

ELEANOR PALMER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Minutes of the
Full Governing Body Meeting
Held on Wednesday 28 January 2015 at 6.30pm

Chair of Governors

Alice Barling Gasson

LB Camden

Boris Telyatnikov

Parent

Julia Hollis, Vice Chair

Kirsten Walton

Shanti Fricker

Vicky Starmer

Mark Peters

Staff

Kate Frood, Headteacher

Nancy Cumming

Community

Jennifer Allan

Tim Peake

Associate members

Fiona Crean

Natalie Stevenson

Also present:

Tania Voaden, Clerk

Rita Biddulph – Guest speaker and educational lawyer for LB Camden.

Neil Murphy – Guest legal advisor for LB Camden.

1.00 SPECIAL ITEM – GOVERNORS' LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Rita Biddulph and Neil Murphy had been invited to the meeting to talk about governors' legal and statutory responsibilities.

They gave a presentation to the Governors and also shared this in hardcopy.

The key points of the presentation included:

Complaints

- Rita Biddulph explained that Neil Murphy reviewed complaints received and was very good at extracting the essence of the complaint and advising heads accordingly.
- Neil Murphy advised that complaints should be responded to in the same form in which they were received (letter or email). He advised that it was not necessary to provide an immediate response and suggested that a time frame for response is outlined in the school's Communications Policy.

- Camden works on a 10 day period for response to letters of complaint and advised schools to follow this timeframe.
- Freedom of Information (FOI) requests require a response within 20 working days.
- The school must have a clear and efficient complaint procedure:-
Stage 1 - to the Head (informal)
Stage 2 - to the Chair of Governors (formal)
Stage 3 - to the Governing Body panel (formal)
- There was a discussion about whether a letter is required for a formal complaint and the difficulties around requesting a letter now that email was a more common form of written communication. Neil Murphy advised that the school should take a view on each case and determine whether to accept an email as a complaint.
- The Chair said that complaints sent through via the Governors' email address should be discussed with the Head in the first instance.
- The Head said that the school uses Camden's complaints procedures as a model.

Admissions

- The Head said that she thought that the legal procedures around admissions had been tightened but could still be strengthened.
- Rita Biddulph said that Camden Admissions could only act upon the information provided in order to investigate fraudulent applications.
- Fiona Crean stated that some boroughs did not apply the sibling criteria if the family had moved away from a school subsequent to the first sibling having gained a place.

Ofsted

- Ofsted expectations – Rita Biddulph explained that Ofsted were looking for a skilled Governing Body working within the new guidelines and regulations. This led to a discussion amongst governors about the balance of skills. The Chair noted that there had been a recent skills audit. Rita Biddulph commended this and said that it was important to identify any gap in skills in the Governing Body and share this with parents at any future parent governor elections to help inform their vote.

Governors' role

- Rita Biddulph reminded governors that they should not act as school inspectors and any observation of teaching must be made by formal arrangement. Governors could not criticise teachers nor comment on the quality of teaching.
- The core function of the Governing Body was to set vision and strategic direction, hold the Head teacher to account and ensure that financial resources were well spent.
- The Governing Body should comprise of committed Governors working as a team. Governors could be suspended for acting contrary to the ethos of the school

Voting

- Governors must be present to vote and proxy voting was not permitted.
- Associate members cannot vote.
- The Chair asked whether email could be used for voting if decisions needed to be made quickly. Rita Biddulph responded that governors must convene in order to discuss matters requiring a vote but the vote itself could take place through email.

7.15pm Boris Telyatnikov joined the meeting.

The Department of Education (DfE) has recently published supplementary guidance to its 'Keeping children safe in education' guidance. The supplementary guidance refers to 'disqualification by association' and raises the issue of staff being required to declare offences committed by people who live in the same household as them.

Governors discussed this and the Head asked for clarification whether the decision to ask staff to sign a declaration sat with the local authority or with the Governing Body. Rita Biddulph responded that as a community school Eleanor Palmer was required to follow the local authority guidelines. She stressed that staff were asked to sign a statement that stated

'to the best of my knowledge'. The statement needed to be signed by all staff on an annual basis.

Nancy Cumming asked how any information could be proved and Governors discussed this. The Chair said that the Camden proforma would be given to staff and that it was the duty of the staff member to sign it. The Head commented that trust within the school is a great strength.

Rita Biddulph stated that it was the duty of a staff member to complete the proforma, but if they didn't it was not a disciplinary matter.

Other points raised-

- Governors' papers and the agenda should be dispatched 7 working days in advance of the meeting.
- The school does not have to accept a governor put forward by the local authority but the Head and Chair must agree the appointment.
- Kirsten Walton asked for clarification as to whether personal emails should be used for school business. After discussion it was agreed that they could be used.

The Chair thanked Rita Biddulph and Neil Murphy for their contribution and they left the meeting.

2.00 There were no declarations of interest.

3.00 Minutes of Previous Meeting held on Wednesday 28 November 2014

3.1 Corrections

Page numbers were omitted in the November Governing Body minutes.

Matters Arising

Actions completed with two items for carryover.

Accessibility plan – CARRYOVER. The Head and Tim Peake to research further and complete.

Policy on staff rewards – CARRYOVER. Will continue as an agenda item for Staffing Committee

4.00 CHAIR'S REPORT – the document 'Chair's Report 28th January 2015' was shared prior to the meeting.

4.1 The Chair thanked Governors and the Head for the work on ensuring policies were up to date and in a 'policy bank'.

4.2 The Head had shared the draft SEF (self-evaluation form) and the Chair advised Governors to review it in detail.

4.3 In encouraging Governors to seek ways to improve their involvement in school and community life the Chair asked governors to join her in attending Parents' Evening. She will set up a table at the entrance with refreshments and outline a few questions to ask to welcome opinion.

- **ACTION** Governors to email the Chair to volunteer to join her at Parents' Evening.

4.4 Admissions Consultation response – The Chair and Head were drafting a response to the consultation and this would include an expression of disappointment that Camden were not taking up the proposal that pupil premium children should have priority for Reception places.

- **ACTION** The Chair to share the consultation response with Governors for feedback and input.

5.0 HEAD'S REPORT

The document 'Head's Report 28 January 2015' had been circulated to governors prior to the meeting.

5.1 Staffing

The Head highlighted the significant reduction in the leadership team with Sally Hill on maternity leave and with Anna McGrory leaving. Whilst this change was anticipated and planned for there was a noticeably increased workload for the remaining members of SLT (Senior Leadership Team). Julia Hollis asked how the loss was being felt. The Head responded that Anna had been doing a lot of Teaching School work and non-class based support. She had been mentoring Beth Elliot in her NQT year and whilst Beth missed her, having had a term of great support she no longer needed that level of help. Fiona Crean said that the workload had increased and was doable and enjoyable. She noted that in the absence of Sally Hill she was spending more time in Early Years. Natalie Stevenson feedback that both departures were planned for and that as NQT Rosie Thomson was getting stronger, the workload was becoming easier to balance between class, Teaching School and SLT.

5.2 Curriculum Development

The Head shared summary data on standardised maths tests that had been introduced in December. She said that the children were comfortably performing at the level they were expected to be and that the test would be repeated in the Spring term.

Mark Peters challenged where the school's performance sat within national statistics. The Head responded that she had not seen the national distribution data.

- **ACTION** Head to chase national statistics.

5.3 Finance

The Head informed Governors that as the school approached year end, finances were in good order. Camden had been subsidising service level agreements (SLAs) between contractors and schools but this is not continuing and they are now priced at cost. This has been reviewed by the Resources Committee and the school is continuing with the Camden SLA using a company called BAM FM for site maintenance. Experience thus far of service from BAM FM has been positive.

5.4 Teaching School

The Head updated governors on School Direct recruitment and the work in Teaching School as outlined in her report. The Head told governors that in addition to work within the LA there were opportunities to work outside the borough. The school is hosting another visit from Jersey heads in March and the Head expressed a view that there is a lot of opportunity to work with schools who gain little support as a real difference can be made.

5.5 Safeguarding



- 5.6 Julia Hollis asked the Head how the staff were feeling about the forthcoming Challenge Partners peer review. The Head replied that the staff knew when it was and had prepared and also knew that the school would gain from the experience.

6.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT

The committee minutes dated 15 January 2015 were shared in advance of the meeting.

- 6.1 Julia Hollis informed Governors that the committee had reviewed and approved the Model Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy from Camden and it was agreed that the Head would annotate the policy and add a cover page with specific reference to Eleanor Palmer.
- 6.2 Revised Model Capability Policy for Schools and Model Capability Procedure for Schools was approved.
- 6.3 The E-Safety policy required a more detailed review which was on the committee agenda for March 2015.

7.0 PPC COMMITTEE REPORT

The minutes of the PPC Committee dates 14 January 2015 had been shared in advance of the meeting.

7.1

Vicky Starmer updated the Governors of the first session of the Parental Engagement Forum (PEF) set up to help find out more about how to engage harder to reach parents.

She reported that the group had targeted parents to invite and that the meeting had gone well. Feedback had included an interest in a homework club and for more

opportunities for parental courses. Suggestions included employment advice surgeries, language and computing courses.

The Head responded that a homework clubs would require parental support and an established rota. Vicky Starmer said that she was looking at how other schools ran homework clubs and whether lunchtime clubs could be considered.

Vicky Starmer commended teaching assistant Lisha Siddiki for her work with the group and that as a Bengali speaker she was a great asset for enable Bengali families with limited English to have a voice.

8.0 RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT

The committee minutes 8 January 2015 were shared prior to the meeting

Tim Peake summarised the minutes for the governors.

- 8.1** He informed governors that he had attended a meeting on solar panels, also attended by School Business Manager Sarah Ewins. He commented that there is a drive in Camden to reduce the carbon footprint and that there was discussion on maximising the clean energy generated within the borough. Plans under discussion included the introduction of solar panels into schools, with schools either paying for the panels in full and taking the energy and any profit generated. There was also a hybrid version which is part funded by Camden and by the school, with Camden then having a proportion of the profit. Tim Peake explained that the introduction of solar panels could not be done unilaterally as premises management was controlled by Camden. There was positive opinion amongst governors about improving uses of energy but some expressed reservation as to whether parents would feel strongly enough about solar panels to fundraise for this purpose. Tim Peake said that it was positive that the local authority were focussing on upgrading buildings, energy efficiency and looking at a sustainability drive and generating income.

Tim Peake drew attention to the note in committee minutes that support staff had received a 2.2% pay increase from 1/1/15 in addition to a small bonus. He stressed that this did not have a significant budget impact

9.0 CURRICULUM COMMITTEE REPORT

The minutes of the Curriculum Committee dated 7 January 2015 were shared in advance of the meeting.

There were no further additions to the committee minutes.

10.0 AOB

10.1

Governors continued the discussions initiated with Rita Biddulph on 'disqualification by association'

Mark Peters drew governors' attention to a 'supplementary advice' document online which stated that 'schools may choose to ask staff'.

The Chair asked Jennifer Allan for guidance on this. She responded that to employ someone who is disqualified was an offence and that Ofsted will ask whether checks had been completed.

The Head confirmed that there was a column maintained in the schools' single central record to log whether a 'prohibition from teaching' check had been completed and when.

The Governors discussed how reviews could be made of 'household members' and Nancy Cumming challenged the purpose of this check and stated that teachers were not comfortable asking cohabitants for this information.

The Governors concluded that the wording 'no legal requirement to seek knowledge' was unclear and passive. The Chair suggested that Governors await the proforma wording when issued and that Boris Telyatnikov and Julia Hollis further review when received.

10.2 Shanti Fricker asked governors to consider whether future Governing Body meetings could start at 6pm rather than 6.30pm. There was consensus on this.

POLICIES APPROVED

- **Model Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy** – Review date January 2017
- **Revised Model Capability Policy for Schools and Model Capability Procedure for Schools** – Review date January 2017
- **Charging and Remissions** – Review date January 2017
- **Freedom of Information Act Scheme Template** – Review date January 2017
- **Freedom of Information Act** – January 2017