



MEETING OF THE ASPIRE ACADEMY COUNCIL

Date: Wednesday 7th December 2016
Venue: Aspire Academy
Time: 4.00pm

- Present:** Jill Gray (in the chair), Michael Carey, Sarah Elson, Bill Greene, Bob Keen, Ryan Sheldon, Carole Sweeting, Lisa Shuttleworth-Brown (Principal), Colin Simkins (Executive Principal)
- Together with:** Phil Birch (Executive Principal Designate), Tony Nicholson (FCAT Deputy CEO), Jane McCumiskey (FCAT Services Lead), John Woods (Assistant Principal – for part of the meeting), and Kath Buddle (FCAT Governance Administrator and minute taker)
- Apologies:** Wendy Middlemas and Sheryl Cardwell

Action

1. Preliminaries

In the absence of Wendy Middlemas, Jill Gray chaired the meeting. Governors were welcomed and introductions were made to Phil Birch, who would be taking over as Executive Principal in January 2017.

Apologies from Wendy Middlemas and Sheryl Cardwell were noted.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no specific declarations of interest for this meeting.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 14th September 2016 and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting were approved with the addition of TN's name on the attendance list. The following matters arising were noted:

3.1 Appointment of Safeguarding Governor (Item 4.2 on the previous minutes) – CSw had felt unable to commit to the role of Safeguarding Governor at this time and BG had agreed to take on the position.

3.2 Support for lower performing subjects (Item 5, page 3 on the previous minutes) – the Executive Principal reported that he had raised the potential to develop Quality Improvement Groups (QIGs) for foundation subjects with the FCAT Executive but it was felt that this might not be practical at this stage. The Deputy CEO explained that a QIG had been set up for PE and the Executive was also considering one for Design Technology and related subjects.

3.3 Training for Governors on Progress 8 (Item 5, page 4 on the previous minutes) – the Clerk confirmed that a Progress 8 session had been included on the Governor Training Programme for the current year. The Clerk was asked to explore the potential to also provide some academy specific training using Aspire's own Progress 8 data.

Clerk

Sarah Johnson, Head of English, joined the meeting for the next item.

4. Departmental Challenge

Governors reviewed a report from the Head of English on the progress of English



across each year group (Paper 4). The Head of English explained the academy's drive towards achievement of Grade 5 results (Progress 8) and the difficulties faced in motivating students to attain these since The Blackpool Sixth Form College (and other colleges) had agreed to accept students with Grade 4 results. JG explained that the College would rather students achieve Grade 5s but needed to ensure it was accessible to as wide a range of students as possible, hence the agreement to admit students with Grade 4 qualifications. However, students are being advised by the College staff that they need to be aiming to achieve Grade 5 results if they aspire to go to university.

Questions from Governors

Asked about the main issues that impacted on English results, the Head of English explained that students found report writing particularly challenging. The academy had made the decision to go with the AQA Board's syllabus which asked for students to provide written work from a point of view perspective rather than as a report and this would, hopefully, make a difference to outcomes. The Head of English had attended AQA hubs to modify assessments in order to make sure they were as rigorous as possible. Another concern for the academy was the level of reading of children on entry to the academy. Each Year 7 student was internally assessed, and, where appropriate, entered into the accelerated reading programme. Students were also benefitting from the 'Drop everything and read' initiative that had been introduced and the increased focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar in classes. Small group work on sentence structure was also being carried out.

In response to a question about phonics, the Head of English confirmed that a member of staff was in the process of trialling a phonics system. The Fresh Start Phonics programme was being used with the weakest students in order to improve their reading levels.

Asked if Aspire was working with other schools outside FCAT to help improve results, the Head of English confirmed that this was the case. The academy was receiving excellent support from Hodgson and Garstang Community Academies to move teaching and learning forward and to develop its middle leaders.

In response to a question about literacy, the Head of English explained that there was now a joint understanding across the whole academy that every member of staff had a responsibility for improving this and this was beginning to impact on outcomes. The extended writing strategy, currently in development, would help to embed this further. Staff would be focussing on marking for literacy and comprehension during a forthcoming showcase week.

Asked about the impact of the different initiatives mentioned, the Head of English explained that it was too early to judge how well these were working. However in Year 7, 81% of students were on target to achieve their expected outcomes which was a positive position. The Executive Principal confirmed that there had been an extensive cultural shift in terms of the numbers of students reading in school.

Asked about whether or not the links with primary schools was making a difference to their results, the Head of English confirmed that this was the case. The academy was working closely with four primary schools in particular and improvements had been identified at all stages.

In response to a question about more able Year 7 students, the Head of English explained that adapted schemes had been put in place for this cohort and teachers were 'teaching to the top level' in classes to make sure work was



appropriately challenging. The Principal explained that the Senior Leadership Team was working with all staff to make sure they were not repeating work already done in primaries. Primary Headteachers and Year 6 teachers were due to come into the academy over the next week to see what was being taught in Year 7 and to advise on future teaching content.

In response to a question about the impact of the 'Drop everything and read' initiative, the Head of English confirmed that this was being monitored. Reading ages were regularly tested as was the impact of accelerated reading programmes.

In response to a question about lower ability Year 11 students, the Head of English explained that staff had been into Montgomery High School to see how teaching of this cohort was being carried out there. Staff were considering the use of step up work materials to support students towards a GCSE qualification.

In response to a question about Year 7 data, the Principal confirmed that staff were more confident in the accuracy of the figures, particularly since working closely with colleagues at primary schools in carrying out assessments.

Asked about resources in place to support those students who did not have books to read at home, the Head of English confirmed that the academy provided reading materials for use both inside and out of school. Children were being encouraged to have a book with them at all times. The library was also available to children after school and at lunch times.

In response to a question about staff training in respect of literacy development, the Head of English explained that continuous professional development activities on embedding literacy across all subject areas was in place. However, there was still work to do to ensure every member of staff understood their role in improving literacy. The Principal explained that a Senior Leadership Team member had been given responsibility for embedding literacy across the academy and that whole school training was planned for the near future.

The Executive paid tribute to the Head of English and explained to Governors the huge amount of work that she had carried out in rebuilding the department following the loss of four senior members of staff and moving it forward in a very short time.

The Chair thanked the Head of English for her report and she left the meeting.

5. Finance and Resources

5.1 Management Accounts October 2016

The FCAT Services Lead had provided those Governors with an interest in finances with a detailed explanation of the accounts prior to the meeting. The Management Accounts for the first two months of the academic year were approved (Paper 5.1). The academy was c£20k ahead of budget due to Pupil Premium income and an additional £60k from this funding stream was due later in the year. Expenditure was behind budget due to the fact that more money was spent at the beginning of the year. The Principal reported that she had regular meetings with the Aspire Finance Officer in order to keep on top of the budget.

There was £69k more in reserves than had been forecasted from last year. The target for the end of the year was £704k in order to offset against the expected reduced student roll next year. The Principal reported that the academy was in a better position than anticipated with 633 pupils currently



on roll (104 in Year 11). Preliminary reports identified that 94 students had put down Aspire as their first choice secondary school for next year and there were also a high number of second and third choice applications.

The FCAT Services Lead highlighted the cost of alternative education provision (pupil exclusions, managed moves etc) as a key risk area. The academy had already spent £11k of a £35k budget for this. The cost of excluding or moving a student was more than the amount the academy received for the pupil.

Question from Governors

Asked if there were a lot of in year applications to join the academy, the Principal confirmed that this was the case and that the academy kept as much control as possible over these in order to reduce the impact. Many of the behavioural issues involved transient students.

In response to a question about how the academy aimed to reduce its staffing costs, the Principal reported that discussions on making four posts redundant were taking place. It was expected that reductions would be through natural wastage.

Asked about the in-year deficit, the FCAT Services Lead explained that this was being re-worked to take into consideration staff pay changes and energy costs.

Asked if the building was energy efficient, the FCAT Services Lead confirmed that costs could be lower but until an outstanding energy bill had been received, (still awaited after a year) it was difficult at this stage to accurately identify savings.

Asked about the strategy in respect of the amount of reserves held by each academy, the FCAT Services Lead confirmed that the FCAT Policy aimed for each academy to acquire 8% of its General Annual Grant (GAG) funding in reserves. A three year rolling programme had been developed to achieve this at Aspire.

5.2 External Audit Update

The FCAT Services Lead confirmed that the external audit of FCAT finances for the previous year had been completed and no issues had been identified.

5.3 Internal Audit Update

The FCAT Services Lead reported that the areas for internal audit for the rest of the year had been identified. These were business continuity, HR processes (follow up report), student records, with particular consideration of Pupil Premium spend, budgetary control and cash handling. Dates for the audits would be circulated as soon as they had been confirmed.

The Chair thanked the FCAT Services Lead for her reports and she left the meeting.

6. Principal's Report

Governors noted the Principal's Report (Paper 6.1). The Principal reported a significant amount of transience this term with some students joining from Special Educational Resource Services (SERFs) which had caused some disruption to the academy early on.



The main focus for the term had been on continuing the Executive Principal's strategy for improvement and to ensure that his retirement and the promotion of the Deputy Principal to the post of Principal did not impact on this. A lot of staff had already experienced a significant amount of change over the last few years and had found the current situation unsettling.

The Principal reported that behaviour at the academy was good and students were now in a position to learn. External consultants had been invited into school to audit teaching and learning practice and to identify areas for improvement/focus. Clear action plans for Maths and Science had been developed and links with partner organisations to move these forward were in place. The roles and responsibilities of Senior Leadership Team members had been reviewed and a clearer structure developed.

Further work on improving the teaching and learning model at Aspire had been carried out by one of the Assistant Principals. Governors asked if the Deputy Principal who was leading on this could come to the next meeting to report on the impact of the new model on outcomes.

Clerk
(agenda)

Questions from Governors

Asked about the issues affecting some of the transient students, the Principal explained that, often, the reasons for their behaviour were hidden and took time to be identified before issues could be addressed.

Asked what she was doing to help alleviate staff concerns during the time of change, the Principal explained that the Executive Principal Designate had been into school to meet staff and to help develop the Self Evaluation Form (SEF). The Executive Principal reported that he had provided counselling to some staff who seemed particularly worried about the future.

Asked about how staff were managing to balance marking time with time for lesson planning/delivery, the Principal confirmed that this had been identified as an issue and a middle leaders mini conference to discuss how to make marking more efficient had been scheduled.

In response to a question about whether students were up to speed with changes to the assessment system, the Principal confirmed that this was the case. Students were taking ownership of their own work and understood the grades they needed to move on.

Asked for an explanation of the 'Golden Hour' as mentioned in her report, the Principal informed Governors that this was an exemplar lesson and what teachers should be aspiring to deliver every time. The Assistant Principal had developed criteria on what constituted such a lesson.

In response to a question about literacy, the Principal informed Governors that this incorporated Writing and Handwriting as well as Reading. However, writing skills were dependent on students acquiring good reading levels first.

Asked about the decline in punctuality, the Principal explained that this was due, mainly, to the current road works at Crossley's Bridge which was delaying traffic in the mornings.

Asked how attendance figures compared with those in other FCAT schools, the Deputy CEO explained that it might be more relevant to compare against national

Principal
(Report)



figures and suggested that this be provided for Governors at the next meeting.

The Assistant Principal: Achievement joined the meeting for the next item.

6b Data Collection Point 1

Governors asked the following questions on the data provided by the Assistant Principal from Data Collection Point 1.

Questions from Governors

Asked if he felt the academy was on track to meet its targets, the Assistant Principal confirmed that he thought it was. However, it still remained to be seen how national figures turned out. Progress against targets in Year 7 Maths was down but the grade boundaries for this subject had been high, and the data had been revised accordingly.

In response to a question about assessments, the Assistant Principal explained that there had been concerns about the accuracy of these and it had been an FCAT wide decision to find a different way of measuring progress.

In response to a concern about progress in Science, the Assistant Principal explained that staff were exploring options to provide more support in this subject including separating students who were causing low level disruption in class from the others in order for both to make progress. A lot of work to improve the quality of teaching was also taking place and the academy was working closely with good Science teachers at other schools on this.

RS gave his apologies and left the meeting.

Asked how the academy was handling poor performing teachers, the Principal confirmed that they were managed through a capability procedure with full involvement of FCAT HR. They were given performance improvement plans and provided with training and support to improve as appropriate.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Principal for his report and he left the meeting.

7. Strategy

7.1 Self Evaluation Form (SEF)

Governors discussed the SEF which was tabled at the meeting and queried some of the scores. Following a discussion, the Principal agreed to change the scores for behaviour to 3 (from 2) and 4 for student outcomes (from 3/4). The SEF would be updated after the next data collection point period and added to Governors Virtual Office for review.

Principal/
Clerk

7.2 Academy Improvement Plan

The Academy Improvement Plan was tabled. Governors noted the key priorities which had been Red Amber Green (RAG) rated. The Principal confirmed that there was a full action plan in place to support each priority.

Governors asked that the Plan be added to GVO.

Clerk

7.3 Admissions Arrangements

Governors approved the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) proforma (Paper 7.3a) for the academy which would be forwarded to Blackpool Council.

The admission arrangements for the new free school (Paper 7.3b) were noted.



7.4 Catering Procurement

The Executive Principal informed Governors of an FCAT wide catering contract which was out to tender. Aspire Academy would be involved in the second phase of this.

7.5 Feedback on FCAT Developments

The Deputy CEO provided an update on FCAT developments highlighting the following:

- Mereside and Claremont Primary Schools were both set to join FCAT imminently.
- There was some debate about the naming of the free school. Currently it was known as 'The Avenue Academy'.
- Felicity Greeves would be retiring as CEO of FCAT at the end of the month and would be replaced by Tony Nicholson. Governors passed on their best wishes to both Felicity and Tony.
- Unity Academy was hoping to be Ofsted inspected this year.
- The reputation of the Trust was growing and there had been approaches to join from a number of schools.

Questions from Governors

Asked if FCAT had identified a limit on the number of schools it would allow to join the Trust, the Deputy CEO explained that there had been an agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) for 15 and the organisation would meet this very soon. The Trust was looking particularly for a 'Good' or 'Outstanding' secondary school to join.

In response to a question about the academic progress of White Boys, the Deputy CEO reassured Governors that the Trust was aware of the data in respect of this cohort and was continually looking at strategies to improve this.

In response to a concern that the Trust might begin to replicate the role of the local authority, the Deputy CEO confirmed that this would not be the case. The Trust would ensure that bureaucracy was kept to a minimum and that the best people were employed to raise standards. Practitioners were expected to immerse themselves in their academies' priorities and ensure focus remained on improved student outcomes. FCAT was developing its own leaders to make sure that, moving forward, the best people possible were appointed to maintain continuous progress.

8. Governance and Leadership

8.1 Appointment of Vice Chair

Michael Carey was nominated as Vice Chair and this was approved. Governors congratulated him on the appointment.

8.2 Governor Training Programme 2016-2017

Governors noted the Training Programme for 2016-2017 (Paper 8.2).

9. Safeguarding

The minutes of the FCAT Safeguarding Board meeting held on 13th October 2016 were noted (Paper 9.1). The Clerk highlighted the fact that the main discussion had been around the increase in the number of children in Blackpool falling into Children in Need and Child Protection categories and the impact this was having on services.



Action

10. Health and Safety

The minutes of the FCAT Health and Safety meeting held on 22nd November 2016 were noted (Item 10.1).

11. Review of Risks

The following risks were identified:

- Accuracy of data
- The design and mechanism of the front door – highlighted as a potential safeguarding risk.

12. Any other business

The Principal circulated a timetable of activities planned for the DfE visit on the following Monday 19th December 2016. The Chair would be involved in some of the discussions.

13. Date and Time of next meeting

Day: Wednesday
Date: 15th February 2017
Time: 4.00pm
Venue: Aspire Academy

Signed: _____
(Chair)

Date: _____