



MEETING OF THE ASPIRE ACADEMY COUNCIL

Date: Monday 15th June 2015
Venue: Aspire Academy
Time: 4.00pm

Present: Wendy Middlemas (WM) (Chair), Michael Carey (MC), Catherine Hill (CH), Tony Nicholson (TN), Steve Parsons (SP) and Colin Simkins (CS) (Principal)
Together with: Emily Trotter (ET) (FCAT Services Lead) and Kath Buddle (KB) (FCAT Governance Administrator and minute taker)
Apologies: Alana Frith and Sheryl Cardwell

Action

1. Preliminaries

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2 Apologies from Alana Frith and Sheryl Cardwell were noted.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 SP explained that he was a governor at Stalmine Primary School. There were no specific declarations of interest for this meeting.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd April 2015

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting were approved.

4. Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda

- 4.1 **Information on assumptions within the budget summaries** (Item 5.1 from the previous minutes) – the Clerk confirmed that these had been included.

Deborah Hanlon- Catlow (DHC) joined the meeting for the next item

5. Teaching and Learning

5.1 Pupil Premium Update

DHC provided an update on Pupil Premium spend and activities (Paper 5.2). The Chair explained to Governors that Aspire's Pupil Premium Programme had been recently acknowledged as a model of excellence by the Principal at Millfield Science and Performing Arts College. Millfield had won a national award for the delivery of its own Pupil Premium activities and the Principal had been very impressed with the use of funding and the level of detail incorporated into reports at Aspire. It was noted that students in receipt of Pupil Premium funding accounted for 64% of the whole pupil population.

Challenge

In response to a question about the differences in numbers of students in receipt of Pupil Premium funding across year groups (53% in Year 11 compared to 70% in Year 9 for example), DHC explained that this was probably due to the fact that there had been fewer first choice applications generally to the Academy when Collegiate and Bispham High Schools merged.



Governors thanked DHC for her report and congratulated her on the success of the Pupil Premium Programme and she left the meeting.

5.2 Principal's Report

The Principal presented his Report (Paper 5.1) highlighting the first visit since academisation by the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE's report following the visit had been very positive and encouraging.

The Principal, Chair and Executive Principal had visited the new building site on Blackpool Old Road, and, due to the progress made, had agreed to bring forward the move across to October 2015 half term (from December), assuming everything was completed by then. It was noted that a final decision on the moving date needed to be made soon in order for existing parents and prospective parents to be informed.

a) Students/Achievements

Around 150 new starters were expected in September 2015, largely because of our improving reputation, increased birth rates and the fact that several other high schools were at full capacity. The new two year Key Stage 3 and three year Key Stage 4 curriculums had been developed and implemented ready for the coming year. To meet the requirements of the Progress 8 model, two hours a week of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) and two hours a week of History and Geography had been incorporated into the timetable. The Principal reported that DHC was leading the FCAT School Improvement Group on Curriculum Development.

The Special Educational Needs (SEN) programme had been reorganised and was progressing well. Pupil Premium activities were continuing and gaps in results and outcomes between students in receipt of the funding and those not in receipt were closing rapidly in Key Stage 3 in particular.

Challenge

In response to a question about the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), which the Minister of State for Schools was keen to see schools adhering to, the Principal confirmed that the Academy was doing what it could to respond to this but that the lack of MFL teachers at a national level, would hinder progress.

b) Quality of Teaching

The quality of teaching was improving and this was verified by the data collated. Although there was a lack of outstanding teaching, there was no inadequate teaching. The Academy was putting in place coaching and mentoring for twelve teachers identified as requiring improvement.

c) Behaviour and attendance

The Academy had had to carry out a number of permanent exclusions but the positive impact of these on teaching, learning and morale had been considerable. Attendance was improving following the introduction of a variety of reward schemes and a greater focus on home visits to non-attendees. There had been an increase in the number of students regularly achieving 100% attendance. A member of staff had been given responsibility for this area, and court appearances for parents of students not attending were underway. In order to ensure good attendance at the beginning of the next academic year, warnings to students and parents of the impact of non-attendance would be forwarded over the summer holiday.



Punctuality had also improved following the introduction of a new detention system (20 minutes for every minute late to be completed on the day). The Principal emphasised the importance of developing punctuality as a life skill in order to support successful work practices in the future.

d) Leadership and Management

The Principal reported that five teaching staff had left the Academy since Easter and another 6.5 would leave by the end of the year. The Academy would be losing the Deputy Principal for two days per week as he was to be seconded to FCAT to support marketing and public relations for the Trust. However, a significant number of new and enthusiastic staff were due to start in September.

Governors were informed that, from today, all year groups had moved up a year to begin the new year early. This would allow for 25 days of teaching and learning at a higher level for students, preparing them for their new curricula. The current Year 11 students had left the Academy in a positive frame of mind.

Challenges

Asked about the intention to increase an already large Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to 17, the Principal explained that this would constitute a wider SLT rather than the core team. He felt that it was important for senior staff to be involved in decision making, albeit at a lower level. The core team (9 members) would make the key decisions.

In response to a question about future leaders, the Principal reported that he had identified 6 – 10 members of staff with this potential, hence the need to include them in a wider SLT. The Principal felt that the core team was the best he had ever worked with and members were keen to improve leadership across the Academy. The Executive Principal outlined FCAT's ambition to develop its own leaders for the future ('growing our own') rather than hiring them from elsewhere and plans were in place to develop common frameworks and systems to allow for consistency of approach and ease of staff movement across the academies.

In response to a concern about the potential for the establishment of common approaches to stultify creativity in its leaders, the Executive Principal explained that, although FCAT was committed to appointing influential leaders, consistency across systems was paramount to ensuring continuous improvement. There was still an opportunity for innovation and if new ideas became identified as good practice, these would be incorporated into the core business of the organisation as standard.

In response to a question about punctuality, the Principal confirmed that there was a disparity between the attitudes of some parents and students. The Academy was continually reviewing its parental engagement processes and had circulated a number of surveys to gather feedback on parents' issues. Parents of younger students were being targeted in order to begin a change in culture in respect of parental support for the Academy. The next newsletter would focus on this issue in more detail.

In response to a question about fixed term exclusions, the Principal acknowledged that these did impact significantly on attendance rates. Asked about the reasons for the high number of permanent exclusions, the Principal explained that the merger of the two former schools into one



academy had impacted considerably on behaviour. Some students had found it difficult to respond to the change in culture at the Academy, and it was important that the quality of teaching and learning was not compromised by poor behaviour and that the safety and welfare of students and staff was maintained. The number of exclusions was expected to drop noticeably in the coming year.

Ryan Hughes joined the meeting for the next item.

5.3 Progress in Core Subjects

RH, Assistant Principal and Head of Maths and English was welcomed to the meeting. The Principal explained that RH was also the FCAT Lead on Improvement in Maths, and, from the start of the new academic year, would also take responsibility for leading on Science at the Academy.

RH circulated a paper on the progress of achievement in Maths and English. Governors were made aware of the disproportionately high number of new Maths teachers appointed since the start of the current year and the impact of this on progress in Year 11. The Academy had provided additional support for Year 11 students in order to help them achieve as well as possible in the recent examinations, but the Academy expected to improve on this next year, moving B grades up to A and A* grades. However, it was noted that some lower ability students had performed better than expected.

The Maths and English Teams had been relocated to a new area together, and, although this had been an unpopular initiative to begin with, staff were now seeing the benefits of sharing good practice and linking relevant areas of work.

Challenges

In response to a question about data capture points, RH explained that there had been five of these across the current academic year and that this would increase to six next year.

Asked if he thought there was strength in depth in terms of Maths teaching, RH confirmed that this was so. The new teachers were very competent and classroom practice was much improved including in under-performing and challenging classes.

In response to a question about performance in English, RH acknowledged the challenges ahead for the Academy. A newly appointed Assistant Director had rewritten the scheme of works for English, making it more relevant and manageable. Other staffing changes and the establishment of more stringent controls on assessments and moderation practices would ensure improvements in this subject.

Asked about his capacity to take on Science, RH confirmed that he was confident of improving performance in this subject. There had been a significant amount of turbulence across the three different Science disciplines and there was a need to embed consistent practices. Support from a team leader at Hodgson Academy and the FCAT Director of Learning in Science had helped to identify and develop required processes. The next step was to manage these in order to raise standards. The increase in team members and sharing of good practice across the three disciplines would help with this.

In response to a question about presentation skills, RH acknowledged the



need for improvements in this area, and in marking. Work was in progress to address both of these in the coming year.

Governors thanked RH for his report and congratulated him on progress so far.

6. Strategy and Governance

6.1 Progress against Academy Improvement Plan

The Principal circulated the current Improvement Plan and reported progress in most areas.

Challenge

Asked about the plans to reshape the school day, the Principal confirmed that this had been put on hold for the moment and would be revisited in the new year.

6.2 Improvement Plan 2015-16

The Improvement Plan for 2015-16 was circulated. This would be further refined at a SLT mini conference on the evening of 3rd July. Actions to support Pupil Premium, the new build, readiness for Ofsted and parental engagement would need to be added. The Principal explained that he met with SLT on a weekly basis to review progress against all actions.

The Chair asked for the Plan to be brought back to the first Academy Council meeting of the new academic year for further discussion.

6.3 Self Evaluation Plan (SEF)

Governors noted the Academy's SEF (Paper 6.3) which corresponded with the Improvement Plans.

Challenges

Asked about the finish date for the SEF, the Principal confirmed that this would be in August 2015 when examination results were published.

Asked about the marking for behaviour and safety (Inadequate), the Principal acknowledged that the language in the SEF needed to be more consistent in order to allow for more appropriate scoring. Processes in place to improve behaviour would be quality assessed in September 2015.

Asked whether Quality of Teaching (which was marked as Requires Improvement) should be scored the same as Achievement (which was marked at Inadequate), the Principal explained that the quality of teaching has improved radically and the majority was 'Good'. However, this did not necessarily translate to better achievement as there were a number of other factors, e.g. student ability, special needs requirements and cultural issues that impacted on this. However, the Academy was confident in its abilities to improve Achievement as well as the Quality of Teaching.

6.4 Review of Academy Council Skills

The Clerk agreed to circulate the Skills Questionnaire in Word format for Governors to complete online.

7. Safeguarding

Governors noted the minutes of the FCAT Safeguarding Board meeting held on 6th May 2015 (Paper 9.1). The Clerk drew attention to the new FCAT

KB
(agenda)

KB/ All



Safeguarding Policy which would be brought to the next meeting of the FCAT Directors for approval later in the month. Also highlighted were the e-safety initiatives and the agreement to carry out peer reviews of safeguarding practices across FCAT family organisations discussed at the meeting.

8. Any other business

8.1 DfE report

The Chair raised the potential for Governors to support the review of work presentation and book scrutiny as identified in the DfE visit report and agreed to bring a proposal on this to a future meeting.

WM

8.2 Reports for Governors – format

Governors discussed the format and delivery of Academy Council reports and agreed to convene an extraordinary meeting before the end of the academic year to agree these. There was a desire to move away from tabled reports. A meeting date of Thursday 16th July 2015 from 1pm – 3pm was agreed.

8.3 Governance Self Evaluation

The Chair was keen to ensure that the Academy Council evaluated itself on a regular basis and agreed to develop a template for this and bring it to a future meeting.

WM

9. Finance and Resources

9.1 Finance Report to April 2015

ET provided a brief summary of the Finance Report (Paper 7.1) which was very healthy. The Academy's Finance Officer was looking at potential investments for some of the surplus funding.

Governors asked for their thanks to be passed on to the Finance Team for their work on the accounts.

9.2 Final Budget for the 2015-16 academic year

ET presented the final budget for the coming year (Paper 7.2) highlighting a carry forward of £1.3million. Staff increments and changes to the pension and National Insurance schemes were incorporated.

Challenges

Asked about staffing costs, ET confirmed that these had been based on worst case scenarios and assumed that all staff would receive full increments. There was an opportunity to make further savings in this area as curriculum requirements were reviewed.

Asked if the Education Funding Agency (EFA) was aware of the fact that the Academy had been over funded in terms of pupil numbers, ET confirmed that this was the case.

In response to a question about pupil exclusions, ET reported that £65k (equating to approximately 11 students) had been allocated for these. The Executive Principal drew Governors' attention to the fact that the Local Authority was looking to increase the payment for each exclusion to £7k per student from £4.5k and that this might need to be taken into consideration within the budget at a later date.

Asked if there was an alternative provider to the Local Authority for Pupil



Action

Referral Unit (PRU) services, the Principal explained that this was unlikely and if there was one, the price would probably be the same as that levied by the Local Authority.

Asked about class sizes, the Principal reported that the student/teacher ratio was 15.2 and the class size about 20 students. These were relatively small classes which was one of the reasons for the Academy to keep reviewing its curriculum offer and related staffing costs. Staffing would need to reduce if pupil numbers reduced.

In response to a comment from a Governor about the need for the budget to reflect a future plan for the Academy, the Principal and ET agreed that this was the case. ET agreed to ask the Academy's Finance Officer to provide some projections for future years based on different possible scenarios.

ET/
Angela
Fail

Following a brief discussion, Governors approved the budget for 2015-16.

10. Risk Register

ET explained that there had not been time to meet with the Principal in order to populate threats and controls to the nine core risks on the Academy's Risk Register. A report would be brought to the next meeting for discussion.

ET
KB
(agenda)

Following a request, ET agreed to email the Risk Register report to the Chair.

ET

11. Date and Time of next meeting

Day: Thursday
Date: 16th July 2015
Time: 1.00pm
Venue: Aspire Academy

Signed: _____
(Chair)

Date: _____