



## MEETING OF THE ASPIRE ACADEMY COUNCIL

Date: Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016  
Venue: Aspire Academy  
Time: 4.00pm

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**Present:** Wendy Middlemas (Chair), Sheryl Cardwell, Alana Frith, Bill Greene, Bob Keen, Colin Simkins (Principal), Felicity Greeves (Executive Principal)  
**Together with:** Kath Buddle (FCAT Governance Administrator)  
**Apologies:** None  
**Agreed Leave of Absence:** Michael Carey

### 1. Preliminaries

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2 It was noted that, due to a serious illness, Michael Carey had been given an agreed leave of absence from Academy Council meetings until he feels able to return.
- 1.3 The resignation of Catherine Hill from the Academy Council was noted. The Chair recommended the appointment of Jill Gray, Principal at The Blackpool Sixth Form College to take up the vacant position. The Academy Council agreed the recommendation subject to approval by the Fylde Coast Academy Trust Board of Directors.

### 2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

### 3. Minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2015

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting were approved with an amend at Item 7.4 on Page 5 – first question under the ‘Challenges’ paragraph. This should read ‘The Director of Expressive and Performing Arts agreed to review and bring back revised **three** levels of progress targets’ (rather than two levels of progress targets).

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

- 4.1 **Aspire Risk Register** (Item 6 from the previous minutes) – the Principal confirmed that actions to attract sufficient student numbers to the academy had been factored into the Development Plan. Cheryl Brindle, Headteacher at The Breck Primary School was supporting the academy’s transition programme and there had been a good response to the academy’s open day. It was also expected that the academy would secure additional pupil numbers as a result of oversubscriptions to the other FCAT academies.

In response to a question from Governors about the impact of a reduction in student numbers on the budget, the Executive Principal confirmed that the projected funding would remain at a steady level in the medium term.

- 4.2 **Thanks to staff** (Item 7.1 from the previous minutes) – the Principal confirmed that thanks to staff for their contribution to the Pupil Premium Programme had been passed on.

Action



- 4.3 Fixed term exclusions** (Item 7.5 from the previous minutes) – the numbers of fixed term exclusions by year group had been included in the Principal’s Report as requested by Governors.
- 4.4 Self Evaluation Form** (Item 8.2 from the previous minutes) – the Principal confirmed that a statement on why the academy was not meeting national floor targets and what the academy was doing to address this had been added to the SEF.
- 4.5 Academy Improvement Plan** (Item 8.4 from the previous minutes) – the Principal explained that staff development priorities had not yet been included in the Development Plan but would be added.
- 4.6 Safer recruitment training** (Item 9 from the previous minutes) – the Clerk confirmed that safer recruitment training for staff and governors had been scheduled.
- 4.7 Use of Year 7 Catch-up Premium** (Item 7.2 from the previous minutes) - the Principal reported that the academy was working with Cheryl Brindle, a National Leader in Education (NLE) and Headteacher at an outstanding primary school, on the use of Year 7 catch-up premium. Greater support for transition from primary to secondary was a priority area for Blackpool Challenge and the academy would be working with a range of feeder schools to identify and address areas for improvement and observe good quality primary teaching practice. SC offered the academy the opportunity for staff to visit Waterloo Primary Academy.

**Question from Governors**

Asked about the how the academy was dealing with the increasing numbers of students with English as a second language, the Principal explained that a specialist Teaching Assistant (TA) had been appointed to provide support in this area.

**5. Finance and Resources**

**5.1 Management Accounts to end of November 2015**

The Executive Principal provided a summary of the financial position. It was noted that some Pupil Premium funding had yet to be attributed and that payments for staff attending a recent open day had not originally been budgeted for. Contingency funding for next year was also needed to counter any reduction in admissions.

The Executive Principal drew governors’ attention to the high staff to student ratio at the academy (12.8 compared to the 16.5 national average) and the need to address this longer term. The Principal reported that three staff had left at Christmas and would not be replaced at a saving of c£140k per annum. The academy was continuing to review staffing as a priority.

One of the Governors recommended a recently published document by the Education Funding Agency - ‘Schools’ Financial Efficiency: top 10 planning checks for governors’. The Clerk agreed to circulate the link.

Clerk

**Action: link shared with Governors 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016.**

A conference on supporting schools’ financial health was also due to take place in Manchester on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2016. The Clerk agreed to check the details with the FCAT Services Lead and get back to interested Governors.

Clerk



Action: Information shared with interested Governors, January 2016.

### Question from Governors

Asked about the potential to provide a 3 – 5 year projected budget/contingencies paper for Governors to consider, the Clerk agreed to discuss the matter with the FCAT Services Lead in time for the next meeting.

Clerk

Action: confirmation that 3 – 5 year projections are being included in the budget process for each academy.

*Leonie Stevenson, Director of Humanities joined the meeting for the next item.*

## 6. Teaching and Learning

### 6.1 Departmental Challenge: Humanities

Governors received an update on developments within the Humanities Department from the Department Director, Leonie Stevenson. The Department was performing well and had been asked to join a North West Hub to showcase excellent teaching in Geography in order to inform Ofsted inspections.

The Director of Humanities explained that the Department was focussing on improving the quality of teaching and learning across all subjects and in encouraging innovation in teaching. Teaching was consistently good to outstanding across the Department. New Heads of History and Religious Education had been appointed and staff were hopeful of good GCSE exam results.

### Questions from Governors

In response to a question about the structure of teaching across the Department, the Director of Humanities confirmed that each member of staff specialised in their own subject area rather than taught across all disciplines.

Asked about the Department's role in the FCAT Humanities Quality Improvement Group (QIG), the Director of Humanities explained that, following the recognition of the Department's outstanding teaching standards in Geography, she attended this group to share good practice and help promote the enjoyment of learning across all Humanities subjects.

Asked about successful tools and techniques employed by the Department, the Director of Humanities explained that the Department did not overly rely on the use of technology in class but that colleagues got on well with each other and provided support and encouragement when required. It was also important that lessons were interesting and challenging for students and that they were introduced to new experiences in order to keep their learning fresh.

In response to a question about opportunities to promote literacy in lessons, particularly for Pupil Premium students, the Director of Humanities confirmed that all teachers in the Department had expertise in literacy and that extended writing was a core component of all Humanities subjects. The Department had recognised that students were very able in terms of their vocal skills but needed support to improve their writing skills.



Asked about whether she felt the staff had enough time to improve the academic progress of students over the time of their stay at the Academy, the Director of Humanities confirmed that there was nothing more that her Department could do to support change. The level of literacy marking was very strong and there had been significant progress, especially amongst special educational needs (SEN) students.

Asked whether the move to the new building had posed any problems for the Department, the Director of Humanities acknowledged that staff had had to leave a vibrant Humanities corridor area at the previous site but that they were in the process of developing classrooms to provide inspirational environments for learning. The Department's current position near to the Travel and Tourism and IT Departments allowed opportunities for staff to integrate with other colleagues to enhance the Curriculum.

In response to a question about GCSE specifications, the Director of Humanities confirmed that these had been developed. The Academy was using the AQA Board examination syllabus for both History and Geography.

*The Chair thanked the Director of Humanities for her update and congratulated staff in the Department for their success to date. The Director of Humanities left the meeting.*

#### 6.2 **Departmental Challenge – Expressive and Performing Arts (EPA)**

The Principal provided an update on the progress of the EPA Department, confirming that the achievement targets set for the Department at the beginning of the academic year would remain on place. The Director of EPA had less subjects to manage this year so should be able to focus on any areas of concern.

*John Woods, Assistant Principal: Achievement and Deborah Hanlon-Catlow, Deputy Principal: Curriculum joined the meeting for the next items.*

#### 6.3 **Curriculum Plan 2016-2017**

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum highlighted the key points from a confidential document outlining the Curriculum Plan for 2016-2017 (Paper 5.5).

It was noted that the small cohort at Year 8 (72 students) could impact on Progress 8 results by the time students reached Year 11.

The Principal explained the importance of developing the Curriculum Plan early and to focus on the Academy's strengths. The Plan might also offer opportunities for students to partake in wider Curriculum activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme. A Wider Curriculum Opportunity Co-ordinator had been appointed to encourage engagement in this and similar activities.

#### **Questions from Governors**

Asked if the Curriculum Plan was based on arrangements in place at 'outstanding' institutions, the Deputy Principal confirmed that it was in line with Hodgson Academy's Plan. The Plan also took into consideration the Blackpool Challenge priority areas and increased focus on PSHE (Personal, Social, and Health Education).

In response to a question about spare capacity within the Year 8



Curriculum, the Deputy Principal agreed to consider using this to provide additional literacy support.

Asked if Year 7 students were entering the Academy with some learning in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), the Deputy Principal acknowledged that the level of ability in this subject was relatively low at this stage and that the academy had to accelerate learning in this area across all year groups.

In response to a question about the progress of boys' learning, compared to girls, the Deputy Principal confirmed that boys did not seem to be able to concentrate as well as girls. The Academy had prioritised reading with boys across all year groups as a way of addressing the gender imbalance.

Asked about those subject areas with small numbers of students, the Deputy Principal confirmed that some of these would need to be withdrawn in order for the Academy to provide value for money.

Following a discussion on the potential to provide a 'Certificate in Personal Effectiveness' qualification, the Deputy Principal agreed to consider the use of Pupil Premium funding to deliver this.

#### 6.4 **Pupil Premium update**

The Deputy Principal: Curriculum provided information on Pupil Premium activities.

##### **Questions from Governors**

Questions were raised about the continuing gap in outcomes between Pupil Premium and non Pupil Premium students (c30%), despite the range and quality of activities put in place to address this. The Deputy Principal explained that a considerable number of students (68% of whole school – 480 students) fell into this category. The Academy was looking at the effectiveness and quality of delivery of activities and focussing on improving the progress of students in English, Maths and Science in particular.

In response to a question about whether students were ready to learn when they came into school, the Deputy Principal confirmed that students were provided with meals in order to encourage attendance and to ensure they were prepared to learn.

It was agreed to review performance of Pupil Premium students again at the next meeting following the receipt of data from Data Collection Point 3 (mock examination results).

*Governors thanked the Deputy Principal: Curriculum for her reports and she left the meeting.*

#### 6.5 **Student Progress Update**

The Chair reported that the Ofsted Task Group (Governors) had met with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to discuss student progress. It was acknowledged that behaviour, pupil welfare and leadership were moving in the right direction and that the new Director of Student Welfare, Child Protection and SENDCo was beginning to have an impact in these areas. It was acknowledged that the academy had come a long way in 18 months and that the focus on student outcomes needed to continue.

The Assistant Principal: Achievement answered questions on his report

Clerk  
(agenda)



(Paper 5.3).

### Questions from Governors

Asked about whether the quality of teaching and learning was reflected in the data, the Assistant Principal confirmed that this was the case. There had been a downturn in results for Maths in Years 7 and 8. As a solution one of the Year 8 groups had been collapsed and a teacher withdrawn from general classroom teaching to focus on work with targeted groups. An inadequate teacher had also recently left the Academy. Some Year 7 groups had been restructured in order to accelerate the pace of learning. Whereas previously there had been a tendency for the Academy to keep introducing new initiatives to support learning, the focus this year was on upskilling children and parents to learn independently. A 'Revision Evening' for Year 7 parents had been scheduled as part of the support programme.

Asked about how the Academy would address the attitudes of some parents in respect of them providing support to students, the Assistant Principal acknowledged that, although the Academy could provide opportunities for further learning, it could not enforce attendance at out of school sessions and that improved parental engagement would take time to embed.

Asked if the Pupil Premium gap in attainment mirrored that of students at other FCAT academies, the Executive Principal reported that there was little or no gap at the other two secondary academies. The Assistant Principal explained that meetings of senior staff to identify progress and address poor performance of students at Aspire were taking place regularly. Parents were also being invited to attend the meetings to better understand their role in motivating students. The reduction in the number of subjects on the Curriculum would also allow for staff to better support students in priority areas.

*Governors thanked the Assistant Principal: Achievement and he left the meeting.*

### 6.6 Principal's Report

Governors noted the Principal's Report (Paper 5.4). The Principal confirmed that the move to the new building had gone well, though there were outstanding maintenance matters that needed to be addressed from the budget which John Topping, the Deputy Principal was leading on. Classrooms were also in need of display facilities. It was expected that developments to the Library and Resources area would be funded through Blackpool Challenge.

The Principal was impressed by the level of leadership across the Academy and the effectiveness of the staff on the Teach First programme. The Deputy Principal: Curriculum had been given responsibility for improving teaching and learning across the Academy.

### Questions from Governors

Asked about the problems the Academy was experiencing with the main front door to the building, the Principal confirmed that measures were in place to alleviate safeguarding issues as an interim measure until a permanent solution could be found.

In response to a question about members of staff on the upper pay spine,



the Principal confirmed that there were still a number of ineffective teachers in this group but that monitoring of their performance was taking place.

Asked about the significant difference in behaviour data between Years 8 and 9, the Principal explained that Year 8 was the first cohort to be admitted to the Academy and had not been subject to the culture of the previous two schools. They had really 'bought into' the new vision and 'Success culture'. It was noted that the number of fixed term exclusions had significantly reduced and that a more positive learning environment was in place.

## **7. Strategy and Governance**

### **7.1 Progress against Academy Improvement Plan**

Governors noted the Academy Improvement Plan (Paper 6.1).

### **7.2 Blackpool Challenge – Aspire Pledge progress**

Governors noted the Aspire Academy pledges as part of the Blackpool Challenge initiative (Paper 6.2).

### **7.3 Transition Project update**

Governors noted the Transition Project Action Plan for the Academy (Paper 6.3) which had been developed in collaboration with Cheryl Brindle. Feedback on progress would be reported to the Blackpool Challenge Board.

### **7.4 Business continuity update**

The Executive Principal provided an update on an incident taking place at Montgomery High School at the beginning of term. Improvements to communications and management of Social Media and the Press had been identified as learning points following the incident. Work was in progress to update emergency procedures in light of issues raised and the Business Continuity Plan was being revised with up to date staff and governor contact details. Practice on emergency procedures would also be carried out during the year.

It was noted that the Montgomery staff had responded well to the situation and Aspire Academy staff were thanked for providing their support during a difficult first week back after Christmas.

### **7.6 Chair's feedback on FCAT developments**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

## **8. Safeguarding**

Governors noted the minutes of the last FCAT Safeguarding Board meeting which took place on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015 (Paper 7.1). The Safeguarding Governor highlighted improved access to public transport for students following work done by staff at the Academy and a letter from the Chair of the FCAT Safeguarding Board to raise the awareness of safeguarding issues in respect of leaving children at bus stops on their way into school.

## **9. Review of Risks**

The following risks were identified:

- the accuracy of progress data/estimates
- the effectiveness of Pupil Premium activities
- the robustness of contingency planning
- the robustness of financial planning for future years bearing in mind the



potential reduction in student numbers.

Action

**10. Date and Time of next meeting**

Day: Wednesday  
Date: 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016  
Time: 4.00pm  
Venue: Aspire Academy

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chair)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_