Diptford School – Minutes of School Ethos Committee meeting, 7 March 2022 (Adopted 11 July 2022)

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

Apologies: Janet Watts, Helen Price, Rev David Sayle

In attendance: Robin Tugwell, Sophie Pritchard

1. Roger welcomed those present to the meeting, with a special welcome to Robin and Sophie - Robin in his capacity as a newly appointed Foundation governor for the Totnes local governing board for Link Academy and Sophie who has assumed some of Georgia’s responsibilities around the PEGS group and Collective Worship.

2. Committee members introduced themselves to Robin and he explained his background and outlined his responsibilities as a Foundation governor. Robin is a church organist within the Dartmouth Parish. Some years previously he had been organist at Diptford church. As Foundation governor he provides the link between the Church and the School and his principal interest is in seeing that the Church’s values are followed at the School. This responsibility will extend to other CoE LINK schools in the Totnes area but, in anticipation of the SIAMS inspection, Robin’s initial focus is upon Diptford. He intends to fulfil his responsibility, and has already started, by visiting the School and attending meetings and collective worship sessions and by observing class room activities.

Previous minutes

3**.** The draft minutes of the previous meeting of 31 January 2022 were reviewed and adopted.

Matters arising

4. Quotations are in the process of being obtained for repainting the lines in the playground. Roger reported that FODS had discussed this matter and are strongly of the view that this is a school maintenance issue to be met out of the school budget and not really something for FODS. Nonetheless, depending upon the quotations FODS would be prepared to discuss this further with LINK’s Business Manager

5. Further to the discussion on school timings and drop-off and pick-up times, Jodie had issued a note to parents. Jodie believes that the revised arrangements are working well and that the risk to children from the cars arriving and leaving is reduced; in addition the teachers have an additional ten minutes of preparation time.

6. This led to discussion of a second note to parents from Jodie, concerning after school clubs and an apparent drop-off in demand and attendance which is threatening to render some clubs uneconomic. We discussed the pricing of the clubs and affordability to different groups of parents, the risks to the school of not providing this service, and the range of activities offered – are the clubs overly focused on sporting activities, for example would something like a Lego club be popular – the yoga and meditation had been popular. It was agreed that continued provision is very important, that it had been sensible for Jodie to expose this issue to the parents and that feedback should be awaited and would prove beneficial.

7. The parents’ evenings had gone well, and it had been good to get back to face-to-face dialogue. Pre-school parents’ sessions are planned for the following week.

Jodie’s ‘Top of Mind’

8. Top of mind has been the challenge of juggling classes and accommodation in response to the storm damage. The Kingfishers and Hawks classes have been directly impacted. The challenge has been exacerbated by staff illnesses and staff changes with Kate replacing Georgia, and by further rain damage. Jodie and Sophie (whose class is probably the most affected) reported that the children have demonstrated incredible resilience through the process. The Village Hall has been booked out for the remainder of the term through to the Easter break allowing for some definite planning and providing some certainty. Jodie reported that the matter is with the insurers and noted further that LINK’s Business Manager, Matt, has been very supportive. We speculated on what might happen longer term as to repair or replacement, and noted that this is outwith the school’s control.

9. Staffing and class structures remain under review and Teresa’s decision to stand down as pre-school lead from Easter is another factor to be addressed.

SIAMS matters

10. Roger surmised that, with all of the other current challenges, notice of a SIAMS visit would be unwelcome just now. On the contrary Jodie believes that the school is as well prepared as it can be and she would welcome the inspection sooner rather than later, before she goes on maternity leave.

11. Jodie had passed to Roger an update of the two–page SIAMS readiness summary which Roger had circulated to committee members. Roger had received feedback from Helen who considered it a good document. Becca and Lucy had no comments. Roger said that, for him, the summary dealt very well with SIAMS aspects but that it didn’t perhaps bring out sufficiently what he, and we he believes, see as the ‘specialness’ of Diptford – the environment, the emphasis on the outdoors, the make-up of its parent base, with professional commuters and yet a strong rural core. The meeting considered that a two pager cannot cover everything and that it provides a good introduction to the detail and that factors such as those Roger had raised would come out from discussion and review of the records. The resilience of the children as discussed in relation to the storm damage is one such illustration.

12. Roger noted that we had previously agreed that we should conduct ‘deep dives’ into the various SIAMS streams. The committee had reviewed Religious Knowledge and Collective Worship in some death and perhaps it was now time, once the school has fully settled down post storm response and Covid, to consider another stream.

Committee interaction with PEG members, Collective worship

13. Roger noted that the committee has expressed the intent to get into the School more to observe Collective Worship and to interact with the PEG members. This has been severely hindered by Covid considerations and restrictions; nonetheless Janet and Lucy visit the school regularly as local governors and Becca has attended sessions, as Robin is beginning to do, whilst Rev David is deeply involved. Jodie is keen for members to visit. She outlined collective worship opportunities, specifically the Monday afternoon sessions, to be led by Ali now, and the Tuesday afternoon sessions in the church led by Rev David; members would be very welcome to observe, in particular to see how the sessions in church differ from those in the classroom. The intention is to hold an Easter service in the church which will be later than normal on a Tuesday afternoon and to which parents will be invited.

14. Becca asked about the monthly Friday Fun sessions led in the Village hall by Rev David. Jodie explained that these events (which had been suspended because of the uptick in Covid but which she now hopes to recommence) are intended to go as bit further; Rev David invites the community into these sessions which are intended to be inter-generational and Jodie encouraged members to experience them and encourage other parents to do so. There was some discussion as to how these are promoted to the village.

15. Roger said that it had been good to see so many children from the School at the previous day’s Lego Church event; Becca and Lucy agreed that this had been well attended, not just by children from the school, and had been well received. The children had been well behaved and a credit to the School.

16. As to interaction with the PEGS, Jodie is keen for Sophie to have a chance to get to know the members first. She suggested that members of this committee might wish to leave it a couple of weeks and then attend a Thursday afternoon PEGS session, to talk and interact with the class representatives.

17 Members of the committee will coordinate availablilities with a view to attending, but not inundating, CW and PEGS sessions between now and Easter.

FODS update, the Village Jubilee celebrations and other community thoughts

18. Roger reported that FODS is relatively quiet currently, planning for the duck race, when proceeds from the sale of cream teas will go towards the cost of the year 5/6 residential trip. Beyond that, thinking has shifted to summer activities, the BBQ and Diptfest. FODS’ fund raising focus has been outdoor seating for the school and with the successful quiz FODS is now probably able to move forward with this project. Possible seating structures have been identified for discussion with Jodie, at not outrageous prices. This will be taken forward with Jodie by the FODS committee.

19. Lucy said that there is little new to report on the arrangements for the Diptford Jubilee celebrations. Sophie has joined the organising committee to represent the School. The School’s focus should now perhaps be on how to assist in the preparation for the event. Ideas were discussed, such as artwork for the Hall, the making of bunting for the event, the sales of commemorative mugs. On the day of celebration itself, the School field will be in use and FODS will lend its bar for the evening (with volunteers being sought for assistance in running the bar). Licensing requirements are being handled by the Village Hall committee and the School has developed plans to prevent unauthorised use of the play equipment to address liability risk.

Parental feedback, questions

20. Becca referred to disappointment on the part of pre-school parents that Teresa is leaving and how Teresa is seen as fundamental to the success of nursery provision. Parents will need to have similar confidence in whoever takes up the lead role. Jodie shares that disappointment and has had discussions with Teresa and understands that she is leaving to do something quite different and not because of any dissatisfaction at Diptford. Equally Jodie sees this as an opportunity; parents may be fearful of a change but as demonstrated previously change can be good; we are sad to see Teresa leave, having been lucky to keep her for so long, but she has identified a great opportunity for herself. Little Dippers is well recognised as fundamental to the success of the School and the need for great care with the recruitment for Teresa’s replacement is well recognised.

Any other business

21. Lucy thanked Sophie for stepping up and taking on new responsibilities. Sophie said how sad it was to see Georgia, her mentor, move on but, again, this is an opportunity for her (Sophie) to experience new things. She is pleased to be able to be a bigger part of the Diptford story.

22. Roger thanked Robin for his attendance and asked him for any observations on the Committee’s discussions. Robin said it had been good to see that everybody’s interest went beyond education to the children’s broader experiences in the environment that is Diptford.

Roger Knight