

Dorset Studio School

**Minutes of the Governors meeting
held on Thursday 14 January 2021, 4.00pm
held virtually via Zoom due to Covid-19**

Governors (GB)	*Kaye Chittenden; *Andy Daw; *Mark Gibbens (Chair); Avril Harrison; *Robert Lasseter; *Joanne Manley (Parent Governor); *Annetta Minard (Principal); *Luke Rake (Member); *Jim Tirrell (Member); *Martha Vigar
Other Attendees	*Vanessa Gifford (KMC Clerk); *Gavin Teasdale (Interim Finance Director KMC)
* <i>Indicates actual presence at this meeting</i>	
AGENDA ITEM	Challenge and Action
1.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
	Representatives of Kingston Maurward College (KMC) and The Thomas Hardy School (THS) reaffirmed their standing declaration of interests in items relating to the financial / legal relationships between those sponsoring bodies and the Dorset Studio School (DSS). There were no further interests declared.
2.	APOLOGIES
	Apologies for absence were received and noted from Avril Harrison.
3.	MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 1ST OCTOBER 2020
	The Governing Body (GB) APPROVED the minutes of 1 October 2020 as a true and accurate record and APPROVED the non-confidential minutes for website publication.
4.	MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES
	The following matters arising were NOTED : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Grievance Procedure still had to be shared to the GB.
5.	PRINCIPALS REPORT
	The following points were NOTED from the Principal's Report: Progress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Principal informed Governors that KS3 progress outcomes could only be based on KS1 prior attainment as there were no SATS last year due to COVID. A2 assessment will now be used to monitor progress and attainment moving forward.



	<p>Year 11: Progress 8 was noted as +0.32 which, if maintained, would be a positive outcome for this cohort. The Principal advised that she was ensuring that English outcomes were checked as they appeared high and a full moderation had been requested. The discrepancy between English and maths was significant and this is currently being analysed. Members questioned how the Principal considered the summer assessment would be undertaken and she advised that she considered it would be teacher assessment with the government setting small tests nationally, but clarification was awaited. She was ensuring that every student had a portfolio for every subject with 4/5 pieces of evidence which was being moderated internally and then external moderation would be accessed through THS.</p> <p>Year 10: this was a realistic assessment with attainment at 3.4 and Progress 8 just below zero. The Principal reported that there was concern with the English outcomes with the middle band which would be monitored.</p> <p>Year 9: the Principal advised that this was a brighter group with attainment just under +4 and Progress 8 at +0.37. This was quite high but reflected the higher ability of this group, and it was noted that there were less SEN students in this year group. The English and maths outcomes were considered an accurate reflection of this group.</p> <p>Year 8: these students were undertaking the new KS3 and had only completed two terms in school due to COVID. The Principal advised that the whole assessment process was different for Years 7 and 8 and it was agreed that this would be shared at the next meeting.</p> <p>Year 7: it was noted that 50% of this year group was SEN, when the norm was around a third. The Principal advised that there were no issues at this stage and she expected the SEN to reduce by Year 9 with additional support.</p> <p>Attendance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was noted that attendance online was strong at over 90%, with it being below 90% across the rest of Dorset. • Some parents had been keeping students at home prior to lockdown due to the pandemic and there was now a new code on the register to reflect this. • A lot of work was being undertaken with letters being sent out to chase up attendance issues and this had been verified and reported to Dorset Council. • Around 50 vulnerable students and those of key workers were currently attending classes at the school and following the online teaching. • It was suggested that with around 10% of students not currently in school learning there could be social issues in the future, and the Principal advised the normal benchmark was 94-95%. <p>Numbers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current applications for 2021/22 indicated that the school would be oversubscribed so the oversubscribed admissions process would need to be implemented. 	<p>AM</p>
--	--	-----------



	<p>Covid Testing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Principal advised that testing would commence the following week with the Army attending the school for the next two days to train and assist. • 3 additional staff members would have to be appointed to undertake testing on a full time basis so there were financial implications. • Schools were expected to carry out testing by the local authority, and it was anticipated that constant testing would ensure that more students could stay at school should there be a positive test result. Members questioned what would happen if a positive test was shown during the school day and the Principal advised that the student would be sent home and those around would have to self-isolate as indicated by the track and trace system. • The Principal thanked all the staff for their support as the guidance had been late in the day and had meant that planning had to be carried out in the holidays. <p>Remote learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was noted that remote learning was now becoming second nature for staff. All children experience their normal timetable, including tutorials and conferences. Safeguarding was being observed with two members of staff in each room and doors open. • Many lessons were being observed by others for quality assurance. • The Principal considered that the students were really engaging, however there was caution that the good attendance would carry on the longer lockdown was in place, and this would be monitored. The staff were introducing the occasional 'fun activities' to ensure that students remained focused with so much school enrichment being lost. • Members questioned what platform was being used and the Principal advised the school was using 'Google Classrooms' and this was working well. 	
6.	<p>LETTER FROM BARONESS BERRIDGE AND DSS RESPONSE</p> <p>The letters were NOTED and the GB considered the DSS joining a MAT and the following points were NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initially it was thought that any capital funding would be conditional on joining a MAT, however this was not the case. However, the DfE required the GB to review joining a MAT and to regularly report back to the DfE. • The Guidance paper: 'Taking the Next Step: Considering forming or joining a group of schools' had been shared prior to the meeting and the Chair asked if any clarity was required, and suggested that a Working Group was set up to review the guidance in detail and report back to the GB in due course. This was agreed and would be implemented as soon as possible. • The Governors continued to discuss with the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ There would need to be further investigation of best practice ➢ MAT's were an ideology of the current administration ➢ There was scepticism on whether it made schools any better. 	AD/VG



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After 8 years of being established, further evidence was required on the benefit of joining a MAT. ➤ It was agreed there was a lot to gain if a school was in special measures, to enable the sharing of best practice, but the DSS was a 'Good' school and striving to be better. ➤ It was acknowledged that the THS MAT worked well but it all depended on the schools involved and the structure. The THS Wessex MAT enabled the sharing of good practice and resources. ➤ There were concerns that the DSS would lose its specialism if it joined a MAT, and its strength was the support of its sponsors, KMC and THS, who understood the ethos and worked well together. ➤ It was agreed that the Working Group should have no pre-conceived ideas and should consider all options. ➤ The Principal considered that debate was important and there should be consideration whether it was right for the school at the current time. It was not a condition for funding although formal confirmation of any capital funding was still awaited. ➤ The Principal KMC suggested that other bodies than schools should also be considered. He added that he could not be a member of the Working Group due to the conflict of interest as the DfE had approached KMC for the freehold of the land, which would have to be agreed by the KMC Corporation. ➤ It was agreed that the members of the Working Group would be: Andy Daw (Chair); Mark Gibbens; Kaye Chittenden; and Joanne Manley. The Chair and Clerk would liaise to set up. 	AD/VG
7.	<p>EXTERNAL AUDITORS AUDIT COMPLETION REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020 INC MANAGEMENT REPRESENTATION LETTER</p> <p>It was NOTED that the Audit & Finance Committee had fully scrutinised the External auditors Audit Completion Report for the year ended 31 August 2020, and the following points were NOTED prior to approval:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Auditor's opinion, the financial statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ gave a true and fair view of the state of the Academy Trust's affairs at 31 August 2020 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended ○ had been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice; ○ had been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006; and ○ had been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP 2019 and Academies Accounts Direction 2019 to 2020. • The Significant Risks and key areas of management judgement were noted as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Management override of controls: No significant transactions outside the normal course of business were identified during the course of our work 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Revenue Recognition: GAG income was reconciled as appropriate to remittances and no exceptions were noted and the treatment of grant income appeared to be materially correct. Other income was sample tested and appeared to be materially correct and recognised as appropriate within the correct funds. ➤ Going Concern due to Covid-19: the Auditor required further evidence of this and the GB view. The school was aware of the potential impact of Covid-19 and included consideration of it in its forward planning processes. The GB had received regular updates to the Covid Risk Assessment which included impact analysis. ➤ Local government pension scheme assumptions: the Auditors work on the underlying assumptions had determined that there were no issues with the methodology used and that disclosures within the financial statements were appropriate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four low priority control points had been raised, with the prior year's having been resolved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Journal Reviews ➤ VAT reconciliations and submissions ➤ Signing Letters of Termination ➤ Payroll Creditor <p>These were accepted and processes would be put in place to resolve.</p> • It was noted that a point had been raised that the new Academies Financial Handbook would state that the Chief Financial Officer had to be employed by the school. The Clerk agreed to investigate and report back. • It was noted that the end of year audit had been difficult, exacerbated by remote working. <p>The External auditors Audit Completion Report for the year ended 31 August 2020, and the Management Representation Letter were APPROVED and AGREED that the Dorset Studio School was a Going Concern.</p>	<p>VG</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>FINAL ACCOUNTS 2019/20</p> <p>It was NOTED that the Audit & Finance Committee had fully scrutinised the Final Accounts for the year ended 31 August 2020, and the following points were NOTED prior to approval:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Staff Pay proportion of 71% was noted and acknowledged that this was standard for the school sector. • The Balance Sheet showed a year end position of £500K at year end. • The current cash position was £561K in the bank which equated to 90 cash days in hand. It was noted that the Audit & Finance committee had requested that the Principal presented a report to the next Committee detailing the restricted funds that were being reserved for specific projects to protect the cash balance. • It was noted that the Audit & Finance Committee agreed that the accounts were accurate and any issues arising were explained. • Thanks were given to the Interim Finance Director KMC for his work on the accounts in a short period of time. 	<p>AM</p>



	After full scrutiny the GB APPROVED the Final Accounts for the year ended 31 August 2020.	
9.	<p>MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS TO 30 NOVEMBER 2020</p> <p>The Management Accounts to 30 November 2020 were discussed and the following points NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The DSS was currently £40K ahead of Budget, with strong performance. • The benefit was in the income which had increased due to additional student numbers. • It was noted that Student Travel would be netted off in due course. 	
10.	<p>CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER</p> <p>It was AGREED that Anna Carvisiglia, the KMC Finance Director, would be appointed as Chief Financial Officer, subject to the point raised earlier in the meeting.</p>	
11.	<p>DEVELOPMENT PLAN</p> <p>The Principal verbally updated the GB on the negotiations with the DfE, and the following points were NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An email had just been received by the Principal from Locate, who were acting for the DfE. It had questioned who the invoice for the rental of the site at Poundbury should be sent to, which the Principal had immediately responded to as she considered that it was not the DSS that was liable for the payments. The GB was concerned that formal notification had not been received from the DfE that it would be funding the second site and there was a risk that the school would end up liable. It was agreed that contact should be made with the DfE requesting formal clarification of all funding as the situation was urgent with accommodation required for September 2021. The Principal advised that she was awaiting confirmation following her response to the email. • It was agreed that the Chair, Principal and Clerk would re-convene the following week to agree next steps if no response had been received, as there were concerns with the speed that the DfE were responding. • It was agreed that the longer a split site was in place whilst permanent accommodation was built could impact on applications with students being lost. Guarantees were required from the DfE. The current health and hygiene project was slow in progressing, and although it was fundamental, it was a reasonably small project. • The Principal KMC emphasised that KMC had to be kept informed of any negotiations as there would impact on the utilities on the estate including power and sewerage. KMC was also a sensitive planning site and care was required with any applications. <p>It was agreed that if necessary an emergency meeting would be held to agree further steps but an update from the Principal would be awaited.</p>	AD/AM/VG



<p>12.</p>	<p>WORK EXPERIENCE/EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>The Principal advised that time was being spent on trying to get students out with employers and there were some continuing their work experience within family links/bubbles. Other work was being undertaken in assisting with application and CV knowledge. The GB was pleased that Work Experience and Employer Engagement was being kept as a priority in the challenging times.</p>	
<p>13.</p>	<p>AUDIT & FINANCE COMMITTEE</p> <p>The Audit & Finance Committee was content with the current state of play, and comments from the Committee had been incorporated as the meeting progressed.</p>	
<p>14.</p>	<p>EXCLUSION</p> <p>The Clerk reported that an Exclusion Panel had recently been held and the decision of the Principal had been upheld, and the student was now attending the Learning Centre. It was noted the parent had been very supportive of the school and had thanked staff for their support.</p> <p>The Chair requested that the Exclusions Policy was reviewed.</p>	<p>AM</p>
<p>15.</p>	<p>ANNUAL REPORTS</p> <p>The following reports were NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEND Annual Report 2019/20 • Pupil Premium Report 2019/20 <p>The following points were NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was noted that there were no gaps and the curriculum suited the learners' needs. • The SEN intake in Year 7 was 50%. The Principal was not concerned as this was likely to improve with additional support, with the usual internal level at around a third, which is above national average. Pupil Premium had to be wisely utilised to support the learners • Governors questioned the EHCP's and the Principal advised that there were 7 in the Year 7 intake with the whole school being 6% higher than national benchmarks. The school was expected to spend £6K per student on support and there was around 1 new application a week that the school had to review, which was a strain on resources. Should this rate continue, further action will need to be taken with Dorset Council. • The Parent Governor questioned whether the high proportion of SEN learners had a detrimental impact on the other students. The Principal advised that all students had the same experience, and before entry to the school the land-based ethos and specialism of the school was explained, and most students enrolled because they wanted to work outside. The school was working hard at reviewing the mixed abilities to ensure that the high percentage of SEN did not impact on other 	



	learners. It was acknowledged by the Principal that if this number continues to increase it could be detrimental to the efficient use of resources and the education of other students.	
16.	<p>CORPORATE RISK REGISTER</p> <p>The Corporate Risk Register was NOTED, with additional risks detailed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The GB was nervous about reducing the cash reserves due to the unknown challenges around capital funding. • The accountability of any building work. • It was noted that the Risk Register should be read in conjunction with the Covid Risk Assessment and the Clerk agreed to make a not to this effect. • The ongoing pandemic challenges. • It was agreed to consider the risks around Prevent. • It was agreed that Risk 3 could become Risk 1 if no action was taken urgently. 	
17.	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS FOR REPORT</p> <p>The following business was NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors asked how the staff were with the current challenging circumstances and the Principal advised that a survey had been carried out before Christmas and the feedback was positive, and staff considered that they were listened to. An audit had been carried out with an action plan put in place. It was noted that further surveys would be carried out to follow this up. The Principal advised that she had encouraging all staff to work at home for 1 or 2 days a week. She considered that the staff were very capable, worked hard and managing change well. <p>No further items were raised.</p>	
18.	<p>2020/21 MEETINGS</p> <p>The following meeting dates were NOTED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 February 2021 • 29 April 2021 • 17 June 2021 	
<p><i>The Meeting closed at 5.55pm with no further business</i></p>		

Chair Date

