

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on Zoom on Wednesday 8th December 2021 at 7.30pm

Present

Isa Garcia Crestani, Stefania Deidda, Tandy Harrison, Amy Mehta, Ken Ong (Chair), Alex Pearson (Head) and Mitali Peckham

Present by invitation: Rinchen Ato (8.05pm to 8.35pm)

Clerk: Gwyneth Barton

Governors' challenge highlighted in green

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially the two new parent governors, Stefania Deidda and Amy Mehta. Apologies for absence were received from Sam Garyali, Roger Lilley, Surabhi Singh and Sue Smith.

Governors noted with great sadness that Rachel Rigby, Homerton's music teacher and a teaching assistant in the Nest, had died the previous day following a short illness. Tandy had sent flowers to Rachel on Governors' behalf and the Storytrail held at Homerton that morning had raised £600 for the Arthur Rank Hospice, where Rachel had been cared for.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of 20th September 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 20th September 2021 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 20th September 2021

- a) **Meeting formats for 2021/22** – It had been agreed at the previous meeting that Governing Body meetings would be held in person at least once a term, if possible. However, rising Covid case rates and concern about the newly emerging Omicron variant had made it necessary to hold this meeting on Zoom. The scope to meet in person would continue to be kept under review.
- b) **Training day on 4th January 2022** – Governors agreed that Alex would not ask Kay to invite her EYITT student to present on Makaton at the staff training day on 4th January 2022, as the schedule for the day was already full, including other provision for Makaton training.
- c) **Governor e-mail address** – Alex would contact Surabhi to check which of her e-mail addresses should be used. **Alex**

5. Governor Recruitment Update

The two new parent governors, Stefania Deidda and Amy Mehta, had been elected unopposed following the recent election process. One filled the vacancy left by Rinchen Ato, whose term of office as a parent governor had ended on 4th December 2021, and the other a longer-standing vacancy.

One vacancy remained, for a co-opted governor. Ken noted that co-opted governors were appointed on the basis of relevant skills, experience and enthusiasm. The most recent skills audit had shown that Homerton's Governors covered most of the key areas outlined by the National Governance Association, with the exception of Human Resources, of which some Governors had some experience in their professional lives.

Isa reported that Elizabeth Head, parent of a child formerly at Homerton, had expressed interest in becoming a Governor. It was agreed that Alex would e-mail Elizabeth, inviting her to submit a written statement and to attend the Governing Body meeting on 7th February 2022, initially as an observer. If appropriate, Elizabeth could be co-opted either at that or the following Governing Body meeting. **Alex**

6. Committee Memberships and Lead Governor Appointments

Governors reviewed Committee memberships and Lead Governors in light of the parent governor appointments.

It was agreed unanimously:

- To appoint Amy Mehta to the Curriculum Committee
- To appoint Stefania Deidda to the Resources Committee
- To appoint Stefania Deidda as Lead Governor for the Nest and Owlets.

Ken noted that he was currently the acting Lead Governor for Equal Opportunities/Monitoring Racial Incidents, but would prefer this role to be taken on by another Governor. Isa agreed to talk to Liz Greenhalgh, Homerton's staff lead for Equal Opportunities, to find out more about what the role involved. **Isa**

Governors also noted that Sue Smith would be retiring from her post as Office Manager in April 2022, meaning that a new staff governor would be needed. The new Office Manager would be invited to attend Resources Committee meetings on a regular basis and could be appointed as the new staff governor, if willing and chosen by staff.

7. Head's Report

Alex briefed Governors on a number of issues:

a) Children – Governors noted that:

- The Centre was almost full and the nursery would be full from January. Some children were moving up from the Nest to the nursery. Two children were leaving, one to move to France and the other to attend the nursery co-located with their sibling's school.
- Six members of staff and one volunteer had tested positive for Covid during the last term, but no cases had been identified amongst the children.
- A number of successful events had taken place including fireworks, celebrations for Diwali, allotment trips and the Storytrail earlier that day.
- Seven children were eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium and this money was being used to fund Primal Play sessions provided by Ross Sargent, which helped with listening and attention as well as physical development. Two children were eligible for free school meals.
- There was a high number of children with SEND. Eight were currently receiving 1:1 support and an extra teaching assistant had been appointed from January to support two further children with previously unidentified needs.

In addition, many children needed some language and behavioural support or lacked independence, possibly due to spending more time at home than usual as a result of the pandemic.

- A large number of children spoke English as an additional language and 83 had at least one family member for whom English was not their first language. Homerton would continue to focus on a different language each half-term; this was currently Spanish and after Christmas would be Chinese.
- Owlets was much better used this term, with a minimum of 11 children per session and a maximum of 18. The holiday club at October half-term had been well attended and had made a profit of £4,000. The additional 1:1 teaching assistant recently appointed would also be working as a playworker in the holiday club.

- b) Staffing** – Alex and Roger had recently interviewed one person for the post of Office Manager from April 2022 but had not appointed. The post would be readvertised in early January. Contingency plans were being prepared in case it was not possible to appoint from April, including Homerton staff working extra hours and input from Histon Nursery. Sue Smith had agreed to work one day a week in the summer term to hand over to the new post holder.

Ken noted that Homerton was facing particular challenges at present, with high levels of SEND and wider needs and staff absences due to Covid. This meant that expenditure on support staff and teaching assistants was higher than usual. Governors agreed that this expenditure was appropriate, especially given Homerton’s relatively strong financial position, to ensure that staff had the support they needed.

Alex and Mitali thanked Governors their comments and paid tribute to the resilience and flexibility of all staff. Alex especially thanked the lunchtime staff who had stepped up to support children in recent weeks.

Governors asked about volunteer numbers at Homerton. Alex explained that there were currently a number of volunteers coming into the Centre, including current and former parents and higher education and secondary students. If appropriate, volunteers were supported to complete qualifications or to apply for positions within the Centre, such as supply lunchtime supervisors.

- c) Parents** – The talk on play had been sent out and core stories were being shared with parents. A raffle had raised £300, which would be used to pay for Christmas events and for the story teller due to visit in the spring term.
- d) Centre Development Plan (CDP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF)** – These had been updated and circulated with the agendas.
- e) Assessments** – Staff had been completing baseline assessments of children’s literacy and Maths, which would be reported to Governors next half-term. Ofsted inspections were placing reduced emphasis on data and the new age bands for reporting were very broad: 0-3, 3-4 and Reception. Governors commented that the recency of the Ofsted inspection and renewed Outstanding status should allow staff to take time to consider how to embed the new processes to ensure that assessment data was meaningful and useful for children and families as well as for wider monitoring.
- f) Future of maintained nursery schools** – The Government had confirmed that supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools would continue for the next three years. In light of this recent information, Homerton’s financial position was relatively strong but other nursery schools in Cambridgeshire were struggling. A meeting between the local authority and the nursery schools would be taking place on 10th December 2021.
- g) Equality Objectives and Equalities Action Plan** – These had been circulated with the agenda.

The Equality Objectives were currently for the period 2019-21 and were usually reviewed every three years. Governors noted that Equality training was planned for September 2022. Having read through the Equality Objectives, Governors confirmed that these remained fit for purpose and agreed to extend them to September 2022, at which time they would be fully reviewed as part of the staff training.

Governors also received the Action Plan, which set out planned actions for 2021/22; however, it was noted that actions highlighted in blue might not be viable due to the continuing pandemic. Alex commented that it was harder to engage parents when it was not possible to invite them into the Centre. Ken asked Governors, especially parent governors, to contact Alex with suggestions as to how to engage all parents effectively, to ensure both that they understood the feedback they received from Homerton and that they were able to raise any issues they might have.

**All
Governors**

8. Update from Curriculum Committee

The minutes of the Curriculum Committee meetings held on 12th October 2021 and 23rd November 2021 were received.

Alex and Mitali were reviewing all of the Curriculum policies in light of the new EYFS framework. Curriculum Committee had to date reviewed the following, which had been circulated with the agenda:

- Communications and Language
- Literacy
- E-Safety.

Tandy reported that as Lead Governor for SEND, she had recently had a phone conversation with Bernie Cafferkey, Homerton's SENCo. They had discussed the high numbers of children with additional needs; what proportion of these needs were due to the pandemic and what proportion to longer-term issues relating to speech and language, behaviour and other identifiable conditions; and how assessment of these needs was being linked to the baseline assessments currently being carried out. Tandy would be writing up their conversation as a Governor visit and sharing this report with Governors.

Tandy

Governors noted that the numbers of children with additional needs was rising across the County and that the increase was not necessarily attributable to the pandemic. The local authority was very aware of this and was seeking to provide effective support, especially as not all support could necessarily be provided by mainstream schools.

Tandy noted that she was hoping to visit in February to see how children with additional needs were being supported in class. In addition, she and Eirini were hoping to carry out a joint Governor visit on Planning in the Moment and the links between this approach and the revised EYFS curriculum. Tandy emphasised the importance of Governor visits, especially for Governors who did not currently have children at Homerton, to see the Centre in action. Visits did not necessarily have to be formal but could also include informal observation of a classroom, or reading the children a story.

However, it was accepted that the pandemic was currently limiting the opportunities available to Governors to visit the nursery. Parents were currently being invited to come in only after 4.00pm. Ken noted that he would like to call in before Christmas and it was suggested that he could do this on 15th December 2021, the day of the Christmas party. Isa also offered to come in to help with the party.

**Ken
Isa**

9. Safeguarding

Governors received the Department for Education's Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE), which had been updated in September 2021.

Homerton's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy had been updated to reflect the latest version of KCSIE. The updated Policy was approved by the Governing Body. Ken and Alex would arrange for Ken to sign a copy.

**Ken/
Alex**

Governors noted that as Deputy Lead Governor for Child Protection and Safeguarding, Surabhi had agreed to lead a 30-minute training session on safeguarding for all Governors at the beginning of the February Governing Body meeting.

Surabhi

10. Code of Conduct

This had been circulated with the agenda. Alex explained that it was based on the EPM Model Code of Conduct for All Adults, adapted for Homerton. Governors agreed unanimously to approve the Code.

Alex

11. Update from Resources Committee

The minutes of the Resources Committee meetings held on 15th October 2021 and 19th November 2021 were received. Governors also received the budget report for October 2021 and accompanying notes.

Ken explained that Homerton's annual turnover was approximately £900,000. Two-thirds of this was funding received from the local authority for the nursery school; the remaining third was private income from the Nest, Owlets and holiday club. Homerton had also had a historic carry forward for a number of years. He shared recent and forecast details of the carry forward:

March 2020 - £294,000

March 2021 - £165,000 (a reduction of £129,000, mainly due to loss of income during the pandemic)

March 2022 - forecast level £125,000 (assuming an in-year deficit of £40,000).

Ken reiterated that Homerton's position remained relatively strong and that funds should be used where appropriate to support staff and to build resilience and flexibility.

12. Any Other Urgent Matters

- a) **Thanks to Rinchen Ato** – Rinchen attended for part of the meeting. Ken noted that Rinchen's term of office as a parent governor had ended on 4th December 2021. He led Governors in thanking Rinchen for her contributions and shared a picture of gifts he had delivered to Rinchen earlier that day on behalf of the Governors and the Centre.

13. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next Governing Body meeting would take place on Monday 7th February 2022 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.