



THE THOMAS ALLEYNE ACADEMY LOCAL GOVERNING BODY

A meeting of the Local Governing Body for the Thomas Alleyne Academy was held by videoconference on Thursday 1 December 2022 starting at 18.00.

PRESENT

Hilary Clifford (Chair)
Robert Baldock
Julia Cooke
Howard Crompton

Cate Ducati
Mark Lewis (Headteacher)
Jenny White

IN ATTENDANCE

Melanie Cook (Deputy Headteacher)

Robert Dale (Governance Professional)

MEMBERSHIP

- The Chair reported with regret that since the previous meeting, Tara McGovern had tendered her resignation because of pressure of work. She had served as a parent governor and a Trust governor since 2016. The LGB recorded their appreciation of her substantial contribution over that period.

ITEM 1A: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- David Gray, Jo Mellett, Kerry Pritchett and Lynsey Steadman.

ITEM 1B: DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- No additional interests were declared.

ITEM 1C: MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2022 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

ITEM 1D: MATTERS ARISING/ACTIONS

- Actions had been followed-up as indicated below:
 - Provide diversity analysis for student and staff cohorts at TAA. **Action Ongoing.** This analysis would be circulated after the meeting; contextualisation against local demographics would follow.
 - Make arrangements for parent governor election. **Action under way.** A call for nominations had been issued. More work to promote this opportunity would be discussed with the SLT, including reminding parents at forthcoming social events.
 - Issue reminder about returning 2022/23 Declarations of Interest. **Action under way.** Responses had been received from most governors. Individual requests would follow.

- Consider adjusting the Governor in School programme to incorporate governor suggestions. **Action complete.** The most recent session took place on 22 November 2022.
- Reschedule one of the proposed sessions to an afternoon start time. **Action complete.** The March 2023 session will be a lunchtime/afternoon event.
- Link staff to arrange meetings/contact with link governors. **Action complete.** These meetings were now under way; written reports would follow.
- Issue reminder about Safeguarding training to the LGB. **Action complete.** This had been issued to governors with training earlier than December 2019 (4/12); one governor had subsequently confirmed that they had booked onto the refresher on 17 January 2023.
- Review Amber rated actions and consider introducing additional milestones. **Action complete.** The latest school development plan report was at Item 7.
- Publish the revised Child Protection and SEND policies on the TAA website. **Action complete.** The revised policies were now on the school website.
- Arrange visit to school with Business Manager to discuss how to improve the current position and to gain access to grant funding. **Action under way.** Work to improve accessibility for buildings was under way.

ITEM 2: HEADTEACHER'S PERFORMANCE REPORT

- The head reported that the latest number on role report showed a reduction in the number of learners in Y12; this partly resulted from genuine departures – three students had left for more appropriate courses including one who had moved out of the area – and an overstatement of numbers in the October report. This had arisen because Arbor also included 'guesting' Y12 students (on roll at other sixth forms but joining particular courses at TAA).
- There had been 199 first choice applications for entry to TAA in 2023/24. This exceeded the school's Published Admissions Number (PAN) for the first time in many years – though it would inevitably mean some families were disappointed. Governors also noted that plans to open a 'Michaela' school in Stevenage had been dropped; the area was not experiencing a shortage in secondary school places.
- There had been a few resignations from support staff, two of which had been mitigated by switching the individuals into different roles, and recruitment was taking place to fill the other gaps. The opportunity had been taken to review the head of year structure with the new arrangement now providing for a non-teaching head for years 7 and 8, and a teaching head plus support for years 9 to 11. This was anticipated to better reflect the needs for pastoral support in these years. The cost of living crisis was impacting many staff across the school.

Question: *Did heads of year stay with their year groups?* The head of year 7 would remain with year 7 because of her expertise with the transition process. Heads of year 8 and 9 would stay with year groups for two years until they move to year 10. The same would happen with years 10 and 11. This allowed year heads to develop age-appropriate experience. The form tutor team would stay with the same form throughout their time in the school. This approach would be kept under review.

- There had been a small fire in the biomass boiler room at the weekend; the necessary repairs were covered by the biomass contract, and the reasons for the fire were being investigated. No serious damage had been caused; the school was using the back up gas provision until the cause had been established.

Question: *How was the engagement challenge with Pupil Premium learners being addressed?* Firstly, the attendance gap was being monitored closely and a full range of interventions deployed to encourage students to attend. Staff continued to discuss what more could be done to improve attendance. Second, in respect of enrichment, staff were exploring with PP learners what the barriers to participation might be and would seek to address them on an individual basis. Direct conversations were considered to be the best approach; seeking to find out what those students did after school if not taking part in clubs. Reward postcards were given for participation.

Question: *Were there cost implications for enrichment?* Clubs were all free, and trips would be subsidised for PP learners where necessary; it was not possible to fully cover the cost of trips however.

Question: *Was there an opportunity for PP students to get a snack after school?* Squash and biscuits were provided free at all clubs.

Question: *Could pupils be used as ambassadors for clubs?* Yes, staff were considering what more could be done to promote after school activities including involving sixth formers.

Question: *Were there PP students in the sixth form?* Yes, a small number; their views on tackling this problem would be sought.

- **The TAA LGB accepted** the report.

ITEM 3: READING STRATEGY

- This paper set out the school's approach to developing reading and responded to feedback from a recent Hertfordshire Improvement Partner (HIP) visit. The strategy had two strands – first, pursuing 'Reading Recovery' and second, developing a 'Reading Culture'. The strategy was being led by Simon Backhouse. The recovery strand made use of improved diagnostics testing to identify learners in need of support while the culture strand was aimed at all students. The paper identified key actions currently being pursued.

Question: *How was tutor reading part of this process?* The 'reading for pleasure' element of the culture strand encouraged teachers to discuss reading in a way that helped learners with following a story, understanding characters etc.

Question: *What was the difference compared with primary teaching?* At secondary level, for most learners, teaching reading was not about phonics; it was more to do with reading for meaning, the significance of punctuation in creating tone, reading with intonation and understanding etc. A consistent approach to teaching was nevertheless essential.

Question: *Were teachers still expected to set an example – eg by identifying their current reading?* Yes. Staff engaged really well with this and understood the importance of reading. There was a book swap in the staff room and staff were encouraged to interact with their colleagues over this.

Question: *How long would this strategy take to make an impact?* There should be an impact on the recovery element quite quickly (though each year the need would refresh with the new intake). There would be a continuing need to reinforce with staff the importance of

teaching new vocabulary. Creating a reading culture would take longer and the impact would be less immediately apparent.

- There would be a joint meeting in the Spring term with Roebuck staff to share experiences and expertise between schools on this strategy.
- Governors were pleased that the strategy had now been properly articulated and that there was clear leadership on it.
- **The TAA LGB welcomed** the report and endorsed the approach being taken.

ITEM 4: ANNUAL SEND REPORT 2021/22

- The report noted that the school had seen a growth in the SEND register including an increased number of students with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) compared with the previous year. A new location for the support team had been made available in school and more resources and support were being provided for this cohort. Governors asked:

Question: *Was this proportion of learners at the expected level?* There were 223 students on the SEND register; most would not have an EHCP and some might not have a medical diagnosis, but all had additional needs, and this reflected experience in other schools following the COVID-19 emergency. The current Y7 did not include a larger group of students in this category than expected, though there were some with high needs that might ordinarily have been expected to have already had an EHCP submission made by their primary school.

Question: *When an EHCP was rejected, was any reason given?* There was limited funding available, but why one case was successful and another unsuccessful was not always easy to understand. Two applications from TAA had recently been accepted and success did bring in some extra funding.

Question: *The data suggested that the school had twice as many learners on the SEND register as the national average, but was only just reaching the national average for students with EHCPs. What was the context for this?* There could be several explanations, including the local authority's resource challenge; parents who were less able to press their child's case; and local primary schools lacking the capacity to submit well-constructed applications. A new head responsible for this provision had recently been appointed by the local authority and this might make a difference. It was noted that between 2018 and 2022, the proportion of children with EHCPs in mainstream schools in Hertfordshire had risen from just over 30% to just over 41% - reflecting the limited specialist provision available.

Question: *Could TAA work with and support feeder primaries to improve their practice in this area?* Certainly, this could be part of a pitch encouraging them to join the Trust.

Question: *How many of the 199 first choice applicants for 2023/24 were SEND or EHCP?* This information would not be known until the summer term.

- Governors expressed their appreciation for a good and clear report, but suggested that it could be improved by including data about success in supporting learners with SEND.
- **The TAA LGB accepted** the report.

Action: Consider how to set and report on success measures in future SEND reporting.

ITEM 5: P2 (OCTOBER 2022) MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS REPORT

- The report showed that the financial position was ahead of budget year-to-date but would return to budget at the year end – with much of the difference relating to the timing of receipts and costs. There was now a small reserve, which was forecast to increase at the year-end and strong cash position.
- Cost risks included energy, the teachers' pay award and wider inflation. No additional cash had been provided to meet the difference between the business plan forecast for pay (a 3% increase) and the current offer – which had not yet been accepted and which might lead to future industrial action. Great care would need to be exercised if the year-end forecast were to be achieved in these circumstances.
- Two Capital Improvement Fund (CIF) bids had been submitted – which if successful would require match funding contributions (which were affordable), but it was unlikely that both bids would succeed.
- Over time, governors hoped that it would be possible to build up a modest reserves position to provide a modicum of protection against future financial risk; the school remained below the position other Trusts had achieved.
- Governors welcomed the news that there had been a clean audit report with no material recommendations and that the draft financial statements would be considered by the Board on 6 December 2023.

Question: *Was the additional fire safety work (the subject of one of the CIF bids) needed because the relevant buildings were not safe?* No; the buildings complied with safety regulations from the time when they had been built but needed to be brought up to current standards. Governors recognised the significant progress that had been made in addressing historic under-investment in school premises dating from prior to conversion.

- **The LGB welcomed** the report.

ITEM 6: UTILITIES COST – UPDATE

- This paper described current arrangements for energy costs at TAA. In summary, the school's main heating source was the biomass installation, covered by a 20 year contract with c14 years still to run. Biomass was not covered by the government's energy price guarantee, but was affected by the Russian invasion of Ukraine (historically, pellets had been sourced from Siberia). Pellet costs were currently c£515 per tonne (c10.5p-11p / LHV kWh) – a broadly similar cost to alternative fuels. It was also noted that the biomass installation was carried out without the school having to bear any capital costs. The estates team was in regular contact with Kyotherm (the provider) about fuel costs.
- The school was currently operating on the gas back-up because of a small fire in the biomass boiler room, the cause of which was being investigated.
- The electricity and gas contract was also a longer term agreement as part of a bulk purchasing consortium; two years' notice of termination needed to be given and there were no current plans to do this. Costs were being monitored very carefully.
- **The LGB welcomed** the report.

ITEM 7: SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022/23 – PROGRESS REPORT

- The report identified progress with actions and governors were pleased to see that solid progress had been maintained. The action associated with the Reading Strategy had been rated Amber rather than Red in this report.

Question: *Was staff engagement with the Development Plan satisfactory?* The latter part of the autumn term was always challenging and very busy, which could mean that some actions were necessarily delayed. The wider cost of living crisis was also negatively impacting staff. However, a staff survey was being conducted and would be reported at the next meeting.

- **The TAA LGB was satisfied** that good progress was being maintained.

ITEM 8: TAA RISK REGISTER

- Two risks had been added since the previous report and one closed, as described in the paper. The changes had also been discussed at the recent Audit & Risk Committee meeting. The closed risk concerned the implementation of the new Management Information System (MIS) – Arbor – which had been successfully completed. While individual day-to-day issues were expected to be encountered, as with any business application, the risk was not now at a corporate level.

Question: *Were staff making effective use of Arbor?* Yes, overall. Parents were also making substantial use of the system: 94% had registered and were using it. Some administrative roles needed further development and definition, but these were in the normal course of business.

- **The TAA LGB endorsed** the latest iteration of the risk register.

ITEM 9: GOVERNOR/SLT LINK REPORTS

- The recent Governor in School session in November had focussed on teaching and learning strategies and showed how improvement strategies were being applied, including the relationship between behaviour and attitudes and progress. Teaching and learning champions described their activities and engagement with each other. Staff undertaking these roles were being supported with personal development relatively early in a teaching career – this was a good opportunity to develop skills gain experience.
- Governors had been impressed with the way that the teaching and learning strategy was described and implemented and aligned with the school's development priorities.
- **The TAA LGB noted** the report.

ITEM 10: POLICIES REVIEW

- There were no policies for review at this meeting.

ITEM 11: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- None.

ITEM 12: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Thursday 9 February 2023, 18.00, by videoconference (Microsoft Teams).
- The meeting closed at 19.15.

.....
Signed – Chair of Governors

.....
Date

LOCAL GOVERNING BODY ACTION LOG

Meeting	Item	What	Who	When
05/05/22	2.	Provide diversity analysis for student and staff cohorts at TAA.	Mark Lewis	27/05/22
07/07/22	8.	Make arrangements for parent governor election.	Mark Lewis	30/09/22
13/10/22	2.	Issue reminder about returning 2022/23 Declarations of Interest.	Robert Dale	31/10/22
13/10/22	13.	Arrange visit to school with Business Manager to discuss how to improve the current position and to gain access to grant funding.	David Gray	30/11/22
01/12/22	4.	Consider how to set and report on success measures in future SEND reporting.	Mark Lewis	31/01/23