



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BoD) OF THE RURAL CHURCH
SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST (RCSAT) HELD AT
BUNBURY ALDERSEY CE PRIMARY SCHOOL
ON 20th MARCH 2024
(Commenced 4pm)**

Directors in Attendance:

P Bostock	(PB)	Chair of Board of Directors
N Badger	(NB)	Executive Headteacher
B Holdcroft	(BH)	(Joined remotely)
P North	(PN)	
T Hayward	(TH)	
J Griffith	(JG)	

Also in Attendance:

B Brockbank	(BB)	Chair St Oswald's LGC
M Gate	(MG)	Chair Warmingham LGC
V Greenbury	(VG)	Chair Bunbury LGC
J Jones	(JJ)	Trust Business Manager
H Cummings	(Clerk)	

PART ONE

The meeting opened with a prayer.

1. APOLOGIES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB) ITEMS

There were no apologies for absence as all Directors were present. The Chair welcomed Jo Griffith to the meeting.

There were no additional items of part 1 business to consider.

2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the business of the meeting. General declarations of interest were recorded in full on GovernorHub.

3. MEMBERSHIP

- a) Directors noted that Andrew Denton had stepped down as a Director at the end of his term of office on 3/2/24. Jo Griffith had been appointed as a Director by Members at the AGM on 28/2/24.

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- b) There were no terms of office of Directors that were due to expire before the next meeting.
- c) Directors **approved** the appointment of Pauline Latchford to the St Oswald's LGC.

ACTION: Clerk to set up on GH and inform MJ to arrange email and training.

- d) Directors noted the resignation of Tim Boote from the St Oswald's LGC.
- e) Directors discussed the definition of a 'staff member' for the purposes of identifying who would be eligible to be a staff governor. It was agreed that to qualify as a staff member in this context, a person must be employed directly by the RCSAT, on either a fixed term or permanent contract.

ACTION: BB to feed back to interested party at St Oswald's.

- f) DBS and section 128 checks were in progress for JG and would be started for PL.
- g) JJ would be responsible for updating GIAS with the changes detailed above.

ACTION: JJ to update GIAS

4. ELECTION OF TRUST BOARD VICE CHAIR

BH was elected as Vice Chair of the Trust Board until the autumn term.

5. PART ONE MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The part one minutes of the following meetings were **agreed** as a true record, signed by the Chair and retained by the trust:

- BoD 22nd November 2023
- BoD 6th March 2024

Matters arising

The action log from the previous meeting was reviewed and all actions had been completed with the exception of the following, which were carried forward:

- Circulate slides from Governor Safeguarding training.
- Obtain 3 quotes for specialist legal support
- Draft a meeting protocol for review.

6. CHAIR'S POWER TO ACT

No actions had been taken on behalf of the Trust Board since the previous meeting, but the Chair had:

- Met with the Chester Diocesan Board of Education (CDBE).
- Been notified about 9 suspensions at St Oswald's.
- Dealt with a parental complaint at Warmingham.

7. PART ONE REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES AND REPORTS FROM GOVERNORS WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Directors had reviewed the minutes from each of the LGC meetings, and the committee Chairs added the following comments:

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Warmingham

MG reported that governors had expressed concern around the implications of the cost saving plans to achieve a balanced budget. However, the discussion had also considered the positive aspects, including the potential improvement in educational outcomes, and MG had emphasised the need for confidentiality and collective responsibility.

St Oswald's (STO)

BB reported that governors were deeply unhappy about the decision to re-submit the CIF bid; over-ruling the recommendation of the LGC. It was felt that the much-needed building work had been delayed yet again, without good reason since the chances of success with CIF bid were extremely small. Subsequent to that decision, governors had learned that the funds saved for the building project had been reduced in order to balance the trust budget, and as a result they felt unsupported by the trust.

PB apologised to governors at St Oswald's for the way in which the decision had been made, noting that it had been made on the basis that alternative plans were pursued at the same time. Directors understood the anxiety and anger at St Oswald's, and agreed that addressing the building issues was a priority.

It was noted that a response had been submitted to the Sport England objection to planning permission for the mobile classroom. A final decision was expected by 19th April, and future plans would be confirmed after that.

The LGC had also discussed the impact on staff of supporting children with behavioural needs, and the potential impact of future staffing reductions. BB concluded that the key issues at STO were space and staffing, and it seemed that progress in both areas was under threat.

Bunbury

VG reported that the informal workshop held in January had reviewed training needs and formulated a plan for monitoring, linked to the school development plan.

There were no further reports from committees, or recommendations requiring approval at this point.

There were no monitoring reports from Directors as these functions had been delegated to the LGCs.

8. FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE

Directors confirmed the following:

- a) The 2022/23 audited financial statements had been published on the school website by 31st January 2024.
- b) The auditor's management letter had been submitted by 31st December 2023.
- c) The 2022/23 accounts return had been submitted by 31st December 2023.
- d) The Admissions arrangements and Appeals timetable for 2024 had been published on the school website by 28th February, and a copy sent to the LA by 15th March.

Approvals:

- e) Directors formally approved the School Resource Management Self-Assessment which had been reviewed on GovernorHub and submitted by the deadline of 15th March 2024.

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To review:

- a) Monthly Management Accounts up to and including February 2024 had been circulated on GovernorHub for Directors to review. It was agreed that JG would take on this role following the retirement of AD.
- b) Budget Review

Directors heard that discussions had been held with the ESFA, after last year's budget forecast showed a potential budget deficit in year 3. As a result of the discussions, the trust had been identified as financially vulnerable, and was required to set a 3-year balanced budget. In order to achieve this, the trust had needed to find £264K of savings over a 3-year period, and the ESFA had made recommendations as to how this could be done.

The trust would be looking at income generation as well as cost savings, and the budget notes circulated on GovernorHub detailed the measures which would be implemented at each school. The emphasis would be on protecting the education of the children as far as possible.

Directors discussed the pressures faced by all small schools, and whether a change of government might make a difference to funding models or levels. However, it was noted that with a falling birthrate nationally, there would be an excess of primary school places within 5 years, so assistance for small schools was unlikely to be a priority.

9. SCHOOL CATERING

School meals were currently provided by Cheshire East Catering, but prices were forecast to rise considerably, and the service was expected to cease completely by March 2025 at the latest. Further information was expected at the end of April, but the trust would need to consider an alternative provider or look at the feasibility of in-house catering.

In-house catering was not felt to be a viable option, but most contracts included a management fee, which increased as the number of meals provided fell. This would significantly disadvantage small schools. In light of this it was hoped that the trust could be part of a larger contract, but further information would be shared as it became available.

10. PART ONE EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER'S REPORT AND MATTERS ARISING

The report had been circulated on GH in advance of the meeting and questions were invited. A governor noted the number of 'outstanding' lessons observed at Warmingham, and NB confirmed that she would be doing some quality assurance as the figure seemed high.

11. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS 2023/24

The school development plan for each school had been reviewed in detail at the relevant LGC meeting. RAG rated plans were available for Directors on GovernorHub.

12. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER/EXTERNAL ADVISER

There had not been a visit by the external adviser since the previous meeting.

13. STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE

Directors discussed clerking arrangements for the board and LGCs for the next academic year. It was agreed that it was important to have a clerk able to provide advice and guidance, as well as taking minutes, and proposed that costings be obtained from Cheshire East.

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ACTION: Clerk to provide costing when available.

14. TERM DATES FOR 2024/25

Term dates for 2024/25 had been approved at the BoD meeting on 22nd November 2023.

15. DIRECTOR'S REPORT SPRING 2024

The Director's Report had been circulated on GovernorHub earlier in the term and items raised at LGC meetings as appropriate.

16. GOVERNOR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

The training link Director had followed up with each of the LGC Chairs where governors had not completed the required safeguarding or Prevent training. The Chairs confirmed that they had discussed with governors as appropriate.

All LGC Chairs were aware of the need to develop knowledge and skills across the LGCs and were working with governors to identify appropriate training. However, it was noted that there was currently no access to online training modules, as the NGA Learning Link subscription had been discontinued due to lack of use.

ACTION: JJ to investigate online training options including SCHOOT

Directors agreed that a board self-review should be completed ahead of the summer term meeting.

ACTION: Clerk to source self-review form and send to Directors.

17. SCHOOL POLICIES

Directors had reviewed the following policies uploaded to GovernorHub for Spring 2024:

- RCSAT-P-035 Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions
- RCSAT-P-003-01 Behaviour in School Policy
- RCSAT-P-003-02 Exclusions Policy
- RCSAT-P-004 Relationships Education Policy
- RCSAT-P-005 Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy
- RCSAT-P-008 Data Protection Policy
- RCSAT-P-012-02 Allegations against Staff Policy
- RCSAT-P-018-07 Sickness Management Policy

All policies were **approved** with no amendments.

18. PLANNED RESIDENTIAL VISITS

All residential visits had received the necessary LA and LGC approval.

19. MEETINGS

The date of the next Board of Directors' meeting was agreed as Wednesday 10th July at 4pm, at Bunbury school.

Chair.....Date.....

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20. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to be discussed in part 1 of the meeting.

Meeting closed at 6.55pm.

Chair.....Date.....

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