

## SIR JOHN CASS'S FOUNDATION SCHOOL

### Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing and Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 10 February 2016 at 4:00pm

Membership:	Mr A Wright* Ms A Godas Mr D Williams Deputy H Jones (Chair)* Rev L Jørgensen* Mr T. Wilson (Head)*
In Attendance:	Mr M Paddon – School Business Manager (SBM) Ms C Beaumont Ms H Franek – clerk

Mr T Wilson opened the meeting with a prayer.

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#### Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D Williams, Mr A Mullee, Ms A Godas and Ms S Laney (observer).

#### Declarations by Governors of any personal and pecuniary interests in respect of items on the agenda

There were no declarations of interest. It was noted that not all governors have completed the annual business interests register.

**Action:** the clerk to send business interest forms to governors whose forms have not been received and to forward them to Mr G Watson, School Administrator, for publishing on the website.

#### Dates of the forthcoming meetings

Governors noted the dates of forthcoming meetings.

#### Minutes of the previous meeting (circulated)

The draft public minutes and Part B minutes of the Staffing, Finance and General Purposes meeting held on 12 October 2015 were received and were approved as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

The committee noted that there had been a request for information from Howard Kennedy LLP on the steps that the City of London is taking to safeguard pupils from pollution at the school.

**Action:** the clerk to send the extract of the minutes of 12 October 2015 to Howard Kennedy LLP for item 1: the Air Quality Report.

Page 3, item 2 – Mr Paddon said that parents need to register on SIMS Agora in order to receive automated e-mails and that they can pay fees online. A text facility is not available, however.

Page 5, item 3 - There had been a question about whether the school could have a different consultant from the City of London (CoL) for LCVAP projects. Steve White, Principal Buildings & Development Officer LDBS, has advised that this would be possible in principle but that he would have to approve the consultant. It was possible that the CoL would not be interested in providing this service and it was agreed to continue to use the LDBS consultants.

Page 7, item 9 – replying to a question from the Chair, the Head advised that the Sport Funding Grant was almost completely spent. The school introduced specialist PE teaching a year ago and has joined the Tower Hamlets Sports Foundation among other initiatives.

Page 8, item 10 – the Chair and Mr Paddon had undertaken a health and safety check. This would be reported later in the meeting.

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## **1. Updated Financial Procedures Manual (circulated)**

Mr Paddon, SBM said that the manual had been substantially updated to ensure that the procedures were adequate and would meet the standard for SFVS (Schools Financial Value Standard).

Replying to questions from the committee, Mr Paddon said that the manual is a working document that will be amended to include best practice and to reflect changes as they occur. Some elements would be reviewed constantly and changes would be reported annually to the committee. The manual will be presented for formal approval by the full governing body every year.

The committee asked how governors could be sure that they were fulfilling their financial responsibilities and whether benchmarking had been undertaken. The Head replied that the SBM and he were responsible for ensuring that governors were involved in the financial procedures, as required. There had not been a great deal of benchmarking to date; however, it was an activity listed in the School Improvement Plan.

The Finance Admin Team are required to follow the rules, regulations and procedures within the manual, which has incorporated CoL policy

The committee asked how checks would be made to ensure the procedures were followed; for example that all petty cash payments have been supported by receipts. Mr Paddon said that there had been a major financial review last year. These are undertaken every five years and he will arrange for periodic spot checks to test compliance. There is a policy of "no purchase order, no

payment" and all orders must be placed electronically. The mechanism that is in place is subject to internal checks by the CoL.

The school was 98% compliant in last year's report, which was attributed to one mistake on a purchase order coding. In relation to paying suppliers, the school is aiming to paying more than 97% on time.

**RESOLVED:** to approve the Financial Procedures Manual.

## 2. School Budget (report circulated)

Mr Paddon reported a favourable variance on the budget as the current forecast was for an underspend of approximately £60k at year end. Some of this was explained by the support staff re-structure.

The Family Centre budget at the end of December was overspent mainly due to temporary agency staff cover for absence and annual leave. The need to revise this budget has been discussed with the CoL Early Years Team as at present it makes no provision for certain costs. The outturn last year was similar and £37k was added to last year's budget by the CoL.

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The Chair said that it would have been useful to have had last year's figures for the SJC Family Centre. The Head advised that this budget had not changed from last year and that it is a CoL budget residing with the City. The Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the Family Centre is due for renewal.

The cost of childcare is expensive as the staff to child ratio is very high and the baby room alone costs £80k+ p.a. There are 12 two year olds at a cost of £100k+. The need for the budget to reflect the cost of childcare will be discussed with the CoL at an impending meeting. It was not appropriate for the DSG to fund Family Centre costs, for which there should be a recharge. £120k has been credited to the school's budget and next year it was proposed to move this sum to the Family Centre's budget.

Ms Beaumont advised that the £37k that was contributed to the Family Centre's budget last year would probably not be available this year following the SBR (Service Based Review).

The committee noted the £45k surplus in the school's budget and asked whether the money should be spent rather than added to the reserves. The Head said that extra temporary support has been provided for SEN pupils in Year 2 and a contribution to the refurbishment work, which is in the School Improvement Plan, could be made. There was a case for planning the spend in a measured way and there has been quite stringent cost control this year to obtain as much value as possible from the funds that have been spent.

The committee asked about the 35% variance for energy costs. Mr Paddon explained that the budget was incorrect due to a miscalculation. He had compared the costs for electricity and they were not out of line with other schools'.

There was a question about a re-imbusement made to the private fund. The Head confirmed that the intention was not to use this account; however, donors were unlikely to pay the CoL and in order to receive donations it was sometimes necessary to allow a cheque to be paid into the private fund.

### 3. School Budget Estimates 2016/17 (report circulated)

Mr Paddon presented the draft DSG budget for 2016/17 and early draft budgets for 2017/18 and 2018/19. The Fair Funding Review would also be considered, which could have a significant impact on the school.

For 2016/17, it has been assumed that the budget will be the same as this year. The slight reduction was accounted for by moving some costs to the Cass Family Centre budget. The committee was asked to note the rising teacher costs of 2% to fund a significant increase in pensions.

Following the Fair Funding Review, there is an expectation that the per pupil funding will decrease in local authority areas that have higher levels of funding than others. The paper that had been circulated to the committee modelled reductions in funding of 18% and 48%, i.e. of £379k to more than £1m. It was thought that the median reduction for London schools would be 22%.

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The committee considered whether the reserve fund should be increased to provide a degree of protection against the future. Ms Beaumont advised the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) would come into play over the first few years of Fair Funding and there was an expectation that there would be cushioning in the transitional period.

The Head said that for next year teaching capacity allows for shared teaching and that some budgets could be trimmed. The reserve budget should not need to exceed £150k.

The price of school meals is currently £1.75p per meal and has not changed since 2013; this compares with £1.90p per school meal in Tower Hamlets. The committee was asked to agree to increase the cost by 15p per meal from 1 April 2016, which would raise £4½k p.a. This did not include costings for staff where the take-up is very low.

At present, the ten staff on duty who eat with the children are not charged for a school meal and the Head was keen to continue this arrangement.

Approximately 18% to 20% of the children are eligible for free school meals (FSMs). Almost 100% of dinner money is collected and although inevitably a few do not pay, the level of debt is much improved. There are no penalties imposed by the school for non-payment

The committee considered the recommendations and **AGREED:**

- to increase pupil meal charges by £0.15p, to be effective from 1 April 2016;

- to continue the provision of free school meals to members of staff on duty with children at lunch;
- to authorise the Headteacher to amend the 2016/17 budget to reflect the decisions of the committee for subsequent submission to the governing body;
- to set aside an amount from the school's reserve equivalent to 7.5% of the proposed 2015/16 revenue budget, with any remaining surplus applied to the redevelopment/enhancement of the school.

#### 4. Aged Debt Report for Invoice Income (circulated)

The committee was informed that arrears for invoiced services provided by the school and Family Centre, not including dinner money debt, amounted to approximately £50k. This was a reduction from £63k at the end of October 2015, but there was still a lot of work to do.

Replying to questions, the SBM said that there was also £10k of dinner debt. There was £19k owing mostly for support staff salary costs dating back to when the school was in a soft federation arrangement with Christ Church school. Christ Church has indicated that it is looking to clear the remaining balance by the end of the year.

The Head said that most of the debt is current and that when parents do not honour payment plans, the school follows them up. There was a suggestion that withdrawing a service could result in parents paying more promptly and the Head said that consideration would be given to doing this for the Play Centre and Children's Centre unless children were particularly vulnerable, when professional judgement would be exercised. The current level of debt could not be allowed as budgets become more constrained and a warning system would be introduced for earlier action to be taken.

At present, the school writes to parents regularly regarding non-payment and the CoL debt recovery/account receivable system becomes involved and sends a series of reminder letters. The school then decides whether the matter should be taken further.

The committee asked whether e-mail prompts could be sent for sums outstanding for more than two weeks. This would not be possible as different ICT systems are involved.

Following the changes to a job description for a member of the office staff, there will be more capacity to concentrate on finance and the intention is for bills to be sent in advance of a service being received.

The SBM advised that this format of reporting debt to the committee would be a standing item on the agenda.

## 5. School Catering Report (circulated)

In 2012, the school tendered for the catering contract with a possible extension of two years. The contract was extended by one year last year. The CoL has been looking at catering services across the LA and would prefer for all the contracts to have the same end date. This would result in a reduction in the cost of tendering for services across the City and hopefully would provide for a better outcome for the school. The CoL has therefore recommended that the school extends the contract with Brookwoods to 2018.

The Head said that if it was decided to re-tender now, a consultant would probably be needed. Service delivery has improved and the uptake for meals was once again 100%. The school was not in a position to manage the service direct and there would be benefits from drawing on the resources of the CoL for the new tender process. Furthermore, changing provider now would not reduce staffing costs.

The committee **AGREED** to the extension of the current school catering contract to 31 January 2018, subject to confirmation that it is compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and subject to negotiating similar costs as now.

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## 6. Annual Conditions Survey 2016 (report circulated)

The committee discussed the report from Wilby and Burnett, consultants to the LDBS, for the local authority coordinated voluntary aided programme (LCVAP).

It was noted that some decoration was needed to the external walls at the front of the building, on the Aldgate side and some re-pointing of the façade. However, given the re-development work in the area, this was not the right time for the external work to be undertaken.

It was also noted that some of the basement areas were priorities for improvement. The boilers are 30 years old and it may be necessary to consider using money set aside for replacing them. The Head said that there might be an opportunity to re-open this discussion at the impending tripartite meeting.

*Rev Laura Jørgensen left the meeting at 17:15.*

There is £90k LCVAP funding and the report contained four proposals for allocating this to refurbishing classrooms.

**Action:** priorities for the use of LCVAP funding to be placed on the agenda for the summer term committee meeting (clerk).

The Chair said that the FEC building is applying for planning permission to add another floor and if it is approved, the company may agree to donate money to the school for the playgrounds. There may be other possibilities of

funding from the 4C Hotels Group, which is interested in acquiring property in the area. A future redevelopment to Guinness Trust properties on Mansell Street may be another source of donation.

## 7. Classroom Refurbishments (Capital Bid for 2016)

The committee received the capital bid and initial drawings. This includes stripping back the floor covering to the parquet flooring, installing a teaching wall, new smart boards and IT infrastructure. The greatest changes will be to Years 5 and 6.

The committee asked about the accommodation for the bulge class. The Head said that the class would be located in the current Art Room. There is up to £35k funding for the class from LA that would have to be supported by receipted costs associated with taking the extra pupils. The funding for pupils will be based on the October census.

The Head advised that the kitchen for staff desperately needs attention and consideration should be given to drawing down on reserves for the work to take be undertaken after costs have been obtained.

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**Agreed:** the Chair will discuss delegated authority with the Head for the works to be undertaken during the Easter and summer holidays.

The Chair said that the Aldgate Partnership might agree to give some money to the school. The Head said that he would try to attend the next meeting.

## 8. Infinite Playgrounds (circulated)

The committee received drawings for improvements to the Cass Children and Family Centre playground. The Head reported that the working party had met to discuss the proposals and would be meeting again. Other environments have been looked at and companies have visited and have provided quotes for the work.

The Working Group has decided that the space downstairs should be refreshed. A quote of £50k has been received from an awnings company and the total cost is estimated at £100k.

The cost of improving the upstairs playground is £25k. It will be play zoned for playing sport. Mr Paddon has spoken to companies about supplying a soft multi-use sports surface and quotes are awaited.

An agreement has been reached with Middlesex Street for reduced costs for parking the minibus. Parking on the school site will be phased out to enable the area to be improved from September.

The committee asked about the consequences for lorries coming on to the site. The Head said that there will need to be a space for disabled parking and deliveries.

Action: the Head will arrange for the minutes of the Working Group to be circulated.

## 9. Health and Safety

The Chair and Mr Paddon had undertaken a health and safety check the day before the meeting, which was generally satisfactory. The area to note for hazards was the basement and the maintenance that is needed will be undertaken during half-term. There was also a recommendation to tidy the car park area once the vehicles have been moved.

## 10. Any other business

### School Improvement Plan

The Head said the School Improvement Plan had been rag-rated to indicate the current position. There are a number of actions that have already been completed and they are mostly on track. He drew the committee's attention to some of the priorities in the plan.

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- The Pupil Premium is being used for speech and language support for eligible children in the nursery.
  - The school is using the archives at the City of London, but it is not keen for the arrangement to continue. Consideration therefore needs to be given to how old documents will be stored in future.
  - Temporary parking permits are being issued.
  - A whole school food policy is needed. At present birthdays are celebrated with cake and this may change to a healthier option.

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End of the option section of the meeting.

Signed Laura Johnson Date 27/4/16  
Chair