



Company Number: 07977368

**Minutes of the Members Meeting**

**Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at 6pm at Faringdon Community College**

Present:

Bob Wintringham- (BW)  
 Gordon Joyner – DBE- (GJ)  
 Dave Wilson- (DW)  
 Anthony Cook - Chair of Trustees- (AC)

In attendance:

Louise Warren (LW)- Director of Education  
 Richard Evans (RE)- CEO  
 Anne Lynn (AL)- COO  
 Rosie Phillips (RP)- Clerk

Apologies:

Standing Items		
1	Welcome, Introductions and Apologies	Action
	<p>Meeting opened at 18.07.</p> <p>AC opened the meeting and welcomed all, before proceeding to introductions of the Members to RE.</p> <p>No apologies, all present.</p>	
2	<p><b>Notice, Confidentiality and Quorum Requirements and purpose of the meeting</b></p> <p>AC noted confidentiality of meeting.</p> <p>Meeting was quorate.</p> <p>AC commented that the purpose of the meeting being sooner than usual in the year was as a result of discussions last academic year, surrounding more regular meetings of the Members to discuss strategic outcomes.</p> <p><i>BW – Is LH (Liz Holmes) not a member?</i>            AL explained that as LH has retired as the Chair of Trustees, and AC has been appointed Chair of Trustees, LH is no longer a member and AC becomes a de facto member.</p> <p>AC noted that the Department of Education (DofE) has a perspective on the Chair of Trustees not being a member, however this has not been certified and so for the time being they will continue as they are.</p> <p>GJ suggested possibility of a mini resolution in future to address this issue.</p>	

3	<b>Compliance - Declaration of interest personal or business</b>	
	AC asked the members for any declarations. None were noted.	
<b>Strategic Matters</b>		
4	<b>Summer key Stage Outcomes – EYFS, KS1, KS2, GCSE and A levels – and any actions being triggered at a school or trust level to address poor outcomes.</b>	
	<p><b>Results headlines and Q&amp;A</b></p> <p>AC began by noting that all documents had been distributed in advance and pre-read, and asked Members if they required LW to summarise any aspects before asking their questions.</p> <p>BW commented that he would like RE and LW to present their views on the assessment data.</p> <p>RE reminded Members that the data before them was yet to be validated, but that nationally the levels had been dropping and that outcomes, particularly for KS2 reading, had reduced over the past two years. Nationally, he noted the outcomes are beginning to stabilise and so the hope would be to see this trend within the Trust too. For FLT phonics outcomes RE noted he was pleased with the results in general, though acknowledged the work needed surrounding consistency across all schools. RE commented on the high SEND need in cohorts across all FLT schools, noting the need to focus heavily on SEND outcomes this academic year.</p> <p>RE informed the Members that, as a Trust, they were disappointed with the GCSE results and so, though there are improvements to be made in Primary Schools, the FLT’s primary focus for the year is improving GCSE results.</p> <p>LW noted that there had been updated data released earlier that day by the DofE that showed the attainment to be far more positive than initial data suggested. LW explained, based on the updated data, attainment is up on the previous year, but that schools still need to adapt and work with their ever-changing demographic to ensure they see the progress continue to grow.</p> <p>LW explained, in relation to the work needed to continue to progress, that there is a mantra for FCC staff this year which is 90-60-30, meaning the aim is for 90 pupils at band 4+, 60 at 5+ and 30 at 7+; this would allow the school to raise attainment above the National Average.</p> <p>RE informed the Members that working in partnership with the VAT secondary schools is proving beneficial already.</p> <p><i>DW – Can you analyse the primary school outcomes in more detail for us please, noting which schools are doing well and which are doing less well, elaborating on why you think this might be?</i></p> <p>LW explained that, in relation to the EYFS data, they demonstrated a good level of development statistics across the board which the Trust were pleased with. Folly View and the Elms are shown to be below average for GLD, with LW noting that both schools had undergone big</p>	

changes which had presented new challenges and impacted on their results, with moving site, adapting to new age ranges and changes in leadership being but a few of them. LW also drew members' attention to the challenging demographic of students for both schools, with high levels of SEND and many vulnerable children in their cohorts. LW noted that, having reviewed the settings, the provisions are good. The children arrive at both schools with lower levels of speech, language, reading and writing, and so this impacts their attainment during the early years especially.

LW informed the Members that the Board had been concerned about attainment at Watchfield the previous year, however the new data showed significant gains and they are now in line with the National Average. This was noted as a positive example of the progress possible for those schools still sitting below average.

LW commented on the positive improvements shown in phonics, with Watchfield sitting at 93%. LW acknowledged that the data was not always translating into their reading results and that, although phonics results were high, often reading results at the end of year one and two were below expected standards. LW noted this – and writing - as their biggest EYFS challenge and focus for the year ahead.

Drawing Members' attention to KS2, LW noted the FLT were pleased with results at The Elms, acknowledging this is where their strengths have always sat having previously been a junior school. LW commented that the FLT were surprised at Shrevenham and John Blandy not attaining the level of progress expected by the end of KS2. She commented that this could be attributed to the high SEND across the Trust, sitting at around 30% in each school, which is a large need to resource.

*BW – Do you have sufficient support for SEND within the schools?*  
LW commented that it can be difficult and that more resource would always be welcome, particularly in the form of TAs, as they are finding more often that TAs time is utilised providing one-to-one support for pupils with high SEND, leaving gaps in resource elsewhere.

RE added that a challenge facing all Trusts is the increasing number of pupils with SEND, the diversity of that SEND and the level of funding available to support those pupils. Compounding the issue is a shortage of support staff, due in part to the pay grade offered in exchange for the high level of responsibility expected.

*BW - Would you say that the level of SEND is the underlying issue with attainment?*

LW confirmed it was certainly a big factor to consider, noting the huge challenge faced by teachers in managing the very high needs children they have in their classes. LW informed members of the Trust's behaviour policy which is based around nurturing relationships and is seen as a positive tool in supporting all children. LW reiterated RE's comment regarding salary vs responsibility when it comes to hiring and retaining TAs.

RE added that another aspect for consideration with SEND children and their attainment is the increased persistent absence and serious absences they see across the demographic.

*BW – Is this a problem specific to Faringdon and our schools?*

RE responded that it is a national issue, and as a CEO split across two Trusts and a Chair of Governors in a school outside of the County, he sees the evidence to support this view that it is widespread.

*GJ – Should the children with the highest needs be in a different provision better suited to meet their needs?*

LW confirmed that some would benefit from a school more suited to and capable of supporting their needs, noting that some pupils do have places at alternative provisions and will be moving on in due course.

*DW – If there is a general trend towards increased SEND nationally, then the national comparisons for attainment are still valid as all schools are being assessed in the same context. Where would the Academy's improvement team be focused for KS1 and KS2, based on what you have just shared?*

LW noted closest support and focus was needed at The Elms and Folly View due to recent unstable staff structure with lots of change and an increased need to reassure and develop the teams within the schools.

RE added that Longcot also required focused attention from the Trust.

*BW – Do we feel that the impact of covid is still present and affecting our schools?*

LW confirmed this to be her view, commenting on a noticeable change in parents as well as children in the wake of the pandemic. She commented on parents' needs and expectations having changed, alongside the ways in which they support their children themselves and expect the parents to support their children. LW informed Members that across all schools they are witnessing increasing requests for individual provision for pupils from their parents, which is not attainable with the level of resource available. With regards to the pupils, LW noted the importance of adapting their expectations as, post covid, they have it is taking longer for learning attitudes to develop; the children are coming to school less focused, less tenacious and less robust than pre-pandemic.

*BW – How can we help families with this? How does it compare to what you saw from families in 2019?*

LW commented that they must adjust and adapt to meet the need of the families as they are and accept that this is the norm right now.

RE concurred with LW's comment on the ongoing impact of covid, drawing attention to VAT secondary King Alfred's (KA's), noting that though KA's have returned fully from an academic perspective and have exceeded their 2019 target, pastorally there are real ongoing issues post-pandemic with high levels of anxiety, mental health concerns and absences amongst the cohort, at a noticeably higher level than pre-pandemic.

*BW – Recognising that the pupils still require additional pastoral care and so it is not perfect, are there ways in which we can adapt to fall in line with KA's from an academic perspective and adopt some of their procedures if they're doing so well with results?*

RE explained that the Headteacher from KA's is working closely with the Headteacher at FCC to provide support and is also part of the triad of schools who meet and support one another and share skills.

*BW – Would you say that you feel FCC has not adapted as well as it might have done post-covid?*

LW agreed with that viewpoint, though noted the unfortunate timing of a new Headteacher beginning very shortly before covid, meaning he lost the vital initial period of getting to know his school personally to the lockdown and period of virtual learning. Acknowledging that, LW commented that she does feel that FCC were too slow to adapt to the changes and to adapt back once lockdown ended.

RE noted an advantage for KA's, to be considered if the schools are to be compared, is that KA's had been an Ofsted 'Requires Improvement' school pre-covid and so action plans for improvement had already been implemented and could be followed and adhered to throughout and beyond the duration of the pandemic.

LW further noted that, post-covid, schools were conscious to support wellbeing of pupils and staff, but in some cases that has been to the detriment of the learning and the quality of teaching.

*BW – How are the staff, from a wellbeing perspective?*

LW noted that the Faringdon primaries' staff are very optimistic at present about their new leadership and are feeling prepared for the work necessary to become Ofsted ready. The recent feedback received from staff was that they feel they are being effectively led and cared well for; the climate within the schools has shifted positively.

*DW – What is the demographic looking like in the primary schools in terms of pupil numbers?*

AL informed Members that nationally they are heading into a decline in primary numbers over the next few years due to lower birth rates. As an example, she explained that they had envisioned a four form entry in Faringdon this year but, as the numbers were not equating, it is barely fulfilling a three form entry. AL commented that The Elms and Folly View had reduced their PAN as they can see they are not getting the expected numbers. AL acknowledged the high level of building in the area and the potential for large numbers of families to be drawn to the area, however recognised also that until those figures are a definite it is impossible to predict.

*BW – Roughly what percentage of decline are you looking at?*

AL noted that JBL, Longcot and Buckland are at PAN, but all other schools in the Trust are around 10% down.

AC commented that the key factor in looking at these figures is noting that there has been an expectation over the past five years that

cohorts will be growing and that schools would be reaching capacity, but the reality has not met that expectation, therefore it is a critical decision to reduce the PAN to protect finances.

AL informed the Members that OCC are being asked by a multitude of primary schools to reduce their PAN, but that the opposite is true of secondaries, which are largely oversubscribed.

GJ concurred that the issue is widespread, noting other schools he is involved with having to reduce entry requirements from 1.5 form entry to 1 form entry to remain financially viable.

*BW – Can you explain how it helps the Trust or the schools to change the PAN?*

AL explained that it protects the finances, as once an entry group is over thirty children then the school is obliged to hire a second teacher for that year; FLT schools have been increasing to 1.5 form entry where necessary but mixing year groups in order to protect against this issue, as if the PAN remains higher then they are duty bound to hire an extra teacher which is not always affordable.

DW extended thanks to AL on behalf of members for her clarification.

*BW – In regard to the Primary Schools within the FLT, how do you feel their LGBs handle any issues at the school and support their school?*

LW remarked that there are very committed governing bodies within the Trust who support their schools effectively. She informed the Members that the LGBs are working closely with the Trustees to allow for collaborative thinking and transition of information, further commenting that the majority of the LGBs are a proactive part of the solution to issues within their schools.

AC contributed for clarity that there are LGBs that require improvement but that the closer work between the Trustees and LGBs should allow a more focused interrogation of this and ensure quality governance.

RE added that they must focus on the Chairs of the LGBs; if they can have effective, proactive Chairs then that will encourage the biggest improvements through their leadership.

*BW – It is imperative that the LGBs work together with the Trustees on the overall objective of the FLT. Do you find that this is the case?*  
AC commented that this is true of some LGBs but reiterated that there are some that require change.

*BW – It is also imperative that the LGB are supporting the staff adequately.*

AL responded that, even in the LGBs whose governance is less effective overall at present, they are still incredibly supportive of the staff and the school, noting their issues are centred in being ineffective at progressing the school.

*BW- Are you confident that, were you to ask it of the LGBs, they would be able to identify the key issues within their schools and define them accurately?*

LW commented that she certainly believes this of the Primary School LGBs within the Trust, though is less sure with regards to FCC, noting the magnitude of the task for Governors at the secondary school.

AC noted the importance of ensuring strong working relationships between the Trustees and the LGBs, ensuring objectives are disseminated and understood and that Trustees act on their responsibility to manage and support the LGBs so that, in turn, the LGBs support their schools in the most effective manner.

On request of DW, LW updated the Members on the changes to results data received by that date. LW noted the focus that they had placed on certain bands had shown some improvements and had made a difference to the results of children within those bands; she further noted the importance of increasing that same focus, applying more resources to the cause and continuing their determined efforts to improve outcomes for the students.

*DW – You can see that band 7 – 9 students are in line with the national average, which is great, but the band 5+ results show the middle to higher ability pupils are not doing as well as they should be and is an area that requires focus. How is the maths department since the overhaul?*

LW commented that the new teachers in the department are helping improve it, but that the biggest focus is on the way in which the maths curriculum is taught. She noted that English attainment was not where they hoped it would be either, but that maths is their biggest concern. LW explained that FCC was introducing a new scheme which is used across the FLT primary schools, which encourages the teachers to be more adaptive in their approach to teaching and further benefits the children by allowing a more seamless transition from primary to secondary school.

*BW – What is the general feeling in terms of how we compare to other local schools? Are we on a par?*

LW noted that FCC 2022 data shows them to be below the national average in most areas.

*BW – Does this make us vulnerable to Ofsted?*

LW responded that it does, further amplifying the need for rapid change and improvement.

*DW – What are the key priorities for FCC?*

RE noted that the key priorities for FCC are; stabilising the staff, ensuring strong teams in all departments, particularly English and Maths; target setting for assessments to ensure the school and staff remain ambitious; ensuring behaviour is, at a minimum, considered good across the school; focusing on their support for SEND and Pupil Premium (PP) children. He also commented that support for the leadership team is vital in achieving this, and that they were interviewing for a Deputy Head soon.

*DW – Are Maths and English fully staffed?*

RE confirmed that they are.

*BW – How do the parents view FCC? Have you addressed the results with them? It is important the data is shared with the parents.*

RE commented that the biggest concern noted in the parent survey was regarding pupil behaviour. He felt as the data was not yet finalised that the Headteacher was unlikely to have shared it with parents however would do so soon.

*DW – Have you had the open evening for the school?*

LW confirmed they had had the open evening the previous week and the feedback from it was very positive.

RE noted that the fact the school had grown in pupil numbers was a positive factor in the way it was viewed.

DW and BW both noted that the biggest concern fed back from the local community surrounding FCC was the behaviour at the school.

*DW – Has anything changed this year in terms of how behaviour is dealt with here at FCC?*

RE explained that the school was part of a behaviour strategy group which has helped the team to adjust their policies and procedures. He noted that, going forward, the focus needs to be on consistency in applying those policies and procedures and ensuring all teachers adopt the restorative approach to managing behaviour. A recent review of behaviour had shown marked improvements in pupil behaviour during lessons, but noted there was still room to improve behaviour outside of the classroom. RE impressed upon the Members that the poor behaviour stemmed from a small minority of students, not the majority.

BW commented that poor reputations are difficult to lose and that it could take a long time to improve community opinions of the school. Members concurred with this statement.

*DW – Thank you, the support RE has outlined sounds positive. What is the central team at FLT doing to aid the improvement?*

LW outlined for Members the additional support being given to the school by the central team, including support from designated English and Maths leads and the combining of the Safeguarding and SEND leads into a separate designated inclusion team working as a separate hub. FCC is benefiting from all these changes.

LW and RE further noted the support being received from Claire Sylvester and Rachel Cleave on school improvement and secondary school strategies.

*BW – From the Board's perspective, what is your overall assessment of the work being done? Are you confident you will see the level of improvement needed?*

AC noted that the improvement required at FCC had been on the Board's agenda since March as they are aware they need to maintain their focus on it, and they are happy with the action plans that are in place. He commented that RE had brought with him an injection of



support when he became joint CEO and that should assist greatly. AC confirmed that, as a Board, they are confident that they are doing the right things to help FCC, but that now the priority must be the focus on maintaining the momentum gained, on continuing to implement the strategies they have adopted to improve, and on ensuring they have the high quality of staff necessary to succeed. AC impressed upon Members that the improvement of FCC is the Board's highest priority and will remain a standing point on their agenda until marked improvements are gained and maintained.

*BW - Can you update us on our financial situation in relation to the action plans? Can the schools support the plans we have put in place?*

AL informed Members that the FLT is in a financially sound position at present, forecasting a small surplus across the Trust. She commented that FCC has a large surplus and so that is beneficial as, if FCC requires the additional money for resources, it is available for use. AL noted that though their position is sound presently, they must be aware of the potential for change with uncertain factors going forward, citing the possible General Election next year as one of these.

AC commented on the strong position the reserves give the Trust in allowing them to have broader options on where they spend their finances.

*BW – So, for example, should a particular school require more money for SEN support, that would be a possibility?*

Noting the importance of balance, AL confirmed that, should a particular school require support, the Trust would be able to direct additional finances and support their way, further noting this as a benefit of being a multi-academy Trust.

RE commended the operations team at FLT and noted how impressed he had been with their methods since being at the Trust.

### **Action plans and next steps**

AC commented that the most notable next step for the Trust is the proposed merger with the VAT and the decision needed from the Trustees on the next steps is paramount. AC reflected on the benefits already seen from the collaboration and improved practice at schools across the Trust, particularly FCC, noting an increased momentum and a need to continue that, regardless of the outcome of the merger. AC informed the Members that they are currently in a period of due diligence and that the final decision on whether to progress the merging of the Trusts will be made in the new year. He further noted the positive indications received in a recent meeting with the DofE, which has instilled confidence in Trustees from both sides that, should they feel in January that proceeding with the merger is in the best interests of their pupils, staff and schools, then they will hopefully have DofE support in doing so.

*BW – There was, in the past, always a very different approach amongst the academies which was an issue in collaborating, would you say that is less of an issue now?*

	<p>AC confirmed that the situation was much improved this time and that the Trusts operate far more similarly than they once did. He informed the Members that the Trustees met early in the process and were able to speak pragmatically about the potential issues and initial concerns and, in doing so, were able to work to reduce these immediately and have collaborated successfully so far.</p> <p><i>BW – Is there a notable difference in the position of the Trusts financially?</i></p> <p>AL noted that the VAT finances appear to be healthy too at present which is a positive.</p> <p>RE confirmed that, as with FLT, VAT have a small surplus.</p> <p>BW noted that there was an attempt to combine the two Trusts five years ago that was unsuccessful for various reasons.</p> <p><i>Considering this, what do you feel is different this time around that could lead to a successful merger between the Trusts?</i></p> <p>RE commented that there has been a change in staff in the past five years, with only two Headteacher’s having remained in post since then. He further noted the complete overhaul in the central team in VAT. He reassured the Members that all schools in the VAT view one another as equals and there is no hierarchy which could place limitations on the success of a merger. He impressed upon the Members that the Board of Trustees at VAT is supportive of the increased collaboration between Trusts and continuing to work towards merging, and already recognise the benefits.</p> <p>AC explained to Members the initiating process undertaken, whereby Trustees from both Trusts met to discuss honestly and in detail the potential benefits and challenges that could arise from the merger and what each Trust could offer one another in collaborating. This was seen as a positive process which allowed both Trusts to enter the period of increased collaboration with clarity.</p>	
Any Other Business		
5	As notified to the Chair before the meeting	
	<p>a. Next meeting agenda</p> <p>It was agreed that the results would be revisited in the next meeting, as the final data would be available for examination before then. A further update on the collaboration between FLT and VAT would also be on the agenda for the next meeting.</p> <p>b. Summer meeting agenda</p> <p>The summer meeting agenda was not discussed.</p> <p>AC closed the meeting at 19:08, thanking all in attendance for their time and contribution.</p>	
	<b>MEETING END 19:08</b>	

Signed and Approved by: