



## Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of the Local Board

held on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020 at 12:30 pm

remotely via TEAMS due to the social distancing regulations imposed by HM Government due to the international Covid19 pandemic.

**Local Board Members Present:** Mrs Alice Allen (Chair) Mr Adrian Alcock  
Mrs Hannah Baty Mrs Claire Cleverton  
Mr Daniel Curtis Mr Stephen Sowden-Mabbott  
Mr Marcus Still (Principal)

**In attendance:** Mrs Kathy Jerbi (Clerk)  
Mrs Vanessa Smith (Vice Principal)

### 1 **WELCOME & APOLOGIES for ABSENCE**

No apologies. Mrs Allen thanked members for attending the meeting at short notice. She wanted the LB to receive an update on the planning of the SLT for the phased re-opening of the academy post lockdown & more specifically a feel of where the SLT have got to with the risk assessment in preparation for that re-opening. Mrs Allen was in the academy at the time of the meeting, having asked to have a walk around the site to get a feel of what the risk assessment means 'on the ground' & the level of risk staff are being expected to manage. Members invited to comment & feedback on the documents circulated.

### 2 **DECLARATION of INTEREST by LB MEMBERS in ANY ITEM on the AGENDA**

None.

The Clerk reminded members of the confidential / sensitive nature of the plans at this time. Mrs Allen pointed out too that the plans may need to change in light of any updated Government direction.

### 3 **Discussion of strategy and risk assessment for re-opening of the academy post Covid 19 closure**

*documents circulated prior to the meeting:*

- Strategic Risk Assessment for Covid 19 Pandemic Lindfield
- Operational Covid 19 Risk Assessment Lindfield
- Overview Plan for Lindfield
- FAQ for Parents

Mr Still provided a brief overview:

- we are ready in line with the Government's plan to re-open on 1<sup>st</sup> June to children in Years R, 1 & 6;
- current re-opening plan:
  - Monday, Early Years (EY) only, each class with a staggered start time (& Key Worker/Vulnerable);
  - Tuesday, EY & Year 1 (& Key Worker/Vulnerable);

- Wednesday, only Key Worker/Vulnerable children, in order to have the classrooms deep cleaned & to allow teachers PPA time, to which they are entitled;
- Thursday, EY, Years 1 & 6 (& Key Worker/Vulnerable);
- classrooms have been arranged such that every space in school is used;
  - 18 classrooms will be used by the 9 classes in Years R, 1 & 6, with a maximum of 15 children in each room;
  - 3 classrooms will be used by the Key Worker / Vulnerable children, numbers of which we expect to increase;
- the SLT have worked hard preparing the risk assessments;
- **headline to the LB – Mr Still does not believe under the current guise that we can keep children or staff safe**, because in the classroom we are looking at about 1-meter distance between each child;
- particularly tricky in EY where the very nature of our academy is a nurturing environment; most tables have been removed from the EY classrooms to enable lots of floor space; seating crosses will be marked out on the floor, as well as a teacher 'safe' space at 2 meters in front of the interactive whiteboard;
- cannot stop 4/5/6-year olds going up to each other; the same can be said even of the Year 6 children;
- therefore 'Classroom Structure – maintaining social distance' on the risk assessment is rated as 'high' risk: purely down to space in the academy;
- the Trust are aware.

Mr Still invited questions:

Q. from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June, will EY, Years 1 & 6 all be in?

A. yes, however, the risk assessment is constantly under review; may change the first week to EY only on Mon/Tue, EY & Y1 on Thu/Fri, Year 6 the following week; because of the unknown quantity of children who may not want to come into school, it may take a lot of time to get the young ones in.

Q. there has been a lot of media discussion, unions & Councils against re-opening, etc. – has the Trust considered *not* opening the academies? Do they feel it is the best course of action to re-open?

A. **confidentially** – The Trust have just made the decision **not to open until Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June**; they will communicate this to staff, LB & parents on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Three reasons:

1. To ensure staff are aware of expectations & fully prepared for re-opening;
2. To allow time for further consultation with unions, who are currently asking members not to return to school;
3. To allow all staff to have time off during half term break (wk. com 25May): the Trust are very aware that all staff have been working incredibly hard & in order to allow opening on 1<sup>st</sup> June they would have to continue working during half term; this would be detrimental to staff well-being.

The delay in opening also allows time for Trust senior leadership to visit LPA & see the risks we are facing for themselves & measures we have put in place. Mr Still has talked the Trust team through the risk assessment & they have not opposed any of his risk ratings. They completely understand the issues. Over half term they will decide a collective approach for all academies.

Q. do we know what Blackthorns Primary Academy intend to do with regards to opening?

A. they will do the same as us, whatever that is.

Q. do we know how many children in Years R, 1 & 6 are likely to return to school when we re-open?

A. the results of the survey posted on-line by the Trust on 14<sup>th</sup> May would indicate 70-80% of children in those year groups intend to return. We are, however, making provision for all of them returning.

Mrs Allen added that having walked around the academy site it is starkly different. Maintaining any social distancing with EY & Year 1 children is going to be a challenge. The Government expectation of having all children return to school in July is just not going to be possible, unless Government guidance on social distancing changes or there is a flexibility for children to attend school part-time.

Mr Still stated that initially the SLT had drawn up plans to have 7 children in a class on a 'week in week off' part-time rota, but Government advice changed & clearly stipulated that part-time timetables are not acceptable. The SLT have considered many different options to ensure the safety of staff & children. The current plans work for our academy, but do not allow for more than 1-meter social distancing.

Q. the press is commenting on the fact that academies have more autonomy than Local Authority maintained schools. Could the Trust decide to go ahead with part-time timetables?

A. the Trust senior team have the risk assessments from all the academies. They will meet on 1<sup>st</sup> June to make a unilateral decision for all its academies. Their decision may be different to West Sussex: they have already made the decision not to open to children before 8<sup>th</sup> June, which shows they are taking safety issues seriously. Their priority is always what is best for the staff & the children. LB members are supportive of the Trust taking this approach.

Q. does the SLT feel supported – LB members are concerned about the pressure being put on teachers to keep the children safe?

A. Mrs Smith responded: they are dealing with ever-changing information, which is stressful. The SLT have received tremendous support from the staff. It is hard to envisage social distancing in the EY & Year 1 classrooms without the children present. The number of key worker/vulnerable children attending in June is another unknown quantity. The whole process has been dynamic. But the SLT feel the academy is organisationally well-prepared. Staff risk assessment briefings are underway for staff who will be working in school. Nobody can be sure what it will look like with children & parents on site. Staff have been very supportive of each other. The supportive feedback from the LB at its previous meeting was fed back to the staff & well received. Whilst it has been difficult, we have a good plan & good people to take that forward - we can't wait to get back to normal when the time is right & it is safe to do so.

Mrs Allen reported that a Chairs' Forum meeting has been scheduled for later the same day & asked members for any feedback they wish to be passed on. Members expressed concern that the SLT & teachers will bear the brunt of pressure & want the Trust to be supportive & alleviate this pressure.

Q. members asked how much of the information shared with us will be shared with the parents, i.e. the risk assessments?

A. the risk assessments will not be sent out to parents. Information that parents need will be formatted in an 'easy-to-read' format. The FAQ's (*circulated*) will be updated. We need parents to note key information. We now have more time to prepare information specific to year groups. Behaviour codes will also be sent out. We are awaiting further guidance from WS on exclusions. The Trust will issue a communication to parents on 22<sup>nd</sup> May explaining the delay to re-opening to 8<sup>th</sup> June & the reasons.

Q. is the only way to reduce the risks in the assessments to receive a change in Government guidance?

A. yes, a reduction in the 2-meter rule or to have less pupils in a class on a part-time timetable. Mr Still has informed the Trust that 7 in a class, 'one week in one week off' would be our preferred option. The LB agreed Mrs Allen should reiterate this strongly at the Chairs Forum. The Trust had supported this plan until the Government guidance changed. The Board also feels it is important that the Trust senior team visit our site & see the risks for themselves. Mr Still added that the Trust has pointed out that this process has highlighted that Government guidance on classroom sizes in primary schools is inadequate as no classrooms in the Trust meet the guidelines.

Q. with so much 'high risk' on the risk assessment, it would seem unlikely that the Trust can tell us to go ahead & open? How can it?

A. the Trust have postponed opening for that reason, so they can go through the risk assessments of all academies in detail. Mr Still feels the Trust will support us in taking a more gradual approach to re-opening. They have said this is not an exercise to simply reduce risk on paper, it is about the safety of our staff & children & they trust our SLT's judgements.

Mrs Allen asked for other feedback from members to take to the Chairs Forum. Members asked for the Trust to look at the risk assessments with keen eyes & to support the SLT in the way they communicate with staff & parents.

Mrs Allen to feedback Trust decisions to the LB. Local Board to possibly meet again 3<sup>rd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> June.

The meeting closed at 1.20pm.

**Signed as being a true and accurate account of the meeting:**

..... **Date:** .....

**Name:** Mrs Alice Allen      **Position:** Chair of Local Board of Lindfield Primary Academy