



MEETING OF THE ASPIRE ACADEMY COUNCIL

Date: Wednesday 18th November 2015

Venue: Aspire Academy

Time: 4.00pm

Present: Wendy Middlemas (Chair), Michael Carey, Alana Frith, Bill Greene, Felicity Greeves, Bob Keen, Colin Simkins (Principal)

Together with: Jane McCumiskey (FCAT Service Lead) Kath Buddle (FCAT Governance Administrator and minute taker)

Apologies: Sheryl Cardwell and Catherine Hill

Action

1. Preliminaries

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and particularly Bill Greene, the new Sponsor Governor.
- 1.2 Apologies from Sheryl Cardwell and Catherine Hill were noted.
- 1.3 Bill Greene was formally appointed as a Sponsor Governor.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2015

The minutes of the meeting were approved.

4. Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda

- 4.1 **Access to Governors' website page** (Item 5.3 from the previous minutes) – Bob Keen confirmed that he now had access to the website page for Governors.
- 4.2 **Chair's meeting with Chair of Unity Academy** (Item 9.4 from the previous minutes) – the Chair reported that she had met with the Chair of Unity Academy about Unity Academy's recent Ofsted inspection and had received some useful advice about how the Academy Council might support an inspection at Aspire. She would be asking for specific members of the Academy Council to join her in an Ofsted working group which would meet with inspectors during an inspection.
- 4.3 **Register of Interests** (Item 9.5 from the previous minutes) – the Clerk confirmed that all register of interest forms for the new academic year had been returned.

5. Finance and Resources

The FCAT Services Lead provided a summary of the Management Accounts to the end of September 2015. There was a small surplus for September rather than the deficit projected at this time. However, it was very early on in the year and a budget deficit by the end of the year was still projected. Reserves were healthy at c£1million but forecast to drop to £300k by the end of the year. This was still in line with Educational Funding Agency (EFA) advice which was to retain at least one month's worth of General Annual Grant (GAG) funding.



Challenges

In response to a question from Governors, the FCAT Service Lead explained that Pupil Premium funding had decreased because of the size and profile of the new Year 7 cohort which was smaller than the Year 11 cohort that had just left the academy.

Asked if Pupil Premium funding was for students on free school meals, the Principal confirmed that this was the case. At Aspire, staff had to bid for money from the academy's allocation of funding and had to demonstrate how this would positively impact on narrowing the gaps in terms of academic achievement between Pupil Premium students and their peers. The use of funding was carefully monitored and this was a focus during Ofsted inspections.

In response to a question about national guidelines on the use of the funding, the Principal explained that, although there were no official guidelines, a substantial amount of good practice was shared across the sector. The academy had a good reputation on use of Pupil Premium funding, which had been verified by Sean Bullen, Headteacher at Millfield Science and Performing Arts College, a nationally recognised 'expert' in this field

Asked about numbers on roll, the Principal confirmed that there were 620 in total though this was still fluctuating and a final number was still to be confirmed. 600 had been the original number projected but there was still potential for new students to join the academy. The new building and facilities might be an attraction for some students and parents.

Asked about the potential to provide budget projections for the next 3 – 5 years, FG explained that this was possible but that the figures would have to be draft estimates. The academy was dependent on a number of environmental factors to maintain and develop its roll, including the high level of transience in Blackpool, new building developments and the profile of the catchment area.

6. Risk Register

The FCAT Services Lead presented the latest Risk Register report which had been Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rated. The scores had been developed in conjunction with John Topping, the Vice Principal and Risk Champion for the academy.

Challenges

In response to concerns from Governors about risks showing as 'Red' on the report, the FCAT Services Lead explained that these were not necessarily urgent matters, but areas that had been identified as needing maximum effort in order to bring about improvements. Scores were based on likelihood of the risk happening and the impact of that should it happen. It was expected that most of the risks would move to 'Amber' over the course of the year. There were no specific action plans in place for each of the risks, but strategic plans already included these as priority areas.

The Safeguarding Governor identified that problems being experienced with the front doors to the academy needed to be added as a new risk.

Following a discussion about Risk 13 (Failure to attract sufficient pupil numbers), it was agreed that this should be included as an agenda item for the next meeting, particularly in respect of the academy's ability to influence parental choice and linking this to contingency planning.

Clerk



7. Teaching and Learning

7.1 Pupil Premium update

The Principal provided a brief summary of the report provided by the Deputy Principal: Curriculum, Deborah Hanlon-Catlow on Pupil Premium. Paper 6.1). The Chair, in her role as Pupil Premium Governor, was working very closely with the Deputy Principal to monitor the effectiveness of use of funding and the academy's Pupil Premium programme was being regularly assessed by Sean Bullen the Head of Millfield Science and Performing Arts College, who was very satisfied with practices in place.

Challenges

Governors identified the need to provide information on Pupil Premium funding and activities in an accessible format, without acronyms, both on the website and in the academy newsletter.

Principal

Asked about the high level of dependency on Level 3 Teaching Assistants (TA3s), the Chair explained that their effectiveness was continually assessed during the regular reviews of activities.

Governors asked that their thanks and congratulations be passed on to the Deputy Principal: Curriculum for her work and commitment in this area.

Principal

7.2 Use of Year 7 Catch- up Premium

Governors noted the report on the use of Year 7 catch-up premium (Paper 6.4c) which provided additional funding for vulnerable Year 7 students following transition from primary schools. Cheryl Brindle, Headteacher at Breck Primary School, was due to work with the academy to help identify how achievement levels could be maintained and developed during Year 7. Nationally, there was a tendency for secondary schools to underestimate the level of teaching and learning taking place in primaries and to unnecessarily re-teach some areas in Year 7. The academy was looking at how it could support its teachers to move students forward in their learning over the year.

Challenge

Asked about the academy's success in moving students forward, the Principal explained that a significant number joined the academy with very low levels of ability and achievement, and needed a significant amount of support to catch up with their peers and the levels expected at this stage. Use of funding was tracked and assessed and the academy expected to see improvements.

Joanna Barnett, Director of Modern Foreign Languages joined the meeting for the next item.

7.3 Departmental Challenge: Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

Joanna Barnett, Director of MFL spoke to her report (Paper 6.3) which outlined the excellent GCSE results from the department. Results in A* - C grades had been 93% compared to a target of 89%, and at A* - A grade 21% compared to a 0% target. It was acknowledged that the presence of very experienced and committed staff had been instrumental in the academy achieving its results. Staff were currently focussing on getting students to complete their controlled assessments, which formed a major part of the final exam mark, early in order to concentrate on exam technique and practice.



Challenges

In response to a question about literacy development across the whole academy, the Director of MFL acknowledged that, generally, levels of ability in reading and writing was poor and that this influenced the potential of students to take MFL subjects. The department was working with colleagues across the academy to identify opportunities to develop literacy and to embed good reading and writing skills from Year 7 onwards. Listening and reading strategies were in place and consistent use of terminology was promoted in order to support improvement.

Asked if all students took French as a subject, the Director of MFL confirmed that the vast majority did. However, a small cohort of students, who were below their functioning reading age, had been withdrawn for additional literacy in Years 7 & 8. The MFL option was available from Year 9 onwards.

In response to a question about visits to France, the Director of MFL confirmed that successful visits had taken place in the past and was a priority area for the future. It was acknowledged that visits improved students' resilience to learning and provided opportunities to develop their understanding of different cultures.

Asked if students were given advice about the benefits of taking MFLs, the Director of MFL confirmed that visits from external agencies, including UCLAN, took place and students were provided with information at the beginning of Year 8 in readiness for taking the option in Year 9.

Asked about the numbers of students with English as a second language, the Director of MFL confirmed that there were a number of Polish students who had taken the Polish GCSE qualification. The changing demographics of the local population would help to promote MFL as an option in the future.

Governors thanked the Director of MFL for her report and congratulated her and the department on a successful year and she left the meeting.

Ben Lavelle, Director of Expressive and Performing Arts (EPA) joined the meeting for the next item.

7.4 Departmental Challenge: Expressive and Performing Arts (EPA)

This was the second visit of Ben Lavelle, the Director of EPA to the Academy Council in response to concerns raised by Governors about the disappointing performance of the department prior to, and following, the last GCSE exams.

The Director of EPA tabled an action plan outlining the current performance in EPA subjects, targets for the year and interventions in place to ensure improvements in 2015-16. The Principal reported that some subjects had been moved out of the department e.g. Art which allowed further support in the remaining ones. There was a greater focus on critical analysis in Drama and listening, appreciation, composing and appraisal in Music and in completing coursework earlier in order to concentrate on exam performance. After school sessions had also been scheduled to provide additional support to key students.

Moderation processes and tracking systems had been completely revised in order to encourage more accurate predictions and staff had received



training on these. Some structural changes to timetabling and testing after the completion of units had been introduced. The Director of EPA was also meeting with subject heads on a weekly basis in order to monitor progress and identify areas of concern earlier. It was noted that some interventions put in place over the previous year had not been effective and these were being reviewed. The academy had received, and was acting on, advice from Lytham St Annes High School on the Drama curriculum choice, preparation for exams and structure of programmes of work, including for lower ability students.

The Director of EPA felt that, in the past, he had not monitored closely enough the progress of students across the different subject areas and had, wrongly assumed that everything was in order, hence the reason for initiating weekly meetings with heads of department. He also felt that the Year 11 cohort had been particularly weak and had not performed in exams.

Some progress had been made this year and the majority of coursework would be completed by the end of this term in order to provide adequate focus for students in preparing for exams. However, the Director of EPA acknowledged that performance in some areas was still poor.

Challenges

In response to a concern about targets set for this year that seemed to be unrealistic given the last GCSE results, the Director of EPA agreed to review these and bring back revised two levels of progress targets to the next meeting of the Academy Council. The Chair explained that Governors needed to see targets for expected levels of progress for all students, including those that might not achieve A* - C GCSE grades.

BL

In response to a question about the quality of teaching across the different subjects, the Director of EPA reported that in Dance and PE teaching was good. However, in Music and Drama, this was less so. Governors were not convinced that this was the case and requested that the Director of EPA ensure that staff, including across his own subject, PE, were made aware that they were responsible for delivering outcomes and that outcomes were based on the quality of teaching as well as the ability of the cohort.

Asked about the schemes of work, the Director of EPA confirmed that there were a number of subjects with only one teacher and that this made it difficult to support progress as they were working in isolation without the benefit of colleague support. There was potential for teachers working on their own to over predict progress. Governors agreed with this and asked that the Director of EPA ensure that all staff across the department were brought up to speed with requirements and that appropriate moderation was taking place across all subjects, including PE.

Asked if he felt that there were any training issues across the department, the Director of EPA reported that he thought that Drama and PE staff might be in need of training on moderation, but that for other areas they were fully skilled. However, he acknowledged that their outcomes needed to improve and that there might be training needs for staff across the other subjects too. The Executive Principal reminded the Director of EPA of the need to ensure cross moderation with 'Outstanding' institutions including Hodgson Academy that had an excellent reputation in EPA.

Asked about whether the department was working with other departments to



identify opportunities for cross curricula activities, the Director of EPA acknowledged that there was work to be done to increase this. Governors voiced their opinions of the benefit of working with other teams to improve levels of literacy, written work and communication skills, all of which would benefit outcomes in EPA subjects.

Governors were pleased that coursework was being completed earlier, but were still very concerned about the level of progress and the need to accelerate this, including across PE. They felt that, compared to progress in other subject areas, EPA was not moving forward quickly enough and that outcomes needed to improve.

Governors thanked the Director of EPA for his report and he left the meeting.

Following this item, and in response to a question from Governors, the Principal confirmed that a considerable amount of support had been, and was continuing to be, provided to the Director of EPA to help secure better outcomes, including changing the line management structure. It was noted that line management had been changed and the Deputy Principal: Student Welfare, Behaviour & Attendance was now supervising the Director of EPA.

7.5 Principal's Report

The Principal outlined the key points from his report (Paper 6.4) highlighting the move to the new premises which had gone well. The academy was due to lose two key members of staff, including an Assistant Principal to Highfield Humanities College and the Director of Special Educational Needs and Disability to an Assistant Headship in Wigan. Their duties would be distributed across the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in the first instance. Neill Oldham, a teacher with vast experience in this area, would likely take over as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO).

The academy was further embedding its 'PAUSE' (Punctuation, Attendance, Uniform, Safe and Sensible Behaviour and Exam Performance and Expectation) ethos which was making a huge difference to attendance and behaviour across all year groups. Punctuality and levels of persistent absence had also improved. The numbers of fixed term and permanent exclusions had also reduced. The focus at the moment was on improving the quality of teaching, marking and student preparation for exams.

John Woods, Assistant Principal: Data Progress would attend the next meeting of the Academy Council to provide an update on attainment data.

Challenges

In response to a question about Aly Spencer, who would be carrying out a whole school review of the quality of teaching at the end of the month, the Principal explained that she was formerly an outstanding teacher from Blackpool Sixth Form College, and now Head of School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) at Fylde Coast Teaching School (FCTS). In this role, she had responsibility for supporting newly qualified and recently qualified teachers across FCTS, and had the potential to deploy good new trainees to FCAT academies. The academy was also taking advantage of the Teach First programme, a national initiative which was fast tracking the best qualified recent graduates into teaching. There were three Teach First graduates currently placed at the academy.



In response to a question about the small Year 8 cohort, the Principal acknowledged that the academy was vulnerable to potential incoming students because of the small numbers.

In response to a request, the Principal agreed to provide information on fixed term exclusions by year group in order for Governors to identify any specific trends in future.

Asked if he felt that the move to the new premises had helped to improve punctuality, the Principal acknowledged that this might have been the case but he could not be sure. A lot of work with parents had taken place prior to the move to focus on the importance of attendance and punctuality.

8. Strategy and Governance

8.1 Governor Skills Audit

The Clerk presented a brief report highlighting current skills based on five of seven Governors. The Academy seemed to be skilled in finance and accounting, strategic planning and management and leadership with, at least a working knowledge of governance, education, employment and equality and diversity. Safeguarding seemed to be a particular area in need of strengthening.

A training programme for governors was nearing completion and would be circulated over the next few weeks.

Governors thanked Alana Frith for delivering a session on Aspire Academy data the previous week which had been very well received.

8.2 Self Evaluation Form (SEF)

Governors received and noted the SEF which was a live document linked to Ofsted inspection themes (Paper 7.1). Governors felt that the document needed to include a statement as to why the academy was not meeting national floor standards and what the academy was doing to address this. The Principal agreed to incorporate this.

SLT had assessed the different categories and were confident that the academy was moving towards a Level 3 (Requires Improvement) Ofsted grade. However, significant improvements in academic achievement were required before the academy could aspire to a Level 2 (Good) grade.

Challenges

Asked if he thought there was capacity for further improvement, the Principal said he felt that there was and he expected a rapid improvement this year.

Questioned about the low marking for attendance on the SEF, the Principal explained that the document was based on last year's performance but that the document was constantly reviewed to take into consideration developments and new data and there would be opportunities to revise this.

8.3 Chair's feedback

The Chair tabled a paper with a proposal aimed at supporting the SEF from a governance perspective. She advocated the development of a task group to reflect key themes within the Ofsted inspection criteria and asked for volunteers to take up places on the group. This would then be the group that met with inspectors at inspection time. Unity Academy had used a



similar approach which had proved successful.

Governors were provided with information about the development of a secure online site for holding Academy Council documents in one place and for governors to access papers and communicate with each other outside of meetings. The Chair was looking into the potential to install 'Governors' Virtual Office' (GVO) software to this effect and would be arranging for a demonstration to take place shortly.

The Chair tabled a Governance SEF which outlined actions for the Academy Council to carry out. Governors were asked to return any proposed amendments to the Chair directly. Volunteers to take part in a learning walk and a book scrutiny exercise were requested.

8.4 Progress against the Academy Improvement Plan

Governors noted progress against the Academy Improvement Plan (Paper 7.6).

In response to a request from Governors, the Principal agreed to include staff development priorities on the plan.

Principal

8.5 Appointment to vacant staff governor positions

Governors approved an advert to go out to staff requesting expressions of interest in the two vacant staff governor positions (Paper 7.7).

9. Safeguarding

Governors noted the minutes of the FCAT Safeguarding Board meeting held on 16th October 2015 (Paper 8.1).

The Safeguarding Governor provided an update on safeguarding matters, highlighting the following:

- a child protection audit was currently being carried out with the Deputy Principal: Behaviour.
- the academy was aiming to apply for safeguarding quality mark status next year.
- external peer assessments, supported by FCAT Safeguarding Board partners would be introduced to further improve safeguarding practices.
- Safeguarding information needed to be included in the annual report to parents.
- Safer recruitment training needed to be reissued. The Clerk agreed to discuss the matter with the HR Business Partner.
- The Safeguarding Governor would be attending Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) training and training on the Prevent Strategy over the next few weeks.
- Neill Oldham had been nominated for the 'Unsung hero' award supported by Blackpool and The Fylde College and British Aerospace.
- The Single Central Record had now been revised and robust case worker protocols were in place. The Safeguarding Governor thanked Lisa Shuttleworth-Brown, the Deputy Principal: Behaviour for her excellent work on this.
- Year 8 students would take an external e-safety qualification over the year.
- A number of virtual safety issues had been identified and the academy was aiming to introduce geo-fencing software to alleviate some of the problems.

Clerk



Governors thanked the Safeguarding Governor for her report.

10. Review of Risks

The following new risks were identified:

- Safeguarding issues associated with the new front doors
- E-safety issues relating to students' ability to access inappropriate materials online
- Safer recruitment training updates required for appropriate staff and governors.

11. For information

Governors received and noted the FCAT Pay Policy (Paper 10.1) as requested at the previous meeting.

12. Date and Time of next meeting

Day: Wednesday
Date: 20th January 2016
Time: 4.00pm
Venue: Aspire Academy

Signed: _____
(Chair)

Date: _____