

**Minutes of the BCAT Board meeting
25 June 2020 at 10.00am
Video Conference – Lifesize conferencing**

Present: Ian Pryce (IP) (Chair) Elizabeth Nash (EN) (Vice Chair) Anthony Abrahams (AA) Lesley Glover (LG), Pat Jones (PJ), Mark Kiteley (MK), Jasmin Masih (JM), Christine O'Reilly (CO'R), Kay Rodger (KR), Gill Scobie (GS)

In attendance: Mary Langley (Headteacher Wixams Tree Primary), Claire Nash (Business Manager BCAT) Rachel Nicol (Company Secretary), Dave Roffey (Project Accountant), Paul Spyropoulos (PS) Principal, Wixams Academy, Lynsey Travers (LT) (HR manager Bedford College)

BCAT/37/20 Apologies for absence Action

There were no apologies for absence.

BCAT/38/20 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/39/20 Matters arising

There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

BCAT/40/20 Head Teacher's report – Wixams Tree Primary

The Head-teacher introduced the report and it was confirmed it had been read.

An update was provided on pupil numbers for September, numbers on waiting lists for each year group, the outcome of appeals for reception places and ongoing demand.

The Board was updated on the opening arrangements in light of Covid-19, current arrangements and the principles of planning for September; plans will be similar to current arrangements and based on risk assessments. It was considered that if a 1 metre distance is implemented class sizes of 30 will be possible. Friday 17 July has been designated as a preparation day.

The Board reviewed the safeguarding report and sought assurance that training had been provided to support staff. It was confirmed that all training had taken place and completion dates will be included in future reports.

It was also noted that the Health and Safety report didn't confirm DsE assessments for support staff. ***The Head-teacher will check the current position and the potential for using the module in the Smartlog system.***

The Board commended the impressive CPD records and was provided with information on how the tasks had been directed.

The Board asked if space restrictions had been considered in light of social distancing requirements and whether the schools should look at some sheltered outdoor space. At the current time WTP has empty rooms that can be used. The exposure of the site to the elements was also raised as a consideration if additional structures are looked at. A reference was made to government views on use of marquees but the context was not known and the schools will continue to monitor all guidance.

The Board was keen that contingency planning takes place in case space does become an issue given the risk of a second wave in the Autumn term. Assurance was given that continuous planning is taking place, particularly in WA with financial and staffing implications being looked at.

Positive progress on staff recruitment for September was noted with thanks given to CO'R and GS for their assistance and advice in the senior leadership appointments. A Deputy and 2 assistants have been appointed and the directors involved commended the hard work and preparation of the candidates.

It was reiterated that the schools have responsibility to carry out contingency planning with regards to the estate and objectives set and can report to the Board where the planning raises funding issues.

Pupil performance data was above national average. The LAB report indicated they had looked at the data in some detail and the work being carried out on writing and literacy and assessments at the end of March had shown strong progress in this area.

The Head-teacher raised the issue of procurement levels being low and causing delays in procurement. DR will review these.

The report was noted.

BCAT/41/20 Principal's report – Wixams Academy

The Principal introduced the report and highlighted;

- Positive progress in terms of staff recruitment in terms of numbers and quality.

- WA only open to key workers and vulnerable children although a change had been made about a week ago to take in some disadvantaged pupils; maximum of 30.
- Risk assessment presented is the assessment for the current setting. PS will update for the rag rating of risks.
- Preparations for September – waiting for more guidance. Bubbles of 30 enables all students to return but poses risks in terms of setting, access to different subject specialists and travel around the site.
- Progress on the introduction of live lessons accessed by pupils in school and at home. The Board asked whether sessions can be recorded and accessed later and the school is looking at the potential for this but also the implications.
- Current activity on contingency planning; 2 different timetables, 1 normal, one on rota. There is potential for LAB to meet over the summer to support further contingency planning.

The school has looked previously at outdoor covered areas in terms of protection from the weather and ability to increase distancing, none currently in place and the dining area is considered small. The Business Manager is looking at external funding streams and has met with external companies. The prices range from £25k to £100k (£50k would pay for an area large enough for 100 pupils. ***The Principal will bring back a proposal in due course once more work has been carried out.***

The current technology strategy was outlined; to date WA has provided each pupil with their own lap top, funds were used from the initial technology fund, reducing school based facilities in favour of providing individual devices. The school wants to continue to support individuals and is looking at a parent lease set up.

The Board discussed;

- Security and safeguarding implications and whether logs of what pupils are accessing are kept. The firewall is hosted through Bedford College and safeguarding leads are informed where anything inappropriate is accessed. Clarification that 6(3) ICT suites means there are 6 potential spaces with 3 set up for September.
- Implications of changing from a funded scheme to a parent lease scheme and whether parents have chosen the school based on the former. The Principal confirmed he had been clear at the open events and in communication that pupils would not be given a free device. The school will however look at how devices can be funded for disadvantaged families.

The Board raised the potential for sponsorship from local businesses and the need to build relationships in the business community. ***MK and AA agreed to provide the Business Manager with some contact details.***

The Board reiterated the need for a clear and longer term technology strategy but supported the general principle of pupils having their own devices.

The Board reviewed the Health & Safety report and questioned whether the reference to the health and safety system was an alternative to Smartlog. It was confirmed that WA have procured a secondary system with the Borough in addition to the use of Smartlog to provide additional support in this area.

With respect to the Safeguarding report the Board asked whether the Local Authority Designated Officer "LADO" had been involved in the safeguarding issues listed. The Principal confirmed that the LADO had not been involved in the allegation of threatening language. The Board however considered that the LADO involvement should have been considered because of potential safeguarding implications and the Principal agreed that this will be done with future incidents.

The Board referenced the absence procedure approved on 2 April 2020 and sought assurance that all line managers are familiar with the procedures. The current practice of the Business Manager holding all the return to work meetings and monitoring triggers was considered not to adhere to the procedure and to undermine the line manager's role. ***The Business Manager will review the procedure and provide any training required to line managers.***

Progress on the appointment of a marketing individual to support the schools was outlined. The Principal agreed that when the person starts and can work on the website the intention is to move back to centrally managed websites.

The report was noted.

BCAT/42/20 Budget monitoring - Schools

The Business Manager presented the reports. The current estimated forecast deficit for WA is now £48k against the £100k previously forecast with the primary factors being the reduced use of consultants.

The issue of the bus contract was raised. It was explained that the bus company had not provided a service in the summer term due to the school being closed. The company had offered a 15% discount but are maintaining the liability for the Trust based on government guidance around supplier contracts.

Key points discussed included;

- No funds being received for Transport costs with BCAT paying for bus services and recouping money from families.
- Status of guidance and different status of academies, exempt charity, compared to locally maintained schools.
- Legal position, initial advice, wider issues and need to consider mediation.

It was agreed that AA will provide support in resolving the current position to balance the duty of the Trust in managing the assets whilst taking the relationship forward.

The update was noted

BCAT/43/20 LAB update

WA – the update and minutes were noted.

The Board noted the resignation of Alan Burgess and recorded thanks to him for his contribution and support to the Academy.

It was reiterated that the LAB are particularly interested in a Sixth form review. The Principal made Proposal for a working group to look at potential for a Sixth form in 2022.

The local plan for education in Wixams and Bedford Borough Council capital expenditure plans were referenced but it was noted to be unclear where the money is coming from and what it is intended for.

IP will make contact with Bedford Borough to ask them to attend a meeting of the Trust so that any work is carried out in the context of local plans, priorities and government guidance on the establishment of Sixth Forms.

The report from WTP was noted to be a comprehensive and useful summary of the work carried out, providing assurance to the Board.

BCAT/44/20 Data Protection update

The Business Manager presented the report and outlined the history and the Board's previous agreement to an outsourcing arrangement.

An Audit will be carried out by DPO centre in October and will be presented to the Board in due course. The Business manager outlined the scope of the initial exercise and progress made against the recommendations. Work is also being carried out on the policies.

Assurance was given that all priority items have been carried out and that there are no serious risks

It was also confirmed that live lesson safeguarding guidance has been provided to staff.

The report was noted

PS, CN and ML left the meeting

BCAT/45/20 Trust budget monitoring

DR presented the report. The impact of Covid-19 was outlined with some improvement to forecast based on vacancies and lower costs.

The report was noted.

BCAT/46/20 Governance update

The Company Secretary presented the report.

The Board approved the re-appointment of Mark Kiteley as a director to 31.08.23

The proposal for board evaluation to be carried out in a focussed survey monkey style survey was endorsed.

It was agreed that a meeting of the Remuneration Committee will be set up to agree the terms of reference and review the development plans of the Principal and Head-teacher in the first instance.

The report was noted.

BCAT/47/20 Proposal for EAP and Legal Support

The HR Manager from Bedford College, providers of HR support to the Trust attended to present the report. The two key proposals were outlined;

Employee Assistance Programme for staff provides counselling, emotional, legal support with an accessible portal. A quote had been obtained from Life and Progress up to the end of the year and participation of staff can be monitored in terms of numbers.

The Board heard evidence on the professional nature of the service, the support for employees and the contribution it can make to fulfilling the employer's duty of care. It was confirmed that the Principal and Head-teacher want the scheme and that in the absence management procedure it can be used as a supportive tool. It was confirmed that the staff running it are clinically qualified.

The Board questioned how it will be implemented and promoted. ***It was agreed that the Business Manager will formulate a communication plan and co-ordinate the presentation of management reports*** which will be available provided there are more than 5 users per quarter. ***The Board will receive an annual report.***

MakeUK legal service, The day to day HR support is currently provided to the schools through the Central Services arrangements with Bedford College. It was understood that **MakeUK** legal service provides support on the more complicated legal issues and will provide support in Tribunal Claims. It was confirmed that the proposal is for an advice subscription only and allows the Trust to be flexible in its approach to any future claims.

The Board approved the proposal for both products to be procured and use will be monitored and reported back to the Board.

BCAT/48/20 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22 May 2020 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

It was reiterated that the Board needs to understand the local plans and priorities around sixth forms in the context of the overall strategy and local demographic.

BCAT/49/20 Any other business

BCAT Way – The Board were keen to understand progress against strategy and revisit the principles. It was agreed that RN would circulate the most recent version. IP updated the Board on the engagement of bid specialists to provide advice on growing the Trust and an update will be provided in the Autumn term.

Succession planning was discussed and there was noted to be no change to the agreed plan for AA to take over as Chair from 1 September and for EN to continue as Vice Chair.

The Board was keen that the previous tension around budgeting will not be repeated and it was agreed that the Remuneration Committee can provide some support through work on the development plans.

It was noted that Keeping Children safe will be updated from 1 September and policies will need reviewing. ***The Business Manager will be asked to look at the Child Protection Policy in the first instance and HR will be asked to review safeguarding and recruitment.***

RN will pick up on safeguarding training for governors as some have completed but there is a choice of training which is providing confusion.

The Board formally noted the hard work of all staff in the Trust schools.

BCAT/50/20 Next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 1 October 10am