



MEETING OF THE ASPIRE ACADEMY COUNCIL

Date: Wednesday 22nd March 2017
Venue: Aspire Academy
Time: 4.00pm

Present: Wendy Middlemas (Chair), Michael Carey, Sarah Elson, Jill Gray, Bill Greene, Carole Sweeting, Lisa Shuttleworth-Brown (Principal), Phil Birch (Executive Principal)

Together with: Katie Hendley (Aspire Finance Lead), and Kath Buddle (FCAT Governance Administrator and minute taker)

Apologies: Bob Keen and Ryan Sheldon.

1. Preliminaries

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Apologies were noted.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no specific declarations of interest for this meeting.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 15th February 2017 and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting were approved with an amendment to the list of attendees (removal of Colin Simkins' name). The following matters arising were noted:

3.1 Parent Governor vacancy (Item 1) – the Clerk confirmed that an election process to find a new Parent Governor would be put in place over the next few weeks.

3.2 Permanent exclusions (Item 5, page 3) – the Chair confirmed that a letter had been sent to Blackpool Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) from the academy, via the FCAT Chief Executive, raising concern about the number of students joining Aspire in Year 7 directly from Special Education Resource Facilities (SERFs). Several of these had been admitted this year and subsequently had to be permanently excluded which suggested the academy had not been an appropriate setting for them.

3.3 Outstanding utility bill (Item 5, page 2) – the Principal confirmed that this had now been received and that the academy had accrued enough to pay it.

3.4 Ratio spend on staffing costs (Item 5 page 3) – the Finance Lead confirmed that, currently, staffing costs stood at 84% of income (9% higher than the FCAT guidelines). She and the Principal were working together to reduce this but acknowledged that it might take time. The Principal reported that payment protection for some staff members was set to come to an end and that there was some capacity to make savings as a result of current and imminent vacancies. However, it was important to provide enough staff for the Pupil Admission Number (PAN).

4. Feedback on visit from the Department for Education (DfE)

Governors were updated on a visit to the academy from David Burnett from the DfE earlier that day. David's feedback had been very positive with him commenting on a 'remarkable achievement' by the academy in terms of improvements to teaching and learning and student behaviour. He had also been

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very complimentary about the role of FCAT in providing support for improvements and building capacity. Leadership (including governance) and management, the work in place to address issues for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), the capability of the caseworkers and the level of challenge to students in Maths had also been highlighted as strength areas.

Areas identified for improvement included narrowing the gaps in outcomes for Pupil Premium students, holding middle leaders to account and academic progress and achievement, all of which had already been identified by the academy.

Governors congratulated the Principal and staff on the outcomes of the visit and acknowledged the hard work that had taken place to get the academy to this stage.

John Woods and Simon Blackwell joined the meeting for the next item.

5. Departmental Challenge

Assistant Principals, John Woods and Simon Blackwell provided a brief summary of progress in Maths and English following receipt of the latest figures from Data Collection Point 3 which showed an upward trajectory since Data Collection 2. Governors were made aware of the fact that grade boundaries for Progress 8 were unknown at this stage, and so estimated figures for achievement in the summer exams was very difficult to judge. The Executive Principal confirmed that the figures compared favourably with those from other local schools at this stage.

Pupil Premium students who made up almost 70% of the school roll, were not performing as well as non Pupil Premium students and the focus on closing the gap in outcomes was key to further progress for all students.

Questions from Governors

In response to a comment about the fact that there were no students in the lower band at Key Stage 2 on track to attain a Grade 5 in Progress 8, the Assistant Principal (Maths) confirmed that this was the case but explained that none of the students from this band had been targeted to attain a Grade 5.

Asked if he felt that it would be possible for middle band students to achieve the Attainment 8 targets by the end of the year, bearing in mind the current position, the Assistant Principal (Maths) acknowledged that it would be difficult. However, staff were targeting individual students with support. The Principal explained that progress, rather than achievement, figures for this group should show improvement.

Asked about interventions in place to support students to achieve Grade 4s and 5s in English, the Assistant Principal (English) explained that 22 targeted students and their parents had met with the Principal and the Executive Principal to discuss how momentum for learning could be continued in order for them to achieve their optimum potential. Students on the cusp of achieving the grades were also receiving robust mentoring. Both he and the Assistant Principal (Maths) were also working with students in lesson time to identify other options for support. A 'diagnosis therapy test' framework was being used to identify and address areas requiring further support.

Asked what the academy was doing to better support students to improve their exam technique, the Assistant Principals explained that practice on exam papers took place regularly in lessons. Further mock exams were planned and staff were



also working with students on an individual basis to consider how they might better answer the more difficult questions.

In response to a question about the impact of interventions on Maths attainment, the Assistant Principal (Maths) confirmed that there had been a 19 mark increase over the year to date with the higher ability students performing particularly well.

In response to a question about the drop in Year 8 Maths figures between the last two data collection points, the Assistant Principal (Maths) explained that this was probably due to the fact that the modules being tested for Data Collection Point 3 had been more challenging than those previously tested. He also felt that students had not been properly prepared for the later tests and acknowledged that this was an area for improvement in the future. The Principal explained that a review of how Maths was taught in Years 7 and 8 would be carried out shortly in order to support better revision and reinforcement of key points in the subject.

Asked about the fact that, during the DfE visit, students had reported that they felt Maths to be a stronger subject at the academy than English, the Principal explained that a lot of extra work on Maths had been carried out recently which might have been the reason for this. However, in terms of outcomes, English was still a higher performing subject. The Executive Principal explained that a lot of preparation had been carried out prior to the DfE visit and staff had been able to identify and address some of the issues raised in respect of Maths in advance.

In response to a question about the lack of data for Year 9, the Assistant Principal (Maths) confirmed that this was not a Trust wide requirement at this time, but acknowledged that it would be useful to monitor progress across the year group. The Clerk agreed to contact the FCAT Strategic Lead in Data about the matter.

Clerk

The Chair thanked the Assistant Principals and they left the meeting.

6. Finance and Resources

6.1 Management Accounts January 2017

The Aspire Finance Lead provided a brief summary of the management accounts as at the end of January 2017 (Paper 6.1). She explained that the in-year surplus was, largely, as a result of higher than expected Pupil Premium numbers on roll.

The academy had saved c£30k to date on utility costs compared to the same time last year. The catering budget had been allocated as even monthly splits across the year, and, although currently over spent, should be within budget by the end of the year as pupil numbers, and subsequent costs, reduced.

Work on next year's forecast was under way in order to inform recruitment. The Principal informed Governors that some difficult decisions would need to be made next year as the Year 7 cohort and was lower than expected, as a result of the low birth rate for the year.

Questions from Governors

In response to a question about the potential to develop a contingency fund for un-budgeted/emergency costs, rather than rely on the academy's Reserves, the Finance Lead explained that this would impact negatively on the funding for teaching and learning as the academy still needed to achieve a surplus by the end of the year. The Principal confirmed that the academy only used monies from its Reserves as a last option and that she had



worked closely with the Finance Lead to address some of the funding issues this year in order to identify a more realistic budget for next year.

In response to a question about the budget for permanent exclusions, the Finance Lead acknowledged that more needed to be apportioned to this cost centre for the next year and confirmed that she had met with the Principal to discuss this.

The Chair thanked the Finance Lead for her report and she left the meeting.

6.2 Risk Register March 2017

The latest Risk Register (Paper 6.2) was noted.

During his visit earlier in the day, Dave Burnett had commented on the size of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) which he considered to be quite large for the size of the academy.

Governors discussed the importance of maintaining a strong and stable SLT in order to support succession planning and recommended that this be added to the Register and also to the agenda for the next meeting for further discussion.

The Clerk explained the intention to identify Risk Champions from across SLTs in each academy to co-ordinate feedback on risks in the future. The Chair and BG offered their support in reviewing the Aspire Risk Register.

7. Principal's Report

Governors noted the Principal's Report and supporting appendices (Papers 7.1 – 7.7).

Questions from Governors

In response to a question about the increase in number of Year 9 students being placed in Impact, the Principal confirmed that these were mainly boys and had often had to be taken out of English, Maths and Science lessons because they had found the level of work too challenging and subsequently misbehaved. This year group also had a high level of special educational need, and, although, as far as possible, mentoring had been put in place to support students, this was not always sufficient to address every situation and, on occasion, students had had to be removed from lessons. The numbers reflected the same students that had had to be removed from lessons multiple times rather than a large number of students.

Asked if the academy itself identified its students' special educational and disability needs, the Principal confirmed that this was the case and that the increase in numbers was due to the effectiveness of the current Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) in being able to identify issues.

In response to an observation about improved behaviour in English and Maths compared to other lessons, the Principal explained that this was probably because English and Maths lessons were more heavily scrutinised and, because of this, staff were more likely to follow procedures. Also, compared to other subjects, there were more lessons in English and Maths and this allowed teachers more time to build relationships with students and extend challenge in class. The Executive Principal confirmed that the Principal and the SLT carried out extensive observations and teachers had become better prepared to deliver expected standards across all subjects.



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Asked about whether the academy was in danger of being distracted from its priorities by the number of Blackpool wide initiatives in place and the requirements on academies in respect of these, the Principal reassured Governors that the academy was focussed primarily on outcomes for its students. The Executive Principal reported that the FCAT Executive was already discussing the impact of local initiatives on staff time. The Chair offered to mention the issue at the next FCAT Directors meeting.

Chair

Asked if the academy was aware of the number of young carers on its roll, the Principal explained that there was no official record of these. Although staff were aware of individual cases, information was considered confidential and many young people did not want to disclose that they were carers.

8. Strategy

Governors noted the feedback from the last FCAT Directors meeting (Paper 8.1).

9. Safeguarding

The minutes of the FCAT Safeguarding Board meeting held on 9th February 2017 were noted (Paper 9.1)

The Chair reported that the safeguarding issues in respect of the main entrance door had been raised with the Chair of the Safeguarding Board and with FCAT Directors.

10. Review of Risks

The following new risks were identified:

- Succession planning
- Distraction of local initiatives

11. FCAT Directors

The following issue to feed back to FCAT Directors was identified:

- Distraction of local initiatives on capacity to deliver the academy's priorities.

12. Date and Time of next meeting

Day: Wednesday
Date: 17th May 2017
Time: 4.00pm
Venue: Aspire Academy

Signed: _____ (Chair)

Date: _____