

Southfields Multi-Academy Trust

Meeting of the Board of Trustees on Wednesday, 2 December 2020 at 17:30 via GoogleMeet videoconference

Present:	Susan Hayday	Trustee	Chair / SH
	Liz Buckley	Trustee	LB
	George Dryja	Trustee	GD
	Andrew Gardner	Trustee	AG
	Wanda Golinska	Trustee / Secondary Head	WG
	Alexis Martinowsky	Trustee	AM
	John Moore	Trustee	JM
	Deborah Rix	Trustee / Special Head	DR
	Victoria Simpson	Trustee	VS
	Sian Tyler	Trustee	ST
	Jackie Valin	Trustee / MAT CEO	JV
In attendance:	Stephen Elson	Finance Director	SE
	Mark Heathcote	Member	MH
Clerk:	Kathleen Formosa		KF

MINUTES

1. Welcome, Apologies & Quorum

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting at: 17:30.

1.1.1 The Chair stated that an item of confidential business would be added as item 11 on the agenda. The matter would be taken in the absence of staff, including Trustees holding staff appointments.

1.2 Apologies were **received** and **accepted** from Sarah Taylor.

1.3 The meeting was **confirmed** quorate and proceeded to business accordingly.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 There were no interests declared.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

3.1 The minutes of the 15 July 2020 meeting of the Board of Trustees (**Paper 1**) were **reviewed** and **approved** for signature by the Chair.

4. Matters Arising

4.1 Matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting (**Paper 2**) were **reviewed**.

4.1.1 The following matters arising were **discussed**:

- Regarding item 6, the Chair clarified that as reopening the schools had been verified by government, the matter did not need to come back to Trustees.

- Regarding item 7.1, JV stated that she was overseeing the operational aspects of premises works, and these were progressing with priority on essential works. It was **noted** that fundraising may be undertaken to support some non-essential works.
- SE stated that safeguarding had been included as part of the risk matrix, and this had now been checked in relation to Linden Lodge.
- Regarding consideration for the Head of School role, JV reported that this was in hand for 2020/21.
- Regarding item 7.2, JV stated that training dates would be sent directly to Trustees by the local authority, with Trustees asked to notify JV if they wished to undertake any training offered.

ACTION: JV to check that all Trustees and governors are receiving emails from Wandsworth local authority regarding training.

5. Chief Executive's Report

5.1 The CEO's summer report (**Paper 3**) was **taken as read**.

5.1.1 ***A Trustee asked whether there had been follow-up to the recommendation that a pharmacy technician be appointed at least part time at Linden Lodge.***

5.1.2 JV reported that there were no updates to report, but that the recommendation had been followed up. She assured Trustees that there no safeguarding risks had been identified in relation to the dispensing of medicines, but the recommendations around improved practice had been acknowledged.

5.1.3 It was **noted** that many Linden Lodge pupils attended highly specialized clinics that may not be in communication with one another, and there was therefore a likelihood of medicines prescribed interacting with each other. It was **acknowledged** that an experienced pharmacist would be needed to identify any such instances.

5.2 The CEO's autumn report (**Paper 4**) was **reviewed**.

5.2.1 JV reported that the autumn term had been challenging, but that staff and headteachers in both schools had done an exceptional job this term in keeping the schools open, managing special health and safety arrangements, and ensuring that risk assessments were comprehensive and kept up to date.

5.2.2 The difficulties experienced around Covid-19 testing were **discussed**. JV assured Trustees that efforts were being made to ensure that teachers in both schools would have access to testing on demand and have early access to the vaccine that had now been approved.

5.2.3 JV reported that both schools were putting in place provision for remote learning should the schools be required to shut down again.

5.2.4 ***A Trustee asked whether the MAT should be petitioning the local authority to class teachers at Linden Lodge with health care and care workers, given the large number of clinically vulnerable children teachers at the school supported.***

5.2.5 JV stated that staff at Linden Lodge were in regular and close touch with Public Health England. However, government had not eased its requirements to accommodate teachers and staff at Linden Lodge. She stated that the matter would continue to be pursued, including through outreach to the local MP.

5.3 A possible move to remote learning was **discussed**.

- 5.3.1 DR stated that on-site education was crucial for the pupil cohort at Linden Lodge.
 - 5.3.2 WG stated that Southfields Academy parents had been pleased with the school's weekly communications and those from pastoral staff during lockdown and through the reopening of the school. In particular, families had expressed appreciation that communications were about pupil welfare and not just education.
 - 5.3.3 ***A Trustee asked why the level of engagement with learning had been reported as low at Southfields.***
 - 5.3.4 WG stated that feedback from parents had included reports of various childcare issues, especially where there were siblings. She stated that the lack of structure during the day had also been challenging for many pupils. It was **noted** that some families did not have laptops available or needed to share one laptop with multiple users in the household. There were also problems with internet access.
 - 5.3.5 WG stated that as the school was not in remote learning again, there was no immediate urgency to address the challenges reported, although laptops were being provided where possible. She stated that outreach had been made to charities who could support pupils' access to remote learning.
 - 5.3.6 WG stated that if there were to be a return to remote learning, individualized plans would be created for pupils to promote as much engagement as possible. Trials were now being tested with live teaching through the GoogleMeet platform.
 - 5.3.7 ***A Trustee asked whether there were plans for the school to implement blended learning post-pandemic.***
 - 5.3.8 WG stated that current discussions around the investments made in distance learning were ongoing, but there was no plan for blended provision at this time. She stated that there was a strong view that face-to-face learning was important for Southfields' pupil cohort, and there had been no indication from parents that they wished for their children to attend school less or learn remotely. WG stated that it was possible online platforms could be used for homework post-pandemic, but she was not yet confident that this would be an appropriate approach.
- 5.4 The impact of school closure and the possible return to remote learning was **discussed** in relation to Southfields Academy's strategic goal of a curriculum judgment of outstanding.
- 5.4.1 WG stated that the school was no clearer now than it was in July regarding the examination system. She stated that there had as yet been no definitive statement from DfE on whether only core subjects would be tested, whether there would be a choice of questions on exams, or whether there would be no exams at all.

6. Headteachers' Reports

- 6.1 The Southfields Academy Headteacher Report (**Paper 5**) was **received** and **accepted**.
- 6.1.1 WG reported that she had been very pleased with students' progression from Year 11 to Year 13, and there was good retention across these years.
- 6.1.2 WG reported that attendance was good across all year groups.
- 6.1.3 WG reminded Trustees that the bubble system had not been implemented at Southfields because the school was not confident that its students would tolerate this approach over the long term.

- 6.1.4 Regarding teaching, WG stated that the school was maintaining standards, but supporting the development and growth of pupils with the current restrictions in place had been challenging.
- 6.1.5 ***A Trustee asked about staff well-being, and whether any staff seemed at risk of burnout given that they have had no breaks and have been preparing for remote teaching while also doing their classroom teaching.***
- 6.1.6 WG reported that retention at Southfields was higher this year than in autumn term last year, and the figures for teacher attendance had been higher than the national average. She stated that half-hour breaks had been built into the day for teaching staff, and these were being enforced. WG stated that teachers had been very positive about continuing to teach and had been providing constructive feedback on what can or should change to ensure support for students and good teaching.
- 6.1.7 Trustees **commended** WG and the staff at Southfields Academy for achieving good results under difficult circumstances.
- 6.2 ***A Trustee asked about the adaptive learning network and whether there was a localized consortium where best practice was being shared.***
- 6.2.1 WG stated that the school was not engaging with the adaptive learning network as this was not fully appropriate for the school.
- 6.2.2 ***A Trustee asked about twilight learning and when project results were expected.***
- 6.2.3 WG stated that the project was being trialled in the evening for various year groups. Control measures would be put in place for the year groups participating and policies written to support and clarify expectations. Other schools' policies would be used as much as possible.
- 6.2.4 WG stated that with the twilight learning project, it was very much a case of learning on the go. The use and management of technology had also been a challenge.
- 6.3 The Linden Lodge Headteacher Report (**Paper 6**) was **received** and **accepted**.
- 6.3.1 DR reported that Linden Lodge pupils had had five months of not being on site. Work was undertaken over the summer to prepare pupils to return to on-site learning. DR reminded Trustees that the transition from one environment to another was very challenging for many Linden Lodge pupils. It was **noted** that many had been isolating throughout the lockdown.
- 6.3.2 DR reported that 72% of pupils attended school in the first week of reopening. During the initial week, focus was on enabling staff and parents to feel confident with risk assessments and to promote the idea of school as a safe space. A recovery curriculum was implemented and resulted in significant student engagement. DR stated that there was good evidence of the recovery curriculum's impact, which had focused on re-engagement, and re-connecting with staff and with learning.
- 6.3.3 DR reported that the school had undertaken classroom observations but had changed the way these were done. She stated that visibility of leaders across the school had not been pursued in the interest of minimizing the number of staff interacting with pupils throughout the day.
- 6.3.4 DR reported that staff have had to get used to wearing significant PPE throughout the day, some of which created challenges in the education environment. She stated that staff have had to be adaptable and flexible in their approach to working,

- including methods of infection control. Public Health England had provided good support to staff. The school's therapy team continued to support families remotely.
- 6.3.5 DR reported that should any cases of Covid-19 be reported in the school, or should any symptoms be shown by a staff member or pupil, the requirement would be for staff and pupils who have had contact to self-isolate.
- 6.3.7 DR stated that overall, there had been considerable success this term, but also considerable challenge.
- 6.3.8 Trustees **commended** DR and the staff at Linden Lodge for achieving positive results under difficult circumstances.
- 6.4 ***A Trustee asked about the management of long-term financial risks at Linden Lodge, particularly in relation to funding support for pupils' increasing needs.***
- 6.4.1 SE stated that local authority funding had not kept pace with rapidly increasing needs. He stated that the pace of change in the technology used to support pupils was also increasing rapidly, and thus the school's need to change its technology was also increasing. Local authority funding was not proving to be adequate.
- 6.4.2 It was **discussed** that therapy costs should be incorporated into EHCPs. SE stated that the school was now insisting that therapy cost estimates be incorporated into EHCPs because the MAT cannot afford to continue subsidizing the chronic underfunding of Linden Lodge pupils. He stated that this may mean that the school will lose some pupils from local authorities unwilling to accommodate the approach.
- 6.4.3 SE reported that he was currently costing the support needed for each Linden Lodge pupil and the amount of subsidy that had been provided by the MAT. It was **noted** that there were 33 local authorities represented at Linden Lodge.
- 6.4.4 SE reported that Linden Lodge had changed its application process in September, with two new pupils admitted to the school since that time. Their local authorities had indicated their appreciation for the transparency of the process and the advice provided regarding the full costs needed to support the pupil year on year.
- 6.5 ***A Trustee asked about the condition of the Linden Lodge properties and whether Trustees needed to think about the possibility of moving sites.***
- 6.5.1 It was **discussed** that there was no other site in Wandsworth that could accommodate the school and the needs of its pupils, and so the current site would need to be made fit for purpose. Steps were being taken to improve the site, with the boilers being addressed as a matter of priority.
- 6.5.2 JV reported that as there was no capital money for the school at the present time, efforts had been directed at determining the most urgent repairs and improvements needed and prioritising accordingly.
- 6.5.3 ***A Trustee asked about the sustainability of the school from a competitive position if its facilities were not fit for purpose.***
- 6.5.4 JV stated that a lack of funding for capital improvement meant that the MAT would need to think about fundraising. It was **noted** that a fundraiser had been recruited. The financial report to be discussed later in the meeting would pick up the issue of the level of fundraising needed to support the school's sustainability.
- 6.5.5 ***A Trustee asked if parents were still actively seeking places at Linden Lodge.***
- 6.5.6 SE stated that the school was finding the market to be competitive, and some local authorities were not keen to support the costs for attending Linden Lodge.

However, the school had no problem attracting families who needed the specialized support and provision offered by the school.

7. Local Governing Body Minutes

7.1 The minutes of the Southfields Academy LGB (**Paper 7**) were **received** and **accepted**.

7.1.1 ST reported that most issues arising at the LGB meeting had been covered in the headteacher's report.

7.1.2 ST reported that catch-up provision had been offered to pupils where there were knowledge gaps, or for subject areas where improvements were needed. She stated that the school had maintained a clear focus on supporting pupil achievement and progress despite difficult circumstances.

7.1.3 ST reported that the LGB had considered an Ofsted inspection of the school next year to be likely.

7.1.4 ST reported that it remained unknown what would happen with exams next year. Teaching staff were therefore unclear about how to prepare students for year end.

7.1.5 ST reported that the LGB had noted the remarkable attendance of pupils and staff through the term and had credited the hard work of staff for this positive result.

7.1.6 ST suggested that discussions be undertaken next year regarding the pandemic's impact on career options for young people, and whether adjustments should be made to the curriculum and/or career advice. She requested that Trustees give their consideration and support to these matters.

7.1 The minutes of the Linden Lodge LGB (**Paper 8**) were **received** and **accepted**.

7.1.1 LB reported that implementation of the governance action plan was in progress.

7.1.2 LB reported that the amount of engagement over Zoom with parents had been positive, and the efforts made by staff to support this were commended.

7.1.3 LB reported that the lack of guidance from DfE for a school such as Linden Lodge had been noted. It had also been acknowledged that the school had contributed to guidance and in many ways to draft the guidance available to special schools.

8. Finance Report

8.1 The MAT Finance Report (**Paper 9**) was **received** and **accepted**.

8.1.1 SE reported that the 2019/20 outturn revealed a problem with overspending at Linden Lodge, with a potentially bigger overspend projected for 2020/21. He assured Trustees that steps had been taken to address the overspending.

8.1.2 SE reported that there were a number of issues contributing to the overspend – e.g., high numbers of agency staff and support staff, urgent facilities repairs, and a need to invest in facilities improvement.

8.1.3 To raise income, SE reported that agreement had been reached to support an additional eight places in the school. He stated his confidence that these places would be filled, and that a way could be found of ensuring that each of these pupils' needs could be fully supported by their local authority.

8.1.4 SE reported that efforts were also being focused on making savings through reductions to non-essential expenditure.

8.1.5 ***A Trustee asked about the potential impact of planned cost cutting at Linden Lodge and the principles applied to ensure cost cutting did not have a detrimental impact.***

- 8.1.6 SE stated that he and JV were meeting regularly with leadership at Linden Lodge to look at the whole structure of staffing and where savings could be achieved. Non-essential expenditure was also being scrutinized to identify opportunities for savings.
- 8.1.7 Regarding capital expenditure, it had been decided that the MAT would fund only essential works, with all non-essential works to be supported through fundraising.
- 8.1.8 ***A Trustee asked whether a staffing and recruitment strategy was in place at Linden Lodge, noting the number of staff leavers and the reliance on agency staff.***
- 8.1.9 SE stated that the staff to student ratio at Linden Lodge was high, but this was because of the high level of support needed by pupils. He stated that agency staff numbers were being minimized to the fullest extent possible, but it would be unrealistic for the school to eliminate the use of any agency staff. It was **acknowledged** that the work required by staff at Linden Lodge was physically and emotionally difficult, and turnover was high as a result. SE stated there was a benefit to using agency staff as it allowed flexibility in the workforce.
- 8.1.10 It was suggested and **agreed** that the MAT Finance Report should be shared with the Linden Lodge LGB as they previously seen only a draft report.

ACTION: SE to share the MAT Finance Report with the Linden Lodge LGB.

- 8.2 The Annual Report and Financial Statements (**Paper 10**) were **reviewed**.
- 8.2.1 SE reported that the bottom-line position for the 2019/20 financial year was an overspend of approximately £170K, supported by healthy reserves. A surplus was projected for 2020/21.
- 8.2.2 ***A Trustee asked whether the MAT's pension costs were sustainable.***
- 8.2.3 SE stated that a technicality in the calculation of the pension deficit made it appear more significant than it was. He assured Trustees that pension costs were manageable, and that the required inclusion of a share of the local authority pension deficit in the accounts skewed this aspect of the financial statements.
- 8.2.4 ***A Trustee asked about the apparent loss of £1.2 million at Linden Lodge.***
- 8.2.5 SE stated that the accounts showed the school having £21 million in income and £23 million expenditure on charitable activities, which represented an accounting gap rather than a cash gap. As in previous years, losses shown on the accounts were largely due to the actuarial calculation of the pension deficit and the calculation of depreciation according to a fixed accounting standard. It was **acknowledged** that neither calculation was within the control of the MAT and did not impact upon the school's or the MAT's cash position.
- 8.2.6 SE stated that Landau Baker had offered to conduct an information session with Trustees to explain how the statutory accounts were compiled and the contributions to any losses shown.
- 8.2.7 ***A Trustee asked about Sarah's Swim School and where the income from their use of the Linden Lodge swimming pool had gone.***
- 8.2.8 SE stated that the swim school was eager to return to using the Linden Lodge swimming pool as soon as possible. It was **acknowledged** that Southfields needed to improve its income stream, but there were issues around the swimming pool that needed to be addressed before it could be let again to the swim school.
- 8.3 The Audit Findings Report (**Paper 11**) was **received** and **accepted**.

8.3.1 SE reported that the external auditors had delivered a positive report which included only two recommendations, both low priority matters concerning VAT. SE reported that auditors had confirmed their satisfaction with the audit and the support from the MAT's finance team.

8.4 The draft Internal Audit Report (**Paper 12**) was **noted**.

8.4.1 SE reported that the internal auditors had returned a few technical recommendations which were being addressed. He stated that progress updates relating to these recommendations would be reported to Trustees in due course.

ACTION: SE to provide a progress update on the internal auditor's recommendations in due course.

8.4.2 ***A Trustee asked about the MAT's compliance with the chart of accounts and whether this was in hand.***

8.4.3 SE explained that the DfE's chart of accounts comprised a standard set of ledger codes and cost centre codes which were meant to be used, as appropriate, by schools across the country. SE stated that the ledger and cost centre codes used for Southfields Academy were compliant with the chart of accounts. However, this was not the case at Linden Lodge because the DfE's chart of accounts did not include ledger codes for items such as therapies. SE stated that work was continuing to find a way to harmonise the accounting of income and expenditure at Linden Lodge with DfE's standard chart of accounts.

8.5 A list of policies updated during the term (**Paper 13**) was **noted**.

8.5.1 SE stated that the full policy document for each policy shown on the list was available to Trustees for scrutiny upon request.

9. Premises Report

9.1 The Premises Report (**Paper 14**) was **received** and **accepted**.

10. Any Other Business

10.1 There was no other business discussed.

The business of the meeting closed at 19:06.

11. Confidential Business

This portion of the minutes has been removed to a confidential annex.

KF/kf: 12/12/2020