

**Minutes of the BCAT Board meeting  
4 December 2020 at 10.00am  
Video Conference – Zoom**

**Present:** Anthony Abrahams (AA) (Chair) Lesley Glover (LG), Pat Jones (PJ), Mark Kiteley (MK), Jasmin Masih (JM), Christine O'Reilly (CO'R), Ian Pryce (IP)

**In attendance:** Anne Day (Trust Accountant) Mary Langley (Headteacher Wixams Tree Primary), Mark Eagle (Financial Statements Auditor MHLLP) Claire Nash (Business Manager BCAT) Rachel Nicol (Company Secretary), Paul Spyropoulos (PS) Principal, Wixams Academy,

**BCAT/73/20 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Kay Rodger and Gill Scobie.

**BCAT/74/20 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 1 October were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

**BCAT/75/20 Declarations of Interest**

Ian Pryce, Dave Roffey, Kay Rodger, Pat Jones and Rachel Nicol are employed by Bedford College.

Mark Kiteley is a non-executive director and Chair at BCS Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bedford College.

**BCAT/76/20 Matters arising**

The Board endorsed the appointment of Lesley Glover as Vice Chair.

The Chair confirmed the intention to focus each agenda on a particular area with the current agenda being centred on financial matters.

**BCAT/77/20 Principal's report – Wixams Academy**

The report was confirmed as read.

**The Principal informed the Board that the LAB had approved Ellie Gamble as their chair and the Board endorsed the appointment.**

Attendance:

1. Attendance is higher than national rates. The school has had one positive Covid case resulting in 7 staff and 51 pupils isolating. Teaching continued through live online sessions with positive feedback.
2. Pupil progress was outlined. Year 10 and year 7 have been hit the hardest with larger achievement gaps for disadvantaged pupils. The Principal also highlighted a higher rate of exclusions / disciplinaries in this group. It is considered year 8 and 9 will be above national rates by end of the year. The overall position was considered to reflect the national picture. Some changes to the presentation of pupil performance data to assist the Board had been proposed by a director but weren't reflected in the paper. It is hoped that this presentation, together with relevant narrative on the impact of intervention with different cohorts will assist the Board in monitoring the impact of Covid on learning and recognise successful initiatives. For year 10 in particular it was considered that more information on performance in English would be helpful. The Principal reported that he considered staff are being conservative in the predictions.
3. Recruitment activity was noted to be positive with 190 first choice applications making the Academy one of the most oversubscribed secondary schools. For the last 2 years the school has taken 150 pupils and the Principal recommended the Board supports 150 in September 2021. The number is provided for in the financial plan and the Board supported this.

The Principal expressed thanks to Sam Bennett, the Trust's Marketing Manager for assistance with the open evening and the reports and information provided.

4. Staff:
  - a. resignations had impacted on recruitment and agency fees.
  - b. Staff absence has been challenging with between 3 and 10 members of staff off each day with high supply costs as a result. The Board sought clarification on the level of staff sickness compared to pupil absence. It was noted that most incidents result from non covid related sickness as well as Covid related isolation and family isolation. Wellbeing has been impacted by arrangements to manage distancing with changes being made to address problems. Money has been claimed back from the government for some of the additional costs incurred and this continues to be monitored.
5. The Board discussed staff morale further. In the first half term absence was noted to be high with resulting demands on staff to provide cover. Other factors included personal concerns around the virus. Changes to zones and plans for students to transition between lessons rather than staff from January have been risk assessed and it is believed they will have a positive impact.

***It was agreed that JM will work with RN to look at bringing the Attainment 8 table to the Board within a dashboard.***

6. Capital Programme:

- a. The Principal confirmed that all allocated funds have been spent to create additional teaching spaces.
- b. The LAB has raised the issue of no covered spaces. The Business Manager and Trust accountant will take this forward in the review of the capital programme.
- c. Parental enquiries are increasing in relation to the provision of a Sixth form. The Principal has been honest with parents in terms of prospects and the need for additional space needed to accommodate a Sixth form. It was also recognised that a viable proposal would require evidence of demand from 200 pupils. ***PS will present a paper on the Sixth form to be discussed at the BCAT Strategy day in January.***
- d. SEN: Information was provided on the overall pupil profile and the number of special needs pupils at the school. The Principal had met the Head of Support Services at Bedford Borough to see if additional accommodation might be funded to provide facilities to support these pupils. Additional teaching assistants are appointed but that additional funding only covers approximately one third of the cost. There was discussion about the formula used for funding of additional needs and educational health care plans. ***It was agreed that PS will liaise with the finance department to review this further to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the funding models used to support additional needs pupils.***
- e. The Board questioned where the EHCP pupils come from and it was confirmed that the majority are from within catchment. The positive reputation for looking after students with high needs was noted to be a contributory factor. Conversations will continue with the Borough to ensure that the needs of additional pupils can be appropriately met. The Board questioned the availability of benchmarking data and information from other schools, particularly outside of the area where local authorities may have other methodologies for supporting additional needs. The relative position of the school to other schools with specialist units were questioned. ***The Principal had deleted comparatives showing additional numbers from specialist units but it was agreed these will be sent to PJ and AD. PS will discuss funding with PJ and AD and bring back a paper in due course***

**The report was noted**

**BCAT/78/20      Headteacher's report – Wixams Tree Primary**

The report was confirmed as read.

1. Site Extension: The Headteacher reported contact made from Wilmott Dixon and a construction partner. Plans for an extension to the site had been presented. The approach came as a surprise to the Headteacher and the Board. No correspondence had been received at Trust level. IP and AA had attended a meeting with the Borough and had understood that discussions were taking place with Central Bedfordshire over potential future plans for the site in particular in respect of funding and consents required. The Board agreed that it is not appropriate for the Headteacher to attend a meeting and that the Trust needs to be included in decisions as they impact on the overall strategic considerations and lease arrangements. ***It was agreed that the Chair would write to Ben Pearson and suggest attendance at the Strategy session in January. The Headteacher will decline the meeting.***
2. The Ofsted visit at WTP and feedback was considered positive. The report can be circulated to parents when it has been checked. It was clarified that there will not be any formal inspections until the summer term at the earliest.
3. Changes have been made to SATS with no KS1 formal assessments due to take place. It has also been confirmed that the KS2 grammar punctuation and spelling test will not take place.
4. Covid Impact: No bubbles have had to close due to Covid. The Board discussed progress in respect of “catch up learning” following the lock down and disruption in the last academic year. Progress was noted to be positive.
5. Pupil Numbers:
  - a. Five new children have joined year 2. The Headteacher and her staff were congratulated for the strong performance.
  - b. Waiting lists and appeal levels were outlined. The waiting lists for year 4 was highlighted with 16 on the list. Financial and academic risks of opening additional classes in September 2021 were highlighted. It was confirmed that the strategy day in January will enable discussion on the proposed expansion of WTP, considerations around additional classes and potential for a Sixth form at the Academy.

- c. Funding is not confirmed until March but proposals will be modelled based on different scenarios as decisions around additional classes should be agreed by February.
6. Staff absences are high in comparison to previous years which was largely attributed to self-isolation requirements.

## **The report was noted**

### PUPILS & POLICIES

#### **BCAT/79/20** Admissions Policies

The Principal and Headteacher had met to discuss the current admissions policy and outlined the use and application of the over subscription criteria. Increasingly it was noted that pupils are from the local area. The sibling position and wider geographical location was noted to have arisen from the initial recruitment on opening but numbers outside the local area decrease year on year.

No children of staff have received places under the criteria to prioritise children of staff in “hard to recruit areas” The issue of widening or defining this criteria was raised but the Board noted there was no recommendation in the report to amend the criteria. The Board did reiterate that they considered it their remit to designate roles as “hard to recruit”. No such designations have been made.

**The Board approved the recommendation not to amend the admissions policy.**

#### **BCAT/80/20** Policies for approval

The Business Manager presented the report and confirmed that the Child protection and Safeguarding policy had been updated to mirror the Local Authority policy and is applicable to both schools.

The Board asked how policy changes are notified to staff. It was confirmed that the Safeguarding lead provides training and all staff are asked to sign to say the policy has been read. The Board revisited discussions over the differences between policy statements and procedures. The statement over responsibility for incidents outside the school was also questioned and the extent of implied liability discussed. Although the consensus was that the statement refers to the school spotting evidence of incidents outside of school rather than having a responsibility for them.

Subject to the Business Manager clarifying the necessity for the wording discussed above the Board approved the policy.

## WORKFORCE

### BCAT/81/20 Pay awards

It was confirmed that all appraisals of staff had been completed and gradings notified to HR for processing in line with previous agreements of the Board.

### BCAT/82/20 Principal and Headteacher appraisals- confidential

Confidential minute

## FINANCIAL

### BCAT/83/20 2019-2020 Financial Accounts and report on audit including Regularity self-assessment and Financial Statements Management Letter

Mark Eagle attended from MHLLP to present the auditors report. He confirmed a clean audit report with no substantial issues found. The regularity report at page 18 was outlined and it was confirmed that no issues of concern were identified.

Key points on the financial statements included:

1. Restricted and unrestricted funds. Restricted funds consist of grant money received and how it is spent with a surplus being shown. Funds available were highlighted.
2. Net current assets (working capital) was noted to be positive.
3. The cashflow movement was outlined and the accounting confirmed that policies had been applied appropriately. The positive position on cashflow was discussed to consider whether this is reflective of a diminution of activity due to Covid.
4. More information was suggested for input on how the Trust coped with Covid and what the Trust did to manage the position. ***The Auditors will recommend a paragraph to be included.***
5. The Trust policy on reserves was noted and the intention to plan proportionate distribution once the agreed threshold of three months normal expenditure was reached.
6. The pension note was referenced in relation to the Teachers Pension scheme and the Local Government Pension scheme. The risk of the Local Authority seeking increased contributions to cover the deficit was considered low. The number of people in the LGPS scheme was noted to be circa 39 administration and support staff.
7. The findings in the Management letter were outlined:

- a. Key findings were noted to centre around best practice points. The recommendation in relation to the preparation of management accounts had been accepted and is being implemented. B.
- b. Findings in the current year were noted to be low risk but included:
  - i. Credit card authorisation. A current review around systems solutions is being reviewed as well as the policy.
  - ii. Review of internal controls cannot be carried out by the Financial Statements auditor and it was agreed the **Trust should look at an internal audit review.**
  - iii. Occupation of land and buildings – need for formalisation of arrangements.

The audit had been carried out remotely and the accounts team was congratulated for the clean audit.

The potential for a second document which is an annual review with more narrative and illustrations for publication was discussed but also raised concern about the presentation of financial information.

**Subject to the addition of a paragraph on the impact of Covid the Board approved the Financial statements and authorised Anthony to sign these on behalf of the Board in due course.**

#### **BCAT/84/20      2020-2021 Trust performance monitoring**

The first management accounts to the end of October were brought to the attention of the Board. Pupil numbers are lower than originally provided by the schools which will result in a funding adjustment. Additional funding has been received in terms of Covid costs and catch up funding of £77k.

A discrepancy was referenced over pupil numbers between the Principal's report and the financial report.

Numbers in pre school have been lower than expected and income adjusted as a result. Salaries are below budget due to an underspend in the Primary school.

**The update was noted**

#### **BCAT/85/20      Financial control framework – Financial regulations, scheme of delegation**

The Trust Accountant presented the report. There is a requirement to review the documents annually and compliance with the Academies Financial Handbook (2020 Handbook) is mandatory to ensure compliance with the funding agreement.

The 2020 handbook clarifies the position around the need for direct appointments of the Accounting Officer ("AO") and ("CFO"). It was advised that retrospective

authority will be required to continue with the current arrangements. ***The Trust Accountant will take this forward with the finance team, clarify appointments and make the necessary applications.***

A separate committee is required to review Audit and Risk. ***AD will advise RN on the constitution of the Committee and then take forward the appointment of internal auditors***

**The Board approved all the changes proposed in particular including:**

- 1. Amendments to the upper limits requiring 3 quotations for purchases from £1,000 to £3,000 to increase flexibility for schools**
- 2. Provision for allowing for fewer than 3 quotations where appropriate. The CFO to waive the requirement for up to £10k, the Board for matters over £10k**

It was clarified that the current scheme authorises The Principal to requisition purchase orders for up to £5k

The Trust Accountant has been included in the scheme.

The report was noted.

#### **BCAT/86/20 Budget 2021-2022 early indications**

The Trust Accountant presented the report:

1. Currently funding is devolved to Local Authorities and the indicative budgets are based on local authority information. It is agreed that KPIs on pay and surpluses will continue and budgets have been prepared on that basis.
2. Teachers pension and pay grants will be incorporated into the General Annual Grant (“GAG”) from next year.
3. Proposed formula and indicative figures were presented. The initial allocations for the GAG will not be known until March and will be based on numbers provided by the schools. The risk of claw back was highlighted. Pupil premium income is passed on to schools. For illustrative purposes a 1% revenue contribution to capital funding has been included.
4. The budget has been based on forecast pupil numbers of 727 and 390 and the Trust Accountant gave assurance that the numbers are reasonable. The risk of a clawback from the Academy is considered to be at circa £70k
5. Clarification was sought on the numbers in paragraph 18 and it was confirmed to include an error which will be rectified.
6. The relationship between pupil numbers and how the budgets are built will be reviewed. It was confirmed that the schools are above numbers originally planned for but below the numbers forecast in 2019-2020. It was



considered by the Business Manager that 716 would be a more realistic figure for the Academy.

***The Business Manager will work with the Trust Accountant to ensure budgets are based on a realistic basis and then funds can be released if additional numbers are achieved.***

**The Board was satisfied that the indicative revenue budgets are appropriate subject to a review on the forecasting assumptions on pupil numbers.**

## **BCAT/87/20 Capital Programme**

The Trust Accountant has worked with the Business manager and finance team to draft a defined capital plan driven by the requirements of the schools:

1. A small devolved budget is allocated to each school. Additional expenditure is taken from reserves and from revenue budgets. Once the planned level of reserves is achieved consideration will be given to how distribution might support the plan.
2. DfE's Condition Improvement Fund is not accessible at the current time due to the new nature of the build but access to other grants is monitored.
3. The schools have provided a list of priorities and the programme was presented for illustrative purposes.

The Board discussed the need to define 2 "buckets", the disaster bucket and then the aspirational bucket for schools to plan.

***The Trust Accountant will review the Reserves Policy and the potential links with the capital programme.*** The Board suggested that rolling programmes including for example IT and vehicle replacement should be established. The Board sought assurance that depreciation matches the projected life of assets. It was informed that IT equipment depreciation is currently 4 years

***The Trust Accountant will work with the schools to incorporate rolling programmes.***

The Board confirmed it was content with the principles set out in the programme including the contribution from the Trust budget (1%) and from the schools (1%). Consideration of limitations will be considered within an agreed framework. ***The schools will build programmes into their strategic planning to identify step changes.***

The Board was updated on the boiler failure at Wixams Academy, the position taken by the construction company and the Local Authority. To date the Trust has paid for repairs required from Trust reserves.

**The report was noted**

**BCAT/88/20 Governance and Committee work**

The Board noted the appointment of Lesley Glover as the Vice Chair, Ellie Gamble as the Chair of WA LAB and the constitution of the Remuneration Committee as AA, LG and GS

**BCAT/89/20 Any other business**

The Board discussed the level of challenge at the LABs, in particular on pupil progress data. It was confirmed by those who had attended that scrutiny was good but JM will work with the schools, the Boards and LABs to ensure scrutiny happens at the right levels.

The issue of Covid screens in the canteen at WA was raised. It was advised that the Catering provider should provide screens.

**BCAT/72/20 Next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 4 February with a date to be agreed for a strategy session in late January.