

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 29th April 2020 at 7.30pm

Present

Rinchen Ato (from 7.50pm), Kay Blayney, Isa Garcia Crestani, Kate Daenke, Eirini Gkouskou, Tandy Harrison, Roger Lilley, Ken Ong (Chair), Alex Pearson (Head), Mitali Peckham and Sue Smith
Clerk: Gwyneth Barton

Governors' challenge highlighted in green

- | | Action |
|---|----------------|
| 1. Welcome and apologies for absence | |
| Ken welcomed everyone to the first virtual meeting of the Governing Body. There were no apologies for absence. | |
| 2. Declarations of interest | |
| There were no declarations of interest. | |
| 3. Amendment to Standing Orders | |
| Governors agreed to add the following text at the end of Section 5 of Standing Orders: | Gwyneth |
| ‘The Governing Body allows remote participation in meetings using video conferencing facilities. Governors must ensure that no other persons are present or can hear the meeting when they are participating remotely.’ | |
| 4. Minutes of 12th February 2020 | |
| The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 12 th February 2020 were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment to Minute 9, Update from Resources Committee, third bullet point: | |
| As Chair of the Resources Committee, Roger would be reviewing the Schools Financial Value Standard financial controls with Sue. | |
| The Schools Financial Value Standard had been reviewed by the Resources Committee at their meeting of 23 rd April 2020. | |
| Governors noted that the meeting of the Governing Body scheduled for 19 th March 2020 had been cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak. | |
| 5. Matters arising from the minutes of 12th February 2020 | |
| Governors agreed that due to the coronavirus outbreak, the matters arising from these minutes were not relevant at present. | |
| 6. Update from Resources Committee | |
| The minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 23 rd April 2020 were received. The Governing Body considered the following documents, which had been discussed by the Committee and circulated to all Governors with the agenda: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schools Financial Value Standard – Ken explained that this was a self-audit of financial processes that the Centre was required to submit to the local authority annually. Governors noted that: | |

- It had been possible to respond to all questions either positively or as not applicable with the exception of one, on whether the Centre had a sustainable three-year financial plan in place. This response to this one was 'in part', with a note on the continuing uncertainty over Government funding for maintained nursery schools after July 2021.
- For the first time this year, the Centre's spending in different areas as a percentage of total expenditure was compared with that of other Cambridgeshire schools and ranked according to a traffic light system. The maintained nursery schools' rankings were very comparable to each other. Homerton's high pupil to teacher ratio was not surprising given the statutory requirement to staff to ratios of 1:4, 1:8 and 1:13, depending on the age of the child. The figure of 34.7 under this heading was not particularly helpful as it was thought not to take into account the Centre's Teaching Assistants. Homerton's spending on teaching resources was relatively low at 0.5%, but did not include recent purchase of IT equipment, and this topic would be considered for future years.
- **Budget report for 2019/20** – Governors noted that:
 - The expected outturn figure for total revenue income for 2019/20 was £936,388, £161,448 more than the £774,940 budgeted at the beginning of the year. This was due in large part to the Centre being fuller than the budget had anticipated, generating additional income from parents for childcare and catering and from the local authority. Additional funding had also been received for SEN and for the Teaching School
 - The expected outturn figure for total revenue expenditure was £881,899, higher than the £804,675 anticipated at the beginning of the year. This was due largely to the higher levels of activity and occupancy.
 - Overall, there was an in-year surplus of £54,489. Added to the revenue carry forward from the previous year, this meant that there was a total revenue carry forward of £290,283.

Governors welcomed this strong position but expressed caution for future years, given the continuing uncertainty over the Government's supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools, which for Homerton was approximately £250,000 a year.

- **Budget proposals for 2020/21** – Governors noted that:
 - It was not possible to predict income in some areas, such as funded 2 year olds and SEN.
 - No substantial changes to expenditure were anticipated for 2020/21. The staffing structure would be largely unchanged, apart from the allocation of 10 additional hours to support children with English as an additional language and the appointment a teacher trainee. Governors noted that this person had previously been working at Homerton as a volunteer. She would follow her EYITT at Bedford University and do her practical training at Homerton.
 - Overall, an end of year deficit of £14,900 was forecast. However, if as in the current year, activity levels were higher than anticipated, there was likely to be a small end of year surplus.

- Ray Byford in Education Finance at the local authority was advising schools not to revise their 2020/21 proposals in light of the coronavirus outbreak, as it was impossible to tell what the impact would be.

Taking this advice into account, Governors agreed unanimously to approve the budget proposals for 2020/21 as circulated with the agenda for submission to the local authority. **Sue**

7. Recommended Addendum to the Safeguarding Policy

Ken explained that this addendum had been prepared nationally to variations to the workings of schools and maintained nursery schools during the coronavirus outbreak.

It was agreed unanimously

To append the addendum to the Centre's existing Safeguarding Policy. **Alex**

Alex noted that the addendum had already been circulated to all Homerton staff and was being used as a working document. In addition:

- Supplementary guidance on safer working practices had just been received
- The Curriculum Committee meeting held the previous day had discussed the need for additional safeguarding protocols for online interactions with families and for a Zoom protocol. Ken thanked Mitali for her prompt work in drafting these.

The documents would be circulated to all Governors by e-mail. **Gwyneth**

8. Headteacher's report

Alex had circulated a written report with the agenda and most Governors had received a further update at either Resources Committee on 23rd April 2020 or Curriculum Committee on 28th April 2020. Alex highlighted a number of key issues:

- a) **Operation of the Centre during the coronavirus outbreak** – Between 2 and 5 children were attending each day. Staff were working on a rota basis to minimise the possible spread of COVID-19. Rooms in use were being cleaned daily with a deep clean every 2.5 days. Six-monthly reviews were being conducted with staff when they came into the Centre.

A small number of staff were self-isolating due to underlying medical conditions. Staff not on rota to work in the Centre were completing on-line training, including training on cybersecurity, and some were working in the allotment and garden. An ARU student had been helping with digging in the allotment.

It was agreed to offer the on-line cybersecurity to Governors, either using the licence already purchased or extending it at a small cost. Gwyneth would send out an e-mail to establish interest. **Gwyneth/Sue**

For children not in the Centre, staff were ringing social care children every 3 days, SEN children weekly and all other families every 2-3 weeks. A range of activities were being provided by e-mail and on-line. These included a weekly activity plan; daily suggestions and stories on Twitter; access for all families to the Easy Peasy app; and circle time by Zoom once a week for each class. Class staff were increasingly helping to deliver these activities and parents were reporting that they and their children really appreciated their input.

On behalf of all Governors, Ken thanked Alex and the staff for their exceptional efforts both to keep the Centre open to those who were eligible and for their innovative outreach work.

- b) **Primary school place offers** – These had now been sent out. Homerton was working to support families who had not received their school of choice, including some who wished to appeal, and a very small number who had not received an offer.
- c) **Homerton places for September** – Offer letters for September had been sent out before the coronavirus outbreak and both the nursery and the Nest were almost full.
- d) **Catering** – No cooked meals were being served at Homerton at present and Dolce was not charging for meals. Homerton’s cook was also one of the cleaners and was continuing to work in the latter capacity. Ken asked Alex to send a note of appreciation to Dolce for not charging, given that nationally, public sector organisations were required to continue to pay for contracts where necessary to support viability of providers, even if services were not being used. **Alex**
- e) **Centre Development Plan** – An updated version had been circulated with the agenda. Most actions were now complete, with a small number ongoing.
- f) **Furloughing of staff** – Governors discussed the Government’s furlough scheme for employees unable to work due to the coronavirus outbreak. Following discussion, Governors agreed that it was not appropriate for Homerton to apply to the Government’s furlough scheme at present.

[This item is covered in more detail in the confidential minutes.]

9. **Update from Curriculum Committee**

The minutes of the Curriculum Committee meeting held on 28th April 2020 were received. In addition to points already covered above, Governors discussed whether there might be a need for more support specifically for parents during the coronavirus outbreak:

- Comments were made that parents as well as children were very grateful for continuing support from Homerton and were themselves benefiting from the phone calls from staff and the Zoom circle times.
- Kay highlighted the range of useful materials available for parents on the CETYS website.
- As SEN Governor, Tandy commented that support for parents took two forms: individual contact with teachers to discuss particular queries or worries about their child; and wider peer support in a more open forum. Both were important during lockdown. Mitali noted that in addition to the regular phone calls, staff were starting to set up Zoom meetings with their key workers for children with SEN.
- Parent Governors confirmed how much they appreciated the support being offered by Homerton to families. They commented that parents’ networks varied between classes and also depended in part on the length of their connection with Homerton – people with a first child at Homerton might know fewer other families than people with subsequent children attending.
- Acknowledging all these comments, staff agreed to consider whether group meetings specifically for parents might be appropriate. **Alex/Mitali**

The next meeting of the Curriculum Committee would take place on 12th June 2020.

10. Policy Review

Governors reconfirmed the following pre-existing policies, subject to dates being rolled forward where necessary: **Alex**

- Health and Safety Policy
- SEND Policy
- Disciplinary Procedure relating to Misconduct for all Employees.

Twitter Policy – Governors also considered the Twitter Policy, which had recently been prepared in response to discussions at previous Governing Body meetings. Governors noted that the Centre’s use of Twitter had changed significantly since the coronavirus outbreak and that it was now one of the Centre’s key tools for keeping in touch with families during lockdown. Use of Twitter had been included in the Curriculum Committee’s discussion of online safeguarding and amendments to the Twitter Policy had been included in the document prepared by Mitali after the meeting setting out additional safeguarding protocols for online interactions with families. The amendments included:

- Allowing staff to ‘like’ tweets to thank families for their comments
- Allowing staff to reply to families’ comments, provided that replies were not private and included the hashtag #Homertonathome
- Enabling staff to use their own hardware to access Homerton’s Twitter account.

As already set out in the main policy, staff had also been reminded not to follow the Homerton Twitter account, as this risked exposing their personal Twitter accounts.

Mitali also noted that Homerton had just set up a Facebook page and was starting to populate this. Some videos already on Twitter could be added to Facebook, but it would be important to check with individual members of staff that they were happy with this.

Rinchen agreed to discuss with Alex and Mitali ways of streamlining Homerton’s use of social media, using tools to populate multiple platforms at the same time. **Rinchen/
Alex/Mitali**

Governors agreed to approve both the main Twitter Policy and the amendments as set out in the additional safeguarding protocols for online interactions with families. **Alex/Mitali**

11. Any other urgent matters

National Governance Association annual survey – Ken encouraged all Governors to complete this survey, which would help the NGA to shape its future priorities. Gwyneth would circulate a link to the survey. **Gwyneth/
All**

12. Date of next meeting

The next Governing Body meeting was currently scheduled for Thursday 9th July 2020 at 7.00pm. **All**

An interim meeting would be arranged if needed urgently, or Alex, Ken as Chair of Governors and Kay and Roger as Committee Chairs could meet, for example to discuss the reopening of the Centre.

The meeting ended at 9.25pm.