

Approved Minutes
Meeting of the Governing Body (GB) of
GOSFORTH CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

Monday 14 March 2016

Present:

Jeremy Bell (in the Chair)
Claire Chetcuti, Jonathan Connolly, Liz Gardner, Jonathan Kemp, Richard Rook,
David Slipper, Jayne Thorpe, Susannah Webb (Headteacher), Christine Willoughby,
Paula Wright

Governors in post - 15; quorum - 8 governors; present - 11 governors
The meeting was quorate

In attendance:

Nick Sanders ~ Governor Services
Deeanne Smith ~ GCMS (Observer)

In attendance for part of the meeting:

Ray Steele ~ Achievement Partner (AP)

3.1 Welcome

The meeting opened at 5.40pm. One of the joint vice-chairs, Jeremy Bell, chaired the meeting in the absence of the Chair (David Brown) and the other Vice-Chair (Gail Nichol). He welcomed everyone.

3.2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were **accepted** from David Brown, Nigel Hearn, Gail Nichol and Liz Trattles.

3.3 Declaration of Interests

Everyone had previously signed the annual register of pecuniary interests. There were no financial interests declared in the business of this meeting.

It was **agreed** to alter the order of the next few agenda items at this point.

3.4 GB Appointments / Membership Update

It was noted that the terms of office of three of the current Parent Governors were due to expire in November 2016 (Jeremy Bell, Jonathan Connolly and Paula Wright). In addition, there was also an outstanding vacancy for a Parent Governor on the GB, which would need to be re-advertised. Following discussion, it was **agreed** to advertise for four places in the autumn term; it was also suggested that, if there were more than four applicants, it might be possible to consider appointing to the Co-opted Governor vacancies on the GB.

Action: Four Parent Governor places to be advertised in the autumn term 2016



3.5 Identification of any Additional Items not on the Agenda

It was noted that Deeanne Smith had recently been appointed (by a unanimous decision) as the school's new Deputy Head following a rigorous but fair process and in competition with a very strong field. Feedback from all of the candidates had been very positive. The Headteacher wished to place on record her thanks to those on the recruitment panel for the excellent support they had provided for the whole process, from short-listing through to appointment.

3.6 Annual Report from Achievement Partner (AP)

Ray Steele introduced himself and his role as AP and spoke to a tabled annual report 2016, which he had drawn up. He went through each section of the report and invited queries; the main areas were as follows:

- **Leadership and Management (overall grade: 2)**

The AP referred to the outcome of the Ofsted inspection the school had undergone last summer term (a grading of 2 i.e. 'good'), which he felt had provided a clear baseline of the school's performance and was an accurate reflection of the work of the school at that time. He also referred to the move away from national levels of assessment and to the positive response of the school to this. He also highlighted the quality of the school's curriculum, the way in which school leaders were aware of and were tackling issues and the contribution made by the GB. He also referred to the work of the Parent Council in helping to develop relationships with parents. The Headteacher noted how actively involved the Parent Council had been in the development of the school's new reporting format.

- **Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (overall grade: 2)**

The AP highlighted the significant emphasis the school had placed on improving the quality of teaching over the year. He also highlighted the way in which lesson planning was now focused on meeting the needs of individual pupils rather than covering content to meet the requirement of the National Curriculum, and to the robust work scrutiny process being undertaken which involved the whole school.

- **Outcomes for Pupils (overall grade: 2)**

There had been an increase from 2014 to 2015 in the percentage of Year 6 pupils achieving Level 4 in the headline Reading, Writing and Maths measure (to around the national average), and a significant increase in the percentage of those achieving Level 5 (to well above the national average).

In Reading and Writing, KS2 outcomes had increased significantly from 2014 to 2015 in terms of the percentage of pupils making expected and more than expected progress. In Maths, outcomes did not reflect the improvements in Reading and Writing, with a decrease in the percentage of pupils making expected progress (7%) and those making more than expected (6%) although the school's figures were still above the national average, particularly in respect of More Able pupils.

There was a query in relation to the difficulty for the school to maintain higher levels of performance. It was acknowledged that this could be the

case, although the SLT (senior leadership team) had analysed the data and were aware of the issues underpinning the KS2 outcomes and had plans in place to address them.

The AP also noted that the inspection report had indicated that pupils were well prepared for learning in the next stage of education and that the performance of the pupils in the GCSE core subjects confirmed this.

- **Personal Development, Behaviour and Wellbeing (overall grade: 1)**

The AP felt that pupils' behaviour around the school was excellent. Attendance levels remained extremely high. It was noted that individual cases where there were issues with attendance or persistent absence were addressed through plans/interventions.

- **Overall effectiveness (grade 2)**

The AP felt that this grading remained as identified in the Ofsted inspection report ('good') but was now much more secure.

He highlighted the four priority areas which had been identified for development over the next 12-24 months. The Headteacher also referred to the significant priority identified in the SDP in relation to the implementation of 'assessment without levels' (AWL). The AP gave an outline of what some other schools were doing in relation to AWL and commended GCMS on the approach it was taking.

There was a query about the difficulty parents and governors might have in understanding AWL and the particular importance for GBs to reach an understanding in relation to fulfilling their role in challenging the school. The Headteacher referred to the open and frank discussion there had been with the Curriculum Committee and the importance at some point for other governors who were not members of this committee to be part of this discussion.

There was a query/concern expressed about how to know clearly about the school's performance given the movement away from the use of national assessment levels. There was some discussion of the measures that would still exist; specific reference was made to the reporting system for outcomes of KS2 SATs next year, which would allow comparison across schools.

There was a query/concern expressed about whether the system/approach the school was now using would be a sufficiently fine measure, particularly when assessing more able pupils. The Headteacher felt confident that this system would be able to assess the progress made by pupils of all levels of ability.

In response to a further query about parents' understanding of the system, the Headteacher indicated that she felt it was important to involve parents, for example through further workshops and such opportunities were planned. The importance of reassuring parents and

keeping them 'in the loop' was acknowledged; it was felt that, in the main, there was a trust in the school on the part of the parents and there was absolutely no desire to do anything to destroy this. It was also suggested that, at the time the school was about to circulate the new pupil reports and parents were able to see the new terminology and look at the reports in the context of their own children, this might present a useful opportunity to organise a participation event to allow parents to talk to one another and ask questions of the school.

Ray Steele was thanked for his report and left the meeting at this point (6.20pm).

3.7 Draft Minutes of the Previous GB Meetings

The draft minutes of the following meetings had been circulated. Both were **approved** (subject to a typographical error on page 1 of the 23 November minutes being corrected); there were no confidential items identified:

- 23 November 2015 – scheduled GB meeting (autumn term 2)
- 22 February 2016 – Extraordinary GB meeting

3.8 Matters Arising from the Above Minutes

23 November

GB Appointments / Membership (page 2)

This item had already been dealt with earlier in the meeting.

Skills Audit (page 2)

It was acknowledged that, in view of previous discussions, there was no need to revisit the skills audit process at this point, apart from in the case of new governors.

22 February

Governors were reminded that this extraordinary meeting had been convened predominantly to discuss and approve the school's admissions policy for 2017/18, but had also included some discussion of staffing changes. There were no particular matters arising.

3.9 a) Reports from Committees

Curriculum Committee – 22 February 2016

The minutes of the above meeting had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The chair of the committee, Liz Gardner, highlighted the main points.

The key focus of the meeting had been to receive an update on the school's response to 'Assessment Without Levels' (AWL), which had been provided by Deeanne Smith. It had been pleasing to note that the school's progress to date matched well with the guidance provided in the final report of the Commission on AWL (September 2015). It had been agreed that Liz Gardner (and any other interested governors) could look at developing an understanding of the changes by reading this report. Liz confirmed that she had already read the report, which she felt did help clarify the process; it was noted that there was a summary report available.



It was **agreed** that governors would be sent a link to the report.

Action: D Smith

The committee had also received a mid-year Maths report produced by the Maths co-ordinator, Andrew Russell, and particular reference was made to the assessment / tracking processes being undertaken in Maths. Andrew Russell and Deeanne Smith had visited Ponteland Middle School (where they had been embedding AWL for two years and were judged as an outstanding school in this respect) to look at how they were successfully managing pupil tracking. This visit had been facilitated through the work Deeanne Smith was doing as part of her Headship qualification (NPQH). It was emphasised that the necessary interventions were in place at GCMS to support pupils appropriately and the Maths Department had plans to move forward in a sustained fashion.

In response to a query about the recent dip in performance within a particular year group, the Headteacher explained that this had been looked into and had been identified as a low attainment issue (rather than a teaching issue). She gave examples of bespoke measures the school was looking at to help individual pupils.

Following discussion, it was **agreed** that Jonathan Connolly would take on the role of Maths Link Governor (and the associated Link Governor visit) instead of Richard Rook as had been indicated in the committee minutes.

Action: J Connolly

Following a query regarding one particular section of the minutes (to do with performance data headlines), there was some discussion of the difficulty in measuring / reporting progress due to the AWL changes and the dramatic increase in the rigour of the testing and the level of performance now required. It was suggested that it might be worthwhile at some point giving governors the opportunity to look at the sample materials received for the English and Maths tests.

Finance Committee – 7 March 2016

The minutes of the above meeting were tabled along with the latest budget expenditure report for the 2015/16 financial year (period 11). The chair of the committee, Jon Connolly, highlighted the main points.

Budget expenditure for 2015/16 had proceeded more or less as expected and, in fact, it looked as though it would be slightly better than the original forecast. The contingency would be above the 8% limit allowed for budget surpluses.

Indications were that, as expected, the funding the school would receive in the 2016/17 budget would be about the same as the current financial year (a 'flat cash' settlement); however, this still provided challenges as some of the school's costs would be increasing significantly (for example, NI contributions).

Jon Connolly emphasised the importance, alongside all of the spending decisions the school/GB made in the light of the wider financial context, of matching spend to the priorities of the School Development Plan (SDP) (including the Maths priorities

mentioned earlier in the meeting).

The Headteacher and Jon Connolly would be going through the budget information in due course and this would be discussed in detail at the next Finance Committee meeting (following which it would be brought forward to the GB meeting in July).

Action: Finance Committee / GB

The Headteacher referred specifically to the school's clear strategic plan for IT (and the rolling programme for the replacement of IT equipment to ensure it was fit for purpose for the IT curriculum), and to the regular meetings she and the subject co-ordinator, Mr Finn, had with the LA in this respect. **In response to a query, she outlined the key processes the school followed not only to ensure each member of staff had the right equipment but in trying to look at the enhancement of teaching and learning through IT and the cascading of best practice throughout the staff.**

b) Reports from Individual and Link Governors / Governor Visits / Governor Training

Reports from Gail Nichol

Two written reports from Gail Nichol on the termly child protection / safeguarding review meetings she had carried out with the school's designated lead (1 December 2015 / 23 February 2016) had been circulated and were received. It was noted that a section on 'radicalisation' had been added to the school's Safeguarding Policy; the school did not require a separate policy in this respect. The Headteacher was to ensure that this section of the policy was circulated to governors.

Action: Headteacher

3.10 Headteacher's Report / School Improvement

Susannah Webb presented her report, copies of which had been circulated, and invited comments/questions. It was noted that some areas had already been covered in detail earlier in the meeting (for example, through the AP's report and the discussion of the committee minutes).

With reference to finances, the Headteacher acknowledged that the biggest proportion of the school budget was spent on staffing; she indicated that, although there was a need to make savings, she was also mindful of the need to maintain a balance of staff in relation to pupil numbers and the effect continuing cuts in staffing would have in compromising the school's delivery of a high standard of teaching and learning.

As mentioned earlier, Deeanne Smith had been appointed to the post of Deputy Head and would take over from Jacques Dinsley when he retired in the summer. His role as Head of Modern Foreign Languages was also to be advertised shortly.

The Headteacher indicated that the feeling was not to replace Deeanne Smith's current role as Assistant Head when she took up the Deputy Head position; she added that it was part of the strategic link to the school's financial planning to be mindful of the staff brought into the school (and at what level) and to maximise resources and ensure value for money.

3.11 Gosforth Schools Trust Items

Jeremy Bell referred to a recent Trust Board meeting at which it had been decided to establish two 'task and finish' sub-groups, one of which he was to serve on. He also referred to the two year tenure of the current Directors of the Trust, which was due to expire in the summer term. He was currently a Director representing GCMS and indicated that he would be willing to continue in the role for consistency's sake although he understood that any such renewal would be up to the GB/school. There was some discussion of the process and it was **agreed** that the Headteacher and Jeremy Bell would need to decide, in discussion, who between them would like to take on the role for the next two years (they would refer this to the governors by email if necessary).

Action: J Bell / S Webb

3.12 Policy Review

There was nothing to discuss under this item. The Admissions Policy for 2017/18 had been discussed and approved at the extraordinary GB meeting of 22 February.

3.13 Finance / Budget Update

The budget had been dealt with earlier in the meeting as part of the report back from the Finance Committee.

Jon Connolly gave some background information about the latest SFVS self-assessment document and the new areas which had been added for this year. Governors **approved** the document for submission to the LA.

Governors also **adopted** the new Schools Financial Handbook and Guide 2015.

It was noted that the new schedule of approved delegated levels of authority had been agreed at the most recent Finance Committee meeting.

3.14 Safeguarding / Health and Safety / Risk Management Items

There was nothing to discuss under this item.

3.15 LA Reports – Summer Term 2016

Several LA reports had been circulated and were dealt with as follows:

- **Elective Home Education Policy / Children Missing Education Policy**
It was **agreed** to adopt the updated policies.
- **Preparing Young People for the World of Work**
It was acknowledged that work on enterprise had always been a strong feature of the school.
- **Update on HR Issues**
The Headteacher reported that she and the Chair had undertaken one of the safer recruitment training sessions offered by HR Services. She felt it had been some of the best training of this kind that she had experienced, which had made her reflect on her practice, and she recommended it unreservedly to those governors who might be undertaking school staff recruitment.



3.16 Reminder of Dates of Forthcoming Meetings

The dates listed on the agenda were reviewed and some changes made; the following dates were **agreed**:

Finance Committee – 3 May

Curriculum Committee – 6 June (changed from 23 May)

Staffing Committee – 27 June (changed from 20 June)

Full Governing Body – 4 July

3.17 Any Other Business

Parent Council

Paula Wright apologised that she had not submitted the minutes of the most recent Parent Council meeting for consideration by the GB. The next PC meeting was due to take place on 26 April at 6pm. It was **agreed** to add this as a standing agenda item at future GB meetings.

Action: Governor Services

Academisation

The Headteacher referred to the discussion she and other governors had been involved in at a recent Trust strategic planning session of different models of school organisation and the current political 'landscape', and the need to look at all available options for developing and moving forward in advance of circumstances overtaking the schools/Trust. It had been suggested that Ray Steele give a presentation to governors (and take questions) to look at all of the various options, including academisation.

Governor Visits

There was some discussion of those areas in which governors were encouraged to have involvement in, and make visits about in the forthcoming summer term and several governors expressed an interest as follows: Writing (C Willoughby), Maths (J Connolly) and Careers / Enterprise / Enrichment (J Thorpe). The Headteacher was to make sure the necessary arrangements were made. The school was also to re-circulate the visit proforma to all governors.

Action: Headteacher / School

It was noted that governors were always welcome to make visits to school anyway. They were reminded about the previous decision for link areas / visits to be linked more to the school's priorities. It was noted that Jeremy Bell would perhaps look at carrying out a Pupil Premium visit later in the summer term. He was also interested in following up a suggestion made for a visit to look at project-based learning.

Action: J Bell

There was no further business; the Acting Chair thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed at 7.45pm.



4th July 2016