

PART I MINUTES

**TRUST BOARD MEETING
OF
THE LEARNING ALLIANCE (TLA):
HELD ON MONDAY 22nd March 2021 at 9am.**

Present:

Mr D Wootton (DW) (Chair)
Mr A Pear (AP) (Vice Chair)
Mr R Armstrong (RA)
Dr M Ashcroft (MA)
Mrs S Dempsey (SD)
Dr A Greenstein (AG)
Mr R McCluney (RM)
Mrs D Sinclair (DS)
Mrs C Thomson (CT)
Mrs J Millward (JM)

Absent:

None

In Attendance:

Mr M Cladingbowl, CEO (MC)
Mr D Twambley – COO (DT)
Mrs N Phillips-Director, Finance & Governance (NP)

Clerk:

Mrs C Gritton

Part 1	
Administration	
1. Welcome & Apologies	Action
The Chair welcomed Trustees and executive team members to the meeting. Everyone was present and the meeting was quorate.	
2. Declarations of Interest	
It was noted that there were no additional declarations of interest for items of this agenda. The Chair reminded trustees to update their declarations and confirmations on governor hub (if not done so already) NP or the Clerk will be able to assist with this if there are any difficulties.	Trustees
3. Minutes of Previous Meetings (paper 3.0)	
<p>3.1 The Chair requested an update on item 3.2, with regard to apparent discrepancies between a school and Trust's in vision and values. Trustees were reminded that this was with regard to the wording of one school's LGB minutes, which had been interpreted as the school promoting its visions and values above those of the Trust. It was clarified that the school's aims were nestled within the trust's vision and values. Alongside this, the trust is now asking LGBs to confirm their understanding and commitment to the trust vision and values, via the code of conduct on governor hub. In addition, it was reported that the COO and NP are working on a suite of qualitative and quantitative information to monitor governance, this will be presented to the next Governance and Search Committee meeting.</p> <p>3.2 ACTION: With regard to item 6.2 of the Minutes, the Chair requested an update for the next meeting on the status of the Chimney house Alliance.</p> <p>3.3 The Minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting, held on 19th October 2020 were approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and the Chair will sign off the minutes.</p> <p>3.4 Actions Log – It was confirmed that the minutes had been updated, the policy lists for each Committee had been completed and the Complaints Policy updated. It was noted that the Action Log will be updated as part of the signed copy of the minutes.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">COO</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chair</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Clerk</p>
Strengthening leadership, collaboration and governance across the Trust	

4. Reports (exception) from Committees	
<p>The Chair expressed thanks to all Chairs and Committee members.</p> <p>4.1. Governance & Search (G&S) – Paper 4.1 had been received with the agenda. The following points were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee will focus on how to support Chairs’ skills and training and reinforce good governance at all levels; work has been done on codes of conduct at all levels; and there is focus on the use of governor hub to monitor and show compliance. The G&S Chair asked trustees to ensure their details and confirmations are correct and up-to-date on governor hub. • It was noted that at some point a review of diversity in boards will be undertaken. • The Chair recommended that the trust board have sight of regular summary information (eg risk register/financials, and it was agreed that this would be considered by the G&S committee. • The committee will consider the technology required to enable blended meetings going forwards. <p>4.2. Finance & Staffing including Finance Summary – Paper 4.2 and 4.2a had been received with the agenda. The Chair of this Committee reported on the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress made on systems’ integration, policies and procedures, which is going well and this Committee thanked NP, Mrs Robinson and the COO for their work on these matters, ensuring that the Trust is on track to meet its timeline targets in those areas. • The committee had reviewed and considered the financial report for trust. Overall, the TLA schools are in a good financial position and there is currently an in-year surplus forecast across the Trust. This would mean that reserves at year-end would be in excess of the 5% of GAG target. Those schools whose reserves are above the 5% target, are now in discussions with the COO to consider potential reinvestment opportunities for the benefit of their pupils. <p>4.3. Audit & Risk (A&R) – Paper 4.3 including the risk register (RR) had been received with the agenda. It was reported that this Committee had considered the following matters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed scrutiny of the risk framework (including RR, Policy, standards to which risks are applied) which the Committee agreed to adopt and adapt following regular review detailing any safeguarding matters and all financial and reputational risks. • It was noted that there is a delegation of risks, and not everything sits with the A&R committee. • The Committee had discussed the risk around integration, noting a requirement to draw up some acceptance criteria to enable the trust to evidence when the integration process is complete. • <i>A Trustee noted that the RR had been created on merger on 1st September 2020 and that Report 4.2 states it is ‘as at 9th March 2021’ and asked whether the document therefore reflects the position as at today’s date.</i> It was reported that the start date of the risk is the date it was identified, ie at the point of merger on 1st September 2020. The report is as reviewed at the A&R Committee on 9th March 2021 and reflects the latest position, including mitigations and likelihood of those risks. <p>4.4. Interim Executive Board (IEB) The Oaks Academy (TOA) – Paper 4.4 had been received with the Agenda. It was reported that the IEB Chair meets with the Headteacher of TOA every week and that the IEB had considered the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress made in safeguarding under the new Headteacher’s lead. • Risks remain, but are under control and improving. Behaviour still requires constant monitoring and the improvements are enabling improved teaching and learning. • A working party of parents and representatives from outside agencies will be established to consider issues affecting those (large numbers of) pupils for whom English is a second language. • It has been discussed and agreed at G&S that it was time to transition from the IEB to a LGB. Trustees confirmed their agreement to the formation of the LGB. Work has begun to identify appropriate diverse governors to sit on that LGB. • ACTION: The Clerk will upload the TOA IEB Minutes to Governor Hub. <p>4.5. Local Governing Boards – Paper 4.5 and all schools’ LGB Spring term minutes had been received with the agenda. The following points were noted:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">All Trustees</p> <p style="text-align: center;">G&S Committee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Clerk</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGB meetings were generally working well. The COO and NP are also focusing on ensuring all LGBs understand the TLA culture and are working in partnership with the LGBs. • Whilst LGB meetings’ structures were good overall and good progress made on compliance, there remains some work to be done to support some of the LGBs. Further work is required in some instances in focusing LGBs on education and welfare and data interpretation to ensure their understanding and evaluation of impact provision on outcomes. The trust executive is working to provide LGBs with reliable and robust data and tools to enable them to do that. • Meetings this term had once again focused largely on the effects of Covid-19 on education and welfare. Areas discussed included detailed assessments of gap analysis, catch-up plans, remote learning provisions, mental health, support strategies and focus on staff wellbeing. • Secondary schools had discussed plans around ‘teachers assessed grades’ for the summer examination series. • Of particular note was the efficient, professional and successful set up of the lateral flow testing for students and staff. • ACTION: The trustees wished to give acknowledgement and thanks for all the hard work and high standards that staff have put (and continue to do so) into successfully overseeing the return of students into the TLA schools and for continuing to provide a strong curriculum of education and welfare for all TLA students. <p>4.5.1 Matters to share with the Trust Board – Paper 4.5, Annex 1, together with the Congleton High School (CHS) Proposed Expansion Paper in the optional supplementary papers folder in Governor Hub, (together called the Expansion reports herein) had been received with the Agenda. Trustees discussed the proposal to endorse the planned expansion of CHS. The COO explained the background and circumstances that had led to the proposal to expand CHS by an additional form entry in ‘a few years time’. A Trustee asked whether there was an agreed timescale for this project. It was reported that this will depend on when the business case is approved and when planning permission is obtained, although no major barriers to planning are anticipated. It is therefore not proposed to increase PAN at his stage (the school is able to admit over PAN until such time as the expansion is approved). This will mitigate the risk that the build would not be completed and the school had to take more students into a school that was not ready. It is anticipated that the process will take around 2-3 years to achieve building work and actual increased intake at the school. It was noted that the expansion would happen on the basis that it is funded by Cheshire East Local Authority. It was agreed that expansion plans should proceed as detailed in the Expansion Reports.</p> <p>A trustee wished to note the better LGB and Trust Board communication The CEO noted that relationships with LGBs were key and much work has been done in this area, alongside structure and compliance at meetings. CEO noted that relationships and culture were much better although not the finished product yet. A particular school was discussed in more detail, and the CEO explained that more work to enable all governors to effectively challenge and understand data needed to take place.</p>	NP to co-ordinate
Improving Education and Opportunities	
5.CEO report	
<p>The CEO report – cover note - Paper 5.0 - was received with the agenda. The CEO shared a slide presentation.</p> <p>5.1. Brief update on COVID-19 – Paper 5.1 was received with the agenda. Additionally reported:</p> <p>5.1.1 For different Covid related reasons, 2 Headteachers were currently not able to attend their schools. Deputy Headteachers have stepped up to maintain the running of those schools with Trust and LGB Chairs’ support. A Trustee asked whether the Trust should consider building in additional contingency operational staffing with regard to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, and is there appropriate funding to do this. Staffing has been covered on a case-by-case basis as need arises. It was reported that the COO and CEO are mindful of the challenges faced by staff, particularly in primary schools with fewer staff and have discussed staffing with the Headteachers and asked what support they need. Additional staff have been put in place as needed, utilising schools’ reserves if necessary, which has currently not caused any financial risk to those schools. Trustees recognised that many staff were working over capacity, and it was agreed that this is a difficult situation which the executive will continue to closely monitor.</p>	

<p>5.1.2 Over the weekend, 12 – 13 members of Sir William Stanier (SWS) staff have been contacted by the national track and trace system and told to self-isolate. This has resulted in Yr9 having to return to remote learning, whilst the Trust looks into the validity and the trigger of the isolation notices. Good systems remain in place for pupils’ learning and the Trust is providing support and assistance to SWS.</p> <p>5.1.3 A Trade Union has written to Headteachers requesting detailed staff welfare information. Responses have been consistent with those discussed with the Trust and Unions have been content with the Trust’s and schools’ responses to welfare needs.</p> <p>5.2. Trust progress against strategic and operational priorities – Paper 5.2 was received with the Agenda. It was agreed that this item would not be taken as a standalone item, as the CEO’s papers and slides cover the issues overall.</p> <p>It was noted that NP will be approaching Trustees shortly with proposed dates for the 3 Trustee Away Days. Topics of discussion will include strategic governance, the changing policy landscape and role of trusts, and strategic plan review. <i>A Trustee requested that the final session starts with baseline status.</i></p> <p>5.3. Trust Strategic Response to COVID-19 recovery – Paper 5.3 was received with the Agenda. The paper presented the proposed Trust approach in detail and recommended that the TLA Trust Board considers and, subject to any amendments, agrees the approach set out in this paper. The CEO noted the following:</p> <p>5.3.1 Whilst it is the responsibility of schools to ensure that students recover in terms of education and welfare from Covid, the CEO wants the Trust to establish a framework to guide and assist schools in catch-up. The trust wants to ensure that catch-up will happen, and happen well across all schools. The significant impact of Covid-19 was discussed including the long-term impact on students and their mental health; the board recognised that there is much more to do than simply catch-up. The trust confirmed the importance of ensuring all diagnostics and interventions are targeted and impactful to accelerate progress for those students who were not at expected levels pre-Covid, but also for those who were and are likely to have fallen behind in the pandemic. Catch-up needs will differ across the schools and so a range of different strategies will be needed. Work will need to be done to identify strengths and weaknesses across the schools to support this catch-up. Additionally, processes put in place for the pandemic will be reviewed as many of the strategies (such as digital learning) will most likely stay in place and continue to be used. There will be a strong focus on ‘building back better.’</p> <p>5.3.2 <i>A Trustee commented that catch-up will be challenging for schools without additional resources, costs and time, and asked if there had been opportunity to quantify the amount of catch-up needed, in particular whether the amount of curriculum to catch-up on has been identified.</i> It was reported that until schools have completed their detailed gap analysis work, the level of catch-up is difficult to quantify. Trustees can be assured that the key objective is to have all pupils back to where they would have been expected to be by the end of their current Key Stage. The CEO is exploring the strategies schools intend to use for that and support the schools with their diagnostic assessments. The main focus will then be on time and people; improving the quality of teaching and ways of working to make better use of classroom time. The Trust will assist with check points to ensure the effective impact of catch-up strategies, which will vary dependant on the differentials of lost learning across the schools. It is not believed that opening schools over holidays would be impactful for catch-up nor conducive to the Trust’s regard for staff wellbeing. The COO reminded trustees that there is a catch-up fund (£80 per pupil) which, if used well, should go a long way to support the strategies to be put in place.</p> <p>5.3.3 <i>A Trustee asked whether ‘flipped learning’ will be of value in the catch-up context.</i> It was reported that flipped learning is not intended to be a strategy applicable to every pupil and will only be made use of where appropriate; pupils learn in different ways and some have thrived with online learning and others will need additional, targeted support and interventions.</p> <p>5.3.4 <i>A Trustee commended the CEO on the approach for catch-up and the opportunity to build on and establish new practices, acknowledging the enormity of the challenge.</i> It was agreed that driving long-term changes and using this as an opportunity for fundamental shifts in learning, should be of great benefit to students and in the long term improve outcomes.</p>	NP
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<p>5.3.4 A trustee (employed within another trust) noted that social and economic factors have an impact on learning and offered to work with the CEO collaboratively to consider how schools can best assist their pupils. It was agreed that schools will benefit from re-engaging with their communities, and the if the school can become the hub of a community, it should assist pupils to engage in learning. The CEO will meet with JM to discuss wider recovery and support strategies.</p>	CEO/JM
<p>5.3.5 A trustee expressed concern around the differential issue on catch up particularly between those who would engage with online learning and those who wouldn't or couldn't, and for those who already have a disadvantage in education. The trust will put their schemes into place and agree this is likely to be a long-term and challenging process.</p>	
<p>5.3.6 A trustee (with prior teaching experience) offered assistance to support any of the trust's schools with catch-up and noted they may be able to source volunteers to assist teachers in the classroom if that would be helpful. The CEO thanked the trustee for this and will liaise directly around the feasibility and effectiveness of this.</p>	
<p>5.3.7 Trustees agreed the trust recovery framework. This will be more directive for weaker schools, to ensure appropriate risk management, and will also develop improved collaborative working across the schools. The CEO explained that the Covid landscape, will lead to a review of strategic priorities and the possibility of moving to greater standardisation across the TLA schools. Trustees agreed with this proposal.</p>	CEO
<p>5.4. Brief update on Teacher Assessed Grades – The CEO shared slides detailing what is known so far about the planned process. CT noted that further guidance is expected at the end of March and spoke around the detail expected in that guidance. CT further explained the processes around the teacher assessed grades noting the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be internal moderation followed by a 3-stage external quality assurance process. • There will be a requirement to submit information about the process followed. • The exam board may conduct a virtual visit and there will be sampling on a random basis. • Appeals processes and procedural reviews were noted. <p>The Board thanked the CT for her support in assisting the CEO with this.</p>	
6. Strategic Safeguarding Update	
<p>6.1 Safeguarding is key to the Trust's aspirations for all children. During the last six months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Kingdom appointed as strategic safeguarding lead across the trust. • Schools' Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) meet half termly and now working as a team. • Governor leads from LGBs are meeting termly. • Underperformance in school has seen intervention and is now turned around. <p>It was noted that there is trust-wide aspiration for outstanding practices in safeguarding.</p>	
Fostering Local Identity and Ethos	
7. Chairs' Forum Feedback	
<p>CEO reported that there had been positive beginnings to the building of strong collaborative relationships and feedback has been positive.</p>	
8. Feedback from Trust Board to LGBs	
<p>Matters to share include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Board is grateful to LGBs for their support of the return to school. - The Board acknowledges the professional and successful set up of lateral flow Covid-19 testing. - The Board encourages LGBs to continue to focus on education and welfare. - The Board were pleased to see that the communication between the LGBs and trust board appears to be working well. 	
9. AOB	
<p>A trustee noted that the Headteachers' virtual coffee morning had been a success and interesting for all involved.</p>	
Date and Time of Next Meeting – Monday 17th May 2021 at 9am. Meeting closed at 11.05am	

ACTIONS

AGENDA ITEM AND ACTION	By When	By Whom
2.0 Trustees to check declarations and confirmations on governor hub.	Asap	All Trustees
3.1 COO to report on Chimney House status to next meeting.	Next Meeting	COO
3.3/4 Update action log and Chair to sign minutes.	Next Meeting	Clerk/Chair
4.4 Clerk to upload TOA minutes in accessible area on governor hub.	Next Meeting	Clerk
4.5 Acknowledgement and thanks regarding the schools' successful return to the classrooms and Lateral Flow testing work.	Next LGBs	COO/NP
5.2 Trustee Away Day dates' proposals to be circulated	Asap	NP/Clerk
5.3.4 CEO to meet with JM to discuss wider recovery and support strategies around Covid.	Next Meeting	CEO/JM
5.3.7 Further work on standardisation of approach to key issues in TLA schools.	Next Meeting	CEO/COO

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 17th May 2021 at 9am