



ACES ACADEMIES TRUST

Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting held on Tuesday 6 December 2023, 5.30 pm, Community Meetings Room, Hinchingsbrooke School

Present: Brian Message (BM), Chair of Trustees
Gary Weston (GW), Trustee
Rebecca Ryan (RR), Trustee
Val Cameron (VC), Trustee
James Nicholson (JN) (joined meeting remotely from 5.50pm)
Raj Joshi (RJ), Trustee (joined meeting remotely)
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)
Debbie Warner, Clerk

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| 1. | Welcome & Apologies |
| | The CEO welcomed Val Cameron as a Trustee who will join the Standards and Innovation Committee due to her significant experience in the education sector. There were no apologies. |
| 2. | Declaration of interests |
| | No new declarations of interest. |
| 3. | To approve minutes of meeting 17/10/2023 |
| | The minutes of the meeting were deemed to be an accurate account of proceedings and were signed off by the Chair. The action points from the last meeting were discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaster Recovery Plan: Ongoing (DRM) • GW to visit ACES Central team to provide input on IT issues: GW has visited – ongoing. <p>The Chair noted that IT has been an ongoing issue for the schools. GW added that there is a perception that IT in the schools is a bit “rubbish” and that he had noted there is a lack of strategy. Discussion by Trustees followed to consider the funding of more PCs.</p> <p>Questioning/challenge:</p> <p>Q: A Trustee enquired on numbers of PCs that the Trust could fund A: The Finance Director said that 1200 pcs over a 5 year period would be in the region of £10 per student per year Q: Could the Trust look to lease pcs to the schools which are less than 5 years old so that all students have access to good quality IT equipment A: DRM said that there are 900 pcs of varying ages across the sites. Not all pcs need to be “top spec”. He added that all teachers pcs are currently on a 3 year upgrade. He added that pcs for self-study do not need to be of the best spec but they need to be able to have access to the internet Q: A Trustee said that purchasing pcs should be part of the strategic plan which would benefit the schools Q: A Trustee enquired about the possibility of using iPads Q: A Trustee warned of the issue of maintenance on older laptops and was also concerned about the security aspects relating to cyber attacks A: The Finance Director said that there had been an upgrade on the servers about 5 years ago to ensure that the network is secure. Risk is not associated with age.</p> <p>ACTION: IT INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN – DRM/GW</p> <p>The CEO thanked GW for his input regarding IT issues and for his ongoing commitment to improve strategies in this area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility study on expanding pupils at GBA: Ongoing but currently no requirement for growth – DRM • CEO to write to Gillian Keegan regarding high needs students: The CEO had written but has not received any communication to date. |

Signed:
Date:

4. CEO's Report

Trustees confirmed they had received and read the report prior to the meeting. The CEO summarised key points from his report: National matters, Trustees resources and governance, Children's Commissioner Report addressing the importance of addressing school absences. Ofsted background reading also included in the report.

The CEO also summarised the CIF bids which are currently pending; this has been discussed in detail at the recent Finance Committee meeting. He informed Trustees of the priority bids for the schools:

HBK: Fire safety £100,000 and roof middle school roof replacement £700,000; GCA: boiler refurbishment £92,000 and roof refurbishment £150,000; CRA: boiler refurbishment £130,000; SPS: boiler refurbishment £130,000

The CEO is hopeful that the current CIF bid for the middle school roof at Hinchingsbrooke School will be successful as this is the third year an application has been made. The Finance Director informed Trustees that it is likely to be the last chance to apply for CIF bids as the Trust will soon reach >3000 students and will qualify for capital investment.

The CEO updated Trustees on the recent executive meeting that took place where he asked members to review a list of all schools in neighbouring counties and provide feedback as to possible options for further growth; this will be discussed at the next executive meeting in January. Discussions with the Cambridgeshire Trust will also continue. Further work in this direction will run alongside the continued work with CAM Trust. The opening of a new Secondary School in Alconbury Weald has been delayed until 2025 or 2026 which is likely to result in a 2-year bulge of some 800+ additional pupils, some of whom may live in catchment but it is likely that this will be accommodated by St Peter's and Sawtry and that HBK is unlikely to be affected.

The CEO summarised the work being undertaken by the Learning Consultants in the Trust. In particular, a summary from Charlie Pettit that shows the excellent work he is doing. The SOS group (Science Outreach Support) is particularly pleasing.

The CEO informed Trustees that there had been no response from his letter to the DfE regarding support for high needs pupils crisis in the schools.

Appendices:

A report from Simon Eardley, Director of Primary report

A report from Antonia Drysdale, Director of SEND and Inclusion report – covered elsewhere in the agenda.

A project update from ACES Learning Consultants

Reports from the Headteachers of each of the schools in the Trust

The Chair thanked the CEO for his detailed report and acknowledged the thorough update contained in the appendices.

5. Strategic Plan – High Needs Action Plan

Trustees confirmed they had received and read the document prior to the meeting. The CEO thanked the work that had been carried out by Jamies Jones – SENDCo for HBK – in contributing information for the report. The report shows a breakdown of comparative figures of EHCPs in neighbouring secondary schools and the number of SEND pupils in each of the primary schools. The CEO informed Trustees that there is already a strategic plan for SEND and Inclusion but the report further expands on the existing plan. Some additional funding from the Trust will accelerate progress and impact positively on the wellbeing of staff by reducing workload and providing additional training. This in turn will positively affect pupil progress and attainment. He added that the plan is built on what schools are prioritising in SEND and what they think will make the biggest difference to pupils and staff. This has been combined with the ACES strategic overview of SEND needs and best practice in meeting them.


Specific areas of focus: Physical Resources; Classroom, pupil facing issues of teaching and support; Administration. The Finance Director gave a breakdown of the ACES schools overspending on SEND.

AD informed Trustees that EHCP applications were admin heavy and better CPD would provide added capacity. Additionally onsite alternative provision will mean schools don't have to bring in expertise.

Discussion among Trustees on how the Trust could assist the schools:

- Could an amount from reserves be given to fund the shortfall in the schools.
- Issue with employing extra staff is that costs will be ongoing.
- Savings can be made if alternative provision is onsite and negates the need to bring in external expertise.

Signed:



Date: 27/02/2024

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could appoint administrators initially for a limited time of 2 years which could be worked into the schools budgets. - Administrator contracts will be funded by the Trust for the first 2 years but thereafter, cost would sit with the schools should they decide to keep the support. - Risk needs to be considered if we were to merge. - Investment in SEND could be supplemented by fundraising. <p>Outcome of discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £200,000 to be funded by the Trust over the next 5 terms to include appointment of 2 SEND Administrators - AD to get training costs down - Agree timeline to measure impact |
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| 6. | Growth Plans |
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| | <p>The CEO summarised current position:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACES continues to look at other options for growth. • The CEO stressed that the main driver in this process is to have more than one secondary school. • Consulting with Headteachers for their views on other Trusts worth considering. • Further meeting of the joint exec board on 25/01/24. <p>Questioning/challenge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Trustee was keen to consider what the Headteachers came back with in terms of options as it is key to have everyone on board and that they are involved in the decision-making process. - The Finance Director said that a 2-hub approach could be considered. - A Trustee enquired whether there is any evidence to support that ACES should be an independent Trust. <p style="background-color: #d9e1f2;">ACTION: FURTHER JOINT EXEC/HEADS/COG MEETING TO BE SCHEDULED IN FEBRUARY 2024 - CEO</p> <p>The Finance Director was pleased to report that the SLA with St Anne’s is going well. They are receiving finance, HR, SIP and performance management support from the Trust.</p> |
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| 7. | AOB |
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| | <p>A Trustee highlighted discussions from the Standard & Innovations Committee on HBK Sixth Form; increase in numbers of students is not going in the right direction. It was evident there is some good teaching in the Sixth Form but it is not consistent. He added that grades and entry requirements have gone down and it feels that the Sixth Form is going in the wrong direction.</p> <p style="background-color: #d9e1f2;">ACTION: INVITE MARK PATTERSON TO NEXT MEETING FULL TRUSTEES TO PRESENT ON SIXTH FORM - CEO</p> |
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Signed:



Date: 27/02/2024