Diptford School – Minutes of School Ethos Committee meeting, 6 December 2021 (adopted 31 January 2022)

Present: Roger Knight (chair), Jodie Talbot, Helen Price, Rebecca Fitness, Lucy Carrol, Rev David Sayle

Apologies: Janet Watts

In attendance (part): Georgia Gilbey

1. Roger welcomed everybody to the meeting and noted that Georgia would join the meeting to discuss collective worship arrangements and the Pupils Ethos Group (the PEG).

Previous minutes

2**.** The draft minutes of the previous meeting of 4 November 2021 were reviewed and adopted.

Matters arising

3. The Open Day, for current and prospective new parents, had taken place on 24 November as planned. Helen reported how enthused her daughter (Year 6 and a PEG member) had been after school that day as a result of her involvement in welcoming parents and showing them around. Jodie said that the involvement of the children had been a feature of the afternoon which she judged a huge success, so much so that a second Open Day may be held during the following term She noted that there is significant interest in places in the School for the September 22 Reception intake and for the pre-school.

4. Jodie cautioned that, despite this demand, final intake figures for September will not be known for some time pending the County Admissions process although she remains optimistic about higher numbers, which will increase the School’s funding. Increased numbers may also result in revised class structures and a requirement for more TA support, but this all remains to be worked through when numbers are clearer. The Committee noted that with this success parents might need to be more flexible concerning their expectations around class structures, with changes year-on-year possible because of relative year group sizes.

5. The Committee acknowledged the efforts that have been put in by the Staff, supported by the Trust and by parents, over the past few years to bring about this upturn, and congratulated Jodie and the current staff on the success of these efforts generally and the Open Day in particular.

6. Rev David confirmed that he was happy with the proposed arrangements for the Christmas concerts in the Church, developed in conjunction with Jodie. Helen reported that she was not aware of any disquiet concerning the arrangements from the group of parents that had had concerns about Covid arrangements earlier in the term, and Jodie noted that every family had applied for at least one parent ticket to attend one of the two performances.

Jodie’s ‘Top of Mind’

7. Jodie believes the School to be in a good place approaching the end of term. However, in addition to continued Covid vigilance, she noted that she and her staff are surprised not to have heard yet from SIAMS. A visit had been expected this term, especially given the School was understood to be near the top of the list at the time of the first lock-down. All that has been said is ‘this academic year’ but the expectation was earlier rather than later. The wait is beginning to bring its own pressures for staff although Jodie believes the School to be well prepared for a visit. The PEG is strong and the school is back in church weekly. Her own priority for the new term will be to get around and to observe more lessons.

8. The Committee noted that with most families attending a concert performance in the church, which will be a collective worship event albeit not a typical one, this might provide an opportunity to obtain feedback from parents concerning collective worship. Rev David, whilst acknowledging the different nature of these concerts, suggested that if feedback is sought the question to ask might be ‘How did you see this as an act of worship and not a concert?’ The committee discussed the merits of seeking feedback and concluded it could be a useful exercise and Jodie undertook to diary a follow-up note to go out the morning after the day of the concerts. Helen noted that questionnaire methodology adopted for the recent survey of parents concerning the teaching of maths had worked well and Jodie confirmed the same basis would be adopted.

[In the event, because of the worsening Covid situation parental attendance at the concerts was abandoned; no survey was possible.]

9. Jodie noted that the premises are looking good and the School generally looks cared for which is again positive for prospective parents. The parental tidy up days are working well. Lucy noted that the installation of the pre-school canopy is scheduled to commence on 20 December and Jodie reported that the windows in the library and in the dippers classroom are to be replaced commencing on 17 December. A huge amount will have been achieved in a short period of time.

Committee interaction with PEG members, Collective Worship

10. Before Georgia joined the meeting to discuss collective worship and the PEG, Roger asked Becca to share her experience of observing a collective worship event shortly after the previous committee meeting. Becca reported that her attendance had been a good experience. In advance she hadn’t expected the level of engagement from the children that she observed. It was good to see how much they were involved and much they ‘got it’. She considered it good how Georgia, leading the event, had offered different things to different age groups, so that all ages were involved and gained from the experience. Even those who don’t normally attend had attended, and knew when and when not to participate. The event had been highly inclusive. All-in-all attendance had been enjoyable and Becca recommended that others attend similar events; Lucy reported that she would be attending soon. Jodie was pleased to have received the feedback and said that this is how collective worship is intended to be.

11. Georgia joined the meeting to explain about the PEG activities and more about CW, for which she is the School lead. Until recently she has been leading all CW activity herself but Sophie Prichard and Ali Read are now able to share that load within Georgia’s plans and she has had more time to focus on the PEG effort. They are an enthusiastic group of elected class representatives who under Georgia’s direction also assist in CW and in taking messages back to the classrooms, for example in deciding how to implement various initiatives, such as the random acts of kindness. Georgia has in particular been helping to develop the PEG’s understanding of some SIAMS considerations and of the School’s values – not just what they are but where they come from and how they were developed.

12. Roger referred to Becca’s feedback on her observation of CW and how inclusive and participative it had been. Georgia explained that CW doesn’t always start with a bible reading, in order to make it more accessible to all – and that she aims for interaction, with some of the older PEG members leading. We asked how we might help, conscious that we don’t wish to hinder. Could our presence be helpful? Georgia is happy for parents to come into CW, and also Events, to share these.

13. Georgia’s sessions with PEG are now scheduled so as not to eat into their lunch and break times. Currently she is meeting with PEG members on Wednesdays (early afternoons) and committee members would be welcome to attend. We will try to do so in the new term.

14. Rev David leads CW weekly on Tuesdays in the church and he sees the older children helping the younger ones. He said it would be helpful for him to receive more detail of the School’s overall CW themes for him to be able to put his topic into a wider context, and Georgia will share with David her weekly plans.

15. Lucy asked whether there are things that other schools are doing which we might be doing at Diptford. Georgia and Jodie, and David with his knowledge of Harbertonford, thought not, although Georgia thought that the children might find the spirituality aspects of the SIAMS programme more of a challenge.

16. The committee thanked Georgia for her time and her insights.

FODS and Community thoughts

17. Roger noted that the disco event had done well; it had been enjoyed by the children and participation had been good. The Christmas Card and Tea Towel projects looked likely to have raised more than sufficient funds to cover the costs of the Christmas Crafts Day. A Mince Pie event is scheduled for the day following the Craft Day, in the playground (to be cancelled if wet because of Covid concerns if brought indoors). Invitations for the village will go home in school bags for sharing with neighbours.

18. The School’s and FODS’s participation in the Advent Fair had been well received, with an appreciation of the Artwork display noted in both the Parish magazine and the Totnes Times. FODS had taken a table and for once had returned a, small, surplus. It was agreed that, with the Hall Committee’s permission, the School should maintain an artwork display.

19. Lucy updated the committee on the Diptford Jubilee Celebration plans and noted that early in the New Year both the school and FODS will need to consider how they will participate. It was noted that the timing (which obviously we cannot influence), towards the end of an extended summer half term break could be problematic for many families.

Parental feedback and questions

20. There was no parental feedback, nor any questions, to discuss.

Any other business

21. Helen asked about the lines in the playground, noting that they require repainting. This is apparently something that would be a summer project, school budget permitting. The committee considered that it would be good to have this done in advance of the summer term and Lucy will contact the Trust business manager who has been helpful with the other initiatives. At the same time an estimate for the work will be obtained, and Roger will see if FODS funds might be available if there is no immediate school budget. A fence has fallen near to the Hall and Jo will check this out.

22. Helen noted that she has been in contact with the Trust business manager concerning the solar panels proposal. He has two quotes but a third is required and Helen will organise this with Guy Gilmore of Good Heat Co (from just outside the village).

23. Lucy reported that she had met the SW Head of the BCC and the Lord Lieutenant of Devon and had learnt of interest in rural school initiatives from both, and the availability of grant funding. She will follow up.

Roger Knight