THINKING SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS

ACADEMY TRUST

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COMPANY NUMBER: 7359755

Subject	**Meeting of the Board of Directors**	Date	3rd February 2021
Room	Via Teams Video Call	Time	5.00pm
Present	Peter Martin – Chair (PM), Stuart Gardner (SGa), Michael Bailey (MB), Steve Geary (SGe), Rachel Jordan-Evans (RJ), David Lycett (DL), Ian Mason (IM), Derek Morrison (DM), Gerard Newman (GN), Linda Randall (LR)	Clerk	Sandie Davenport
Apologies accepted	Gary Chapman	In attendance	Gwynn Bassan (GB), Kaye Bettey (KB), Kelly Denton (KD), Mandy Gage (MG), Dan High (DH), Lee Miller (LM), Jody Murphy (JM), Natalie Sheppard (NS)
Non-attendees			

No.	Agenda Item	Action/Discussion	By whom	When
	Key Points Discussed and Action Items			
1.	**Declaration of business interests**	There were no declarations of interest pertaining to items on the agenda.		
2.	**Welcome and apologies for absence**	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received and accepted from Gary Chapman.		
3.	**Minutes and matters arising**	The Chair considered the minutes from the previous meeting There were no matters arising and the minutes were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.		
4.	**CEO report**	SGa gave a presentation on his CEO report to the Board. Response to lockdown – remote learning provision from 5th Jan 2021 • Medway was in Tier 4 at the start of Jan 21 so provision from 5th Jan was expected to be provided remotely (primary and secondary). Portsmouth primary schools were due to be		

		open.
		• CEO made a decision on 4th Jan, with the Chair's approval, to delay school-based learning to Thu 7th Jan pending a Government announcement expected on Wed 6th Jan (which was then brought forward to Mon 4th Jan).
		• The Strategy Committee gave retrospective approval for the decision to defer remote learning at its meeting on 27/1/21.
		• All schools switched to remote learning on 4th Jan after the announcement of the lockdown. SGa was pleased with the positive response from schools and feedback from parents had been positive.
		• Pulse staff survey in Jan was also positive:
		  – 90+% teachers felt well/very well supported during the transition.
		  – 93% were positive about training received.
		  – 94% were confident that there was someone they could connect with if they needed support.
		• Trust schools delivered remote learning above and beyond Government expectations.
		• NS noted very positive feedback from parents, particularly at Meon Junior about the positive impact of the educational offer. Parents had praised the school on social media, some had written to Ofsted praising the educational offer and the school had featured in an article published in the Portsmouth Education Partnership Bulletin.
		  – Q: PM – would the Trust be promoting the positive feedback.
		  – A: SGa – the flagship publication online included some of the positive feedback. Matt Goodwin was also crafting a survey for parents which would give quantitative data that could be published.
		• Pupil engagement in primary schools was above 90%.
		• Secondary engagement was more variable – grammar schools above 90%, non-selective schools lower but a great deal of work was being done by the schools. MG noted that she was very proud of the incredible work being done, particularly at Victory where 70-80% of students were attending 100% of lessons.
		• Plymouth High School had joined the Trust on 1/2/21 and had already received positive feedback from parents regarding remote learning. LM – the Trust had provided a significant amount of IT support to the school ahead of the conversion to fix critical issues that had been impacting on teaching and learning and the school would be moving to the Trust's single network in the Easter holidays.
		• The Trust had benefitted from the release of laptops from Government. Thanks noted to Dan High.
		• All schools had completed a remote learning SEF at school level and departmental level. Thanks noted to the Directors of Education. Schools had also created remote learning statements for publication on their websites in line with statutory requirements.		

Ofsted
- Currently doing remote Section 8 inspections of RI and SM schools. Expected resumption of normal inspections from Term 5.
- Ofsted windows now hard to predict but 12 Trust schools could potentially be inspected in the next 18 months. Schools had been preparing but Governors also needed to be aware.

2021 summer exams
- Consultation had closed 29/1/21. 100,000 responses with nearly half being from students.
- Expected publication of guidance by Government by end of Feb but exam boards expecting to publish or be given guidance by 22nd Feb.
- Working assumptions:
  – There will be some form of national assessments to be marked by teachers. They may be voluntary but likely that the Trust would use them.
  – Teachers will be able to provide additional evidence to support their centre assessed grades (CAGs). The Trust's Assessment Group is developing a proposed robustness framework in relation to the different types of evidence.
- Problems:
  – Currently no grade descriptors.
  – If the national assessments are voluntary, how will students feel if the Trust decides to use them?
  – Statements from DfE in early Jan suggested students would have grades pegged at the level that they were at in 2020; the consultation, however, consulted on whether students should be allocated grades that they could demonstrably get rather than what they could have got without the impact of Covid.
- Q: KB – what would "national assessments" look like and is the Trust thinking of using them or using assessments of its own?
- A: SGa – the Trust is anticipating that exam boards will be expected to produce a range of standardised assessments and make these available to schools for them to choose whether to use them or not. There would be a mark scheme and the assessments would take place under exam conditions. A challenge for schools would be how to convert the raw score into a grade as the grade boundaries fluctuate from year to year. The Trust would want to be as fair and accurate in its assessment of student ability as it possibly can be and if the national assessments can contribute positively to this, the Trust would use them as they would provide robust evidence of where a student was, in terms of ability, at that point in time. The Assessment Group will review in Feb after the guidance has been published.
- Q: KB – will the Trust consult students?
- A: SGa – the Trust will share the robustness framework with students as soon as possible so that students and teachers will know the level of robustness of different pieces of work and how each will impact the final assessment. A template letter has been drafted. Heads

- of Department are already tracking pieces of work and assessments so that they will be able to rag-rate each according to robustness.
- Q: IM – some independent schools are considering reducing the syllabus to focus more on depth than breadth. Would the Trust consider this?
- A: SGa – this would not be straightforward as depth vs breadth is very subject specific e.g. it is easier in History to demonstrate depth but it is harder in Science as the breadth of understanding is critical. A Levels and degree courses will also assume that the breadth of knowledge required has already been taught.
- Q: IM – what can schools do in the interim before Feb?
- A: SGa – the Trust has made working assumptions, e.g. mock exams will take place, so schools are working towards these. Curriculum leaders are also considering how best to use the 10 weeks between the return to school on 8th Mar and the May half term after which the national assessments may be rolled out.
- A: GB – Curriculum leaders have been asked to focus on planning for the different scenarios for assessment and to look at a consistent approach for assessment e.g. timed essays, online assessments from exams.net etc. Feedback has gone back to the Exec Team.
- KS2 SATs also cancelled. The Trust considers it important for all schools to still run a SATs-style assessment and has fed this back to Medway LA. This would give secondary schools data to ensure that the new Year 7's are given the right provision and is also important for primary schools to be able to assess how they did over the Covid time-frame.
- SGe agreed; schools have a duty of care to their children and need to be able to give the best information they can to secondary schools.

1:1 with Gavin Williamson
- SGa meeting with Gavin Williamson (Secretary of State for Education) 4/2/21; will cover four key points.
- Feedback on the Trust's position:
  – Exemplifying the fantastic work that staff have done.
  – The value of the size of the Trust, particularly over the last 6-12 months.
  – Staff are feeling sensitive under the current crisis.
- Exams 2021:
  – Key recommendation to look at grade descriptors.
- Reopening of schools:
  – Recommendation to consider vaccinating teachers after the current 1-9 groups have been vaccinated.
- Longer term educational recovery:
  – Plans for return of key year groups and catch-up provision for lost learning.

Digital Strategy update (NS)

- Digital transformation is continuing across all schools.
- Digital community developments:
  - Trust held first cross-school online training with 360 participants. Positive feedback.
  - Looking at setting up digital staff rooms across primary schools to enable curriculum collaboration and sharing of resources.
- Digital classrooms:
  - Working towards launching 1:1 initiative using Portsmouth Academy (TPA) as a case study.
  - Vision is for all students to have their own learning device to address the digital divide; to help students to be future-ready and develop skills for the workplace; to free teachers from the front of the classroom so that learning is student-centred and interventions can be 1:1 while the rest of the class is still engaged with their learning.
  - TPA is on track to become a Microsoft Showcase school by Dec 2021. School is using the Microsoft K-12 Education Transformation Framework.
  - Planning to purchase HP360 devices for Sept 2021 Year 7 students at £12/month parental subscription (£5 subsidy for FSM students). Order to be place early March for 250 devices following by marketing campaign for parents to sign up and training provided in July for students. Students of parents not wishing to sign up will be given a device for use during the school day but will not be able to take the device home.
  - Initial outlay for laptops expected to be offset by savings in photocopying and exercise books, replacement of interactive whiteboards with TV screens, and reduction in investment/maintenance costs of computer labs.
  - Fratton RGB is very supportive.
- Q: GN – looks very impressive. Are the devices designed to support remote learning or are they assuming learning is based at school?
- A: NS – the device strategy would support remote learning as it enables all students to have a device at home unlike currently where some students are having to use mobile phones. The vision for classroom-based learning is for blended learning with more conversation and screen breaks.
- Q: GN – it is important that the Trust review its cyber security arrangements to ensure that it is not exposed.
- A: LM – there are two areas of consideration. Firstly, ensuring that the Trust has a reliable network infrastructure – this has been under consideration which is why the pilot will be at TPA as the school has had a great deal of investment in the network infrastructure. Secondly, broadband and filtering services which the Trust is about to retender for – this is a high priority and the Trust will ensure that security and safeguarding priorities were met. An internal auditor will test the security arrangements, including staff and student devices.
- Q: GN – also need to consider cloud storage service providers and their own security and backup arrangements.

- A: LM – yes, very important. KD looks at this when procuring cloud-based services.
- A: SGa – all schools have backup procedures in place.

Performance management overview (GB)
- Looking to move from a "prove" based system to an "improve" based system.
- Two years' planning and work has gone into the new approach; roll-out due Oct 2021.
- Key principles of mastery, autonomy and purpose, linking to intrinsic motivation.
- We want our staff to be the very best version of themselves they can be and we want to retain staff who will grow and improve with the Trust.
- Key features are meaningful tasks, reflective practice, personal responsibility and continual feedback.
- Moving away from BlueSky platform to Weekly10 platform which enables 10 minute weekly check-ins with staff and promotes reflective practice. It also integrates into MS Teams.
- Focus group of staff and stakeholders.
- Presenting to JCNC 8/2/21.
- November Pulse staff survey – the number of staff responding positively around the effectiveness of the current performance management process was lower than the Trust would want (2.6 score where 1 was strongly disagree and 4 strongly agree). A further survey revealed that the current process was not motivating staff to perform at their best.
- The proposed model is based on the "be your best self" agenda and will be based around impact on others, impact on yourself, impact on the Trust. Within each of these, staff will select a focus, a goal and will then consider how they achieve mastery within that goal.

Change management framework
- The Trust's processes for change were already embedded around the Lewin and Kotter models and the common language would be incorporated into the change planning template. Part of the process was linking the processes to the structures. Thank you to Lee Miller and Gwynn Bassan for their work in this.
- The structures were new; there were 3 layers:
  – Strategic objectives which linked into the Trust pillars.
  – Strategic groups which would be the project change groups e.g. Digital Strategy Group.
  – Working parties/groups which would report to the Strategy Group e.g. 1:1 initiative.
- Timeline – trial in 2021/22 followed by review and reflection, working towards completing the structure in 2023/24. Thank you to the Strategic Committee for their input and support.

Progress on the Trust Improvement Plan 2020/21
- The "Do less, but do it well" agenda had been well received and enabled staff to manage workload and expectations around what could be achieved.

		• Progress had been made across the pillars and schools continued to plan and implement improvements. "Amber" areas had not been progressed. • Need to ensure commitment of Headteachers to Think Ahead and to ensure cross-hub engagement with CPD as illustrated by the success of MAT Monday the previous Monday (staff had been asked how confident they were in using the digital tool which was the subject of the session, before the training and then after the training – the response was 4.5/10 before the training and 7.5/10 after the training). Trust Improvement Plan priorities for 2021/22 • Strategic goals for 2021/22 were reviewed in detail by the Strategy Committee. • SGa will present a final proposal to the Board at the next meeting. The Chair thanked Mr Gardner for his detailed update and thanked everyone who had contributed to the report.			

5.	**Admission arrangements 2022**	GB had previously circulated a summary of admissions arrangements for the secondary schools.
		
		• HGS, TVA and GA's admission arrangements were unchanged for 2022/23, except for the dates. The admission arrangements were therefore agreed and determined by the Board.
		• RGS admissions policy had been amended to cater for the change to IB-only sixth form. During the consultation, Medway LA did not comment on the sixth form changes but did comment on over-subscription criteria 4 which they had approved for the previous two years. Criteria 4 relates to children attending TSAT primary schools having priority for a secondary school place over a child who lives closer but did not attend a TSAT primary.
		• The Board discussed the matter at length, including the following comments.
		  – All TSAT secondary schools include this criteria but the LA had only challenged RGS.
		  – The OSA (Office of the Schools Adjudicator) had not raised any objections when this criteria had been introduced at HGS.
		  – There was a good rationale for this criteria as it ensured continuity of the Thinking Schools approach for pupils transitioning from primary to secondary school.
		  – Could the Trust be seen as looking after its own rather than encouraging exclusivity to all Medway pupils? The Board agreed that the rationale for continuity of pupils' education from a Trust primary to a Trust secondary was of key importance. Furthermore, the Board had been passionate about increasing the opportunity to attend RGS to every pupil who wanted to and the PAN had been increased accordingly and the rank order of admissions changed a couple of years ago to favour local pupils so there were very few children now who placed RGS as their first choice who didn't get a place.
		• In conclusion, the Board agreed to determine the proposed admission arrangements for			

		RGS for 2022/23.		
6.	**Penhale alternate provision**	LM updated the Board on the plans for alternate provision at Penhale Infant School. • Portsmouth City Council had confirmed support for the plans to develop a 16 place alternate provision on the Penhale Infant School site and agreed to invest £1mill which would fully fund the development. • The project would not affect the infant school provision or the nursery. • Portsmouth City Council were keen for the project to start immediately with the first cohort starting in September 2021. • The Board agreed that this was an exciting project and would benefit the children in Portsmouth. • LM advised the Board that they were required to make decisions on two proposals: – To approve the commencement of the formal consultation. – To approve name changes for Penhale Infant School to Penbridge Infant School and for Newbridge Junior School to Penbridge Junior School. • The Board approved both proposals and congratulated LM for securing the funding. • LM noted that plans would be brought to the Board in the future for a similar provision at The Portsmouth Academy.		
7.	**Governance structure and membership**	KD advised the Board that they were required to make decisions on two proposals: • To move from separate AABs at Penhale and Newbridge to one AAB at Penbridge (following the name change previously agreed). – Q: PM – had there been issues with AAB numbers at Penhale? – A: KD – yes so this would be resolved by moving to one AAB. There had also been no Chair but Lee Trimby had offered to take on the new role. • To agree the appointment of three new RGB members as previously circulated. The Board approved both proposals.		
8.	**Update from Committees**	<u>Strategic Committee update</u> – this had been covered in the CEO report.		
9.	**Trustee legal responsibilities**	The Chair advised that the Board had reflected on a session delivered by Nick McKenzie of Browne Jacobson in relation to its responsibilities under Charity and Company Law. • Could the Board be doing more to communicate? How does the Board communicate with Headteachers and senior leaders? • Does the Board have time to build relationships within the Board and with the Exec team?		

		• How do Governors remind themselves of the Nolan principles and ensure that they are working in line with those when reading key documents? • The Board should reflect on how it maximises institutional performance and success, on the strategic and operational split, and on how it responds to new landscape and opportunities. KD proposed that the Board consider the following suggestions in response to the above reflections: • To have an August conference with the Exec Team. • To widen the scope of communication to include staff, leaders and Governors. • To invite Board members to observe RGBs and AABs. • To include the Nolan principles in Governor inductions and in communications to Governors. The Board agreed to all four suggestions being taken forward.		

10.	**Board Development Plan**	KD updated the Board on actions arising from the Board Development Plan.
		
		• To complete a review of the RGB structure – a survey of Governors had been completed and benchmarking carried out against other MATs. KD to review and report to the Exec Team. KD to then report to the Board at its July meeting.
		• LM to develop an Exec summary report – now in place.
		• DH to look at consistency of data to Governors – to be trialled in Term 4 with implementation Sept 2021.
		• Session with Nick McKenzie – this had taken place and been reviewed.
		• To look at the Board's continuous improvement and to have a peer review with another MAT – peer review set up with The Mead Educational Trust (TMET) to take place in March, the process to be as follows:
		  – SGa, PM and KD to hold initial meeting with TMET to agree the scope of the peer review.
		  – TMET to look at the last internal Board review.
		  – TMET to conduct interviews with Board members.
		  – TMET to conduct a review of documentation (schemes of delegation, minutes etc.).
		  – TMET to attend the March Board meeting to observe.
		  – TMET to report key findings to the Board.
		
		LM noted that the Board had had several reviews (including the session with Nick McKenzie, the review coming out of the RGB surveys, an Exec Team self-review and the upcoming peer review) and commented that it was important to build some time in to the summer residential to reflect on all the reviews. SGa added that it was important for the Board to
			KD	

		consider what it wanted to get out of the reflections, to take time to process the outcomes and to decide how it wanted to move forward in relation to the feedback.		
11.	**Communication from the Board to the Trust community**	KD asked if the Board had any key messages that they wanted to communicate to the RGBs or the wider community. • Q: PM – who are the Board minutes circulated to? • A: KD – a one-page report is sent to Governors and Members; the full minutes are published on the website so RGBs and the school communities have access to these. • Q: DM – could the Board please send a communication to school staff to praise how well they are doing during the current lockdown? • A: KD – will draft a communication for PM.	KD	
12.	**Any other business and correspondence to the Chair**	CEO delegations 2020/21 review • KD had previously circulated some proposed changes to the CEO delegations which had come out of the data protection audit. • The Board approved the changes. TSAT Complaints Policy • KD had previously circulated one proposed change to the Complaints Policy. • The Board approved the change.		
13.	**Items for next agenda**	To be advised.		
14.	**Date of next meeting**	The next meeting will be held on Wed 31st March 5pm. The Chair thanked Board members for their attendance and contribution. The meeting closed at 7.07pm.		