



## Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting held on Tuesday 27 February 2024, 5.30 pm, Zoom

Present: Brian Message (BM), Chair of Trustees  
 Gary Weston (GW), Trustee  
 Val Cameron (VC), Trustee  
 James Nicholson (JN) (joined meeting remotely from 5.50pm)  
 Raj Joshi (RJ), Trustee  
 Andrew Goulding (AEG), Trustee & CEO (ACES)

In attendance: David McMillan (DRM), Finance Director (ACES)  
 Simon Eardley (SE), Director of Primary (ACES)  
 Antonia Drysdale (AD), Director of SEND (ACES)  
 Mark Patterson (MJP), Principal – Hinchingsbrooke School (HBK)  
 Debbie Warner, Clerk

1.	Welcome & Apologies
	The Clerk noted apologies from Rebecca Ryan and the Chair welcomed Mark Patterson (MJP), Principal of HBK, to provide an update on the School's Sixth Form.
2.	Declaration of interests
	No new declarations of interest.
3.	HBK Sixth Form Update – Mark Patterson (MJP)
	<p>Trustees confirmed they had received and read MJP's Sixth Form report prior to the meeting. MJP provided a comparison between HBK Sixth Form and national for 2023 results at KS5. He added that the Sixth Form did well comparatively with other schools in the county and was among the strongest and top three for all key measures. MJP referred to the accompanying presentation evidencing improvement since 2019 in terms of results. He referred to the large and inclusive sixth form, based on its broad curriculum, attracting external students and students with fairly modest entry requirements.</p> <p>MJP said it was his opinion that if the curriculum and entry criteria remains the same, incremental improvements in students' results are likely to be seen but these are likely to be modest. However, raising grade entry requirements, would likely see a significant uplift. He added that, in the short term, fewer students would be eligible, resulting in less money and a less inclusive Sixth Form.</p> <p>The Chair thanked MJP for his report and advised Trustees that he would like to see the Sixth Form continue to be inclusive. The Chair invited questions to MJP.</p> <p><b>Questioning/challenge:</b></p> <p><b>Q: A Trustees noted that the number of pupils in Year 12 has fallen after forecasting an increase, indicating a pattern of optimism followed by disappointment. Increased numbers of external students could be largely due to issues that other Sixth Forms are currently facing rather than a sustainable increase in numbers of external students. Additionally, the Sixth Form should mostly serve ACES students, nurtured by ACES schools. Only 117 out of 300 HBK students will join which is the same level as 2 years ago representing a decline. Why are HBK students choosing to go elsewhere and what is being done as mitigation?</b></p> <p><b>A: MJP added that the entry requirements were raised in 2020 and are currently higher than in previous years. This situation has been created by the modest increase in entry requirements. MJP said he is not concerned about Sixth Form numbers and some students who have not applied because of their predicted grades will do so once they have received their results. The school does not provide vocational subjects. MJP believes the Sixth Form is strong and results are good but to raise the bar further will potentially result in fewer students. He added that 400 students in the Sixth Form is a very high number.</b></p> <p><b>Q: A Trustee asked about sustainability of numbers for future; has any work been done on projections in future years? Are students disintitled from the school of their choice because of a slight discrepancy in results?</b></p> <p><b>A: MJP referred to the algorithms used to predict numbers but acknowledged the inevitability that should entry requirements be raised, fewer will get in. There is a question over what the right grade entry requirement is and students with modest results also do very well in subjects like film studies. MJP felt that grade entry requirements should be looked at on a subject by subject basis.</b></p>

Signed:  
 Date:

	<p><b>Q: A Trustee asked if the Sixth Form is adding value to students; are they benefiting from being in the Sixth Form?</b></p> <p><b>A: MJP thought it was a mixed picture but the vast majority of students do well.</b></p> <p>The Chair thanked MJP for his report. MJP left the meeting at this point. AD concurred that the Sixth Form should stay inclusive and that it was important to track students from their starting and finishing points. Further questioning on the Sixth Form was answered by the CEO.</p> <p><b>Q: A Trustee enquired how success is measured?</b></p> <p><b>A: The CEO said that this is evidenced through destinations but not all students go on to university; this should be monitored through the Local Governing Committee (LGC). The CEO believed that the purpose of Sixth Form is to allow students to access their next levels. Another measure is quality of teaching.</b></p> <p><b>A Trustee said he would be interested to know whether the school canvases pupils as to why they do not follow on at HBK Sixth Form – this should also be addressed to the LGC.</b></p> <p><b>ACTION: CEO TO SPEAK TO COG TO ENSURE PROGRESS AND SIXTH FORM DESTINATIONS ARE BEING MONITORED BY THE LGC</b></p>
4.	<p><b>Approve minutes of meeting of 6 December 2023</b></p> <p>Minutes of the meeting were deemed to be an accurate account of proceedings and were signed off by the Chair. Action points were discussed: IT Infrastructure: Continuation of work being done by The Finance Director and GW - Recommended actions provided by GW who requested an update following his meeting. The Finance Director informed Trustees that work on asset replacement plan is ongoing. Trust to look at IT strategy and consider alternatives for future PCs. The Finance Director said there was a question over leasing versus purchasing – with over 900 PCs across the schools, there is a need to identify which ones need replacing. 100 laptops are already leased which is in the region of £1500 over 3 years. Leasing is preferable but still needs to be funded.</p> <p><b>ACTION: FINANCE DIRECTOR TO PROVIDE UPDATE TO GW FOLLOWING WORK ON IT STRATEGY</b></p> <p>A Trustee asked whether a £10 levy on each student would be perceived as being part of the top slice? The Finance Director said this decision should be driven at school level.</p>
5.	<p><b>CEO's Report – CEO</b></p> <p>The CEO updated Trustees on his report which had been circulated and read by Trustees prior to the meeting. The CEO highlighted priority points in the report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capital allocation has now been reached due to pupil figures and the Finance Director is creating an Asset Management plan which will be ready by the summer; this will focus on estates to identify areas of most risk. £350,000 per year funding will need to be put aside for the Trust to identify areas that are either critical or have a safety requirement; this is not a lot of money to cover all sites and there will be no further DfE funding.</li> <li>• CIF bids have been submitted and this will be the last opportunity.</li> <li>• National matters include debate on mobile phones.</li> <li>• The CEO thanked Trustees for the extra funding made available from the Trust for high needs in the schools.</li> <li>• CEO noted that IT is relatively more stable with no issues reported.</li> <li>• HR and Estates Team are stretched. An Apprentice Electrician has been appointed and a Primary School Compliance Caretaker will be appointed resulting in a small increase in budget but will reduce need for specialist caretakers. Investment will be needed to carry out the work the Trust needs to do.</li> <li>• Absence in schools is still problematic with parental shift in attitude since the pandemic; this continues to be a priority for ACES schools.</li> <li>• <i>Simon Eardley, Director of Primary, provided an update contained in the CEO's report:</i> A focus is on Arbor use in the primary schools to ensure it is being used to its full capacity. More functionality will be forthcoming from Arbor to allow more effective reporting to the Trust and Headteachers reports. Increase in Reception year at GBA is working well.</li> </ul>

- *Antonia Drysdale, Director of Inclusion, provided an update contained in the CEO's report:*  
Ongoing challenge with Local Authority on EHCPs at SPS and GBA. AD reiterated her thanks for the high needs funding from the Trust. There is a focus on outdoor learning and part of the grant will be able to enhance outdoor areas at HBK and GBA. Discussions with Forest School and Wilderness are taking place. Quality of SEND provision in the schools is very good.

The CEO thanked Headteachers for their reports which he summarised to Trustees:

- Cromwell Academy oversubscribed and very well led.
- GBA is coming on well with good work around high needs.
- GCA has seen co-heads absent but Simon Eardley, Charlie Pettit and Antonia Drysdale have stepped in.
- SPS continued issue with low numbers of pupils.
- HBK covers complex aspects within the school.

AD noted that the HBK report does not reflect the impact of the money coming in from the Trust board for high needs and where the money has been allocated and requested it be included in the next report. AD added that increased numbers at HBK may lead to pressure on Basecamp and intervention spaces and put a strain on budgets.

**ACTION: MJP TO ADD DETAILS OF IMPACT OF HIGH NEEDS FUNDING IN NEXT HBK REPORT TO TRUSTEES**

**Questioning/challenge:**

**Q: A Trustee noted that in the HBK section of the CEO's report, it states that the increased PAN is causing financial stress on the school, however, the intention of the increased PAN was surely to ease matters?**

**A: The Finance Director confirmed that this is the case: HBK's budget was going to an in-year deficit and a PAN increase was required. A high proportion of high needs students have been allocated places at the school and the increased PAN has necessitated extra classes and staffing.**

**The Chair of Finance Committee stressed that it was important not to overspend as this will cause an issue when the school reaches capacity.**

**6. Growth Plans - CEO**

The CEO advised Trustees that following an executive meeting on 13 February 2024, a document has been put together outlining pros and cons of growing versus ACES staying the same size. He added that the document is very much through the lens of each individual school and that the benefit of system leadership has not been considered. The CEO stressed that one of the reasons to merge with another Trust is to benefit from more feeder primary schools and secondary schools.

The CEO read out the priority points of his growth proposal document:

The Trust has been seeking growth for a long time with a desire to have more than one secondary school and that many attempts have been made to merge. He feels uncertainty is destabilising and there is a need to set out a clear intention of merger with timescales with a recommendation of December 2024. The CEO asked if Trustees were prepared to adopt this proposal.

A confidential discussion followed about growth and Trusts that are being considered.

The Chair felt that after discussion, it was unanimous that ACES should join another MAT with at least one other secondary school but felt the timescale was unrealistic and were therefore opposed to the timescale of December 2024. Trustees reiterated earlier discussions that it was imperative to bring the staff body with them. The CEO suggested that it be articulated to Headteachers reasons for not taking some of their suggestions forward. A Trustee thought that the elimination process could be accommodated by a visual grid.

**7. Leadership at HBK – CEO**

The Chair advised Trustees that he has recently become aware of some unhappiness from The Principal at Hinchingsbrooke School and has had a couple of conversations with him since the executive meeting of 13/2/24.

The CEO left the meeting at this point.

The Clerk left the meeting at this point.

**10. Date of next meeting**

Tuesday 7 May 2024, 6pm

