

THINKING SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST
COMPANY NUMBER: 7359755

Subject	Meeting of the Board of Directors	Date	21 October 2020
Room	Via Teams Video Call	Time	5.00pm
Present	Stuart Gardner (SGa), Steven Geary (SG); Rachel Jordan-Evans (RJE), David Lycett (DL), Peter Martin (PM) (Chair), Ian Mason (IM) (to 18.30), Derek Morrison (DM), Gerard Newman (GN), Linda Randall (LR)	Clerk	Janet Smith
Apologies accepted	Michael Bailey	In attendance	Gwynn Bassan (GB), Kaye Bettey (KB); Kelly Denton (KD), Mandy Gage (MG); Lee Miller (LM), Jody Murphy (JM); Natalie Sheppard (NS)
Non-attendees	Dan High; Stu McIntosh; Matthew Fleet		

Key Points Discussed and Action Items				
No.	Agenda Item	Action/Discussion	By whom	When
1.	Declaration of business interests	There were no declarations of interest relating to items on the agenda. Directors were requested to complete the Annual Declaration of Business and Pecuniary Interests if they have not already done so. Action: Directors to ensure Annual Declaration of Business and Pecuniary Interests and return to KD.	All Dirs	10 Nov
2.	Welcome and apologies for absence	The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. He offered congratulations to Lee Miller on behalf of the Board for his recent award of MBE for services to education. Apologies were received and accepted from Michael Bailey.		
3.	Minutes and matters arising	The minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2020 were considered and agreed as an accurate record of the meeting. They were duly signed by the Chair.		

		<p>Matters arising: <i>Item 8 Board Development:</i> KD confirmed that the training with Browne Jacobson is in place for February 2021.</p> <p><i>Item 8 Governor Safeguarding training:</i> KD confirmed that most governors had completed this statutory training, with only a few still complete. Reminders had been sent to those governors to complete the training urgently.</p>		
4.	CEO report	<p>SGa informed the Board that no written report was available for this meeting as, due to changes in the meetings cycle, reports from the RGBs and AABs had not yet been received to inform his report.</p> <p>SGa presented a PowerPoint to Directors and the main points are discussed below.</p> <p>TSAT SWOT Analysis The SWOT analysis had been updated following input from senior leaders, headteachers and Senior Management Teams.</p> <p><i>Strengths:</i> SGa had been pleased to note that strengths identified had been similar across all teams, a particular strength being values led ethos.</p> <p><i>Weaknesses:</i> communication continues to be a challenge across the Trust. It is important to continue work on “We are One”. SGa informed the Board that work on the weaknesses is in hand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communication is improving, and he urged Directors to look at the school websites to see virtual tours. • Think Ahead – work continues on succession planning for school leaders. • LM has been working on the role of the EBM, which is becoming much more school based in response to concerns highlighted. <p><i>Opportunities:</i> the digital strategy: great achievement relating to remote and hybrid learning was noted.</p> <p><i>Threats:</i> the Goodwin debt, Ofsted inspection, Covid-19 and in-year funding not received were all identified, [REDACTED]</p> <p>Directors discussed the SWOT analysis and acknowledged the actions being taken to</p>		

improve weaknesses. **GN proposed that the analysis be accepted by the Board, and this was seconded by LR. All Directors agreed, and the SWOT Analysis for 2020/21 was accepted.**

Summary of start to term one and school opening

Surveys

SGa reported that staff surveys are being undertaken every month. Three questions are posed, asking staff to rank high to low based on how they are feeling and how they perceive the Trust has reacted to their safety and wellbeing. The responses give the Trust an immediate understanding of how staff are feeling at each school. The responses to the September and October survey show that staff feel communicated with, feel safe and consider that the Trust is putting their wellbeing as a high priority when making decisions.

Directors were impressed by the positive responses from staff shown. A Director asked what the next steps are in response to the survey. SGa informed the Board that they would ensure there is good communication from Trust leaders to staff informing them how the Trust is reacting to the outcome of the survey, for example the Trust acknowledges that staff workload is very high and in response to this they have reduced School Development Plans so that staff can focus on the day to day. This will be followed up by the Headteacher. In this way, the Trust can show that they are reacting quickly to staff's concerns and they are being listened to.

Attendance

Student attendance: SGa demonstrated that the average attendance at TSAT is way above the national average of 89%, the lowest percentage being at Goodwin at 91.7%. This shows that parents and students feel that the school environment is safe and that students are keen to carry on with their learning. SG commented that this is testament to everyone's hard work, as in reality it is very difficult to operate in a Covid secure manner and deliver top quality education. There is also a strain on the time of school leaders in supporting schools when problems arise.

MG gave the example of the school day currently at Victory: 1,100 students on roll with multiple times for breaks and lunch. This means that learning is continuing for many year groups while one year group is on a break and potentially causing a disturbance. Cases at Victory mean that it has entered Tier 1 where all students are required to wear masks. She indicated that daily procedures will shortly be reviewed to see if improvements can be made. LM agreed that they are learning as they go on how to proceed when there is a positive case. SGa referred to operational drag.

	<p>SGa brought Directors up to date with Covid-19 cases at Trust schools. It was noted that Cedar closed three days before half term due to positive cases amongst students and staff; it is open to key worker children.</p> <p>DM asked for an explanation of the difference between two seemingly similar scenarios of a Year 11 being tested positive, however a group in one school was isolated for 14 days (Victory), and in the other (Holcombe) for 1 day. MG responded that the normal track and trace in school was not enough for the Victory case because of extensive social contacts who were not able to be traced, whereas close contacts were able to be traced in relation to the Holcombe case. She added that the Year 11s who were isolating at Victory experienced excellent online learning. LM added that this demonstrates that all cases are unique and the Trust is diligent in examining all contacts.</p> <p>DL asked if there had been feedback from students at Victory regarding the online learning offer. SGa noted that hybrid and remote education has also been available at RGS and Holcombe and he has been very impressed by how staff have stepped up to this task at all the secondary schools. He added that MG had worked extremely hard on this and had deployed a large number of support staff to ensure that students had access to online learning. MG informed Directors that lessons had been delivered through Microsoft Teams, with daily phone calls to students; hard copies had been sent when necessary and the library was set aside for Year 11 vulnerable students to work in. GB spoke about the five cases amongst staff and students at Goodwin, where teachers had used Teams to deliver lessons from home and students could access learning on the digital platform. Directors expressed their thanks to all staff for their dedicated work in ensuring students were able to access their education.</p> <p>SGa informed the Board that TSAT is taking a different approach to other trusts in terms of IT and in measures applied when a case is notified. GB explained the process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The case is reported to the DfE who then asks what action will be taken at the school. • TSAT have their track and trace process, i.e all lessons adhere to seating plans so it is known who is in close contact, ensuring that only those who have been in close contact with the positive case are sent home to isolate. • A communication is sent to parents informing them of the case and the action taken. Some parents are not satisfied and take their children out of school. • The DfE assist the school in how to react. <p>SGa asked JM to explain the procedures in the primary phase:</p>		
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		<p>reviewing this date. SGA responded that the decision is under review: it is anticipated that the situation in relation to Covid 19 will not have materially changed and his view is that the current system of interim visits will continue, however no decision will be known until December. SGA informed directors that he is working with colleagues at the Confederation of School Trusts and they plan to lobby parliament to delay from January 2021.</p> <p>Therefore, his recommendation is that the Trust continues some work towards preparedness for Ofsted.</p> <p>Remote learning and digital strategy</p> <p>LM reported that he had recently met with unions on the Trust digital policy which is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a whole class is isolating at home there will be a switch to full online teaching by all teachers. • If individual students are isolating at home then there will be a switch to hybrid teaching. • If a teacher is isolating at home but is well, then almost all teachers to switch to online streaming. <p>LM reported that NS had presented the policy to the unions and made the Trust’s commitment to provide support to staff very clear.</p> <p>LM reported that a Digital Strategy Group had been formed, into which working groups bring reports of their discussions, The focus of the Digital Strategy Group is to ensure effective digital learning and to create banks of digital responses and assessments. Five pillars were identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers’ CPD to access and deliver digital learning • Software solutions • Procurements strategies – ensuring value for money • How students can be supported to become “digi-citizens” • Policy decisions to be made, and whether some existing policies need to be reviewed. <p>LM agreed to post the minutes of the Digital Strategy Group onto the Board’s teams documents area.</p> <p>Action: LM to post minutes of Digital Strategy Group</p>	LM	
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PM extended thanks to LM and to NS who works closely with LM on the strategy. NS added that virtual learning will be extended across the primary phase and informed the Board that Portsmouth Academy has been accepted onto the Microsoft Schools Global Programme. RJE congratulated the team on excellent progress on digital development. GN asked if the Board can have advance warning of costs and expenditure that is being incurred on the digital programme. LM responded that he is putting together a paper for Operational Committee which will outline the spending for the year and address any transparency issues. If there is significant variation from this then LM would report to the next Board meeting. Directors were satisfied with this level of reporting.

South West Hub Development

SGa confirmed that work is proceeding with Plymouth High for a 1 January 2021 conversion.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Ofsted one day visit at Cedar

SGa reported that no judgement had been given, however a letter listing the actions that the

		<p>school are taking was issued.</p> <p><i>Health and Safety Visit</i></p> <p>LM reported on a successful Health and Safety visit which was made by the H & S Executive at Meon Junior. The inspector talked to staff, students and parents and inspected the premises. The outcome was that it had been a very positive visit and the inspector could offer no improvements. LM reported that the same controls are present in all Trust primaries, so this outcome acts as a validation of the Trust’s actions to safeguard staff and students at all primaries. Directors extended congratulations and thanks to James Fenlon.</p>		
5.	Reports from Committees	<p>Strategic Committee – Review Risk</p> <p>PM confirmed that Directors are content with the actions being taken with the risks highlighted.</p>		
6.	Board Development Plan	<p>KD reminded Directors that a self-assessment of capacity and effectiveness had been undertaken by the Board in February 2020, following which the Board Development Plan had been written. KD reported on progress as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RGB Structure: a review will be taken to the February Board Meeting. • Executive Summaries: LM is leading on this and will take forward. • Report templates: Dan High will trial this in Term 4 and will be in place 2021/22 • Training on Board responsibilities: arranged for February 2021 • Peer review of Trust Governance: KD is co-ordinating. In response to a question from PM, KD explained that she is working with GovernorHub in identifying a trust of similar size and history to TSAT to work with. 		
7.	Communication to RGB and AAB	<p>Following discussion, it was agreed that “doing less better” needs to be the main message to take to the RGBs. KD will liaise with SGa about which slides from his PowerPoint should be used.</p> <p>Action: KD to work with SGa on the message of “doing less better” to RGBs</p>	KD/ SGa	
8.	Any other business and correspondence to the Chair	<p>Audit Service Plan</p> <p>LM asked directors to note that UHY are formulating the plan and no areas of concern have been raised at present. A full report will be presented to Audit Committee in December.</p> <p>GN asked if the points they raised about “going concern” is just for good order. LM responded that there is a new requirement in the updated Academies Financial Handbook to</p>		

		<p>ensure there are no concerns around a going concern.</p> <p>Additional Board responsibility under Data Protection KD reported that the recent ICO audit had identified that the DPO appointment should be reviewed annually. The Data Policy has been updated to reflect this requirement.</p> <p>Kent RGB KB pointed to the concern raised in the Kent RGB minutes of 6 July relating to a problem with the parameter fencing at Goodwin which she felt had not been dealt with by the Board, her understanding being that RGB concerns should be picked up by the Board. KD responded that the July Board meeting should have discussed this and she will check and report back to KB. LM reassured KB that he is aware of the problem and has met with GB on actions to be taken. A report will be given to the next meeting of the Kent RGB.</p> <p>Action: KD to investigate Board minutes of July 2020 and report to KB.</p>	KD	
10.	Items for next agenda	To be advised.		
11.	Date of next meeting	<p>The next meeting will be on 16 December at 5pm.</p> <p>PM reminded Directors of the training session with Nick McKenzie in February 2021 and advised all directors to attend.</p> <p>He thanked Board members for their attendance and input. The meeting closed at 18.45pm.</p>		