Diptford School – Minutes of School Committee meeting, 7 May 2019 (DRAFT)

Present: Roger Knight (chair), Lizzie Lethbridge (Head), Natalie Siddons, Helen Price, Louise Lethbridge, Carole Partridge, Laura Bell, Matt Matthew (Link Academy Trust Business Manager)

1. Apologies were received from Jo Palmer, Claire Moorman and David Sayle

2. The draft minutes of the previous meeting of 12 March had been distributed only shortly before this meeting and accordingly it was agreed that they would be adopted only once members had had an appropriate period to review (by 12 May). Matters arising would be covered by the agenda.

Head of School Report

3. Lizzie’s Head of School report is attached at the end of these minutes. Roger had advised Lizzie in advance of a number of matters being discussed by parents and her report covered many of these. The report prompted discussion in a number of areas, including in particular:

a) Class structures and staffing for the 2019/20 academic year have now been advised to parents. Recruitment of appropriate maternity cover for Natalie is commencing. Ms Churchwood will assume Natalie’s senior teacher role. Mrs Sedgebeer and Mrs Goshawk will provide continuity for the (future) year 2 and 3 children in support of the new teacher.

b) In relation to uniforms, the teaching staff have become increasingly concerned that the School’s policy is not being adhered to and also consider it inappropriate for boys and girls to be differently attired – hence the message reminding parents of policy. The intention is to phase in a standard colour over several years as new children, and their parents, join the School. Existing parents are not expected to change existing arrangements. Clarification will be issued. [Lizzie issued a note of clarification to parents, 9 May.]

c) Some Hawks parents have expressed concern about forest school and PE provision in the current half term. Lizzie explained that the revised arrangements are short-term only, to facilitate the imminent SATS tests. The overall weekly duration of such activity is broadly unchanged but some of it has been ‘rebranded’ as ‘Outdoor Learning’ because ‘Forest School’ can only be led by a qualified forest school practitioner. Lizzie acknowledged that the communication of this could have been better and has already spoken personally with some of the Hawks parents.

d) Lizzie explained briefly her thoughts as to how the School Committee might support SIAMS/ethos monitoring, in particular from the start of the next school year. She said that she thought that this would be a constructive and interesting role for the committee. Roger asked if members would like consider this, and the committee’s terms of reference more generally, before the next meeting. He also asked if Lizzie could introduce him to the Chair of the Harbertonford Ethos Committee (its school committee equivalent) so he could tap in to their experience of supporting the SIAMS initiative. [Lizzie has subsequently passed Roger’s contact details to Cat Radford, chair of the Harbertonford Ethos Committee.]

In response to Lizzie’s question, Roger confirmed that there had been an election of School Committee parent representatives at the beginning of the current school year; insufficient volunteers had come forward to require voting. According to the current terms of reference members serve for two years. However the increased focus on the school’s ethos programme might provide a reason to refresh the committee’s membership earlier.

e) Lizzie outlined her tentative plans for a Diptfest event, separate from the school production, later in the summer term, intended to showcase the musical talents of pupils. Hers plans will be developed for further discussion. Hopefully FODS will be able to support the event by organising refreshments.

f) Following Broadhempston Primary School’s decision to join Link Trust, a letter will go out soon to parents inviting volunteers to act as parent governors for some of the Trust’s schools, including Diptford. The letter will explain the governors’ role and responsibilities; each school will require a minimum of one parent governor.

g) In relation to upcoming trips and events, Lizzie and Natalie confirmed that all health and safety and related checks have been carried out.

h) Lizzie, who was required to leave the meeting midway through, explained that neither she nor anybody else at Diptford had been involved in the decision in relation to lunch provision and that she would leave Matt to speak to this. However she noted that, in her view, the meals prepared at Harbertonford are of a good standard; Natalie endorsed this.

Parental dialogue

4. During discussion of Lizzie’s report, both Lizzie and Natalie referred to the frustration increasingly felt by the Staff as to the scope and often negative tone of dialogue with parents. They consider that they are continually being called upon to justify decisions and that their personal and professional judgement is being called into question unnecessarily.

The Committee members stressed that there is nothing but positive comment in relation to educational matters but acknowledged that communications had been difficult and that some recent comments had been unnecessary. They also noted that some recent communications from the School might have been clearer. [Subsequent to the meeting Roger received highly positive feedback from a Year 6 parent concerning the teaching, which he was able to pass on.]

Lizzie and Matt both noted that seemingly parents at Diptford raise more issues and hold stronger views than those at the Trust’s other schools. The meeting surmised that perhaps, for historic reasons, there is insufficient awareness among the Diptford parents of the differences between the academy system and the former State system, and the respective roles and responsibilities of the Trust and its directors, the schools and the governors. Whilst parents can expect to have a say, this has to be within the proper framework and they cannot expect to be involved in every decision affecting the School and their children. Natalie commented upon the many good things that the Trust has brought for both teachers and pupils and how this seems not to be appreciated.

The Committee would like to see more constructive dialogue and the re-establishment of trust between parents and the staff. It was suggested that perhaps an open forum might help, where parents could meet and ask questions of representatives of the Trust. Lizzie and Matt agreed to give this some consideration but noted that, if such an event is held, parental attendance must be better than for the meeting held before Easter with the Trust’s CEO. Roger said that if it is agreed to hold a forum perhaps class representatives could canvas parent groups to try to establish the most convenient timing.

Lunch provision

5. Matt explained the background to the decision to cease cooking at Diptford and explained how the new arrangements will operate, amplifying his recent note to parents. There was a constructive discussion during which the following points were made:

a) Lunch provision is managed and contracts are let at Trust level, for reasons of cost efficiency. The provider, Devon Norse, remains unchanged for the time being.

b) Costs are allocated to the participating schools equitably.

c) Principally because of low pupil uptake, lunch provision at Diptford is running at a loss of GBP several thousands per year. These losses are absorbed within the school’s operating budget directly reducing the funds available for teaching.

d) As a consequence there has been financial pressure for a change for a number of years. This has been resisted, in recognition of the other significant changes undergone at Diptford over recent years.

e) Adjusting the content of meals, eg eliminating desserts, has insignificant financial impact.

f) A number of alternatives have been considered. The only practicable, and potentially the most cost effective, alternative is to prepare the meals offsite and bring them to Diptford in batches for serving. This model is well tested. Harbertonford has been selected to minimise the time for transportation to Diptford.

g) Menus and the ingredients will be unchanged. Meals at Harbertonford are well regarded.

h) High quality containers are being used for transportation, to minimise deterioration and heat loss.

i) The prices to parents at Diptford and at Harbertonford will be the same.

j) Financial savings will revert to Diptford in their entirety.

k) The revised provision will be monitored closely and reviewed as necessary

k) It is Matt’s understanding that Mark was to be offered a role at Harbertonford to assist in the preparation of the meals. It is not clear that this has been actioned by Devon Norse; Matt will follow up.

Matt acknowledged the disappointment at the decision, which is well understood, but stressed that the decision has been taken in the best interests of the School and its pupils.

FODS Update

7. Laura noted that FODS continue to hold funds for various initiatives, a new stage, the proposed art/community space and for the library. In addition there is a small residual of the monies donated specifically for the completion of the early learning space. Laura will check the provisions of the relevant grants and will liaise with Lizzie to ensure that any conditions, eg as to the timing of spend, are met. Spend on materials for the mosaic project are likely to be eligible spend for the arts/community grant. Laura noted that a parent had offered to assist with the stage work and she will follow up on this with Lizzie.

It was suggested that some of the residual early learning space monies might be used to re-instate the sails that were taken down to allow the new build. Matt suggested that the contractors who removed the sails be invited to quote for their reinstallation.

FODS general funds are stretched and it is more and more difficult to raise these, with perhaps a degree of parent donor fatigue creeping in. Matt outlined assistance that people at Trust level might provide in targeting grant funding and pointed to the successes of other schools, whilst also acknowledging the huge effort involved for the new Early Learning Space and the significant contribution made by FODS recently. He suggested that Laura talk with the chair of the PTA at Landscove School, which has considerable success in the past couple of years in attracting grant monies

Parish Hall Update

8. Neither Helen nor Carole had been able to attend the last Hall Committee meeting. It was noted that although it had been understood that arrangements for deep clean had been agreed between Devon Norsk and the Hall Committee issues remain as cleanliness. Matt reported his understanding that negotiations for a revised contract between the School and the Hall Committee are concluding.

Engaging the Community

9. Attendance from the village at the recent Diptford Arms event had been disappointing, especially in comparison with the previous event, despite a big effort to drop leaflets.

Roger reported that anonymous donations had been received from members of the community to allow work to be done to cut back the rogue tree that had been threatening the Magnolia tree in the playground. A note of thanks from the School will appear in the magazine.

Any Other Business

10. Matt asked about the toddler group that meets in the Hall and the meeting discussed ways of strengthening links between the group and the School. It was suggested that, perhaps weekly, the toddlers be invited into the School to mix with the Pre-schoolers. Natalie will consider the possibilities.

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**School Committee Meeting – 7.5.19**

**Head’s report – Lizzie Lethbridge**

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| **Pupil Numbers per year group** | |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Summer term 2019 | | Nursery | 15 | | Reception | 8 | | Year 1 | 8 | | Year 2 | 14 | | Year 3 | 9 | | Year 4 | 2 | | Year 5 | 9 | | Year 6 | 12 | | Total: | 62+15 = 75 |   Currently 11 pupils for Reception in September. Others still possible.  Numbers are stable. |
| **Uniform** | The reminder about uniform went out because a lot of variance had crept in. On looking at the policy, I also wanted to address how, currently, girls and boys are expected to wear different colours which is not appropriate. So, the plan is for grey to be phased in over time to and will affect only the information for new parents/anyone needing to buy new. In the meantime, navy or grey is fine and completely acceptable. Pupils are only challenged about uniform if it is inappropriate, e.g.  bright colours, bright trainers, etc; and then it is done in a sensitive manner. |
| **Hawks/Kingfishers forest school** | Hawks 'official' forest school is starting after half term but the class will be having Outdoor Learning with Miss Harvey every Monday this half term to ensure they will still be getting the same outdoor provision.  Their Outdoor Learning this half term will involve using the school grounds and forest school site in a similar way and the children will love the addition of orienteering activities that are planned. We recognise how hard they have worked this year and how beneficial outdoor learning is. This was a change to ensure we could encompass the SATs next week amongst other things. Apologies for any differences in info between emails and newsletter. |
| **School structure** | Natalie's maternity leave has been advertised.  Mrs Churchward is very experienced in Early Years/KS1 and is the best person to go into that class and will step up into the ‘senior teacher’ role for the duration of Mrs Siddons’ leave.  Mrs Gilby is a very safe pair of hands in KS2 and consistency is paramount for this year group.  The new Y2/3 class will be well supported and Mrs Sedgebeer will provide some consistency.  I will of course endeavour to find the best person we can and ensure continuity/high standards/nurture are at the forefront of all of our minds when going through the process.  This is really positive for Mrs Siddons. |
| **SIAMs and school committee purpose** | New reps – consider new members.  A primary purpose of this committee should be to monitor the ethos and Christian Distinctiveness of the school. I would like the SC to be part of the monitoring of school ethos and collective worship in Sept.  I would like to invite them to come on a 'learning walk' with me to shape their understanding of what makes us 'distinctly Christian' and how this links with our multi-faith and inclusive approach, e.g with our values and our ethos, etc.  It has been a really interesting process at Harbertonford and one I think the SC will enjoy. |
| **Diptfest** | All of the classes are preparing something to perform.  Children who have lessons/talents in musical areas will perform as a group and/or individuals and Steve/Petya/Angela will support this through their lessons.  Any child is invited to perform and have to ‘sign up’ with a well prepared performance!  I am hoping the SC/PTFA can support with some kind of refreshments or similar for the intermission/after. A date will be coming out soon. |
| **Events, trips, visits** | Coming up:   * Healthy Living Week incorporating Sports Day – 23rd May 2019 * Adrenaline Quarry and Ski Center (all appropriate checks and measures have of course been taken). * SATs week 13th May – all Y6 pupils expected to be in school. SATs breakfast from 8.30am. * Phonics screening 10th June – all Y1 and 2 pupils expected to be in school * Y5/6 residential and Y3/4 residential. |
| **School meals** | I hope to reassure parents that Helen (the cook at Harbertonford) is excellent.  Her meals are exceptional and she really goes the extra mile.  It means that more budget can go to the children and it is likely that there will be very little difference for pupils.  Mr Matthew is attending the meeting and can answer questions. |