**Present**

CHAIR: Martin Pfutzner (MP)

Headteacher: Paul Lufkin (PL)

Joseph Brasse (JB)

Katy Gandon (KG)

Lisa Gardiner (LG)

Will Mellor (WM)

Sam Rickman (SR)

Taliah Walklett (TW)

Milly Williams (MW)

**In attendance**

Steve Cleary, Clerk (SAC)

Lisa Kingsbury (LK) (Deputy Head)

*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. All governors were present. It was noted that Georgia Harris and Tash Gourlay are on leave of absence from the board. There were no further apologies.

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. No declarations were made.

Governors **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the full governing board of the Wimbledon Primary Federation held on 6 February 2024 and 12 March 2024 pending any comments or questions regarding their accuracy or content.

Governors were introduced to Taliah Walklett who was attending the meeting as a prospective co-opted governor. All present introduced themselves and it was noted that Ms Walklett has legal expertise which is being sought by the board. It was **RESOLVED** to co-opt TW to the board for a 4-year term of office.

KG reported that the training tracker is up to date and that access to training is also available through the National Governors Association (NGA).

**SATs Supervision and Student Interaction**: a governor recently visited the school to oversee the Year 6 SATs. Student behaviour before exams was calm and students were well-prepared, with special arrangements being undertaken for students with unique needs.

Governors **RESOLVED** to update their profiles on the website.

1. **SCHOOL BUSINESS FOCUS**

**Budget**

* The budget is appearing healthier than a year ago, although there is an increasing backlog of items requiring expenditure such as maintenance items, and building expenditure. There is a need to consider whether school reserves are earning sufficient interest, especially with rising interest rates.
* The schools’ funding picture continues to be quite dynamic in the context of wage and cost inflation. The government continues to announce supplementary funding to schools outside of the main school grant linked to significant payroll cost increases (wage settlements and national insurance contribution increases). Prudent estimates for these increases have meant that these grants support the additional costs. Each year the supplementary grants are rolled up into the funding formula in order that these are sustained to schools and so core schools’ budgets have increased markedly in the past two years. Patterns of funding are stabilising, providing more predictability although potential changes in government could impact future funding. Core grants and free school meals grant contribute to a forecast 6% increase in income next year.
* Total income in 2024/25 is budgeted to be £4,315,680 an increase of over £250,000 or 6.2%.
* **Staffing Costs**: Staffing represents just over 70% of total costs. The planned staffing structure is developed by the Headteacher and senior leadership team based on needs and school improvement priorities. Staffing costs are relatively straightforward to model due to known capacity, staff costs, and associated expenses like superannuation. The staffing structure remains broadly the same for the upcoming year. Specific adjustments include returning maternity covers, long-term agency contracts for specific roles. Last summer, the staff reorganisation plan generated annualised cost savings of about £140,000 from teaching support staff costs. However, there have been higher than expected wage settlements, and a need for additional staffing with the growth in 1:1 support required (alongside the increase in top up SEN funding). Maintaining the same lean staffing structure as implemented last year, results in the budgeted staffing costs increasing
* **Staff Agency costs**: The main three members of staff on agency contracts are included in the budget. One is a maternity cover, and two are for one-to-one support where deployment for next year is yet to be determined. Employing agency staff has been a deliberate decision over permanent hires for certain roles because of the flexibility it provides.
* **Support Staff**: The lean structure primarily impacts support staff, particularly those assisting with additional needs. There are more needs than the school can currently meet. Efforts to apply for top-up funding are ongoing, but such funding rarely matches the actual cost of additional support. Local authorities frequently miss statutory deadlines for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), resulting in the school bearing the cost of interim support.
* The teacher pay settlement has not yet been announced, and the school has modelled 4% at this stage (which seems prudent against the eventual settlement awarded at 6.5% last year). Support staff pay for 2024 is again not yet agreed and unions are asking for a flat rate increase of £3,000 against most of the pay grades employed in school. If the settlement is of this order of magnitude (which is 50% higher than last year), there could be additional costs of £30,000 that are not budgeted.
* **Overhead/non-staffing costs** – The core non-staffing costs are forecast for the year ahead by the School Business Manager based on the year end costs for goods and services in the previous financial year (with known adjustments), together with any investments required for school improvement work. Scrutiny of the DfE financial dashboard and Merton’s schools financial benchmarking at the last governors meeting showed that Wimbledon Park benchmarks favourably in non-pay cost areas compared to similar schools in Merton/London. The budgeted costs have been scrutinised closely to reduce or minimise increases. However, most supplier contracts continue to increase wage and inflation pressures passed on in contract prices: Total non-staffing costs increase in the budget from £1,031,243 to £1,107,695, an increase of £76,453 or by 7.4%, due to inflation/contract prices, full year of KS2 free meals and increased Kidsology profit share (from increased income).
* **Grant Funding**: Schools grant income has been allocated using the schools funding formula and the pupil premium income estimated by Merton. Total grant income increases by around £225,000 this financial year or 6.4%. Grants are approximately £225,000 ahead year-on-year. Stable grants and pupil numbers provide financial certainty for the current and upcoming years. The free school meals grant is expected to rise significantly this year.
* **School Generated Income**: The biggest positive variance was in school-generated income (nearly £100,000 ahead of budget) with continued increased demand for childcare and clubs (with higher pricing and income share). This is a significant success with a continuous increase due to strategic pricing and involvement in teaching school hubs. Forecasted to rise by 5% next year, contributing to overall income growth.
* **Year-End**: The financial year ended significantly better than anticipated. Various income streams performed well, contributing to the overall positive outcome. Income is approximately £100,000 ahead of the budgeted figures and contrary to the expected small deficit, the school ended with a surplus of £75,000. Reserves have increased for the first time in three years and currently stand at nearly £400,000, providing a buffer against future uncertainties.
* **Donations from Families**: Last year, an initial request for donations was sent out to families. The follow up was minimal to allow the campaign to organically develop. Although donations have not seen a significant increase, some donors have set up recurring direct debits, providing a steady income stream. Given the school's current healthy funding position, the necessity of continuing to ask for parental contributions is under review.
* **Strategic Allocation**: A significant portion of surplus funds from the Kidsology childcare facility will now be directed towards maintenance and classroom updates. This decision acknowledges the ongoing and recurring need for classroom maintenance and updates.
* **Backlog Management**: Despite efforts, a backlog in maintenance needs is anticipated to persist over the next three years. If all maintenance needs were to be met from the main budget, it would result in a deficit. The focus remains on using these funds specifically for maintenance and classroom updates to avoid financial strain on the main budget.
* **Non-Pay Expenditure**: The school is to examine small cost elements such as photocopying and paper purchasing and contracts are regularly scrutinised for potential savings.
* **Inflationary Pressure**: Recent years have seen inflationary pressures although these seem to have stabilised, allowing for better predictability in budgeting. The budget anticipates a 3% inflation rate for both staff costs and income. This balanced approach helps in maintaining financial equilibrium and ensures that the school can meet its financial obligations without compromising on quality.
* **Capital Income and Expenditure**: Budget assumptions (with no capital expenditure) result in the school generating an in-year surplus of over £112,000 (and remaining in surpluses in the three-year forecast). This would allow reserves to grow to nearly £500,000 at the end of next year. The school believes that a prudent total reserve would £300,000, allowing us considerable flexibility to catch up on previously postponed decorative and capital works this year and in the next 2-3 years. We also will have the usual devolved capital grant income of around £11,000. Recent capital expenditures have been driven by necessity, such as toilet updates and boiler repairs and funds were reallocated from income lines to cover these critical expenses. A budget of £150,000 is proposed for the current year to tackle the maintenance backlog. A minimum of £90,000 annually from the extended schools' surplus is anticipated for the next few years. Previous capital expenditures have depleted the revenue reserve.
* **New Cost Centre**: Because nearly 90% of our current reserves are in “extended schools”, it is proposed to use this reserve to make a capital and maintenance expenditure through “Extended Schools property maintenance” as a cost centre rather than a revenue to capital transfer as in previous years. This approach avoids direct capital transfers while achieving the same financial management goals.
* **Classification Challenge**: Certain expenditures, like redecorating, may be classified differently (capital vs. revenue). The school will treat these as annual costs for easier management within accounting restrictions.
* **Fire Risk Assessment Funding Gap**: Significant items from a fire risk assessment remain unfunded by the local authority (Merton) this year. The school is advocating for Merton to treat fire risk mitigation as a statutory duty due to the safety implications for Merton properties.
* **Joint Funding**: Previous projects have seen a joint funding model, with Merton covering the majority and the school contributing a smaller portion. Governors expressed the view that it is strategic to wait for Merton's support due to the high cost-benefit ratio.
* **School House Expenditure**: Expenditures related to the school house will flow through the school accounts, potentially distorting budget numbers. Governors received an update on the plans for the school house.
* Club Contributions: The impact of clubs on the school building justifies their contribution to maintenance costs.

**Security and Gate Access**: Governors discussed potential funding for security works on the car park gate which had been raised in a previous meeting. A two-gate system has been proposed to enhance security and ensure that children do not leave the site unsupervised. Security measures would be in place to control ingress and egress effectively. Many modern schools have a single entrance system and are designed with perimeter boundaries that facilitate controlled access. The current setup lacks a single access point that funnels children correctly and there is a difficulty in replicating the single entrance system due to the existing layout. It was noted that current signage might be insufficient, causing visitors to wander and there is a need for clearer, more obvious signage to direct visitors appropriately. One alternative security measure would be to implement the French system where adults are not allowed to enter without specific appointments. One potential adjustment might be to shift the daytime entrance and exit to the car park side to enhance security although there are challenges in managing the space, as it is primarily a car park and not designed for high foot traffic.

**Website Redevelopment and Maintenance**: The view was expressed that the current website is outdated and non-functional in that its original build was over 10 years ago and there was a patch up approximately 4-5 years ago. A rebuild is now a high priority due to its fundamental role in marketing, parent communication, and teacher recruitment. The current website's performance on mobile devices is poor, which is a significant issue as many access the website this way. Rebuild costs are estimated at around £8,000 including photography and videogrpahy. There was a suggestion to leverage skilled parents within the school community to reduce costs. However, concerns include ongoing maintenance, hosting, and the robustness of the content management system (CMS). There is a need to consider established website design companies that offer both bespoke and template-based designs. A professional service ensures ongoing support and a robust CMS and the estimated cost is considered reasonable for a bespoke design.

**Cost Savings**: Significant savings have been identified in areas, such as redecorating classrooms and corridors, reducing estimated costs from £105,000 to around £73,000. A decision to purchase refurbished PCs instead of new ones would also cut down on costs. It is aimed to complete the entire school redecoration over the summer and the website redevelopment is to be planned alongside other maintenance projects.

Governors received a number of key documents including the Net Budget Outturn, Budget Estimates Report, Three-Year Plan[[1]](#footnote-1) and Year on Year Comparison[[2]](#footnote-2).

Governors were apprised of contract approvals i.e.: contracts exceeding £20,000 which require prior approval to ensure proper oversight and compliance with financial regulations.

**Cash Balance Management**: It was proposed to place cash balances in accounts that yield higher interest. The strategy includes a mix of easily accessible funds with lower interest and fixed-term deposits with higher interest rates. This ensures that the school’s reserves are managed prudently to maximize returns without compromising liquidity. Historical data shows that the school's cash balance has not dropped below £500,000 in recent years. This provides a buffer to manage unforeseen expenses and ensures financial stability even during turbulent times.

**Pupil Premium and SEND Funding**: The school is currently seeing more Pupil Premium children leaving than joining, indicating a future decrease in this funding, although in recent times it has been rising and the school has had a number of children transferring in. Projections are based on current trends and historical data to ensure accurate forecasting. SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) funding is provided to support students with additional needs. The school forecasts this funding based on current students with SEND statements and anticipated needs of incoming students. Variances within the year are managed through prudent financial planning and regular updates.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the 2024/25 budget and three year plan as circulated and to submit these to the local authority.

**Kidsology Childcare Programme**: Kidsology is the childcare program run by the school, which has historically been challenging to manage. Over the past 14 years, staff turnover and lack of proper incentives have been persistent issues. Initially, the responsibility often fell to a couple of staff who managed the programme without significant incentives to improve staff performance or develop the curriculum. Since restructuring the programme to share the surplus with the two managers, Kidsology has seen significant improvements. Attendance has tripled, indicating increased demand and satisfaction and managers now have a vested interest in the program's success, leading to better staff management and curriculum development. Funds paid as a share of the surplus to the managers are recorded as expenditure. The program employs several staff members and makes various purchases, which are also accounted for as expenditures.

**Parent Fund**: Established just over a year ago, the Parent Fund has generated about £15,000. It is proposed to hold regular fundraising appeals to maximize contributions. The fund is to be set up as a charitable entity to benefit from Gift Aid. Consideration has been given to setting up either a charitable trust or a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)[[3]](#footnote-3). The benefit of a CIO is that whilst it has limited liability for trustees and similar reporting requirements to the Charity Commission, it allows for more flexible fundraising. Governors RESOLVED to choose a CIO model and confirm that the charitable purposes would be set to advance children's education and maintain school buildings. It is proposed to have a mix of school leadership and governors as trustees. A draft governing document has been prepared, based on a successful model from another school fund. It was noted that the three trustees selected would hold a virtual annual meeting to approve the accounts and disbursement back to the school. It was **RESOLVED** to appoint the Headteacher, School Business Manager and Chair of Governors as ex-officio trustees.

In the past, schools like Wimbledon Park received substantial capital grants, around £70,000 to £80,000 annually. These grants have since disappeared, putting financial pressure on schools to find alternative funding sources for capital projects. Whilst faith schools have often relied on diocesan grants, sometimes matched by the schools themselves, this model has been less common in non-faith (maintained) schools. Free Schools have greater flexibility in what they can ask from parents, including mandatory contributions of time or money. Maintained Schools cannot charge mandatory contributions. Fundraising must be voluntary and not appear as compulsory fees. Governors commented that there should be a dedicated page on the website for the school fund, including donation links and updates. Social Media such as Twitter could be leveraged to reach a broader audience and parents could be engaged through WhatsApp groups and other informal channels to gather feedback and maintain interest.

Clearly defining and separating the purposes of different funds can help in making contributions feel more meaningful. For instance, having a specific "Capital Improvements Fund" makes it clear where the money is going. The Parent, Teacher, and Friends Association (PTFA) should focus on community-building activities and events rather than being the primary source of school funding. This can include organizing social events and activities that foster a sense of community. The school fund should be targeted at essential maintenance and improvements. Providing regular updates on how the funds are being used can help maintain transparency and trust. This can be done through newsletters, dedicated sections on the school website, and social media updates. Encouraging parents to set up direct debit contributions can ensure a steady flow of funds. This method is often preferable as it provides a reliable source of income that the school can plan around. Showing photos and providing updates on completed projects funded by these contributions can help reinforce the value of ongoing donations.

**Approval of Summer Decorative Works:** Governors **RESOLVED** to approve a quote from Shreeve and Sons (copy on file) for the school redecoration during the summer holiday. This includes all classrooms, nursery, corridors, some group/office spaces and disabled WCs totalling 59 spaces. Companies have been approached companies that are local, registered with the Painting & Decorating Association and that have good recommendations (Check-a-Trade; Google).

**Lloyds Bank Charge Cards:** Governors **RESOLVED** to approve the school to move from using a school Debit Card to a Lloyds Bank Corporate Card with a limit on each card being set at £1500 as suggested by the school.

1. **COMPLIANCE**

**GIAS Updates and School Website Compliance**: GIAS updates are current and are prompted every three months. The school meets statutory requirements for website compliance, verified by a recent audit.

1. **STAFFING UPDATE AND EXIT INTERVIEWS**

Seven teachers are leaving this year, with various reasons such as lifestyle changes, relocations, and promotions. It was suggested to advance exit interviews to gather feedback before the next meeting in July. An exit interview questionnaire is available. It was RESOLVED that SR, KG and MW conduct the exit interviews.

Five new teachers are needed; two positions are filled, and two candidates are pending. Eight interviews are scheduled by the end of May with a strong pool of candidates. The school is confident in finding and supporting good teachers. It is planned to announce new staff once recruitment is complete. Consideration is to be given to publish class lists ahead of reports to reduce anxiety among students and parents.

1. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Wimbledon Park[[4]](#footnote-4)** – 2 July

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

Chair of Governors

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

1. Although not mandatory, this plan provides a forward-looking view of the school's financial situation. It helps in long-term strategic planning and ensures the school can sustain its operations and investments over time. Key components include projected income, expenditure, and major financial commitments. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This document tracks the changes in the school's funding and expenditure over the past decade. It highlights trends such as increases in budget, changes in staffing costs, and shifts in non-pay expenditure and is useful for contextualizing current financial decisions and understanding historical financial patterns. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A CIO is designed for not-for-profit organizations and supports their growth, making it a logical choice for the school’s charitable fund. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. All meetings at 6.30pm [↑](#footnote-ref-4)