

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on Zoom on Monday 8th February 2021 at 7.30pm

Present

Kay Blayney (from 7.50pm), Isa Garcia Crestani (until 8.30pm), Kate Daenke, Sam Garyali, Tandy Harrison, Roger Lilley, Ken Ong (Chair), Mick Patel, Alex Pearson (Head), Mitali Peckham and Sue Smith
Clerk: Gwyneth Barton

Governors' challenge highlighted in green

- | | Action |
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| 1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence | |
| Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Rinchen Ato and Eirini Gkouskou. | |
| 2. Declarations of Interest | |
| There were no declarations of interest. | |
| 3. Minutes of 3rd December 2020 | |
| The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 3 rd December 2020 were approved as a correct record, subject to the correction of 'Tansy' to 'Tandy' Harrison in the list of those present. | |
| 4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 3rd December 2020 | |
| a) Liquid Logic – Governors asked for an update on Liquid Logic, the new system that health, education and social work professionals were now required to use to share information about children with SEND. Alex explained that this was proving easier to use following recent bespoke training sessions. Homerton also had a responsive contact at the local authority who was helping with queries. Governors suggested that other professionals working with children at Homerton who were encountering difficulties with the system could be signposted to the same contact. | Alex |
| b) Ofsted – The local authority had advised at a recent Zoom meeting that Ofsted inspections of 'outstanding' settings were not expected to take place until at least September 2021 and more probably January 2022. | |
| c) Parental consent for information sharing – Governors had previously been advised of a new practice from September 2020, to seek parents' consent for educational information about their child to be shared with the child's next school. Governors had asked what the Centre's position would be if no response were received or if consent were actively withheld. Alex explained that there was no definitive answer on this. If the situation arose, she would speak to parents and explain that the EYFS was a two-year curriculum, meaning that information sharing was important. However, ultimately the EYFS was not statutory education and the decision about information sharing rested with parents. | |
| d) SENCo award – Alex reported that Bernie Cafferkey had passed her SENCo award. Tandy agreed to write to Bernie conveying Governors' congratulations. | Tandy |
| e) Wellbeing – Alex reported that she had attended a day-long course on mental health the previous week. Mitali and Felicity Higginson had also attended training, meaning that there were now three staff recently trained to support wellbeing. | |

5. Parent Governor Reappointment

Kate Daenke's term of office as a parent governor had ended on 2nd February 2021. The local authority had advised that as Homerton was not currently fully open, the Governing Body could if it wished reappoint her for a further three months. Kate confirmed that she was willing to continue. Governors thanked her and confirmed Kate's reappointment until 8th May 2021.

6. Head's Report

Alex briefed Governors on a number of issues.

- a) **Coronavirus update** – The Centre was currently running at 40-50% of capacity. The local authority had recommended operating at 50% and, after inviting preferences from all families, it had been possible to accommodate all those wanting places without exceeding this threshold. A small number of additional families were now wanting to return after half-term and it was expected to be possible also to accommodate them without exceeding the threshold. Key worker children would be prioritised if necessary but it was not thought to be likely to have to turn any families down before schools reopened more fully.

Dolce was providing fortnightly hampers for all children eligible for free school meals who were not in the Centre or were attending for only part of the week, although not all eligible families were taking these up.

The take-up of wraparound care was low and only 7 children were currently expected for the half-term holiday club, meaning that it was likely to run at a small loss, approximately £250.

Children in school were learning about traditional tales and celebrating Chinese New Year with activities including dancing and cooking. Learning was being delivered online for children at home and class staff were also phoning children. Attendance at Zoom meetings was good, with some sessions having 40-45 children.

- b) **Children** – One child had left to move to Australia; one was transferring to Fawcett; and another would be moving to Australia shortly.

Places were being offered for September 2021. Application numbers were high for the 30-hour places and other classes were also filling well, with numbers lowest in South. Overall, numbers were good, especially given that there had been no advertising and that visits were not currently possible. A number of enquiries had been received for children with SEND and staff were working to place these children appropriately.

Alex suggested that it might be appropriate to advertise Homerton on the side of its allotment shed, which was next to the passageway leading to the allotments. Governors agreed, suggesting that the advert could emphasise outdoor learning, which was especially relevant given the new EYFS curriculum's emphasis on the natural world. Kate suggested that a contact at Morley might be able to paint the side of the shed.

Governors asked whether the YMCA nursery on Blinco Grove, which had opened in spring 2020, was thought to be having any impact on Homerton's numbers. Sue noted that numbers for the Nest were quite low. Alex commented that the Blinco Grove nursery did not appear to be having a significant impact to date. One member of staff and two families had recently moved from Blinco Grove to Homerton.

- c) **Staff** – Staff remained understandably anxious about the wider situation. Lateral flow testing had just started, with the first staff taking their tests the previous night. All had been negative. The local authority had previously said that teachers would be a high priority for vaccination, but the situation had since changed.

- d) **Centre Development Plan (CDP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF)** – Governors commended the good progress being made against the CDP. Alex noted that the SEF had been updated to reflect training courses recently attended by staff and the current online offer for children.
- e) **Curriculum Statement** – Alex had noted that it had been a new requirement last year for schools to add their Curriculum Statement to their websites. Homerton’s Statement had been developed by the Curriculum Committee and circulated with the agenda. Alex thanked Tandy and the other Committee members for their work. Governors agreed that the Statement should be added to the website following this meeting, along with the Message to Parents, which was an introduction to Homerton for parents looking for a nursery. Governors noted that the website would need to be updated to link with the Curriculum Statement and also in due course to reflect the new EYFS curriculum being introduced from September 2021. **Alex**
- f) **SEND report** – A SEND report had been circulated with the agenda. **Governors noted the high numbers of children with SEND and asked whether Homerton would ever consider a ceiling to the number of children with SEND that the Centre could accommodate. Alex explained that this was a difficult issue, since the admissions criteria set by the local authority prioritised looked after children and then children with SEND. However, some children with SEND required 1:1 support and classrooms could become very busy with additional adults. Governors noted that some children could find it harder to cope in busy environments. It was important to take all children’s needs into account and to be realistic about capacity and balance.**

7. Update from Curriculum Committee

Curriculum Committee meetings had taken place on 4th December 2020 and 2nd February 2021. The December meeting had worked on the Curriculum Statement, as discussed above. The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd February 2021 were received. Governors discussed the following issues:

- **Data** – Tandy explained that data comparison was difficult under the current circumstances, as data could be collected for those children attending but not for children at home. It would be interesting to compare the data for the children in these two groups in the summer term, especially as children currently attending were benefiting from higher levels of individual attention due to smaller class sizes.

Mitali noted that the baseline data collected in the autumn term of 2020 did not appear to differ significantly from the baseline data for children in the two previous years, suggesting no significant impact of the first lockdown, for example on personal, social and emotional development. Mitali agreed to e-mail the baseline data to Governors. She would also bring an update to the next Governing Body meeting comparing baseline data and this term’s data for the children who had been attending. **Mitali**

- **New EYFS curriculum** – Training for staff on the new EYFS curriculum would be taking place via Zoom on 10th February 2021 and 3rd March 2021. Governors were also welcome to attend; Alex would send the invitation. **Alex**
- **Visits** – The pandemic meant that it was still not possible for Governors to carry out visits in person. However, the Committee had suggested that it might be possible to carry out some monitoring remotely. Kay and Kate were due to look at the Expressive and Creative Arts Policy and were planning to join a Wednesday Zoom meeting and to look at Twitter. As SEND Governor, Tandy was planning to carry out her ‘visit’ by speaking to Bernie on the phone and possibly joining an online session between a child and their specialist teacher.

- **Effects of lockdown** – The Committee had highlighted the potential impact of a mid-year return, both for children who had been at home and for children who had been at the nursery and would experience changing dynamics when a larger group returned. Staff would need to be aware of the possible challenges and how these might be mitigated. Alex noted that a staff meeting was scheduled for 24th February 2021, after the Government’s expected announcement on the wider reopening of schools. Mitali noted that staff were planning to make a ‘welcome back’ video for children returning to the Centre.

8. Update on the Teaching School

Kay explained that the Cambridge Early Years Teaching School (CEYTS) would cease to exist in July 2021, when the funding for teaching schools would be coming to an end. She and Kay Dimelow would complete their outstanding commitments and then stand down. Rikke Waldau was doing some work on a freelance basis. Ysanne Heald was exploring the possibility of Cambridgeshire’s six nursery schools forming a Trust; Governors would be kept updated on this. Kay commended the achievement of CEYTS in promoting the nurseries in the wider educational community

9. Policy Review

Governors reviewed a number of additional policies that had been circulated with the agenda:

- Admissions to the Nest
- Admissions to the nursery school and over-subscription criteria
- Safer Employment Policy

Governors noted that there were no substantive changes to the previous versions of these documents. They were agreed as circulated.

Alex

Alex noted that there was an update to Keeping Children Safe in Education for 2020, which Ken would need to sign. She and Ken made arrangements for him to do this.

Alex/Ken

10. Update from Resources Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Resources Committee held on 19th January 2021 were received. Roger reported that the Committee continued to monitor the Centre’s position carefully and there were no specific issues to report. Governors noted the following points:

- Because the Centre had remained open for all families wanting places, the local authority had recorded it as fully open and it would receive full funding. Roger commented that the local authority had been very supportive and helpful during the current lockdown.
- A year-end deficit of £150,000 was projected, due to reduced private income during the pandemic. This would be offset by the carry forward from 2019/20.
- The Government had announced that the supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools would continue for another year. Alex commented that the longer-term prospects for maintained nursery schools also seemed more positive. It had been clear during the pandemic that parts of the country with maintained nursery schools had been better able to meet the needs of key worker families. In addition, some private childcare providers were expected not to survive because of financial difficulties caused by the pandemic.

11. Any Other Urgent Matters – none.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next Governing Body meeting would be held on Wednesday 17th March 2021 at 7.30pm.

Question and Answer Session on COVID-19

At the end of the formal meeting, a question and answer session on COVID-19 took place with Dr Rajalakshmi Lakshman, Consultant in Public Health Medicine, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Dr Lakshman introduced herself, explaining that she was a public health lead for children and young people, working closely with the local authority's Director of Education, Jon Lewis, particularly on local outbreaks. The session covered the following points:

Vaccination programme – The vaccination programme had been agreed nationally by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The JCVI had identified the first nine priority groups for vaccination, with vaccination of people in the first four groups to be completed by mid-February. Locally, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group was responsible for delivering the programme. Cambridgeshire's vaccinations were being carried out in line with the national programme. The data to date suggested that teachers were not at greater risk from COVID than the wider population, but this was being kept under review. There was significant lobbying nationally for the vaccination of teachers to be prioritised, particularly early years staff who could not easily maintain distance from children and needed to provide personal care.

Alex noted that four members of staff at Homerton were in their 60s and one was clinically vulnerable, meaning they would be included in the first nine priority groups for vaccination.

Lateral flow testing – Homerton staff had started lateral flow testing the previous evening. Alex commented that the instructions provided had been clear and that the first round of tests had gone well, with all results being negative. Homerton was collating test results on a central spreadsheet.

Dr Lakshman noted that lateral flow test results should not be self-reported into the contact tracing app, whether positive or negative. Lateral flow tests were not 100% reliable and any positive result from a lateral flow test done at home, should immediately be followed up with a PCR swab test for confirmation. A positive test result entered into NHS Test and Trace acquired legal status and was difficult to delete, for example if a positive result from a lateral flow test was subsequently negated by a PCR swab test. Lateral flow tests done at community/workplace testing sites under supervision did not need a confirmatory PCR test and were entered onto the NHS Test and Trace system.

Dr Lakshman further explained that lateral flow testing picked up the most infectious people, even if they were asymptomatic, but could miss up to 50% of cases overall. PCR tests (swab tests which were sent to the laboratory) were more reliable because they magnified and analysed genetic material.

Governors welcomed the 100% take-up of lateral flow testing by staff at Homerton.

Preventing transmission – Governors noted that in the early stages of the pandemic, there had been considerable emphasis on cleaning surfaces; they asked if this was still relevant. Dr Lakshman confirmed up to date SAGE advice that all three forms of transmission – aerosol, airborne and surface transmission – remained of concern and that efforts to reduce all three should be renewed, given the higher transmissibility of the new variants.

Alex asked about outdoor equipment at Homerton, noting that this was not wiped down between groups. There was also differing advice on children sharing water and sand. Dr Lakshman commented that it was important to be realistic about what staff could achieve with cleaning between sessions. There was no clear evidence to date of transmission occurring through children's shared use of water and sand but this should be kept under review in the event of an outbreak.

Good ventilation remained important, although measures should be realistic during the current very cold weather, for example opening doors onto corridors and opening windows intermittently, rather than risking children getting too cold and becoming ill for other reasons.

Dr Lakshman noted that transmission in schools appeared to be taking place primarily between staff in meetings or sharing cars; catering and cleaning staff; between siblings and their households; and between children's friendship groups, rather than from children to staff or vice versa.

Dr Lakshman emphasised that neither the lateral flow tests nor vaccination were a complete solution. Measures such as face coverings and social distancing would be needed for some time to come, plus travel restrictions and limiting social interactions to limit the spread of new variants. It could be necessary to modify vaccines and an annual programme and/or boosters could also be needed.

Symptoms – Dr Lakshman confirmed that COVID could present with a variety of symptoms, especially in children. Any child who was unwell should be kept at home until they felt better. Governors asked whether a broader symptom list would be issued officially. Dr Lakshman explained that an official change to the list of symptoms would require the agreement of the UK's four Chief Medical Officers, but that Public Health England's advice consistently had been that any unwell child should be kept at home.

Contact and isolating – Governors noted that being in contact with a person testing positive for COVID was defined as spending one minute or more less than one metre away from them; or 15 minutes or more less than two metres away from them; or travelling in the same vehicle as them. These criteria meant that if a child tested positive, it was not always necessary for the whole class to isolate. However, the criteria were easier to apply in secondary schools than in primaries or nurseries. Adult to adult transmission remained more common than transmission between children, especially in the younger age groups.

Reopening of schools – Dr Lakshman confirmed that schools would not reopen before 8th March 2021, as the Government was clear that sufficient notice was needed. Reopening would depend on case numbers coming down. Numbers were currently falling, but not as quickly as in the first wave. The data was monitored daily across a number of different setting types, including schools, nurseries, care homes and workplaces.

Governors noted that an 'outbreak' was defined as two or more linked cases in a setting. Monitoring of outbreaks helped to show whether cases were due to community transmission or specific to a setting. Resources were available locally for contact tracing and there was also a community support team to help people if needed to observe the 10-day isolation requirement.

Easing of the lockdown was likely to happen on a national rather than a local basis, since rates of decrease were similar nationally. At one stage the Kent or UK variant had been more prevalent in the south, but was now accounting for 75% of cases in the East of England.

Conclusion – Dr Lakshman invited Governors to e-mail her with any further questions. Governors thanked Dr Lakshman for giving up her time and for the very helpful discussion.

The meeting ended at 9.05pm.