Diptford School – Minutes of School Ethos Committee meeting, 31 January 2022 (Adopted 7 March 2022)

Present: Roger Knight (chair), Jodie Talbot, Rebecca Filtness, Lucy Carrol,

Apologies: Janet Watts, Helen Price, Rev David Sayle

1. Roger welcomed those present to the meeting. Notwithstanding the lower than usual attendance (the meeting had been rescheduled at short notice), it was agreed to continue with the meeting. It was noted that probably there would not be much to report given the difficulties posed by Covid since the beginning of term. On behalf of the Committee Roger congratulated Jodie on the news of her pregnancy; whilst everybody would be sad that she’d be away from the School, equally everybody is delighted for her

Previous minutes

2**.** The draft minutes of the previous meeting of 6 December 2021 were reviewed and adopted.

Matters arising

3. Because of the Plan B Covid restrictions, the difficult decision had been made to abandon the plans for parents to attend the carol concert and to go on-line with the event. Jodie reported that parents had seemingly accepted the decision readily. One positive was that it had been possible to share the link with, eg, grandparents and thus the audience had been broadened.

4. The latest news from SIAMS and the Diocese is that inspections will not recommence until 28 February and it is by no means certain that the School will be subject to inspection in the current academic year. It could easily slip into the first term of the next academic year. Jodie noted that this is frustrating given the thinking and effort that has gone into preparation; it will be a challenge to ‘keep fresh’. There was discussion of the particular difficulty of Georgia moving on within the Trust to further her career and Jodie going on maternity leave. Jodie noted that Ali will continue in her role, that Kate (Georgia’s replacement and an experienced teacher) will pick up Georgia’s role and that between them Ali and Kate will be asked to take on Jodie’s role; she and Georgia will be doing their utmost to provide an effective handover. Jodie believes that the SEF is in a good place; Becca suggested that a review schedule could be utilised to ensure that appropriate updates are not missed.

5. It had been intended that early in this term and further to Georgia’s presentation at the previous meeting members of this committee would be able to interact with the PEGS and in particular to attend one of their briefing meetings. Jodie noted that because of the Covid issues and in particular the number of absences it hadn’t been possible to arrange meetings so far this term. As Kate picks up responsibility hopefully it will be possible to do something.

6. As to premises, the windows in the main building have been replaced and the pre-school canopy has been installed; both are looking good. Roger noted that FODS fundraising efforts are now turning to the outdoor seating area and noted that a plan and estimated cost would be helpful. Also, with additional funds donated by Totnes Rotary orders are being placed for playground games equipment. No progress has been made in relation to repainting the lines in the playground and it was agreed that Roger would contact the Trust’s Business Manager to see if he had a preferred supplier from whom a quote could be obtained.

Jodie’s ‘Top of Mind’

7. Roger surmised that staffing must be top of Jodie’s mind currently. Jodie said that whilst it’s sad that Georgia is moving on it is a fantastic opportunity for her and Jodie is excited at the prospect of Kate replacing Georgia. Kate is an experienced teacher who has started to get to know the children whist here on supply. The plan is for her to assume the safeguarding lead and senior teacher roles. As for the Head role, Jodie is aware that the Trust is reviewing options but believes that there are no definite plans in place as yet. Also, class structures may need revision depending upon the final Reception intake for September. Although the application deadline has passed final numbers will not be known until April, although Jodie believes that the position is healthy. She said that if the School is required to go beyond PAN it would be able to do so and she would wish it to do so. On both fronts things should be clear around Easter.

8. As for the pre-school, demand is less clear, dependent upon three year old numbers. Currently there are not many but this is always the case at this stage. Lucy asked about the wrap-around offer for pre-school, saying she’d heard some parents remarking that it was no longer being offered. Jodie said that this applies to three year olds where the offer depends upon demand and financial viability; it is not worthwhile offering the service for just one or two children. In discussion it was noted that when the younger children become four they can join the main wrap-around offering from Premier; they do not have to have progressed to Reception. It was thought that this might not be clear to parents and that the whole pre-school offering might be more attractive if parents were aware of this. Jodie will put out an email and possibly this might be followed up in the Little Dippers WhatsApp group.

Parental feedback, questions

9. Roger referred to an email from a parent that he had forwarded to Jodie that morning concerning drop off times and whether children could be left earlier. Jodie said that after the upcoming half-term break she plans to revert to pre Covid timings. In addition she proposes to offer that parents can drop off pre-schoolers at the main drop-off time of 8.45-8.50 (but are not obliged to do so) although pre-school will not start until 9.05. Because Teresa’s and Paula’s day does not start until 9.05 there will be a nominal charge of GBP1 for this. In addition the pre-school pick-up time will be aligned with the main school, lengthening the pre-school day (without charge). By doing this Jodie hopes both to help parents and to address the sometimes chaotic and dangerous car situation in the lane at pick-up. Hawks will still be released from the bottom gate but everybody else from the top gate.

10. Becca asked (on behalf of another parent) whether parents could wait inside the gate in the pre-school play area. Jodie said that for a number of reasons she prefers not to revert to this practice. The pre-school cohort is larger now and with activities outside continuing it becomes difficult to manage. Also she has noticed that, without the parents, the children’s self-confidence has increased.

11. Roger said that he thought the question about early drop-off had been in relation to older children and whether they could be dropped off at, say, 8.40. It was noted that children can be dropped off to the breakfast club if parents are looking for an early get-away. But from 8.30 teachers are preparing lessons and not available to be on the gate or supervising the playground. Whilst some parents may remember fondly and wish to recommence meeting up in the playground before start time, Jodie says there can be no return to this. Jodie or another teacher will be on the gate from 8.45-8.50 and children will expected to be at their table ready to start the school day at 9.00. This is a positive development to have come out of Covid, and again the confidence of the children going into the School has been enhanced.

12. Jodie will be issuing a letter explaining these changes, and it was agreed that this clarification and related rationale would be useful.

Other matters

13. Jodie reported that the intention is to hold the upcoming parents’ evenings face-to-face, although an online alternative will be available, on a different day for logistical reasons.

14. Jodie noted further that Rev David had suggested to her the inclusion in the weekly newsletter of an RE/CW Update. This was considered a good idea and Jodie will progress.

FODS and Community thoughts

17. Roger reported briefly. The mince pie event had gone well he thought. It had been good to have the Totnes Rotary in attendance and good also to see some people from the village, who he understood had spoken with Jodie. The Quiz, although having to be moved online, had also been a success and had raised good funds.

18. Lucy noted that there will be another meeting of the committee arranging the village’s jubilee celebrations shortly and that Sophie Pritchard will be representing the School. This is a Village event not the School’s although the School would like to be an important part of the planning and preparation.

Roger Knight