Q/C: Governors asked about the disparity between NH's assessment commentary and the validated SAT assessments. NH reminded governors that the commentary related to the whole school, whereas the SAT scores were for Year 6 only.

Q/C: Governors asked if NH was concerned that no children had achieved a 'greater depth' SAT assessment for writing. NH replied this was not really a concern; the criteria for 'greater depth' required a level of skill that would suggest a very unusual and elevated passion for creative writing.

Q/C: Governors asked if attendance figures could also be expressed without the data for the two children with very low attendance, as in such a small school they skewed the figures considerably. NH replied that he would do this – without those two children, attendance was actually much stronger. **ACTION: NH**

Q/C: Governors asked what was in place to help Pupil Premium children. NH replied that they were systematically identified and catered for in planning materials, but he acknowledged that they were not consistently getting their 20 minutes of focused time – again, it was an issue of teacher habitual practice which he would continue to challenge. Because this and other changes to practice were not habitual and embedded, it was taking teachers a long time to do them because they were having to relearn their approaches – time would tell if this would get to be more 'business as usual'. External mentors were being used.

SIAMS: NH reported that the SIAMS inspection would take place on 2 July. The inspector had been provided with all the relevant documents, including the newly completed SIAMS SEF, both SDPs, the vision statement and the latest SIAMS report. The inspector would be talking to the children and looking for evidence that they were flourishing spiritually and learning from the RE curriculum. The outcome would be a report card – the type of helpful report that many wanted Ofsted reports to become, rather than the current single word judgement. The timetable would

be agreed on 27 June, and staff and parent letters had been sent out. **Q/C: Governors asked if NH would like governors present.** NH said he would welcome this. **ACTION: All governors.**

Parent survey: The results of the recent parent survey were in the pack. The quantitative results were less positive than one would hope; the comments, though, were much more complimentary. NH observed that while, in a small school, a small number of respondents could impact on the scores considerably, some of the results were fair and to be expected – communication with parents did need to improve, and the classroom environment did need to be calmer. Criticism of the attendance awards would be looked at. **Q/C: Governors asked if the issues identified were being tackled.** NH said they were, and he was having honest discussions with teachers.

10. Policy Review

The following policies were reviewed by Governors and were approved:

- Early Careers Teachers Policy 2024-25
- Grievance Resolution Procedure 2024-25
- SEND Policy 2024-25

There would be a meeting of the Policies Sub-Group on 9 July at 1:15pm via MS Teams. JA would circulate the policies for consideration. **ACTION: JA**

11. Safeguarding

There were no safeguarding issues to report at this meeting.

12. Governance Issues

Governor Visits: An NGA publication - *A Guide to School Visits for Governors in Schools and Trusts* – was included in the pack, and was weighted towards current priorities. NH reminded governors to look at evidence such as support grids and ‘sticky learning quizzes during visits. Governors said that the most useful thing was the conversation with the subject leader.

Notice of Chair and Vice-Chair Election: DJ reminded governors that if anyone wanted to stand as Chair or Vice-Chair of Governors, they should notify JA over the summer. **ACTION: All governors**

13. Date and Time of Next Meeting:

17 September 2024, 4:30pm.

The meeting closed at 7pm.

Item no.	Action	Owner	By when
7	Lead on organising the Love Your School day, and organise a crèche	SB/ BP/ ER	End of Summer Term
8	Contribute ideas for how to address the financial situation to the sub-committee.	All governors	End of Summer Term
9	Express attendance figures without the data for the two children with very low attendance	NH	Next FGB
9	If possible, come to SIAMS inspection day	DJ	End April
10	Notify JA over the summer of any intentions to stand a Chair or Vice-Chair of Governors	All governors	Next FGB

Item no.	Summary of Governor Questions & Challenges
7	Governors asked if there was a paper trail of progress on proposals made with TAS actions.

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8	Governors asked NH to assure staff that they fully supported them and were concerned for their wellbeing.
8	Staff Governor LVZ confirmed that staff morale was low and that falling numbers were causing great stress about the future. She reiterated the importance of avoiding speculation about what would happen if and when the need to restructure arose.
8	One governor pointed out that there were a number of large family homes on the market nearby, and expressed the hope that more children might move into the village at some point.
9	Governors asked NH if he was recording the reasons for children leaving.
9	Governors asked about the disparity between NH's assessment commentary and the validated SAT assessments.
9	Governors asked if NH was concerned that no children had achieved a 'greater depth' SAT assessment for writing.
9	Governors asked if attendance figures could also be expressed without the data for the two children with very low attendance, as in such a small school they skewed the figures considerably.
9	Governors asked what was in place to help Pupil Premium children
9	Governors asked if the issues identified in the Parent Survey were being tackled.
9	Governors asked if NH would like governors present at the SIAMS inspection