

THINKING SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST
COMPANY NUMBER: 7359755

Subject	Meeting of the Board of Directors	Date	18 th December 2024
Room	The Portsmouth Academy & Via Teams Call	Time	5pm
Present	Gerard Newman (GN) (Chair), Stuart Gardner (SG), Kaye Bettey (KB), David Glassey (DG), Steve Geary (SGE), Derek Morrison (DM), Ashley Hall (AH), Andy Minchin (AM), Krysia Butwilowska (KBA)	Clerk	Jennifer Coates
Apologies accepted	Peter Martin (PM), Clive Star (CS)	In attendance	Lee Miller (LM), Mandy Gage (MG), Michelle Smith (MS), Jay Davenport (JD), Anna Webb (AW), Kirstie Jones (KJ), Lirette Mill (LM)

Key Points Discussed and Action Items				
No.	Agenda Item	Action/Discussion	By whom	When
1.	Declaration of business interests	Lirette Mill – Head of HR Advisory Service for HR Connect – wholly owned by Kent County Council Local Authority who provide support and supplies to schools across Kent and beyond.		
2.	Welcome and apologies for absence	<p>The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies accepted from Peter Martin and Clive Star. KBA will be leaving the meeting at 6pm.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Chair welcomed Lirette Mill, who is currently being onboarded as a new member of the Board. When onboard, Lirette will take on the HR link role. - The Chair acknowledged the resignation from Andrew Medhurst. The Board expressed their thanks for his service to BET and TSAT. - The Chair informed the Board that Krysia Butwilowska has agreed to take on the Pupil Premium link role – additional to role on secondary education. - The Chair explained that there was a Board pre-meet on Monday where a number of items were discussed. As a result, SGs report will focus on those key/substantive items and only discuss any other items by way of exception. 		
3.	Minutes and matters arising	Governors reviewed the minutes from the last meeting and unanimously approved they were an accurate record of the meeting.		

		<table><tr><th>Action</th><th>Update</th></tr><tr><td>Action MG to capture 'beyond school' data as a Trust moving forward.</td><td>Complete.</td></tr><tr><td>Action KD to set up a meeting with SG and GN to discuss experiences of Trustee and Ofsted meetings on inspection days and how we can support them.</td><td>Complete.</td></tr></table> <p>The Board acknowledged the remote decisions made since the last meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Approval of the new HR & Payroll System- MIS Procurement Proposal	Action	Update	Action MG to capture 'beyond school' data as a Trust moving forward.	Complete.	Action KD to set up a meeting with SG and GN to discuss experiences of Trustee and Ofsted meetings on inspection days and how we can support them.	Complete.		
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4.	CEO Report	<p>SG presented the CEO Report which contained the following key information:</p> <p><u>Positive</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- 3 Ofsted inspections – results were as expected. KAA inspection was earlier than anticipated. The reason for this was because of the transition arrangements in place during Covid. Will have 4 Ofsted inspectors in the Trust post January.- KJ - CCA Ofsted inspection was positive and inspection team were very keen to hear Leaders views. Excellent to have the work of the staff recognised. <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>Gov Q – In regards to the unexpected early inspection at KAA, does the reason that was earlier bring any other schools on your radar earlier?</p> <p>SG A – Not applicable to any other schools.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Finalists in two categories for IIP awards.- New Regional Director for the South is starting in January 2025. The new staff member is a HMI and previous Headteacher. There is a comprehensive handover planned with MS and KBA is going to be his mentor.- Clear improvements evidenced at BRI, GWA and TPA through QA visits. Leaders are robust and curriculum intent is secure. Curriculum implementation remains too inconsistent								

		<p>particularly regarding students having a narrative in respect of what they are learning and why they are doing it.</p> <p>Gov Comment – On my recent visit to BRI, in terms of behaviour it felt like a different school. The progress was very obvious and measurable step forward.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building works begun at TVA to allow SRP and 6th form block. - Implementation and first round of new Governance structure has gone well. - HGS Co-ed approved and first cohort will join in September 2026. <p><u>Minus</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget NI announcement will hit Grammar schools hardest due to staff composition. - Anticipating the possibility of future unfunded pay rises. - MAR requiring Trust support regarding attendance and SEND. - TPA has improved but remains a vulnerable school. - Schools are working hard, particularly around KS4 outcomes, and even more focussed on driving outcomes but we are noticing a lag between action and impact. <p>Gov Q – How are the central safeguarding team supporting MAR?</p> <p>SG A – The existing attendance officer’s role has been changed to support with fulfilling the safeguarding responsibilities within the School. Currently the central team are supporting with attendance. However, there is a new attendance officer starting in January. The existing Trust Lead for Inclusion is also joining MAR as a Senior Vice Principal permanent member of staff.</p> <p><u>Interesting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National drive to move away from pay performance links. This will impact us under the new Children and Wellbeing Schools Bill. - AW and MS invited to become Ofsted inspectors. At end of January, we will have 4 Ofsted inspectors in our Trust. - Decision by RGS to move away from IB to A Levels. Largely driven by finances and number of students who stay on to take the IB. Initial data indicates over 150 students will now stay for sixth form as they have the opportunity to do A Levels. <p>Gov Comment – In terms of phrasing, I would suggest it wasn’t a decision by RGS to move away from the IB, more that RGS has agreed to and it was Trust led.</p> <p>MG Comment – The Headteacher initiated this decision. If this was just an academic decision, it would not be one they made. For them to have a viable cohort they knew they had to make this choice and they began this discussion. Beyond finances, we are retaining excellent students in our schools.</p>		
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		<div style="background-color: black; height: 60px;"></div> <p><u>Key school progress/updates</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- MIS – AW – QA at beginning of November which was very positive and recognised noteworthy progress made. Phonics results are below national. <p>Gov Comment – I recently visited and was very impressed with the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- AFS – KJ – Expecting ungraded inspection. Low set of results last academic year which was specific to the context of that cohort. SEND provision has improved. Behaviour and personal development are positive. <p><i>KJ and AW left the meeting.</i></p>		
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TPA – MS – 2 external QAs since September 2024 which included deep dives in the 3 core subjects. Clear that students are engaging in lessons and quality of education strategies are embedding. Variety of standards of teaching. Small number of students displaying challenging behaviour. Attendance has improved. Suspensions have reduced by 50%. Ofsted complaints have significantly reduced. LA have acknowledged the improvements made. MS thanked Directors for recent visits. <p>Gov Comment – In the QA report, there were a number of encouraging points which corroborates our view as Governors that the school is improving.</p> <p>Gov Comment – From discussions we had with staff and students there was definitely a view that the School was on an improving journey, but everyone recognises there are still some gaps in learning because of disruptive behaviour but we were assured the School has strategies in place to improve this.</p> <p>AM Q – Lots of school improvement work is repetitive in different schools and contexts, what are executives doing to make sure some of this work is codified and step by step programmes and guidance is available to leaders to improve schools and there is a roadmap in place for these situations?</p> <p>SG A – Yes, this links into the strong policies agenda we have at the moment – what do we expect schools to be doing and if they aren’t performing what is the roadmap. MG working on codifying this. We are not there yet but we are on that journey of understanding as to what the codification will look like and the roadmap to school improvement, and empowering the Heads to do that for themselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maritime – SG – School has made significant progress over the last term. Some Trust support remains in respect of attendance and SEND. Curriculum intent is secure. Adaptive teaching is a concern. Rapid progress is being made and actions from recent QA that the School is working on. - Goodwin – MG – Recent visit from Director of Education at KCC who was complimentary about progress seen including pupil conduct and learning in classrooms. All actions from the QA are in the SIP. SEND QA actions in place. Attendance remains a challenge – confirmation from RSL that school is doing all they can to address that. Student Voice QA and students are very positive about improvements in the School and vocal about the higher expectations of them and the positive impact of those expectations. <p><i>KBA left at 6pm.</i></p>		
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		<p>Gov Comment – 4 schools in Ofsted window and we have the Board Trustee link roles. Important we get visits and reports in if possible before the Ofsted inspection. DM - AFS, KB - GWN, DG - MIS, GN & PM - Maritime. GN requested a commitment from Trustees that you will be able to complete a visit and produce a report for the schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SG requested communication from the Board to all Governors to include the request for them to track actions included in and follow up on QA reports. <p><u>CRGS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Challenges of a satellite school within TSAT include contracts, school systems and pay scales. The agreed next steps including joining certain Trust contracts and moving towards utilisation of TSFE services. <p><u>Children and Schools Bill</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No longer a duty for schools to be academised if they go into special measures. This is now a power which allows room for appeal. The drive towards academisation is slowing. - Expectation that ‘every school teacher will have the same core pay and conditions offer’ however ‘schools will have greater flexibility to attract and retain best teachers. - New schools will not automatically become Academies. - LAs will be able to direct students into Academies. <p>Gov Q – With regard to the Trust’s onboarding strategy, in the report you talk about feeder schools in the South but what about the other regions, particularly the South West? What is our view on extending the onboarding strategy to include other regions?</p> <p>SG A – I would suggest I work with JD on this but I sense that there are limited opportunities.</p> <p>Gov Q – With regard to the external TSFE work, most Board members do not have visibility in respect of how much income comes in through TSFE and, in the context of the pressures with the restructure, can you provide assurance that this external work will not compromise the support you will be able to give to TSAT?</p> <p>LM A – Average monthly income from external work is approx. £60k. One of our key contracts is PLT. We have strong directorates in place for delivery of key aspects of the Trust. I have modelled the way of working that others mirror.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____.</p>		
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5.	Financial Strategic plan update	<p>LM presented an update on the progression of the financial strategy which contained the following key information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Central restructure – (review 1, 2 & 3) is now complete. Savings now factored in to future forecast and has achieved what we set out for. - Review 6 – ‘how are we going to redistribute charges back to schools. The cost per pupil basis was having a negative impact on some of our schools. There has been a significant level of review and scrutiny in place in securing a new model which differentiates primary schools and secondary schools into different rates. Had we not done anything and continued to recover the full cost – we would have needed to recover £25.9m from schools. With the financial model in place £15.3m is being recovered through central services, £3.8 recovered through cost of leaders and in the model, there is £3.7m being delegated back to schools. These are costs that schools have greater control over such as electricity. Headteachers have been accepting of this position. - Retained £1m back for reinvestment back into schools for the I.T. strategy. This remains under review. <p>Gov Comment – In the Finance Committee, you presented a very helpful analysis of how the savings were flowing down to each individual school and from my discussions with heads that is helpful and they can see the central services savings and how that is affecting their budgets positively for 25-26.</p> <p>Gov Q – In the analysis provided, a number of schools are rated “red” and “amber”. From the Board’s point of view, what is the process now to get those schools to a balanced budget position?</p> <p>LM A – LM provided the information below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LM has met with every school to discuss indications - based on certain assumptions, of the likelihood of them achieving a balanced position in 25-26. The funding gap was £3m, and as can be seen is now much improved. - Used a RAG rating system to categorise school positions. There are three schools in ‘red’ position, KAA, NHP and TPA. They need more time to develop their plans. - Any school that is “amber” or “red” is going through a process of change - Modelled a 3% uplift in pay that is unfunded. <p>Gov Q – Does the modelling include an unfunded 3% uplift?</p> <p>LM A – Yes. If it goes beyond 3%, it would be more challenging.</p>		
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6.	Reports from Committees	<p>Committee chairs presented the one-page reports from the Board Sub-Committees which contained the following key information:</p> <p>6A. Curriculum & Quality Assurance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Noted improvement in the content of the QA reports. <p>6B. Operations Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns from Committee members regarding the timeframe for implementation of new MIS system. DH has provided assurances that this will be met. - Asbestos – 2 further improvement notices issued to 2 schools by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). One previously issued to RGS for the same reason. We now have a H&S Advisor in the Trust. Board requested a robust review of all schools with asbestos and asbestos management. Needs to be a focus for the operations leadership moving forward. <p>SG Comment – DH has provided an update on asbestos management and is working proactively to improve our position on that.</p> <p>6C. People Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HR and Payroll system and tight timelines for go live date. - Term time only claims have all been settled. - New Sexual Harassment legislation has been incorporated into relevant policies. - Reviewing new Employment Rights bill. - Approved the new Apprenticeship hourly rates of pay. - Committee approved the Executive Pay for 24-25. <p>6D. Governance & Compliance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New Governance arrangements in place. Mainly successful first round of AGB and RAB meetings. RABs positive meetings and gave clear areas of focus and improvement. KD has circulated report from Governance Committee which goes into detail. - Noted improvement in compliance at Plympton Academy. - Discussed attendance in non-selective secondary schools which whilst below national is improving and reviewed the strategies in place. <p>6E. Finance Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25/26 budget update. - Reviewed numbers for the 23/24 accounts. - Current in-year deficit has been reduced – pleased with the progress but it still going to adversely impact reserves. 		
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7.	Communication from the Board to the Trust Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thanks to AGB members for the support with school budgets. - Request for AGB Governors to review and follow up on actions from QA reports at future meetings. 		
8.	Any Other Business, Correspondence to the Chair & <u>Chair update</u>	<p><u>Propose 5 TSTARs from the Board</u></p> <p>KJ – work on admission policy for Primaries.</p> <p>SN – work on the Nursery provisions.</p> <p>JV – IIP efforts and nomination for 2 awards.</p> <p>SA – Work for selection and implementation of E-ploy and improvement that has seen in recruitment process and data and information.</p> <p>JB – Work on the HR and Payroll system.</p>		

10.	Items for next agenda	Strategy day at Browne Jacobson offices in London on 10 th February.		
11.	Date of next meeting	Date of next meeting: 10 th February 2025, London. The meeting closed at 6.57pm.		