Diptford School – Minutes of School Committee meeting, 9 December 2019 (adopted 31 January 2020)

Present: Roger Knight (chair), Jody Churchward (representing Lizzie Lethbridge), Jo Palmer, Rebecca Filtness, Janet Watts.

1. Apologies were received from Lizzie Lethbridge, Rachel Botell, Lucy Carrol, Price, Laura Bell and David Sayle. Carole Partridge has now left the village and has accordingly stood down from the Committee.

2. Roger welcomed Janet Watts, a governor for the Totnes group of schools within LINK with ‘link’ responsibility for Diptford, to her first meeting.

3. Although attendance was low, it was agreed to press on with the meeting.

4. The draft minutes of the previous meeting of 1 November 2019 were reviewed and adopted. Jody noted that the Open Day had attracted a few local parents with young children; this led to a discussion of the Nursery and whether it might be possible to accept younger children than is now the case. Roger noted that Lizzie had attended a meeting of the Diptford Parish Council and had explained to the Council the role and development of the LINK Trust and had reassured members of the Trust’s commitment to the School. He had heard from a couple of councillors that Lizzie’s presentation had been well received. Subsequently, the Council had resolved, subject to regulatory advice, to award a grant of GBP250 towards the play equipment replacement fund, further to an application from FODS. (Unfortunately, the National Association of Local Councils advised that such a grant would be inappropriate and the Council was obliged to reverse its decision.) Jody undertook to check with Lizzie whether she had spoken with the individual identified as a possible replacement for Carole as a representative of the community on the Committee.

The Role of the Local Governing Board

5. Roger asked Janet to explain for the Committee the current role of the local governing board within the Trust/Academy environment. Janet outlined the status of the LINK Multi Academy Trust and its recent growth. A CEO, responsible to a Board of Directors and supported by academy Executive Heads or Heads at individual school level, is responsible for operations. The CEO and the Heads are charged with cooperation across the MAT, to achieve efficiencies and quality benefits. There is still a role for governors, to provide checks and balances, although the relationship between them and the Directors and their respective responsibilites, in the new Academy world, is still developing.

6. Governance arrangements within LINK MAT are distributed geographically, in parallel with many of the operational arrangements, with Janet being a member of the Totnes Hub Board of Governors, along with Lizzie (as a staff representative) and, most likely in due course, Lucy (as a parent governor). Janet is designated as the ‘link’ governor for Diptford and thus has a particular interest in the school. Responsibilities are shifting between the governors and the Directors with some that were historically led by governors now taken up by Committees of the Board (albeit with governors’ input), eg quality, standards and curriculum.

7. Janet visits Diptford regularly. Her recent focus has been upon safeguarding, health and safety, and the school improvement plan (addressing the quality of teaching and academic standards). She expects her priorities now to be upon the improvement plan and on pupil premium (whereby some categories of pupil, eg those from military families, attract additional funds – Diptford has fewer such pupils than many schools). Janet said that neither she nor the governors collectively had had a particular focus of ethos and SIAMS.

8. Janet said that she had been pleased to read in recent minutes of the Committee a recognition that its role was not that of a ‘grumbling shop’ for parents, although parental feedback remains important, but is intended to be more constructive and an element of the governance structure. She wondered whether parents generally understood this; it was acknowledged that they probably don’t all do so and that work is required on communication in and around the school.

The Committee and the School’s Ethos Programme

9. Roger noted that he, with input from Lizzie, was increasingly aware of the potential role of the Committee in monitoring the school’s Ethos programme. In Lizzie’s absence it wasn’t possible to develop this thinking in detail but there was a discussion of the role of collective worship, focusing of the Christian and biblical underpinning of the school’s vision and values, and the alternative arrangements made for those ‘values’ pupils (five currently) who do not attend collective worship. Jody explained the arrangements, and noted that other pupils do ask why these values pupils do not attend. (Subsequently, in early January 2020, Lizzie, Rachel and Roger attended a cross-MAT workshop on Ethos Committee development.)

10. Rachel and Helen had recently observed collective worship sessions and had provided feedback to Lizzie. It is hoped that they can share their thoughts at the next Committee meeting.

Head of School Report

11. Lizzie had provided her Head of School report, which is attached at the end of these minutes. Roger had previously passed to Lizzie some positive feedback from parents with thanks for early notification of arrangements for end of year residentials, for the tree planting and for the enhanced teacher presence at after-school events. There had been some comment about recent issues with the lunch arrangements.

FODS Update

12. In Laura’s absence Roger reported on recent and upcoming FODS activities, including the successful quiz and raffle evening, which had maintained momentum in fund raising for new playground equipment. He noted that FODS is still holding funds designated for the accelerated reader scheme and for new staging in the playground; plans for the latter are progressing. Laura has put some proposals to Lizzie concerning the old sails, but FODS focus is very much on the playground equipment currently. Plans are in place for the Christmas craft activities and the parents’ lunch.

Engaging the Community

13. Lizzie’s attendance at the Parish Council meeting, the Council’s support for our fund raising efforts and the need to identify a representative for the Committee had already been noted. Roger additionally thanked Clare Moorman in relation to the School’s participation in the Christmas Tree Festival at Harberton and the teachers and Rachel for the School’s and FODS participation in the Angel Festival in the church. There had been only a few from the village at the quiz evening and not many returns for Bags2School, despite door to door leafleting.

Future Meeting Dates

14. Provisionally the next meetings will be held in the weeks beginning 20 January and 24 February.

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**Ethos Committee Meeting – 9.12.19**

**Head’s report – Lizzie Lethbridge**

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| **Pupil Numbers per year group** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Autumn 2019 | | Nursery | 8 (+2 in January) | | Reception | 10 | | Year 1 | 8 | | Year 2 | 9 | | Year 3 | 13 | | Year 4 | 7 | | Year 5 | 3 | | Year 6 | 8 | | Total: | 66 | |
| **Lunches** | Matt Matthew and I are both in constant contact with Devon Norse at the moment. Following a number of different temp staff, Norse have since organised the same, interim person. Unfortunately the cook, Helen, is also off sick with Bell’s Palsy which has exacerbated the issues. We now have a new person appointed for the Diptford service who is starting as soon as recruitment checks are done - and a regular replacement (one of their managers) is now in place to cover Helen until she is well. |
| **Events, trips, visits** | Coming up:   * Christmas dinner and FODS craft morning, along with Christmas Jumper day 11th Dec * Christmas service 5.30pm 12th Dec * General election – hall used – 12th Dec * Dippers theatre trip – 17th Dec * End of term Thurs 19th – 2pm finish * Inset day - Mon 6th Jan * Pupils return to school – Tues 7th Jan * Hawks tree planting 17th Jan * Tag rugby 24th Jan * Book fair 5th Feb (1 week) * NSPCC school visit 11th Feb * Y1/2 multi skills 13th Feb * Half term 17-21st Feb * Hi-five netball 25th Feb * Easter service 25th March, 9.30am |
| **Local Board** | We have a new Local Board Governor representative for Diptford, Lucy Baldwin (mum of Elliot). We are really pleased that now Diptford is represented on the Local Board. Thank you so much to Lucy! |
| **C of E school ethos**  **Christian distinctiveness**  **RE and World Views** | Collective worship monitoring:  Helen and Rachel come in to see CW in action. Their feedback was positive including:  -CW was very inclusive  -CW encouraged participation from all children.  -Children were encouraged to respect each other’s beliefs and views  -Children showed respect for teachers  -Children were familiar with the format  -CW was friendly and welcoming  -The theme of ‘joy’ was clear  Their questions included:  Q: What happens when the story isn’t from the Bible? We discussed the windows/ mirrors/ doors structure that underpins all CW. Always includes collective reflection and prayer – if children don’t want to pray, the expectation is that they reflect on the content/theme, what it means to them and are respectful.  Q: What do children do who don’t attend CW? Although, there isn’t a statutory need for any school to provide anything other than supervision if parents chose to withdraw, we choose to ensure the time is purposeful. The ‘values team’ meet to focus on values and world views. This is led by school staff.  We will be arranging another visit for all Ethos Committee members. Hopefully Rachel and Helen will feedback in person at the next meeting.  Lizzie, Sharon Lord (Central RE and SIAMS leas) and Jade Morgan (Diptford/ Harbertonford RE lead) monitored lessons which were found to be positive and centred on ‘big questions’. Children felt confident to explore their own and others’ beliefs and views and ask questions. Monitoring of RE books and scrap books is taking place today!  Our values:  Respect. Joy. Kindness. Courage. Community. Thankfulness.  Half termly focus. ‘Hidden’ values also taught in between.  Let Your Light Shine! |
| **Feedback** | Thank you so much for your positive feedback! I am reassured that a lot more is being discussed with teachers on a daily basis and I am always available (by phone or email if not at Diptford) to follow anything up as or when needed. Thank you as a committee for your support with this – the staff team really appreciate it. |