**Present**

CHAIR: Martin Pfutzner (MP)

Headteacher: Paul Lufkin (PL)

Joseph Brasse (JB)

Katy Gandon (KG)

Lisa Gardiner (LG)

Will Mellor (WM)

Sam Rickman (SR)

Milly Williams (MW)

**In attendance**

Steve Cleary, Clerk (SAC)

Lisa Kingsbury (LK) (Deputy Head)

June Crame (Head of Governor Services, LB Merton)

*The features of effective governance from the competency framework: -*

*Strategic Leadership, Accountability, People, Structures, Compliance, Evaluation*

*All original papers are available on the LGFL MyUSO drive.*

1. **GOVERNANCE**

The meeting began at 6.30pm and was deemed to be quorate. Governors confirmed that they had received and read papers in advance. Apologies were received and consented to from Tash Gourlay (TG) and Georgia Harris (GH).

In accordance with the Education (School Government) Regulations, governors were invited to declare any interest they might have in respect of any item to be considered at the meeting. MP declared he had an interest in the item on the nursery although this was not pecuniary. No further declarations were made.

Governors **RESOLVED** to defer the minutes of the full governing board of the Wimbledon Primary Federation held on 6 February 2024 to the next meeting.

PL reported that he had received interest from two parents in being a governor. Nominations were not received, and details are being kept on file. It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Natasha Gourlay as a co-opted governor.

Training: Governors noted that a new training tracker and evaluation system has been introduced. Members are required to fill out an evaluation form after each training session. Positive feedback was given on a recent face-to-face training session, the first since COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Those present were encouraged to register training activities, including induction, and keep records updated, including various types of training like diversity, equality, and policy training. Work-based training is also relevant. Upcoming training opportunities include safeguarding, diversity, Prevent and British Values. Training schedules can be adjusted to accommodate different needs, such as offering sessions during lunchtime or early morning. The National Governors Association run learning link online modules, which offer short online courses on various subjects. These are accessible for governors who might miss live sessions.

Governor recruitment: There is currently one vacancy on the governing board. Governors noted a potential candidate from a legal background who has been involved with schools. There is another potential candidate, but details about them are not yet known. The view was expressed that there would be a need for HR expertise as this is difficult to fill and highly valuable. It was **RESOLVED** that MP meet with the potential candidate from a legal background and invite them to the next meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** to retain the circle model of governance which entails fewer, but more comprehensive meetings, streamlined decision-making and broad understanding and participation across the full spectrum of school business.

Governor visits: A governor visit has been undertaken on reading and phonics which had found that small teaching groups were very effective. Observations pointed to effective practices that could be supported and expanded, particularly concerning assessments and special needs provisions. Staff are actively engaged and there is a clear emphasis on reading fluency and phonics checking. The regular use of modelling expectations and tasks were observed in all lessons. There was a universal pedagogical approach through which reading and phonics are delivered as evidence. There is an excellent utilisation of group discussions which enhances pupil’s retrieval of knowledge. Future plans include looking at assessments and provisions for pupils with additional needs.

Governors discussed the need to update governor profiles and promote involvement in school activities such as attendance at Friday morning briefings. Those present were invited to submit their photographs and a brief bio for inclusion on the school website.

1. **PUPILS AND COMMUNITY**

Enrolment and Demographics: Governors were reminded of the importance of monitoring nursery enrolments and overall school roll, which directly impacts school finances and helps in understanding local demographic changes. There has been a noted increase in families moving out of the area, attributed to the rising cost of living. This trend might lead to significant changes in school demographics. Particular attention is being paid to likely moves of pupils prior to the October census given the impact that this would have on funding for the 2025/26 financial year.

Pupil Premium and Special Educational Needs (SEN): Governors were apprised on the breakdown between pupils eligible for income-based free school meals and those without, but still qualifying for pupil premium. The school tracks a significant number of pupils under SEN due to concerns about their academic progress, though specific diagnoses may not yet be confirmed.

Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs): Financial planning for EHCPs is crucial as they involve additional funding. The unpredictability of when pupils with EHCPs might leave the school complicates budgeting. The school has five children in Y6 with EHCPs who will be leaving and a further six or seven children elsewhere in the school where EHCPs are in progress.

Behaviour and Exclusions: The school has a low number of suspensions and exclusions, which are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Behavioural incidents discussed include safety concerns in reception and a racial abuse case in year five. Incidents of racism and homophobia were discussed, with a particular focus on how they manifest (e.g., playground vs. classroom) and the school's response, which includes recording even minor incidents to detect any patterns. The decrease in incidents from year four to year five is attributed to targeted equality training and educational efforts. All incidents, regardless of severity, are reported and documented to ensure there is a clear understanding and response to any emerging patterns. The school's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) prioritizes pupil behaviour updates at their weekly meetings. Many behavioural incidents are related to pupils with SEN, particularly those with self-regulation challenges. Previously, many incidents involving children with complex needs were not recorded systematically, especially if they were frequent and viewed as typical for those pupils. However, a procedural change was implemented to ensure all such incidents are recorded in the Management Information System (MIS). This change aimed to provide complete and accurate records essential for supporting applications for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and other interventions. Governors noted that the perceived increase in behavioural incidents was largely due to the new recording practices rather than an actual rise in incidents. In response to observed patterns, the school has implemented several initiatives such as Lunch Club, a "Calm Cave," and restrictions on certain playground activities like football and chasing games, to better manage and support pupil behaviour. Incidents, even those that might seem minor (such as disagreements over game rules leading to conflicts), are reported to parents.

Attendance and Persistent Absence: there has been an improvement in overall attendance, with a decrease in both general and persistent absences. Governors were apprised of the process for attendance monitoring and noted that there is a significant concern for the school where a child is frequently absent due to illness. One-Time significant absences including serious illnesses or injuries requiring extended absence from school are noted but not a primary worry since they are isolated incidents.

School Meals: There is a high uptake around 90% for infant free school meals (reception through year two), although a lower participation among pupils eligible for free school meals based on income, which is a concern. Key Stage Two meals have an 80% participation rate, which aligns with the funding levels. Plans are in place to continue this programme into the next year. There has been an increase in staff taking school meals compared to the previous year, enhancing the social and communal aspect of meal times. Efforts are being made to foster enjoyment of food, respect, and control during meal times, including reducing food waste. Reasons for not taking Free School Meals include a preference from some pupils to bring their lunch from home, often due to personal preferences for specific foods or past negative experiences with school meals.

Governors noted the school improvement partner report as submitted as well as the process of developing and refining the school's mission statement with the involvement of various staff members, highlighting the shift from "We Are Family" to "We belong".

1. **SCHOOL BUSINESS FOCUS**

Financial Audits and Self-Checking: Due to a lack of resources in the education sector in Merton, the school hasn't undertaken a financial audit in approximately 7-8 years. In the absence of formal audits, the school relies on self-assessment methods to ensure financial compliance and efficiency:

* Benchmarking Information: Provided by the local authority to compare financial performance against other schools. The school generally benchmarks at a relatively efficient cost per pupil basis.
* School’s Financial Value Standard: A checklist of financial governance questions that must be reviewed and submitted.
* Consistent Financial Reporting: Online tools provided by the government for schools to conduct a 'financial health check.'
* These tools help the governing body monitor and manage the school's finances despite the lack of formal audits.

Financial Efficiency and Challenges

* Staff Costs: Anomalies like lower average cost per teacher are due to payment methods (e.g., agency staff costs) rather than actual salary reductions.
* Capital and Maintenance Costs: The school faces challenges in maintaining its facilities due to financial constraints. Capital transfers from reserves are necessary for funding maintenance works, which are becoming increasingly delayed.
* Energy Costs: The school participates in Merton’s negotiated energy deal. Although energy costs are monitored closely, they are a small percentage of the total budget. Discussions on whether to seek a better energy deal outside of Merton's contract are ongoing.
* Maintenance Delays and Community Involvement
* Current State: The school is slightly behind on its maintenance schedule, mainly affecting the decorative state of the school and specific areas like toilets for older pupils.
* Community Involvement: There was a suggestion to involve community members in maintenance tasks like painting. However, logistical issues (e.g., high ceilings, need to move furniture) make this challenging. The possibility of organizing a community day for outdoor maintenance is being considered.

Governors **RESOLVED** to approve and sign off the School Financial Value Standard (SFVS) documents for submission to the local authority.

Monthly monitoring reports: Variances were reported on in November 2023 when the budget was positive overall. Since then, there have been some more adverse variances which have impacted the school.

* Income Variance: The school has seen an income increase of £6,000, primarily from school meals, with specific budget variances linked to the timing of EHCPs. Originally, fewer EHCPs came through than expected, and those that did were delayed.
* Expenditure Variance: Overall expenses increased by £40,000, partly offset by additional income of £40,000 from catering for free school meals, resulting in a balanced impact in this area.
* Staffing Costs: The combined variance for teaching staff, other employed staff, and agency staff indicates expenses are still lower than budgeted for this year, despite all categories needing consideration together. Teacher staff costs are likely to be higher than budgeted for as a result of few experienced teachers leaving.
* Reserve Funds: Starting the year with £300,000 in reserves, the school anticipated a £30,000 decrease. However, improved monitoring predicts a positive variance of about £70,000, leading to an expected year-end reserve of £340,000.
* Deficit Trends: the school has managed to reverse a trend of significant deficits from previous years, where the budget shortfall was nearly £250,000 at one point. This year’s surplus is a positive development, attributed to careful financial management and strategic income generation.
* Income Generation: The school has increased income from extended school activities and other initiatives beyond traditional school funding sources, such as consultancy work and increased parental contributions.
* Community Contributions: The Parent-Teacher-Friend Association (PTFA) faced reduced income due to poor weather affecting events like the summer and Christmas fairs, resulting in about £5,000 less income year-on-year.
* Lettings: The school has shifted focus from small, short-term lettings to more substantial, long-term agreements.
* Future Outlook: Whilst the school has managed to achieve a surplus this fiscal year, maintaining this status is challenging due to rising costs outpacing income growth. The school acknowledges the difficulty in creating long-term financial plans due to these dynamics but remains committed to exploring new income streams and managing expenditures prudently.

The school has managed to break even this year, though not without deferring several maintenance and upgrade activities as follows: Air conditioning installation, Computer suite upgrade, Decorative maintenance. These deferrals are seen as temporary solutions that may lead to increased future costs.

1. **FEASIBILITY OF FULL TIME NURSERY PROVISION**

The school has conducted a survey to assess interest in nursery placements for this year and next year, including preferences for full-time or part-time placements. The survey indicated that there is a high demand for September 2024 with 37 full-time places needed (25 siblings, 12 new families). Part-time places are prioritized, creating a complex situation for fitting full-time and part-time demands. The future outlook indicates a decrease in demand for sibling placements next year from 25 to 19 as well as a falling birthrate.

Governors concluded that current feedback and demand do not compellingly justify a shift towards a full-time model from financial, educational, demand, sustainability, operational or staffing perspectives. It was **RESOLVED** to maintain the current model to ensure sustainability and minimal disruption. It was further **RESOLVED** that the nursery model be revisited in the future, considering it is based on projections such as birth rates and demand which are subject to change. Nursery places should be assessed annually to stay aligned with actual needs and trends, rather than relying on outdated projections or assumptions.

1. **COMPLIANCE**

**Data Protection and Cybersecurity**

Governors received the data protection report from the appointed DPO[[1]](#footnote-1) who advises on data protection and handles related training for schools. Details are contained around data protection practices, such as GDPR compliance, data breaches, and cybersecurity policies. It was noted that the school is becoming more aware of data protection and breaches are reported more efficiently. The school has a GDPR information system and is assured of IT security and infrastructure. A proper backup and restoration plan is in place and school policies reflect the importance of good cybersecurity. Staff are trained on GDPR and cybersecurity. It was **RESOLVED** to include data protection as a more prominent agenda item in future governance meetings, potentially inviting Derek Crabtree, the DPO, to provide a detailed report and facilitate discussion. Governors considered whether to assign a specific "data protection governor" role, which is seen as beneficial but not mandatory. The link governor could help to ensure that policies are actively followed and documented, which could be verified through mini-audits. The main concern would be managing data breaches and ensuring proper handling of sensitive data by staff.

**Policies**

Equalities Information and Objectives Policy: Governors were apprised of the need to update the equalities information and objectives, which is a statutory requirement. This involves documenting how the school is working towards fulfilling its duties under the Equalities Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The policy aims to prevent discrimination based on the seven protected characteristics and promote good relations among different communities. Various challenges in diversity and representation were noted such as a noted lack of diversity within the governing body, limited diversity among teaching staff, with most culturally diverse or black individuals occupying lower-paid roles such as cleaning and catering. This impacts the representation seen by pupils daily. The school also faces difficulties in attracting a diverse pool of applicants, particularly male and culturally diverse teachers, due to a lack of applications. The school is proactive with equality in the curriculum, including activities like LGBTQ History Week and integrating diverse reading materials although there are community sensitivities in addressing potentially controversial topics like non-binary identities in a primary setting, which some families may oppose. Efforts are needed to diversify the curriculum and teaching materials to better represent a variety of communities and challenge stereotypes. In addition, there is a need for an ongoing review process of school policies, incorporating feedback from various sources to ensure the policies are comprehensive and reflective of the community's needs.

Feedback on Pupil Mix-up Policy: Those present reviewed feedback regarding the pupil mixing policy at the end of reception year. Despite the social challenges, it was decided to retain the mix-up at this stage as it's crucial for addressing class disparities and ensuring proper placement. The previous policy had three mix-up points. After consideration, this was reduced to two, specifically at the end of reception and Year 3. The school emphasized flexibility to mix pupils at other times if necessary, but generally, there would be no additional mix-ups unless deemed essential. Special attention would be given to the needs of children with complex behaviours or social communication difficulties to prevent exacerbation of issues. It was **RESOLVED** to:

* Continue with mix-ups at the end of reception and Year 3 only, with flexibility retained for additional mix-ups if needed.
* Maintain the ability for pupils to nominate peers they work well with, to minimize challenges during transitions.

Educational Trip Policies: Concerns were raised about the existing policies on school trips, particularly the requirement for governing body approval for residential trips six months in advance. It was noted that current practices might not align with the policy, necessitating a review and possible amendment of the language used.

1. **CARETAKER’S HOUSE**

Governors concluded that the proposal to convert the caretaker’s house into a short-term rental property appears to be a financially viable solution to a pressing maintenance and usability issue, offering a potentially significant new income stream to support school operations. Further approvals and detailed planning are required to proceed.

1. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Wimbledon Park[[2]](#footnote-2)** – 21 May, 2 July

Signed:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Print Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Chair of Governors

Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Derek Crabtree serves as the Data Protection Officer (DPO), with support from the LGFL and DPA. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. All meetings at 6.30pm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)