

The Active Learning Trust

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE ACTIVE LEARNING TRUST

*held on 4th January 2021
7pm via online Video-link*

MINUTES

Trustees/Members Present: Mr D. Bateson OBE Mr J. Beswick
 Prof. A. Boddison Mrs H. Capron
 Mr C. Bush Mr S. Chamberlain (CEO)
 Mrs J. Cutchey Mr R. Dool (Chair)
 Mr G. Hely-Hutchinson Mr M. Kerr
 Ms M. Lloyd Ms R. Weaver

Officers Present: Mr D. Hilton Mrs K. Jarvis
 Mr C. Paskell Mrs J. Steel

THE KEY DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEETING ARE SUMMARISED BELOW	
DECISION	Approve school reopening (fully and partial) as recommended by SC

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE, NOTICE & QUORUM

Mr Dool thanked all for attending at short notice and wished all a Happy New Year. He gave particular thanks to members of the Central Team and school staff, whose Christmas break had been disrupted, for their commitment and dedication in reacting to the latest circumstances.

1.1 Apologies for absence had been received prior to the meeting from Ms Adams and Ms Quinn

1.2 All apologies were accepted.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 No new interests were declared for items on the agenda.

3. REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

Mr Dool explained that the purpose of the meeting was discuss the re-opening of schools for the Spring Term in light of national pressure from staff unions.

Mr Chamberlain gave a summary of the latest position, where unions have advised staff to submit a template letter to their employers, referring to section 44d of the Education Act, where employers are legally obliged to ensure a safe working environment. The union letter suggested that schools are currently unsafe due to COVID 19 and for their members to return would place them in imminent danger in an unsafe environment.

Mr Chamberlain informed Trustees that school Risk Assessments have been updated to reflect the new variant of COVID 19 and that there is no considered increase risk in terms of health and safety. It was however recognised that there is science based evidence that there is an increased risk that children transmit the new variant at a higher rate.

Mrs Steel referred to a letter that has been sent to headteachers that can be used to respond individually to any member of staff that submits the union template letter, and a more standard letter that can be sent to all staff. The letters set out the position of the Trust, including advising that schools reserve the right to withhold pay for non-attendance. Mrs Steel explained that this would be a last resort, but we needed to lay out the possibility as early as possible.

Mr Chamberlain informed Trustees that, following contact with schools, nine of ALT's fifteen primary school heads have expressed concern about their capacity to reopen fully (remembering that secondary and special school opening has already been delayed). This is mainly due to capacity. He added that schools have received emails from parents who are refusing to send their children back.

Mr Chamberlain asked that Trustees accept his recommendation that ALT primary schools remain closed to the majority of pupils, and only reopen for children of key worker parents and children who are considered vulnerable.

Mr Bush stated that this seemed a sensible solution and would meet the Secretary of State's request that Key Workers are supported to return to work.

Mr Hely Hutchinson asked how the nine schools expressing concern had reached their decision, and whether Mr Chamberlain was comfortable with the conclusions reached. Mr Chamberlain replied that decisions have been made when considering the number of staff available to work, either

because they have COVID, are shielding, or are following union advice. He added that he is confident that each school has risk assessed their own environment on its own merits, including staffing, the buildings, and childrens' age profiles. He stated that, in most cases, it simply comes down to "are there enough staff to open safely?"

Mr Hilton stated that initial surveys have indicated that 500 children of critical workers would attend.

Ms Lloyd asked for clarification on whether staff are expected to work if they do not attend. Mr Chamberlain confirmed that this is the case and schools re ready to switch to on-line learning. Staff would be expected to fully engage in on-line learning, including completing individual professional development programmes.

Mrs Cutchey asked if schools will have enough staff willing to attend to cover key worker and vulnerable pupils in school. Mrs Steel explained that the letter being sent by staff states that they would be prepared to work from home and cover vulnerable pupils, so this should not be an issue. She added that reduced numbers will reduce the risk to what would be deemed an acceptable level of risk.

It was noted that Ravensmere Infant School has not submitted a revised risk assessment. Trustees asked that this be followed up.

Mr Dool asked what period of time Trustees were being asked to approve the proposal for. Mr Chamberlain asked that the proposal be approved for an initial one week, with weekly reviews thereafter if required. He added that, should the Government move to a third national lockdown, new guidance would be issued, but decisions needed to be made based on the immediate situation.

Following a question from Mr Dool, Mr Chamberlain reassured Trustees that the situation would continue to be monitored closely at national and local level.

Mr Bateson asked for clarification on whether the schools where heads felt they could open safely would be allowed to do so. Mr Chamberlain confirmed this, adding that each school has assessed the risk on an individual basis and would continue to do so. Mr Hely Hutchinson asked that a summary of recommendations agreed be sent to all Trustees as confirmation of the decisions made. This was agreed.

It was noted that other schools (secondaries and special schools) are currently expected to open on 18th January, either fully or on a phased return. It was agreed that Trustees would meet again to discuss the reopening of these schools if required. Mr Chamberlain confirmed that schools would be informed of the Trustees decision as soon as the meeting ended.

4. Any Other Business

4.1. Ms Lloyd added her thanks for the work of the Central Team and headteachers over the past weekend. This was echoed by all present. Mr Chamberlain agreed to pass on thanks to all concerned.

4.2. Trustees were keen to officially note their belief that, if schools are being asked to remain open, staff should be considered front-line workers when it came to distribution of COVID vaccine. This was thought to particularly relevant in light of the discovery that children transmit the new strain of COVID whilst remaining asymptomatic.

4.3. Mr Chamberlain spoken briefly about the mass testing programme being introduced into secondary schools.

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ACTION POINTS

Agenda Item	Who?	Action	Timeline
3	DH	Ensure revised RA received and reviewed from Ravensmere Infant school	ASAP
3	SC	Inform Headteachers of Trustee decision	immediately