

Southfields Multi-Academy Trust

**Meeting of the Board of Trustees
on Wednesday, 24 March 2021 at 18:00
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
	Sarah Taylor	Trustee	STay
	Sian Tyler	Trustee	ST
	Jackie Valin	Trustee / MAT CEO	JV
In attendance:	Stephen Elson	Finance Director	SE
Clerk:	Kathleen Formosa		KF

MINUTES

1. Welcome, Apologies & Quorum

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting at 18:04, welcoming the Trustees and others in attendance.
- 1.2 It was **noted** that all Trustees were present at the meeting.
 - 1.2.1 It was **noted** that AG had requested to leave the meeting early and this was accepted. AG was excused from the meeting at 18:30.
- 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 2 December 2020 meeting of the Board of Trustees (**Paper 1**) were **reviewed** and **approved** for signature by the Chair, subject to the replacement of the word "implementation" with "creation" at item 7.1.1 of the minutes.

ACTION: KF to amend the minutes.

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 minute 4.1.1, several Trustees reported that they were still not receiving emails from Wandsworth regarding training. It was **noted** that the local authority may not be offering training during lockdown.

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

- Regarding minute 8.4.1, SE stated that he would circulate the internal auditors' recommendations to Trustees and governors with the next set of financial papers.
ACTION: SE to circulate to the internal auditors' recommendations with the next set of financial papers.

5. Chair's Report

- 5.1 The Chair reported that since the previous meeting of the Board of Trustees, she had been in contact with JV regarding the schools' progress in reopening and had visited Southfields to observe testing and other procedures in place to support students' return to classroom learning. She stated that she has also had some confidential discussions with JV around staffing issues.

6. Chief Executive's Report

- 6.1 The Chief Executive's Report (**Paper 3**) was **taken as read**.
- 6.1.1 JV commended the Headteachers and their staff for the excellent job done in reopening the schools and making arrangements for organised and efficient Covid-19 testing for all students upon their return.
- 6.2 JV reported that her main concern this term had been the nursing contract at Linden Lodge. She stated that weekly meetings were currently being held with St. George's Trust and CLCH on the sticking points around medication dispensary. JV stated that CCG's position is that education staff should handle medication dispensary rather than nursing staff.
- 6.2.1 Trustees discussed that medication dispensary was beyond the competence of the teaching assistants whom CCG expected would dispense medication. It was **noted** that some students had medication given throughout the day, and that some medications were delivered by feeding tube rather than orally. Trustees **confirmed** their unanimous view that it was unreasonable to expect that teaching assistants could competently perform the dispensary function.
- 6.2.2 The risks involved in having teaching assistants perform the medication dispensary function were **discussed** at length, including risks to life should there be drug interactions which teaching assistants would not have training or expertise to notice or question. Trustees **confirmed** their unanimous view that the lack of nursing support would put the MAT at risk.
- 6.2.3 It was **noted** that CLCH had previously undertaken due diligence at the school and had raised concerns around medication dispensary and recommended that a technician and part-time pharmacist should be appointed. It was **noted** that the senior pharmacist who made these recommendations spent over three weeks at the school to sort out its management of the dispensary. JV reported that, due diligence recommendations aside, the number of nurses required by Linden Lodge in order to adequately handle medication dispensary in the school exceeded the number that CCG was prepared to provide.
- 6.2.4 ***A Trustee asked whether there were other special schools in a similar situation with their nursing contracts and/or medication dispensary arrangements.***
- 6.2.5 It was **noted** that the case mix at Linden Lodge was so severe in some pathologies and in the side effects of some of the medications given that it was difficult to make comparisons with other special schools. It was **noted** with interest that teachers in mainstream schools were not allowed to dispense any medication -- not even paracetamol -- to any student.
- 6.2.6 Trustees unanimously **agreed** that they rejected the proposal that teaching staff at Linden Lodge be asked to dispense medication, and that they were unwilling to accept the risk presented by CCG and CLCH agreeing to remove nursing support from Linden Lodge. It was **discussed** that as a last resort, JV would ask whether legal indemnity would be provided by CCG and CLCH if they were obdurate in not giving adequate nursing cover.

ACTION: JV to write to the CEO of CCG confirming Trustees' serious concerns regarding the MAT's corporate liability should nursing support be removed, and to confirm that teaching staff would not be asked to dispense medications.

- 6.3 JV reported that the therapy contract at Linden Lodge had been successfully agreed after a year of negotiation.
- 6.3.1 Trustees **congratulated** JV on the successful conclusion of these negotiations.
- 6.4 JV reported that the strategic plan had progressed on the matter of remote learning, but that progress on curriculum had been slow. She stated that emphasis had been placed on support for student mental health and resilience as the schools reopened.
- 6.4.1 JV stated that the cancellation of GCSE and other exams was causing significant issues for Southfields Academy. Staff have worked to ensure that robust quality assurance and monitoring was put in place so that grades, as determined by the school, were seen as fair and would withstand challenge.
- 6.4.2 ***A Trustee asked whether the impact the cancellation of exams might have on teachers and staffing had been assessed, particularly if grades given will be subject to challenge.***
- 6.4.3 JV stated that guidance from the examination boards would not be available until the end of April. She stated that the burden of challenge would likely fall on the school's senior leaders and heads of department. Senior leaders had already been asked to remain available for the fortnight window in which challenge can be raised.
- 6.4.4 ***A Trustee asked whether DfE would provide extra funding to support the extra work teachers have been asked to perform in response to exam cancellation.***
- 6.4.5 It was stated that current expectations were that there would be no funding made available for the extra support teachers were asked to provide.
- 6.4.6 The quality assurance processes to be implemented around grading were **discussed**. It was **noted** that full guidance was not yet available, and that the procedures to be used would not be finalised until after full guidance was received.
- 6.6 Trustees **confirmed** their support for the commendation of head teachers included at the end of the CEO's report.

7. Headteachers' Reports

- 7.1 The Southfields Academy Headteacher Report (**Paper 4**) was **received** and **accepted**.
- 7.1.1 WG reported that the first 8.5 weeks of term had been delivered virtually. Much had been learned from the experience of the first lockdown and changes to virtual delivery were implemented to improve the virtual school experience this term.
- 7.1.2 WG stated that one area of improvement in virtual delivery had been assessment, which teachers found difficult in the virtual environment. Following experience gained in the first lockdown, many teachers found assessment to be in some ways easier online as they were able to scroll through documents as students worked on them. Some teachers had expressed disappointment that online assessment was no longer available upon return to face-to-face learning.
- 7.1.3 WG stated that teachers had found checking attendance to be easier in the virtual environment, and that attendance had generally improved. However, experience of the first lockdown taught that some students would check in for attendance, but not otherwise engage. Improvements had therefore been made around engagement in virtual delivery during the second lockdown.
- 7.1.4 ***A Trustee asked whether there was any learning from the experience of virtual delivery that might be leveraged in the return to classroom learning, particularly for any students who thrived in the online environment where there were fewer distractions.***

- 7.1.5 WG stated that the revision schools normally offered during school breaks may be delivered online going forward. The in-person summer school would focus on well-being, and the kind of creative and collaborative activities that were not possible to deliver online. WG stated that parents' evenings and other parent events had also been better attended online, and there were plans for these events to continue to be delivered in this way.
- 7.1.6 WG stated that the school hoped to collect some of the equipment that had been donated through the lockdown for students' use, and to repurpose it for classroom use.
- 7.1.7 ***A Trustee asked whether the school had experienced any students having mental health issues as a result of lockdown, or who were struggling to come back into school.***
- 7.1.8 WG stated that there were some students who had not returned to school because of anxiety, but overall, she was impressed with how resilient students had been. She stated that strong mental and emotional health support had always been available in school, and this was continuing.
- 7.1.9 It was **noted** that some staff also had mental health concerns, and these were also being supported.
- 7.2 It was **noted** that the return to school had required mass testing of students and this had been done well.
- 7.2.1 JV and WG expressed their gratitude to the staff and volunteers who had supported Covid testing upon the return to school, and for their success in keeping operations running smoothly.
- 7.2.2 JV reported that of the 4000+ tests conducted in the 2.5-week timeframe, three tests were returned positive.
- 7.3 Trustees **commended** WG and supported her commendation of Southfields Academy staff at the end of her report.
- 7.4 The Linden Lodge Headteacher Report (**Paper 5**) was **received** and **accepted**.
- 7.4.1 DR reported that the period of January to March was challenging for Linden Lodge students, particularly given some students' difficulty with communication. She stated that the remote curriculum had been adapted to support the use of voice activated software, and for one-to-one teaching.
- 7.4.2 DR reported that 48% of students had returned to school. She stated that there was now a high level of onsite teaching and learning, but the online offer was being maintained for those students who were shielding. She stated that there had been a high level of parental engagement throughout lockdown, and the school was trying to sustain this as students returned to site.
- 7.4.3 DR stated that on-site lodging had resumed, although annual reviews were being carried out remotely. She stated that there had been better attendance from local authority representatives as well as parents at annual reviews in moving them online.
- 7.4.4 DR reported that Year 14 transitions had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. She stated that there was now reduced capacity in colleges and reduced local authority support. It was **noted** that many placements were costly for local authorities. DR advised that there may be increased tribunal activity as a result of funding uncertainties.
- 7.4.5 It was **noted** that there continued to be a number of issues around payment for various therapies from local authorities. The difficulty was attributed to the new system for payments, which was still being embedded.
- 7.4.6 ***A Trustee asked about the school's plans to open provision to able bodied deaf children, and if explanation could be given for how these plans had come about.***
- 7.4.7 It was **noted** that Linden Lodge was facing potentially significant drops in residential placements as soon as next year. DR stated that all special and mainstream schools had

been asked by DfE to review their offers and identify gaps in the population that could be accommodated, and Linden Lodge had identified a gap in the area of provision for deaf pupils. She stated that the school's view was that as there is some able-bodied provision at Linden Lodge already, provision for able-bodied deaf children would fit well with this.

- 7.5 DR reported that Linden Lodge had to negotiate a number of complex issues around lateral flow testing, including issues around consent. She stated that those students who would need restraint in order for a test to be administered were not being tested.
- 7.5.1 DR reported that the school had had no positive results in three weeks of testing, although the rate of positive results had previously been quite high. She stated that there had been a high uptake of vaccination among students, families and staff.
- 7.5.2 It was **noted** that the response to the recent family survey had been overwhelmingly positive. DR stated that she was aware that many families with children at Linden Lodge had been affected by the pandemic. She stated that the school was fortunate in that no students had lost parents in the pandemic, which was unusual for a special school.
- 7.5.3 DR reported that the school had had a small increase in the number of pupils having difficulty with transitions to and from home, and also a slight increase in self-harming.
- 7.5.4 DR reported that Linden Lodge would run an Easter scheme in addition to a summer scheme, with the Easter scheme to focus on catch-up, functional skills, mental health and well-being.
- 7.5.5 ***A Trustee asked how the school had coped with EHCPs during the pandemic.***
- 7.5.6 DR stated that annual reviews had been well-attended and had run smoothly. However, many local authorities had been unwilling to include provision in the EHCPs. DR stated that because of reduced capacity in local authorities generally, there had been some effect on updating EHCPs, which had slowed.
- 7.6 DR reported that there were four new governors joining the Linden Lodge LGB, one of whom would be the new safeguarding governor.
- 7.7 Trustees **commended** DR and staff at Linden Lodge for the work they have done to support students at Linden Lodge.

8. Local Governing Body Minutes

- 8.1 The minutes of the Southfields Academy LGB (**Paper 6**) were **received** and **accepted**.
- 8.1.1 ST reported that Southfields Academy governors had expressed concern about the workload pressure on staff in the school and had taken assurances that staff welfare and wellbeing were being supported.
- 8.1.2 ST reported that governors had also discussed the benefits that might have arisen from remote learning, although the overall view was that the reopening of the school was an improvement for students as they now had social contact.
- 8.1.3 ST reported that governors' discussions around catch-up was mostly about how to leverage some of the positives in the experience of lockdown. Governors acknowledged that not all students could take full advantage of what was on offer because of their circumstances, but governors had been impressed with the level of engagement achieved.
- 8.1.4 ST stated that an interesting question had arisen for governors around the Black Lives Matter demonstrations. She stated that questions and challenges about the integration of the issues and debates arising from the demonstrations were being looked at by members of staff, and the topic would be picked up as a matter for discussion at the next LGB meeting.
- 8.2 The minutes of the Linden Lodge LGB (**Paper 8**) were **received** and **accepted**.

- 8.2.1 It was **noted** that two key issues at the most recent Linden Lodge LGB meeting -- i.e., the nursing contract, and the achievements of remote learning and the return to school -- had been covered earlier in the meeting.
- 8.2.2 LB reported that the recruitment of four new governors and the resolution to appoint linked governors had progressed governance development in the school, but there was more work to be done.
- 8.2.3 It was **noted** that the issues of cash flow and other financial matters relating to Linden Lodge would be covered in the MAT finance report.

9. Finance Report

- 9.1 The MAT Finance Report (**Paper 9**) was **received** and **accepted**.
- 9.2 SE reported that the MAT had received £26K and £36K in additional funding for Linden Lodge and Southfields Academy, respectively. He stated that the additional funding had been granted in support of extra expenses incurred by the schools through the pandemic.
- 9.2.1 SE reported that a new finance system had been installed, with conversion from the old system now in progress. SE reminded Trustees that the new finance system would allow all school information to be seen in one place.
- 9.2.2 SE reported that a new MAT bank account would be opened, with various banks now being consulted regarding their offer.
- 9.3 The schools' cash flows were **reviewed** and **discussed**.
- 9.3.1 SE reported that cash flow had been at a worrying low point at Linden Lodge but had now greatly improved. He stated that cash flow for the school was particularly volatile and difficult to control as a result of the school's multiple funding streams.
- 9.3.2 SE reported that cash flow at Southfields Academy was positive, with the prudent management of cash continuing.
- 9.3.3 ***A Trustee asked what would happen should cash flow at Linden Lodge fall so low that suppliers could not be paid, and whether a short-term loan facility was available.***
- 9.3.4 JV stated that Linden Lodge had protection against defaulting on its suppliers through Southfields Academy. SE confirmed that the school would not default on its suppliers, although it may withhold payment for the full length of any payment terms.
- 9.3.5 ***A Trustee asked whether it would be possible to project Linden Lodge's budget further than just one year ahead so that Trustees could have a sense of the business' sustainability.***
- 9.3.6 SE stated that there would be a five-year forecast for the school presented at the July meeting of the Board.
- 9.3.7 DR stated that the focus on admissions (including in-year admissions) and marketing, as well as shift in profile -- i.e., expanding provision to include more deaf children -- was part of a strategy to ensure the school's sustainability. She stated her view that Linden Lodge was in a stronger position than most special schools given its regional specialism and its relationship with the MAT.
- 9.4 SE reported that the 2021/22 budget would be brought to the next meeting of the Board of Trustees. He stated that government funding had increased for both schools by approximately 2%.
- 9.4.1 SE reported that high needs block funding had also increased, which would be helpful in balancing the Linden Lodge budget.
- 9.4.2 ***A Trustee asked that a breakdown on supplies and services costs be provided along with the budget, with an indication of where savings could be achieved.***
- 9.4.3 SE stated that catering was the largest expenditure area currently coming up for review. He stated that savings of approximately 35% might be achieved through renegotiation in this

area. It was **noted** that the scrutiny of contracts as they came up for renewal was part of the MAT's continuing scrutiny since Linden Lodge joined the MAT.

- 9.4.4 **A Trustee asked about the photocopier contract and if this had been resolved.**
- 9.4.5 JV stated that the matter was still ongoing, details of which were confidential.
- 9.4.6 **A Trustee asked whether the MAT was still receiving income from the swim school, and whether the contract had been impacted by the pandemic.**
- 9.4.7 SE stated that the contract with the swim school did not include a mandatory payment, only payment for use of the swimming pool. As the swimming pool has been closed, there has been no income.

9.5 The internal audit reports were **noted**.

10. Premises Report

- 10.1 The Premises Report (**Paper 11**) was **received** and **accepted**.
 - 10.1.1 SE reported that premises improvements at Linden Lodge were continuing and would be ongoing for some time. He stated that contracts for gas and electricity provision had recently changed, with the new suppliers actively supporting improvements on site.
 - 10.1.2 SE reported that the boilers at Linden Lodge were being systematically inspected, with repairs or replacement recommended following each inspection. He stated that the boilers, like many aspects of the facilities, had been neglected over a number of years and would take time to improve.
 - 10.1.3 **A Trustee asked if Linden Lodge's air-cooling systems were environmentally compliant.**
 - 10.1.4 SE stated that an updated report on the air-cooling system was expected in summer. The contracts to be put to tender would likely sweep up this and other issues on site.

11. Any Other Business

- 10.1 **A Trustee asked if all Trustees had received a Wandsworth anti-racism campaign email, and whether the MAT intended to respond.**
 - 10.1.1 JV stated that there was no plan for the MAT to respond to the email, and that no other schools in the area were planning to respond. She stated that as there was suspicion that the email was politically motivated, and schools were not permitted to engage in political activity, there was a consensus view among schools that there should be no response.
- 10.2 SE stated that the next meeting of the Board of Trustees had been scheduled for 7 July 2021, and would be held in person, if possible.
- 10.3 JV, SE, DR and WG were excused from the meeting at 19:44, 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: 05/04/2021