

**Minutes of the BCAT Board meeting  
1 October 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) Kay Rodger (KR), Gill Scobie (GS)

**In attendance:** Anne Day (Trust Accountant) 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/51/20 Apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

**BCAT/52/20 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/53/20 Matters arising**

The Board noted the resignation of the Vice Chair [REDACTED] and asked to record their formal thanks for her significant contribution to the Trust, both in her involvement in establishing the Trust and schools through her work with Bedford College and more recently in assuming the role of Vice Chair.

The minutes had noted the plans for publication of a revised Keeping children safe in education guide and the management team were reminded that the Safeguarding and Child Protection policies should be updated and issued for approval as required.

Procurement and the appropriateness of the scheme of delegation were discussed. AD updated the Board on work being done on the scheme of delegation and financial regulations with regard to the updated Academies Financial handbook

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

**BCAT/54/20      Head Teacher's report – Wixams Tree Primary**

The Board had confirmed the report had been read.

ML updated the Board on the current position in respect of Covid with the primary issue being staff required to isolate and be tested due to family members rather than incidents in the school itself.

The Board noted the numbers are looking positive and questioned whether oversubscription levels are causing problems. Some year groups are not up to capacity [REDACTED] the class number to 32. IP advised that he is establishing a meeting for himself and AA with the Local Authority. ML is applying to the ESFA for funding for extra classes where years are over subscribed to be able to consider opening additional classes.

ML confirmed that she considered the budget is available to furnish the classrooms and provide IT but funding based on pupil numbers will be required to secure teachers.

The capacity of the main school was confirmed at 420. The Board discussed whether the admissions criteria requires review. It was however considered that oversubscription even occurs in the close proximity. Sibling entries will reduce now reduce and capacity issues will be eased by the Borough's plans for a new school.

The Board acknowledged that there will be some strategic issues to consider around admissions in due course.

The Board commended the report and the assurance provided on the work done during Covid. ML updated the Board on the "recovery curriculum", base line assessment work and increase in phonics work. It was understood the older children coped better during lock down. KS1 tests will provide more information but tests carried out in March prior to lock down provided useful intelligence. Engagement during lock down was positive with a minimum of 4 lessons per day and strong communication. It was recognised that pupils nationally, particularly the disadvantaged pupils have regressed on progress but ML provided assurance on the positive work being done and the comparative position of the school.

The Board encouraged ML to consider her assessment of the school in terms of outstanding. ***ML was encouraged to seek pre-inspection input and visits and consider whether there is resource to engage this externally.***

The report will be reviewed in terms of the references to boys and ensure it reflects on the progression at different rates. ML will look at national benchmarking to provide further assurance.

ML was encouraged to review social media commentary on the school and ensure further informal feedback is obtained and referenced. Recommendations are positive and parental satisfaction is high. The Board particularly commended the fact that the positive reaction to the school has been consistent from the outset.

**The report was noted**

**BCAT/55/20      Principal's report – Wixams Academy**

The report had been read and the Principal highlighted;

- Overall numbers positive, the predicted total number next year of 715 pupils next year is considered to take the school to physical capacity even though it was built for circa 800.
- Reflection on admissions appeals.
- Recent parent survey results are being compiled.
- New history teacher in post, 22 new staff in the current academic year with concerns only over [REDACTED].
- Potential for Ofsted fact finding visit to review quality of provision in getting children to return to education. Considered to be planned as supportive fact finding visits.
- Contingency planning for a second lock down, plan to teach circa 70% of lessons live online.
- Summary SEF with amendments re Covid.

The Board discussed student access to remote teaching. All year 8,9 and 10 have Academy lap tops. Year 7s are subject to a lap top scheme and assurance was given that these will be place in the near future. The DfE and the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire are providing some lap tops.

A survey has confirmed 99.5% of pupils have confirmed internet access with support being provided to those who do not have access.

The Principal was asked for an indication of the current performance of pupils. Baseline assessments are being carried out but assurance was given that recovery is possible. There is strong wellbeing support in place.

The Board sought clarification on when the current pupils commenced GCSE programmes. The annual assessment cycle and correlation with performance data was explained; with slower progress at the start of a course with enhanced performance in the summer term. Lack of assessment in the summer term due to Covid therefore impacts the current results. A recovery curriculum and interventions are in place.

An update was given on the induction for new staff. The induction has been comprehensive in terms of statutory responsibilities, culture and teaching to the top. Assurance was provided around the reported no notice resignation and the reasons. Management structures and support are in place to support the replacement member of staff.

The Board further discussed the work being done to induct new staff in terms of Ofsted, particularly given the focus of Ofsted on intent, impact and implementation. The Principal gave assurance that key information is provided to staff but that the current focus is on the recovery curriculum. It was confirmed that the school has been working with an external support and will continue to do so. ***The Board asked the Principal to look at sourcing external and independent assessment to support the preparations for inspection.***

Further action required to develop the consistency and quality of teaching was explored further including; NQT mentoring, coaching programme based on triads, more formal observation system, deep dives and programme of unannounced learning walks.

The Board considered the engagement with the pupils during lock down was extremely positive, particularly compared to other schools in the Borough and social media feedback is positive. The desire for live lessons by parents is recognised and being managed.

The Business Manager provided an update on staff and pupil absence with current pupil absence being attributed to seasonal coughs and colds.

4 to 5 staff per week have been absent, generally due to the requirement to isolate because of the position of household members. Barriers to obtaining tests are being worked on. Teachers isolating are continuing to deliver from home by presenting on the big screen with a support member of staff in the classroom.

An ongoing issue for both schools is the feedback from local residents on the increase in traffic. Highways were due to carry out an assessment following a meeting in February. PS and ML have written to Highways to press for an inspection. Staff are supervising pupils outside the schools. Comments have been received from residents and parents and the travel plan is being reviewed. WTP has changed timings to differ to WA to reduce traffic. The local Councillor is also involved and has been very supportive. Walking bus / crocodiles will be considered post Covid when social distancing is no longer required.

The buses are running more smoothly and no complaints have been received.

**The report was noted**

#### **BCAT/56/20      Indicative financial out turn - Schools**

The Project Accountant provided a verbal update on the indicative financial out turn and introduced the new Trust Accountant, Anne Day.

WA is showing a small surplus compared to budget with the improvement to previously reported position of circa £35k primarily due to resolution of bus contract. Other income has reduced due to lack of parental contributions for buses with pay costs as a percentage of income for the year above target. Assurance was given that the current year budget returns the pay percentage to below 75%.

WTP surplus with a better than budget performance across all areas, savings from non-pay areas in student support, IT and premises maintenance.

The Board discussed the level of additional expenditure for PPE and other Covid related expenses. Records are being kept and CN advised that there is a potential for a reclaim of circa £30k (costs incurred from March to September)

The Board was updated on the current position in regards to the boilers. The Business Manager highlighted ongoing problems with the boilers since the schools opened in September 2017. Emergency works were carried out in the summer, with the support of the College, to ensure the schools had hot water for opening. The heating is not currently operational. Solicitors letters were sent to the main contractor and sub-contractor in the summer and a meeting has been arranged between the Chair, Company Secretary and representatives of the Contractor and Sub-contractor to try and resolve the position. The Council has been kept informed throughout and clarification of the contractual position. The Board was clear that the schools cannot remain open after half term without heating and supported the Chair and Company Secretary in trying to resolve matters with all interested parties as a priority.

Pay awards were planned to be discussed during the Trust section of the meeting. The Principal and Head Teacher explained the proposals in their own reports. It was considered in WA that there was insufficient evidence to justify pay award differentials given the closure in the latter part of the year. ***It was reiterated that there is a need for consistency on grading across the Trust, consideration of an exceptional grade and the Board will consider this at their next away day.***

The Chair outlined his plans for the meeting cycle with a focus on key themes. The March meeting will focus on the plan for the following year and December on the financial out turn.

PS and ML left the meeting.

#### **BCAT/57/20      Indicative financial out turn - BCAT**

The overall indicative surplus was noted at £340k, exceeding budget; Income for Trust 3.7m, Pay at 66% and just under budget at £2.4m. Cash position 1.2 million.

The Board discussed the likely need for contingency spending due to Covid; cover arrangements, cleaning costs and overall level of reassurance which could be impacted by the boiler issues.

The potential to accumulate surplus for future capital expenditure including the installation of covered areas was discussed. ***The Trust Accountant is preparing capital budget and it will be presented to the Board in due course.***

DR will check the position on the Primary surplus. The Board sought clarification that schools have access to their own surplus. The principle of schools having access had previously been agreed. It was however recognised that the Trust requires control over surplus setting and reserves management for future contingency planning. ***It was agreed that the Trust Accountant will pick this up in reviewing the financial regulations and the Board will discuss further at their away day. AD will pick up in the handbook.***

***It was agreed that the Trust needs to look at resources to be able to fulfil the future strategic objectives. A number of issues to consider were noted to include the impact of another primary school, consideration of a 6<sup>th</sup> form.***

The appointment of the Financial Statements Auditor was discussed. The Board was reminded that the College carried out a formal tender exercise a couple of years ago and shared the results with the Trust. **It was noted and endorsed that Macintyre Hudson are the Financial Statement Auditors for 2019-2020 and that a tender exercise is on the work plan in the Spring.**

#### **BCAT/58/20 Governance update**

The Company Secretary presented the report and the Board confirmed it had been read.

The resignation of the Vice Chair had already been noted, The Company Secretary asked for expressions of interest for the role of Vice Chair.

The Governance action plan was outlined and the Board asked to send any feedback to the Company Secretary.

Skills gaps continue to be monitored and the Trust will continue to recruit on an ongoing basis to support the strategic development of the Trust. An application had been received for the role of Local Advisory Body Chair of WA and it was agreed that Lesley Glover will support the interview process.

The board evaluation survey will be circulated by survey monkey.

#### **BCAT/59/20 Pay scales**

Lynsey Travers (HR Manager at Bedford College who provide services to BCAT) attended to present her report.

It was recognised that the process to date had disjointed elements with some staff not understanding the structure and links to scales, roles and appraisals.

IP provided some background; the history of teaching scales based on the Trust's strategic aims with higher starter salaries, progression and more senior scales. Support staff were recruited on spot salaries but as the Trust has grown it was recognised that a scale is required for each post. The Trust had previously agreed that there needs to be a rational for Heads of department and had determined that additional allowances are not appropriate.

The Board's remit was discussed including the need for an overview of which staff are entitled to the Upper Pay Scale; oversight of the overall model of staffing, balance of management / teaching and support staff. Individually agreed progression pathways based on national leadership scale points at top level were outlined.

LT agreed to look at national scales (mechanism based on number of pupils) at different levels and include in the overall structure.

**The Board agreed the PRP awards at 2.5% for a grade 1, 2% for a grade 2, 1% for a grade 3 and 0 for a grade 4.**

Further guidance is required on how staff move on to the upper pay scale and how it operates; fixed number of posts with no automatic progression; increases in pay scales. ***The Trust Accountant will work with the HR manager to set out the position more clearly and establish the time line to ensure decisions can be made by the Board to enable staffing decisions in line with the budget and the framework.***

**BCAT/60/20      Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 25 June 2020 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

**BCAT/61/20      Any other business**

There was no other business discussed.

**BCAT/72/20      Next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Friday 4 December 10am