

**Polaris Multi-Academy Trust**

**Members & Trust Board Meeting**

**6 January 2022 at 5.00pm**

**MINUTES**

**Present at the Meeting: -**

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| **Members:** | **Duncan Brundell** |  | **DB** |
|  | **Fiona Cullivan-Ward** |  | **FCW** |
|  | **Martin Ford** |  | **MF** |
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| **Directors:** | **Andrew Tatham** |  | **AT** |
|  | **John Sharp** |  | **JS** |
|  | **Nick Midgley** |  | **NM** |
|  | **Ian Philp** |  | **IP** |
|  | **Sam Priestley** |  | **SP** |
|  | **Jackie Nellis** |  | **JN** |
|  | **Karen Bowron** |  | **KB** |
|  | **Andy Mahon** |  | **AM** |

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| **Attendees:** | **David Whitehead** | **(Clerk)** | | | **DW** |
|  | **Steve Evans** | | **CEO** | **SE** | |
|  | **Sarah Laverick** | **CFO** | | | **SLA** |

DB welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made by all.

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| 1.0 Apologies for Absence | |
| Apologies were noted and accepted from Colin Meredith. | |
| 2.0 Declaration of Interest for items upon the agenda | |
| Presented by: | Clerk |
| There were no declarations of interest. | |
| 3.0 Members to receive and approve Articles of Association and Scheme of Delegation | |
| Presented by: | Chair |
| The Articles of Association and the Scheme of Delegation had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting.  These were formally approved and accepted by members. The decision was unanimous.  Proposed: FCW Seconded: MF | |
| 4.0 Polaris MAT Strategic Plan | |
| Presented by: | Chair |
| ***See attached Appendix for questions asked and answers provided prior to the meeting.***  The document had been circulated prior to the meeting and SE explained the rationale for this.  The document has been designed to be a strategic document, that through robust reporting to the Board is underpinned by strong operational quality assurance practices (these systems were highlighted by the CEO). Hence this document is an umbrella document that gives the Trust the comfort that the correct areas are being focused upon in the plan.  SE thanked KB for her questions relating to the content of the plan and advised how it had been developed to show a clear direction.  In respect of the Risk Register, software packages are being investigated and any further proposals will be brought to a future meeting.  The informative section on each of the schools in the MAT was particularly noted and this section will be developed on an ongoing basis.  **Q – The Vision is very much around pupil outcomes, however, within the strategy section we only have raising attainment and progress - is this enough? How will we measure how we are delivering on the vision?**  A – The ultimate judgement is from Ofsted, but the weekly assessment comes from teachers and the leaders at each school.  SE explained the importance of the School Improvement Plan and the data assessments which take place. He explained how a Section 5 inspection would look at Quality Assurance (QA) as well as outcomes.  The numerous QA processes in place were outlined to members and directors.  How judgements are made through observations and QA through the year were noted.  **Q – Will the Director visits previously carried out be continuing in schools?**  A – The LGB Chairs carry out visits monthly covering areas such as Pupil Premium, Data etc. Safeguarding/SEND Lead Governors visits will also take place.  KB noted that the high-level approach detailed in the plan would benefit from a more contextual approach. SE explained how this will be developed as a Trust through the coming months and that this and future plans are working documents.  **Q - Will the plan be published on the website?**  A - Yes once it has been finalised. The document will be reviewed at each Trust meeting.  It was noted that the plan is very reflective of what other Trusts produce.  The overall strategic objectives of the Trust were discussed in detail.  **Q - Expansion – there is not a great deal noted in the plan. How are we going to look at any expansion and incorporate it into the plan?**  A – The detailed plan submitted to the RSC was noted by SE and a summary version is included in the plan circulated.  FCW noted that capacity needs to be in place to support further schools in the MAT.  DB advised that Polaris may well be asked to take on schools as well as actively looking for schools to join.  IP explained that discussions have taken place previously re the pace of development at RHS and a considered approach to expansion needs to be taken. This view of ‘growth with care’ was agreed as the correct approach by the Trust Board.  This area was discussed in detail.  The plan will be reviewed continually involving Members, Trust and LGB members | |
| 5.0 CEO update report | |
| Presented by: | CEO |
| ***See attached Appendix for questions asked and answers provided prior to the meeting.***  SEadvised that this had been written in December and he noted the involvement of different advisers as well as the LA.  The challenges faced in respect of upskilling staff, phonics and reading programmes across the MAT were noted.  He explained how different Phonics/Reading methods were previously in place across the Brighter Futures Trust and now this has been addressed with standardised practices introduced. CPD etc for staff in this regard has taken place. The TA involvement in the Phonics programme was outlined.  The Ofsted inspection at Luddenden was detailed to the meeting.  The need to standardise the teaching processes across the MAT particularly in reading was stressed.  History for example, needs to be taught chronologically and this is being rolled out across the primaries.  SE noted the hard work, openness and commitment of all the staff in improving this area of school practice. The timescale to turn the curriculum around is 24 months.  **Q – Across the Trust what is the biggest issue causing concern?**  A – The delivery of consistently higher standards of teaching at Field Lane  The progress being made in this area and the work taking place to address this was outlined.  **Q – Is there a potential for increasing numbers at Field Lane?**  A – SE explained how online marketing is taking place to try a reach a broader audience. The open evening was well supported.  **Q – How responsive do you think parents at Field Lane will be to any changes in respect of those attending school?**  A – We must encourage greater numbers attending due to the financial pressures.  SP noted the marketing budget needs to reflect the need to promote certain schools.  Luddenden Foot is oversubscribed at present, so this is not an issue at all the schools.  DB advised that once standards improve then the demand for places will hopefully grow.  Wrap around care provision was also discussed and noted as being a key area in this regard.  The school-to-school support currently being undertaken by SE, MW and MC was summarised, however, some of the involvement with another local authority will be ending in the near future.  **Q – Have we got the capacity to continue with this work?**  A – Yes. The benefits to RHS and the Trust by seeing other practices in place at the schools were noted.  Staffing  The resignations received by the Trust were noted and an Administrator is being recruited in the near future to support the Central Team.  A staffing structure was requested by Directors to give clarity on roles within the Trust. | |
| 6.0 Forecast income and expenditure report and narrative | |
| Presented by: | CFO |
| ***See attached Appendix for questions asked and answers provided prior to the meeting.***  SL advised that there is no requirement to submit this to the ESFA as a new Trust, and it has been circulated to Directors for information.  The breakdown of the data was noted including the total Trust income.  The audited accounts have been submitted and from next month, monthly management reports will be provided.  The healthy reserves position was noted, and the Trusts reserves policy will determine how this is to be used.  **Q – What is the Reserves policy at RHS?**  A – It is £250k. There was no policy at the primaries when they were taken on. How this will be developed to ensure a more appropriate reserve was explained.  The revised policy will be brought to a future meeting.  IP noted that much of the income is guaranteed due to being pupil led.  **Q – How sure are we on the capital estate?**  A – The CIF has been carried out and the report is awaited. Several small issues were detailed. In terms of future bids, 30% of the project costs is now required.  **Q - Estates Management – is the staffing in this area being investigated?**  A – It is, however, there are experienced people on site.  **Q - Field Lane – are the issues with income and expenditure purely due to pupil numbers?**  A – Yes.  AM asked if it was realistic to try and get a balanced budget at Field Lane or will this continue to run at a deficit. SL explained the previous Trusts policy of allocating costs across their Trust, so it is difficult to answer at present. It is hoped to give a detailed answer in May to this question.  SE detailed the different areas to be investigated in respect of previous Trust figures.  The different support staff costs were also noted, and these will be investigated further.  The high level of SEN pupils at Field Lane along with the numbers of Disadvantaged pupils was also discussed. | |
| 7.0 Minutes and Matters Arising from the Trust Board meeting 11 November 2021 | |
| Presented by: | Chair |
| The minutes had been circulated prior to the meeting.  Agenda item 4 – to be amended to show the unanimous appointment of Ian Philp as Chair of the Audit Risk and Finance Committee.  **Proposed:** JS **Seconded:** KB    Subject to the above, the minutes were approved as a true record. | |
| 8.0 Trust Budget Forecast Report | |
| Presented by: | CFO |
| Addressed in agenda item 6. | |
| 9.0 Any Other Business | |
| Presented by: | Chair |
| SE advised that the revised Declaration of Pecuniary Interest Form is now available on the portal and any Directors who have not completed this were asked to do so.  The rationale for this was explained. | |
| 10.0 Date of next meeting | |
| Presented by: | Clerk |
| Trust Board - 7 April 2022  Members – 12 July 2022 | |

**Meeting ended at 6.20pm**

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| **Approved as a True record of the Meeting** | | | | |
| **Signed:** | | |  | |
|  | | | **Chair** | |
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| Agenda item | | Action | Person Responsible | | Deadline | |
| 5 | | Detailed Staffing Structure to be circulated to Directors | SE | | ASAP | |

**Appendix A**

**Polaris Members & Trust Board meeting 6 January 2022**

Questions and responses received prior to the meeting

**Q - Governance meeting schedule - I note the SIP visits which, in respect of RHS, purposely coincided with a Director visit session. Given the current situation with Omicron I would suggest that any Director visit sessions are not undertaken in January. However, what are the plans going forward, particularly with the Primary schools in terms of Director visit sessions?**

A - I will inform Mat to update him on this change to the Rastrick schedule.

The plan in year one is that dates are being agreed between school leaders and LGB governors with named responsibility to conduct visits to schools (based on current circumstances this has seen a delay). Alongside this, the Chairs of each primary school LGB meet with the Heads of School once a month for an update on the progress against the SIP.

**Q - Strategic Plan - how often will this document be reviewed, both formally and informally?**

A - The document will be reviewed by the Trust and Members annually. This review will form part of the meeting highlighted in the schedule in July 2022.

**Q - Given that they were all part of the same Trust before joining Polaris, is there a marked difference in approach to phonics, curriculum design and implementation, across the Primaries?**

A - There was a difference in the depth of planning and implementation. This is because the previous Trust did not have the capacity to develop, test and implement strategies in a systemic way, meaning that too often strategies were not quality assured, followed up and checked for their stability and on-going effectiveness. For example, where a school has started the delivery of the phonics programme earlier (Siddal) the practice is deeper and more consistent than the other schools and where teaching is of a higher standard across all year groups and medium-term planning is more progressed, curriculum design is stronger (Luddendenfoot).

**Q - There is clearly work to be done but leaders within the primaries are aware of this and is reflected in the school improvement plan, which I suggest is a positive. Given this can you put a timescale on these improvements being undertaken and completed?**

A - It is definitely a positive, as is the on-going enthusiasm of school leaders for the structure and consistency the Polaris MAT brings. The different elements you have listed above will require different timescales. The curriculum is a large piece of work and will take 24 months to get to a stage where each subject in each year group is of the same high quality in all the schools. The progress in the development of the phonics programme is well underway. I am expecting to see incremental improvements through this academic year to result in all school to be at least good in this area by September 2022.

**Q - RHS - it used to be Humanities and MFL that were identified areas for improvement and now Science is an area of concern. Have they concentrated too much (although successfully) on Humanities and MFL to the detriment of Science?**

A - I do not think the improvements we have made in MFL, and Humanities have been at the detriment to other subjects. The leadership team in Science has now been in place for 3 years, meaning that there is stability at middle leader level. The key area to improve in Science is to recruit the number of teachers needed to bolster the faculty and improve the small number of teachers who are not consistently teaching well. The faculty saw a considerable number of staffing moving on two years ago for reasons such as promotion and to work in the private sector. The school has done everything it can to recruit to these posts, but the pandemic has negatively impacted the process. The process for recruitment continues, with adverts being run across the Christmas period and through the early part of January, with the view of running interviews in mid-January.

**Q - Do we have enough resources across the school to maintain and sustain improvements/excellence in all subjects?**

A - Yes. Senior and middle leadership depth and technical skill is continually improving (as seen in the last SIP report). The Trust’s succession principles are supporting strong internal recruitment.

**Q - How are the new recruitments going? Have they been advertised yet? What level of interest?**

A - Recruitment processes in both primary and secondary schools in the Trust are running (as highlighted above). The market is the most difficult I have seen it, despite this we are seeing interest in the adverts we have placed, particularly amongst student teachers.

**Q - Why, with similar pupil numbers on roll is it that Siddal gets 20% more GAG than Luddendenfoot and why Luddenden get 40% more PE UIFSM than Siddal?**

A - The demographics of pupils in each of the schools are quite different. The IDACI codes (Index of Deprivation Affecting Children Index) drive the amount of income per child. The higher the area of deprivation, means that income per pupil is higher in Siddal. The difference in PE UIFSM funding allocation is distorted because pupils receiving Pupil Premium funding through the DfE grant are not eligible for the funding in this line / as part of this income stream. There are high numbers of pupils receiving the Pupil Premium grant at Siddal, hence the figure is lower.

**Q - The issues relating to Science at Rastrick could well highlight the impact of restrictions on subjects that rely on learning through practical experience and experiment in a laboratory.**

**To what extent is the school managing to provide catch up in practical sessions?**

A - The impact of the pandemic on practical lessons has been mitigated against through adaptations to the curriculum. The key area to improve in Science is to recruit the number of teachers needed to bolster the faculty and improve the small number of teachers who are not consistently teaching well.

**Q - Regarding the primary schools, one issue is about compliance and consistency. How can schools be helped with issue of meeting very precise requirements whilst maintaining the broader aims of the curriculum? (Given my previous experience it is highly likely that the current requirements will change again)**

A - To support compliance and consistency we have worked with the Heads of School to agree the principles that sit behind the school’s curriculum intent. We are also in the process of systematically reviewing each curriculum area to ascertain its current effectiveness and compliance to the standards expected by the inspectorate (well sequenced, broad, and balanced). As each subject area is completed the Trust team are collaborating with subject specialists from each school to develop and implement new medium-term planning, using an agreed format that is consistent across the primary schools in the Trust. This piece of work will not be rushed through, as I am committed to ensuring that those who are delivering, and leading curriculum areas have an ownership of its design.