

**DOWNS INFANT SCHOOL  
FULL GOVERNING BODY**



**Agenda for the conference meeting of the Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023, 5-7pm**

**Attended by:**

Tony Fallowfield (TF) (Chair)  
Anita Bullock (AB) (Vice Chair)  
Sarah Digon (SD)  
Loren Davies (LD)  
Emma Smith (ES)  
Gill Hammett (GH)

Aisha Hoten (AH)  
Jalia Kangave (JK)  
Caroline Dean (CD)  
Hildi Mitchell (HM) (Headteacher)  
Kirsty Cargill (KC) (Associate Governor)  
Gaynor Newnham (GN) (Clerk)

No.	Item
1.	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b></p> <p><b>1. Welcome</b> TF opened the meeting.</p> <p><b>2. Apologies</b> Apologies were received from Carrie Palmer Fry (CP).</p> <p><b>3. Review agenda</b> There were no changes to the published agenda.</p>
2.	<p><b>Register of Business Interests</b> No interests were declared.</p>
3.	<p><b>Previous Meeting Minutes</b></p> <p><b>1. Approval of the minutes of the meeting, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023</b> <b>The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting</b></p> <p><b>2. Review of actions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance Toolkit - There is a city-wide attendance project and HM is on the working group</li> <li>• The Data Group met in January and the report was shared</li> <li>• Phonics books –HM explained that there are usually enough, except at pinch points when year groups cross over, when they are moved around as needed. Governors <b>asked</b> if more are needed, and HM explained that the situation is manageable. A reading spine is being developed, linked to ‘Talk for Writing.’</li> <li>• Communication to parents is complete and there will be a further newsletter after Easter.</li> <li>• Website - Governors’ biographies are mainly up to date, though one has not yet been added and another is in the wrong place. CD will re-send her information.</li> </ul> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>CD to re-send her biography for the website</b></li> <li>• <b>ES biography to be moved to the correct place</b></li> </ul>
4.	<p><b>Safeguarding</b></p> <p><b>1. Safeguarding Policy</b> <b>The FGB agreed changes in the Safeguarding Policy (updating from JH to AH)</b></p> <p><b>2. Governor Report</b> AH noted the report. AH also reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Safeguarding audit is outstanding and will be completed</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A child mentioned in the report has been discussed with the parents and strategies to address the issues are in the process of being addressed.</li> </ul> <p>Governors <b>asked</b> about raising the profile of safeguarding in the school, and it was explained that there are now iPad sign-in procedures in place and photographs of the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL's) are in reception and at key places in the school, and at children's eye level. It was agreed, in response to a <b>question</b>, to add the DSL and Front Door for Families information to the bottom of the newsletter.</p> <p>KC explained that she will meet the reading army next term and discuss safeguarding. It was confirmed, following a <b>question</b>, that all volunteers complete DBS checks and will be made aware of who the DSL's are.</p> <p>AH has trained the premises team on safeguarding, and it has been demonstrated in their actions that they have digested and understood the information.</p>
5.	<p><b>Mathematics</b></p> <p>HM reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be a maths workshop for parents on Friday and they will then be surveyed about their wants and needs.</li> <li>• There was a positive learning walk to look at consistent teaching of mathematics which demonstrated that there is practical investigation and a real buzz around maths, even with cover teachers. There was good extension work, questions to extend learning and teachers knew the sequence of learning.</li> <li>• More work is needed on scaffolding children to make discoveries.</li> <li>• There will be a further walk early next term.</li> </ul> <p>A governor <b>asked</b> if HM feels the TA support and same day interventions are effective. HM explained that teachers are more confident in tackling maths, though some need more support than others. There are good strategies to address possible misconceptions, and all adults are now confident to intervene, which is positive.</p>
6.	<p><b>Headteacher's Report</b></p> <p>HM reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the priorities for next year are developing organically.</li> <li>• Work will continue with Talk for Writing, as it is a 2-year project.</li> <li>• Disadvantaged attendance is an ongoing concern – HM and TF attended the recent governor conference, which was thought provoking. The whole approach to attendance needs to be reconsidered, with a focus on belonging and friendship. Continuous provision and play promote collaboration and friendship. Data will be reviewed, looking at specific concerns.</li> <li>• Instructional Coaching will be rolled out from phonics and maths, to be more general and encourage teachers to reflect on their practice. Teachers will be able to develop areas of weakness. KC explained that this fits with the way staff are observed and supported – the aim is for the teachers to plan their way forward following deep conversations about possible barriers, and constructive ways forward. It can benefit staff wellbeing as they have time to sit and reflect on their own practice, which is valuable. Accountability is improved. It was explained, in response to a <b>question</b>, that there has been rapid impact.</li> </ul> <p>A governor <b>asked</b> about the reading spine, and it was explained that there will be a selection of essential texts for the children, and children will be ensured to read the right things at the right time.</p>

Governors **asked** about the Inclusion Quality Mark. HM explained that it is a grass roots review of inclusion ethos which involves all stakeholders. Language and structure are included in the review. Governors **asked** how they can support with the accreditation, and HM suggested that the strategic group could look at this. HM will review the DA data, which will then be presented to governors. Deep work is planned, which will make a huge difference to children and ensure their needs are known and understood.

Data was circulated with the HT Report and there will be more headlines available soon. 80% of Y1 pupils are on track for phonics, which is an improvement on last year, when 50% were on track. There will be accurate data at the next meeting.

There is one open referral.

**1. School Development Plan**

There is progress and a review will be completed for the next meeting

**2 Staffing update**

Staffing has been tricky, but children in the classes concerned seem happy and settled. Staffing absence is an ongoing concern and is impacting on the school. Stress is an issue for staff; today there are 2 employees off with stress, and 1 with COVID.

A governor **asked** how work stress is being managed, how staff are supported, and whether the areas of stress are identified. It was explained that one teacher cited a particular area of stress, but redeployment was not possible. They have been referred to Occupational Health.

Not all stress is work related.

**3 Staff Wellbeing**

The staff governor gave examples of staff concerns, which include the rising cost of living, anxiety, workload, pressure of being a main earner, heating costs, and having to take extra jobs to make ends meet. HM explained they are all doing a great job despite the difficulties. There is also anxiety for school leaders, due to the added impact of reducing school budgets.

A governor offered to share details of possible support, vouchers, etc., that staff may be able to access.

Governors **asked** about the strikes, and it was explained that the NEU have already sent an electronic response to the most recent pay offer, encouraging members to reject it, as the pay rise is insulting and not funded. There are 2 strike days planned in April and May. HM also explained that the NAHT is going out to electronic consultation. The growing differential between Wales and Scotland will impact recruitment for English schools on the borders and, in Cornwall, it is impossible to recruit TA's, due to term time only contracts and higher pay. Leaders are faced with having to tell parents they cannot provide what their children need and managing the endless parental complaints. The governors confirmed that they will do their best to support the leadership.

HM explained that Downs Junior School has informed parents that they will not make the cuts and will protect the children's education, despite the 10% budget deficit, which puts DIS in a difficult position. A parent governor explained that the parents are aware of the different situation at DJS, which has more income due to out of hours care for example.

The strikes have led to a sense of disharmony among members of staff, which has also impacted on wellbeing. Governors **asked** if further action will be supported by DIS staff, but the staff members who were present were unable to give a clear answer. Governors **asked** if there is any option for support staff not to come in on strike days and HM explained that the laws around industrial action are harsh. Doctors notes must be provided for illness on strikes if staff are in the union that taking is action. People shouldn't take time off but there may be childcare issues, for example.

Possible means of parents supporting the school were discussed, and LD circulated an example of another school's fundraising approach. It was noted that there needs to be sensitivity when requesting support for the school while families are also struggling. It

was also recognised that there are parents who work and do not have time to support the PTA but could afford to make donations.

It was explained that OFSTED inspections place considerable pressure on senior leaders. HM will raise this at the NAHT conference and with colleagues in South Central. There is also a planned meeting with the Director of Education to discuss LA support for leaders if there is an inadequate judgement. There is access to external counselling through the staff sickness insurance.

**4 Attendance**

HM reported that attendance is 0.2% below national, though there have been improvements since the report was written. Successful interventions will be explained at the next governor day. It was noted that COVID is having an ongoing impact on attitudes to attendance.

HM explained that the working party looking at a city-wide policy is planning to support parents and address barriers constructively. There should be a city-wide policy by the next FGB meeting.

**5 Impact of cost of living crisis**

This was covered under agenda item 6.3

**6 Feedback on transition to year 3**

The report had been circulated with the agenda.

HM explained that she felt uncomfortable with the report, which appeared to be critical of DIS.

HM explained that:

- A friendship strategy for DA pupils was employed post-COVID, so that they learned to socialise. This has paid off, and the children demonstrated good attitudes and learning routines.
- Children had exhibited a lack of stamina in reading and English, and gaps in phonics knowledge, so they were streamlined the children.
- Work on writing is already showing impact
- DJS saw continuous provision as opting out of learning, though infant teachers know that sitting down for long periods can be hard for some children. The strategy is based on research, which shows that children need to be able to move around for their development and growth.
- There were post-COVID learning gaps; some 7-year olds were at the start of the EYFS curriculum while some were soaring. Teachers meet children where they are, as they need to be secure in EYFS before moving on – and in Y2 before moving to Y3. They should not be seen as failures.

It was confirmed, in response to a [question](#), that the analysis of transition is a new initiative, which should be welcomed.

HM also explained that there was lots of planning for delivering maths through continuous provision. Children may not have been aware they were doing maths and thought they were playing. This has been addressed, with more focused maths and writing time, but the balance needs to be right for each cohort.

Governors supported DIS' approach, as teachers know the children well and put the appropriate measures in place. It is not DIS' job to prepare children for KS2, but to meet their current needs. The junior staff do not understand continuous provision.

It was suggested that, in future, DIS should drive the agenda and suggest questions for them to look at – this was agreed to be a good idea.

The report noted that PSHE is excellent.

*KC left at 18.48*

**7 Parent Carer Code of Conduct**

HM explained that parents are, increasingly, taking their stress, fear, and anxiety out on school staff. Staff respond professionally, but a recent incident has prompted HM to seek advice from an NAHT colleague. The suggested Parent, Carer Code of Conduct includes an agreed script to close conversations respectfully.

	<p>A governor <b>queried</b> one statement, related to data breaches, and it was agreed that this section will be reworded.</p> <p><b>The Parent Carer Code of Conduct was approved, pending improvements to the wording before adding to the website</b></p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Adjust wording in the Parent Carer Code of Conduct and add the final version to the website</b></li> </ul>
7.	<p><b>Finance and Premises</b></p> <p><b>1 Finance Report</b></p> <p>The minutes of the last meeting had been shared with the agenda. LD reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 2023-24 budget outturn currently shows a deficit. There have been further discussions and work on reducing the deficit, and the budget has been sent to the LA so that they are aware of the situation.</li> <li>• The GB should not normally approve a deficit, and the LA has stated that the deficit must be addressed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> year.</li> <li>• 80% of costs relate to staffing and all other costs have increased</li> <li>• It is very stressful for headteachers, and changes will be needed, though all schools are facing the same issues</li> <li>• The budget will be presented to governors in May</li> </ul> <p>A governor <b>asked</b> if schools may hand budgets back to the LA if they cannot be made to balance, and HM explained that the LA could take over the budget, due to declining pupil numbers and rising costs. Governors noted that many LA's have deficit budgets.</p> <p>The possible licensed deficit was <b>queried</b>, and it was explained that the LA advises on budgets for staffing costs, etc. The situation will decline if things continue as they currently are, but the leadership team feel that any cuts would negatively impact on the running of the school.</p> <p>A governor <b>asked</b> if it would be effective for every school to hand back its budget. It was explained that the LA would be unable to cope. 47 schools signed an open letter to the LA saying they cannot balance their budgets. Only 2% of schools, nationally, feel they will be able to balance budgets – nobody has been reckless, but times are difficult.</p> <p>HM explained that it is likely that temporary support staff will be released, which will impact on the children they support. Parental anxiety will be impacted as families learn their children will not receive the support they need, for financial reasons. Children will receive inconsistent support because finances will not allow the right people to be recruited. Leadership and subject development time will be lost, and there will only be additional adults for severe safety reasons, meaning that the safety of the school will be at risk.</p> <p><b>The SFVS was approved.</b></p> <p><b>The Charging and Remissions Policy was approved.</b></p> <p><b>The Cover Policy was approved.</b></p> <p>Governors noted that the policy must be used with care. Absence management needs to be addressed and there needs to be careful use of cover to support strategic development.</p> <p><b>2 Health &amp; Safety</b></p> <p>Inspection reports had been shared with the FGB.</p> <p>A governor raised a concern about the asbestos register not being available as it is legally required. HM explained that the register had been stored using an online facility which has been removed, but there is nothing else in place. The school is in breach of</p>

	<p>regulations, which has been flagged with the LA. The school has been advised not to have any building work done, though none is planned.</p> <p>It was stressed that there must be clarity around the location of asbestos in the school, and that the Health and Safety Commission is undertaking unannounced inspections to schools and improvement notices have been issued. The Asbestos Register it is a statutory requirement and the is needed urgently.</p> <p>HM confirmed that she has been chasing this and will raise it at higher levels. No work will be done until it is in place.</p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Continue to chase the Asbestos report</b></li> </ul>
8.	<p><b>Strategic Governance</b></p> <p><b>1. Strategic Working Party</b> TF requested a meeting before the end of term, to cement the school's position on academisation. A loose federation could be discussed with DJS at the next meeting. The DA strategy and implementation also need to be looked at.</p> <p><b>2. Staff Governor Report</b> It was reported that wellbeing has been the main issue, due to the cost of living and strike action, while being desperate to do a good job. Anxiety will increase when staff realise the budget will impact on staff.</p> <p><b>3. Governor Day Reports</b> Governors noted the reports, which will be added to the governance file in preparation for OFSTED. Governors were thanked for completing the reports.</p> <p><b>4. Succession Planning</b> A governor fed back on a recent governor forum on succession planning. TF will circulate possible dates for a meeting to discuss this, as well as to review the governor self-evaluations and complete the annual review of governance.</p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Arrange a meeting to discuss succession planning, review the governor self-evaluations and complete the annual review of governance.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>5. OCOW project / Sustainability</b> This is going well. Children are engaged and excited, staff and FODIS are on board; there will be a meeting on the 24 April. Shades will be installed to enhance outdoor learning and there is an exciting plan for the school grounds. TF asked if there could be an OCOW tab on the website – HM/KC to action. TF has written to FODIS to thank them for their support and contribution to the Sustainability project, as they have worked hard and given practical support.</p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Add OCOW tab to the school website</b></li> </ul> <p><b>6. Disadvantage Strategy</b> HM explained that, once data is gathered, all interested parties will be invited to a meeting to discuss and explore strategies</p> <p><b>7. Link Governor report</b> It was explained that the next meeting with the Junior school is scheduled for 21<sup>st</sup> April and will look at transition, budget, and collaboration; governors were invited to submit their ideas</p> <p><b>8. School name</b> The rationale for reverting to Ditchling Road Infants School had been circulated, and it was confirmed that the LA have received and acknowledged the letter of request.</p>

	<p><b>9. Training Reports</b> Governors <b>noted</b> the reports on safeguarding and anti-racism training, and the conference. Governors were asked to read the references to the LA strategy against racism, and to complete safer recruitment training and send certificates to Molly in the Office, and to the clerk.</p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Read up on the LA strategy against racism</b></li> <li>• <b>complete safer recruitment training</b></li> </ul>
9.	<p><b>Governor Effectiveness – what have we done today to help pupils and deliver on our core functions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos, and strategic direction</b></li> <li>• <b>Holding school leaders to account</b></li> <li>• <b>Overseeing financial performance</b></li> <li>• <b>Stakeholder engagement</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Governors listed the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• safeguarding and raising its profile</li> <li>• mitigating cost of living issues</li> <li>• Shared best practice from professionals in an educational environment re practical support for staff</li> <li>• Early conversations about the SIP for next year are positive</li> <li>• Stakeholder involvement – re DJS transition and how children cope there</li> <li>• Financial performance and holding leaders to account</li> <li>• Maintained the focus on maths</li> </ul>
10.	<p><b>Any additional or urgent business</b> Governor Newsletter – TF will draft and circulate</p> <p><b>Date of next meeting: 16<sup>th</sup> May 9-11am</b></p>

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 19.25

#### Attachments

No	Action	By	Notes
1.	CD to re-send her biography for the website	CD	
2.	ES biography to be moved to the correct place	HM	
3.	Adjust wording in the Parent Carer Code of Conduct and add the final version to the website	HM	
4.	Continue to chase the Asbestos report	HM	
5.	Arrange a meeting to discuss succession planning, review the governor self-evaluations and complete the annual review of governance.	TF	
6.	Add OCOW tab to the school website	HM	
7.	Read up on the LA strategy against racism	FGB	
8.	Complete safer recruitment training	FGB	