

## Southfields Multi-Academy Trust

### Meeting of the Board of Trustees on Wednesday, 7 July 2021 at 18:00 via GoogleMeet videoconference

<b>Present:</b>	Susan Hayday	Trustee	Chair / SH
	Liz Buckley	Trustee	LB
	George Dryja	Trustee	GD
	Wanda Golinska	Trustee / Secondary Head	WG
	John Moore	Trustee	JM
	Deborah Rix	Trustee / Special Head	DR
	Sarah Taylor	Trustee	STay
	Sian Tyler	Trustee	ST
	Jackie Valin	Trustee / MAT CEO	JV
<b>In attendance:</b>	Stephen Elson	Finance Director	SE
<b>Clerk:</b>	Kathleen Formosa		KF

### MINUTES

#### **1. Welcome, Apologies & Quorum**

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting at 18:01, welcoming the Trustees and others in attendance.
- 1.2 Apologies were **received** and **accepted** from Andrew Gardner (AG) and Alexis Martinowsky (AM).
- 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 24 March 2021 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 As a matter arising from the previous meeting, it was **noted** that emails from Wandsworth Council regarding governor training appear still to not be arriving to governors.
  - 4.1.2 It was also **noted** as a matter arising that JV had sent the letter of concern regarding the removal of nursing care at Linden Lodge.

#### **5. Chair's Report**

- 5.1 The Chair reported that since the previous meeting of the Board of Trustees she has:
  - Liaised with JV on various staffing and student issues:
  - Responded on behalf of the MAT to DfE who had contacted her regarding a complaint about bullying at one of the schools. The complaint was found to be insubstantial, and the case was closed; and

- Attended Ofsted training, along with ST. Training for all governors would be planned for delivery as a matter of priority in the autumn term.

**ACTION: Chair to circulate the papers received as part of the Ofsted training.**

- 5.2 The Chair reported that GD would be retiring as a Trustee of the MAT this year, with this meeting to be his last in that capacity. It was **noted** that GD had served for 21 years as a governor at Linden Lodge, and as a trustee of the MAT. On behalf of the board, she thanked GD for his extraordinary commitment and contributions to Linden Lodge and the MAT.
- 5.2.1 LB, in her capacity as Chair of the Linden Lodge LGB, thanked GD for his service to LL, and particularly for his support and advice around health and safety issues.
- 5.2.2 Individual and personal thanks to GD for various aspects of his service were expressed.
- 5.2.3 GD stated that he shall miss his work with Linden Lodge and the MAT, but that it was now time to move on to other things. He wished the trustees all success for the future.

## **6. Chief Executive's Report**

- 6.1 The Chief Executive's Report (**Paper 3**) was **taken as read**.
- 6.1.1 JV noted that specific questions had been sent through from Trustees in advance and that these would be addressed in the course of discussion.
- 6.2 Plans for the 2021/22 school year were **discussed**.
- 6.2.1 JV reported that risk assessments relating to Covid-19, safeguarding, and other aspects of school operations would be updated to align with updated guidance from DfE.
- 6.2.2 JV reported that consideration was being given to a staggered start to the school day at both schools to ensure continued testing for Covid-19 could be undertaken. It was **noted** that each school had had cases needing to be managed during the year, and that due care would be taken going into next year.
- 6.2.3 JV stated that students' mental health and anxiety were monitored daily as a part of the schools' overall safeguarding approach. She reported there was a general view across the schools that children with anxiety disorders were not being supported adequately through CAHMS, and discussions were under way to try to obtain a better service for mental health support. JV reminded trustees that the MAT would continue to have its own staff for mental health and anxiety support.
- 6.2.4 JV stated that safeguarding was the biggest single issue now as efforts were made to get all students back into school. She reported that a change would be made to the behaviour policy in response to the number of behaviours manifesting following the period of lockdown. A positive behaviour system would be implemented.
- 6.2.5 It was **noted** that Linden Lodge had received an excellent safeguarding report from the local authority, as well as having been awarded the PTA of the year award. It was **acknowledged** that Linden Lodge had performed exceptionally well considering having had 18 months of managing through a pandemic.
- 6.3 Preparations for Ofsted inspection were **discussed**.
- 6.3.1 JV reported that improvements to teaching and learning would be a key area of focus next year, and that coaching would be used in both schools to this end.
- 6.3.2 The Chair reminded all trustees that Ofsted inspectors would expect them to have deep knowledge of both schools. Ofsted training would be offered to trustees early in the 2021/22 school year.
- 6.3.3 ***A trustee asked whether Ofsted would be interested in details of how the schools were making use of the national tutoring programme and the use of catch-up funding, and if so, if details could be provided to trustees.***

- 6.3.4 JV stated that the schools were not making use of the national tutoring programme, as it was felt that given students' anxieties and mental health, it would not be helpful to have brand new tutors coming into the school from the tutoring programme.
- 6.3.5 JV reported that catch-up funds were being used at Southfields Academy to catch-up on sporting and creative activities. She stated that the schools had done very well to keep students engaged with their core subjects through lockdown, but that students had missed out on creative and sporting opportunities. She stated there was a clear view at Southfields that catch-up funds should be used to support those learning opportunities that were practical only if engaged in face-to-face and in groups -- i.e., the arts and sport.

6.4 ***A trustee asked about enrolment at Linden Lodge and whether admissions for the year appeared to be robust.***

6.4.1 SE reported that there were approximately 150 students thus far in the 2021/22 intake at Linden Lodge.

6.5 JV commended the headteachers of Southfields and Linden Lodge for their outstanding leadership of the schools this year. Trustees supported the commendation.

## **7. Headteachers' Reports**

7.1 The Southfields Academy Headteacher Report (**Paper 4**) was **received** and **accepted**.

7.1.1 Trustees **agreed** that the headteacher's report was very detailed and thorough and could therefore be **taken as read**.

7.1.2 WG thanked JV for her support throughout a difficult year.

7.2 WG reported that Southfields had suffered a loss to the progress made prior to the pandemic, and priorities have been adjusted accordingly. She stated that the following would be the priorities for the school going into 2021/22:

- To ensure that investment is made in behaviour systems -- WG stated that to redevelop a culture and stabilize the school community, there would be a switch to a system of positive reward. This shift has begun with changing the approach in meetings with parents who are called in to participate in the repair and sanctions process; and
- To address issues with safeguarding -- WG stated that the well-being of students and staff must be fully supported, and the school is currently building in the resources needed to support student and staff well-being within the context of safeguarding.

7.2.1 WG stated that attention to teaching and learning in the school could only be attended to once the new behaviour and safeguarding systems were firmly in place. As a first step, staff confidence in teaching practices and processes would need to be reestablished. Support is being provided to staff through teaching groups, collaboration and peer support.

7.2.2 WG assured trustees that planning for 2021/22 was progressing, although not in the way that may have been typical in previous years.

7.2.3 WG reported on the rising number of children isolating because of Covid-19 and related issues, and the reasons for and impact of these rising numbers were **discussed**.

7.2.4 WG reported that in the autumn term this year, the school had recorded its best attendance for students and staff. She stated that no bubbles had been sent home during the year. Processes put in place at the start of the year would continue until September

7.3 Various issues around safeguarding at Southfields were **discussed**.

7.3.1 ***A trustee asked about the new safeguarding software in use and whether staff were concerned that the software highlights certain search words being used by staff in internet***

**searches. Concern was expressed that staff could be caught in the safeguarding snare by innocent activity.**

- 7.3.2 WG stated that use of the software and how it monitors internet search terms would be addressed through training. It was **noted** that reports would first go to the senior DSL and would be kept confidential. WG assured trustees that there was not a risk of labelling anyone inappropriately if procedures were followed.
- 7.4 WG commended Southfields Academy staff for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. Trustees supported this commendation.
- 7.5 The Linden Lodge Headteacher Report (**Paper 5**) was **received** and **accepted**.
- 7.5.1 Trustees **agreed** that the headteacher's report was very detailed and thorough and could therefore be **taken as read**.
- 7.6 DR reported that there had been several external visits to the school throughout the summer term. She explained that the school relied on external visits to assure good practice as the very specialist population of students in the school made it difficult to benchmark its activities and initiatives.
- 7.6.1 DR reported that among the external visits this term was a safeguarding review conducted by the local authority at the request of the school. DR stated that the review received was lengthy and in-depth, assuring that the school's direction of travel regarding safeguarding is positive, and that improvements have had a positive impact. Awareness had also been raised that there was more to do to sustain and continue safeguarding improvement.
- 7.6.2 DR reported that a business-as-usual operational plan had been agreed from September.
- 7.6.3 DR reported that support would continue to be given to students remaining at home for medical reasons and accessing learning through remote education. She stated that she and her staff were working to ensure that the remote learning programme was closely monitored, and that student progress in the remote programme tracked with that of students accessing education in classrooms.
- 7.6.4 DR reported that through summer term, focus had been on pandemic response and measures around infection control within the school. She stated that efforts had included meeting with union representatives on a weekly basis and ensuring staff confidence in the measures the school had taken. It was **discussed** that understanding at every level among staff was needed to ensure risk assessments were undertaken at the right level, considering students' vulnerabilities, but not limiting their learning and experiential opportunities.
- 7.6.5 **A trustee asked about the hydrotherapy pool and whether ongoing problems with the pool were being addressed.**
- 7.6.6 DR stated that three possible leaks had been detected in the pool and a surveyor had been commissioned to investigate. Repair of the leaks was potentially costly, depending on where they were located. Issues were hoped to be resolved before September.
- 7.6.7 **A trustee asked about the Derek Troll bequest and how this was planned to be used.**
- 7.6.8 DR stated that an award to be made from the bequest had not yet been announced, but the intention was to make an award to one student this year for academic achievement. It was **noted** that the student to be awarded had achieved two A-levels.
- 7.7 Regarding curriculum, and teaching and learning, DR reported that the SEF had been completed and the SIP was substantially in progress. She reported that consideration was being given to joining Challenge Partners to support curriculum, and teaching and learning development and improvement.

- 7.7.1 DR reported that the RSHE curriculum was now ready for implementation. In planning the RSHE curriculum, the school had worked with SEN specialists and consulted with parents to ensure the curriculum developed was appropriate to the school's population.
- 7.7.2 DR stated that other areas of the curriculum had been refreshed and were ready to launch. Efforts had been directed at integrating the therapy programme into the classroom. It was **noted** that the school would need to recruit approximately 20 therapists before September in support of the new integrated approach to therapy, and that recruitment was in progress.
- 7.7.3 ***A trustee asked about the quality of applicants to the therapist and other posts in the school, and whether recruitment had become more challenging post-pandemic.***
- 7.7.4 It was **noted** that in London it was particularly difficult to recruit therapists, but that Linden Lodge had done a good job of becoming an employer of choice. DR stated that there had been some very good candidates interviewed within and outside the UK. She stated that changing visa restrictions had made recruiting staff from abroad quite difficult.
- 7.7.5 DR stated that recruitment to more senior level posts was more challenging than was recruitment to junior staff and support roles. She stated that for support roles there were many graduates looking for opportunities to develop their skills. While this was positive in terms of being able to fill vacancies quickly, staffing continuity tended to suffer as turnover was expected to be high.
- 7.8 It was **noted** that the school was anticipating an Ofsted inspection in the near term. DR stated that it was anticipated this may be a joint inspection of the school and its residential provision. Rigorous preparations for a joint inspection were therefore in progress.
- 7.8.1 It was **discussed** that in any joint inspection, there would be a thorough review of safeguarding.
- 7.9 DR commended Linden Lodge staff for their hard work and dedication throughout the year. Trustees supported this commendation.
- 7.9.1 DR thanked JV and members of the Linden Lodge LGB for their support of the school. She thanked members of the LGB especially for their work during the year to strengthen the school's governance.

## **8. Local Governing Body Minutes**

- 8.1 The minutes of the Southfields Academy LGB (**Paper 6**) were **received** and **accepted**.
- 8.1.1 In her capacity as Chair of the Southfields Academy LGB, SC reported that the school's governors had been impressed with the outstanding work done to ensure robust testing, evaluation, and appeals of year-end assessments. She stated that the LGB expressed confidence in the soundness of the systems, procedures, and standards implemented.
- 8.1.2 SC reported that the LGB had continued their monitoring of procedures put in place in response to the pandemic. It was **noted** that the school had had a very low level of infection in comparison with other schools in Wandsworth and nationally.
- 8.1.3 SC reported that the LGB had committed to keeping safeguarding a high priority. The LGB had discussed the extent of sexual harassment reported nationally and had taken assurances that Southfields Academy were equipped to address any issues arising.
- 8.1.4 SC stated that the LGB had expressed some concern about the pressures being put on staff, and the reduction of the usual amount of down time through the summer. She stated that careful attention on the issue of staff well-being would continue into next year.
- 8.1.5 SC reported that the new approach to managing behaviour in the school and plans to update the behaviour policy had been reported to the LGB. She stated that the LGB would review the updated policy and approach at the end of the 2021/22 autumn term, at which point the new system would have been embedded and evidence collected regarding its effectiveness.

- 8.2 The minutes of the Linden Lodge LGB (**Paper 7**) were **received** and **accepted**.
- 8.2.1 In her capacity as Chair of the Linden Lodge LGB, LB shared her appreciation of the amount of work staff had done over the course of the year and how much had been achieved. She stated that the LGB had received an excellent presentation at its last meeting on the school's evolving strategy and the level of specialism needing to be maintained within the school to support EHCPs and coordinate closely with various local authorities.
- 8.2.2 LB reported that the LGB had been working to improve its governance, taking advantage of the number of new governors recruited to the LGB. She stated that external advice had been taken on the complexities of Linden Lodge and the difficulty such complexity presented for link governors. There were specific concerns among link governors regarding the level of detailed knowledge expected of them in any Ofsted inspection. LB reported that the LGB had now agreed to allocate link governors to different topics and for different centres within the school to develop a matrix of knowledge.
- 8.2.3 LB reported that a new link governor for safeguarding had been appointed by the LGB.
- 8.2.4 LB stated that the LGB continued to be concerned by the inadequate support being offered through CAHMS.
- 8.2.5 LB stated that the LGB was also concerned about the repairs needed to the hydrotherapy pool. It was discussed that fracture related risks were high for some pupils, and hydrotherapy was needed for a significant number of children at Linden Lodge. LB stated that the school was trying to get the needed repairs resolved as quickly as possible, with a target date in September, but that a "plan B" should be found should the repairs not be complete by the target date. She stated that it was not an option to not provide hydrotherapy to the students who required it.

8.3 ***A trustee asked about clarifications to be made to MAT governance and when these would be addressed.***

- 8.3.1 The Chair stated that it had been acknowledged that greater clarity was needed in the differentiation of roles and responsibilities between the LGBs and the MAT Board of Trustees. LB was currently working on this from a Linden Lodge perspective and would bring forward a proposal for discussion in due course.

## 9. **Finance Report**

- 9.1 The MAT Finance Report (**Paper 8**) was **received** and **accepted**.

- 9.1.1 SE reported that an external audit interim visit had been recently completed. The final external audit would take place in October. Reports from the external auditors would be circulated as soon as they were received.

**ACTION: SE to circulate the external auditor's reports to all trustees as soon as they are available.**

- 9.2 The Budget Report (**Paper 9**) was **reviewed**.

- 9.2.1 SE reported that a break-even budget had been set for Linden Lodge in 2021/22 (**Appendix 2**). However, he asked trustees to note that there were several premises issues needing to be resolved in the year ahead, and that some of these were likely to be costly. He stated that the MAT together with the school were looking for sources of funding to support the works needing to be done.

- 9.2.2 ***A trustee asked why the budget for residential staff at Linden Lodge appeared to have been set at £0.***

- 9.2.3 SE stated that this was a technical issue relating to the new software being used. He assured trustees that the current salary for Linden Lodge residential staff had been included in the general staff budget. He stated that the reporting issue would be corrected as soon as the

software issue could be corrected. He also assured trustees that agency costs were not included in the staff budget line.

- 9.2.4 It was **noted** that a break-even budget had also been set for Southfields Academy in 2021/22 (**Appendix 3**).
- 9.2.5 The five-year forecasts for both schools (**Appendices 4 and 5**) were **noted**. SE stated that the longer-range forecasts included assumptions which were subject to change. Most likely to change were the assumptions made around salary increases and premises costs.
- 9.2.6 **A trustee asked about the budget projections for Linden Lodge and whether the assumption that premises costs would increase by 2% was overly optimistic given the degree of disrepair in some areas of the school's premises.**
- 9.2.7 SE stated that the assumed 2% increase would cover day-to-day maintenance of the premises. For exceptional repairs, funds would need to be found outside of the budget -- e.g., through fundraising, special application to DfE, etc.
- 9.3 The MAT budget (**Appendix 1**) was **approved**.
- 9.4 The internal audit reports for term 1 (**Paper 10**) and term 2 (**Paper 11**) were **noted**.

## **10. Any Other Business**

- 10.1 It was **noted** that the date of the next meeting of the Board of Trustees was still to be confirmed.  
**ACTION: SE / KF to circulate meeting dates to trustees and governors once available.**
- 10.1.1 It was **noted** that a date for trustee and governor Ofsted training would be arranged for early autumn.
- 10.2 JV, SE, DR and WG were excused from the meeting at 19:26 in advance of trustees' consideration of a confidential item of business.

## **11. Confidential Business**

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

*KF/kf: 26/07/2021*