

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on Zoom on Monday 7th February 2022 at 7.30pm

Present

Isa Garcia Crestani, Stefania Deidda, Ken Ong (Chair), Alex Pearson (Head), Mitali Peckham, Surabhi Singh and Sue Smith

Present by invitation: Elizabeth Head

Governors' challenge highlighted in green

1. Briefing on Safeguarding Children

As Homerton's Deputy Lead Governor for Safeguarding and Child Protection, Surabhi gave a briefing on safeguarding children. The slides of her presentation are attached as Appendix A to these minutes.

Governors thanked Surabhi for her presentation and asked her to cover the section on preventing radicalisation at the March Governing Body meeting. **Surabhi**

2. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Elizabeth Head. Apologies for absence were received from Sam Garyali, Eirini Gkouskou, Tandy Harrison and Amy Mehta and from the Clerk, Gwyneth Barton.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of 8th December 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 8th December 2021 were approved as a correct record.

5. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 8th December 2021

a) **Lead Governor for Equal Opportunities/Monitoring Racial Incidents** – Isa had not yet been able to talk to Liz Greenhalgh about this role, but hoped to do so before the next Governing Body meeting. **Isa**

b) **Curriculum Committee** – The January meeting of the Curriculum Committee had had to be postponed and was being rearranged. Tandy's report on her conversation as Lead Governor for SEND with Bernie Cafferkey, Homerton's SENCo, would be shared with Governors when possible. **Tandy**

c) **Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy** – Ken confirmed that as the Lead Governor for Child Protection and Safeguarding, he had signed the updated version of this policy.

6. Co-opted Governor Vacancy

Elizabeth Head, parent of two children formerly at Homerton, had expressed interest in becoming a Governor and her personal statement had been circulated with the agenda. Elizabeth left the meeting whilst her application was discussed. It was agreed unanimously

To appoint Elizabeth Head as a co-opted governor.

Elizabeth returned to the meeting and Governors welcomed her to the Governing Body.

Later in the meeting, it was also agreed to appoint Elizabeth as a member of the Curriculum Committee.

**Tandy/
Gwyneth**

7. Head's Report

Alex briefed Governors on a number of issues:

a) Children – Governors noted that:

- The nursery was virtually full, with one space in East Blue. Vacancies in the Nest resulting from children moving to the nursery were being filled.
- Approximately 40 applications had been made for September 2022, which was relatively low, but enquiries were still being received and prospective parents shown round. Alex encouraged all Governors to help advertise the availability of places at Homerton. **All**
- In the Nest, from September 2022 it was proposed to trial sessional times, under which children would attend on a regular basis with the same group of children. **Governors noted that it was hoped that this would help staff to get to know the children better and children to settle in their groups more quickly, with greater continuity. Fixed sessions would also help to reduce the admin time currently taken to organise individual children's hours and would make it simpler to fill any vacancies. The change would mean that five fewer families could be accommodated than at present, but overall, the number of sessions was not being reduced. A range of options would be available to families, included part-time and full-time places and places for funded 2 year olds. Governors endorsed this proposal.** **Alex**
- Applications for SEND places from September 2022 were already high. It would be important to manage offers, with 2 places per class a realistic limit, given the number of adults needed to support them and the capacity of the SENCo. It was also noted that as well as the children with SEND already identified, additional children could present with SEND after arriving at Homerton and would also need support. It was thought that this had been a particular issue this year due to the pandemic and lockdowns and could improve as the pandemic eased, with needs being identified earlier, for example by health visitors.

b) Staffing – Governors noted that:

- Homerton had been badly affected by Covid in the last three weeks, with 13 members of staff testing positive and about 20 children. It had been very challenging to keep rooms open and it had been necessary to close South Room for two mornings. The support of all staff, including lunch staff, and of former members of staff had been greatly appreciated.

Mitali led Governors in thanking Alex for her efforts in keeping the Centre running calmly during this difficult time. Isa reported that parents had been grateful for and fully supportive of Alex's approach.

- Laura Webb had joined as a 1:1 teaching assistant in East Room, where a number of children had been identified with SEND after arriving at Homerton. Laura would also be working in the holiday club.
- The Office Manager position had been advertised twice, unsuccessfully. Suzy Hughes, an existing member of the office staff, had subsequently expressed interest in the position for four days a week and so it had been readvertised on this basis. Suzy had applied and her application had been successful. Sue Smith and Suzy were

already working on the handover and Sue had agreed to continue to work for one day a week in the summer term. Suzy would be supported to attend relevant training courses.

Arrangements would need to be made to backfill Suzy's current role, which was three days a week. In the summer term, two days a week would be provided by Melody Wright, Owllets Manager; more support would be brought in if needed.

- A celebration service for Rachel Rigby had taken place on 21st January 2022 and staff from Homerton had attended either in person or on Zoom. A memorial service had also been held in the Homerton garden on the first day of term. Rachel's husband had given Homerton a picture, which would be displayed in the Rainbow Room. Music was currently being taught by staff in children's circle time and Alex would be considering in due course whether to recruit a music teacher, since Rachel's music sessions had been an important part of life at Homerton.
- Staff had received a useful Makaton training session on 4th January 2022 and were using Makaton with children, which they were really enjoying. Staff had also taken part in online food hygiene training.

- c) **Catering** – Dolce, Homerton's caterers, would be increasing the cost of lunches from £2.05 to £2.15 and had also introduced a £500 annual management fee. Alex would be discussing the management fee with them. However, she noted that when Homerton had last tendered its catering services, Dolce had been the only company not to include a management fee. Losses made during the pandemic were thought to be what had now made this necessary.

Governors noted that at Homerton, parents did not pay directly for lunches; instead, the Centre paid and the cost was included in overall charges. This meant that if Homerton did not increase its charges to parents, the increased lunch cost would be borne by the Centre. Homerton also had to pay for a minimum of 70 lunches per day and the actual number of lunches served was typically lower than this.

- d) **Fees** – Resources Committee had discussed whether to increase fees in the nursery and the Nest. Charges were currently £6.50 per extra hour in the nursery and £7.50 per hour in the Nest. Core hours for children in the Nest who had turned 3 were paid by the Government at a lower hourly rate. Funded 2 year olds in the Nest were also paid for by the Government at a lower hourly rate.

Ken drew Governors' attention to the budget report circulated with item 12, including expected income for 2021/22 and the expected year-end out turn and variance. The report showed an anticipated year-end deficit in income of £14,830 for the Nest. Year-end deficits were also anticipated due to higher expenditure on supply teaching staff and education support staff, due in large part to the number of children identified with additional needs after joining Homerton.

However, revenue income for the nursery had been higher than expected, with local authority funding for more children than had been expected and additional SEND funding.

Overall, the reduced revenue income in the Nest and additional expenditure were offset by greater than anticipated revenue income primarily from the nursery, meaning that the total anticipated deficit for the year-end was currently less than £1,000 on a total budget of around £900,000, with a carry forward of £165,600.

Governors noted that although this was a much stronger position than had previously been anticipated, £130,000 had been used from the historic carry forward in the previous year due to pandemic-related costs and losses, showing that the Centre remained vulnerable to changing external circumstances.

Returning to the Nest deficit and fees, Governors noted that:

- An increase of £1.00 per hour in the Nest would cover the current deficits in income and increased costs.
- Alex had been asked to compare Homerton's charges with those of other providers. This had proved difficult as many charged a sessional or weekly rather than an hourly rate. However, it appeared that the charges of most other maintained nursery school providers in Cambridge were higher.
- Homerton had not raised its fees for 3 years.
- There had also been a deficit in the Nest the previous year and the local authority had pointed out that it was not permitted to cross-fund the Nest from the nursery.
- In response, Nest costs had been reduced slightly when Jacqui Shephard, a qualified teacher, had moved from the Nest to the nursery.
- Inflation meant that all of the Centre's costs, for example energy costs, National Insurance and salary costs had increased and were likely to increase further in coming months and years.

Following discussion of a number of options, Governors agreed the following changes with effect from September 2022:

**Alex/
Sue**

- To increase the hourly fee for the Nest by £1.00 from £7.50 to £8.50
- To increase the hourly fee for the nursery by 50p from £6.50 to £7.00
- That no change should be made to the £2.50 lunch charge.

Governors also discussed possible fund-raising activities for the Centre. However, it was noted that these funds could not be put towards the core costs of running and maintaining the school but were used for enrichment extras such as play equipment or special visitors.

e) Capital expenditure – Governors noted that:

- Homerton and four other schools had been given a shared grant of £449,667 by the local authority to replace their boilers. Alex was waiting to hear how much of this Homerton would receive, what the work would entail and how much of the work the Centre would have to fund itself.
- Homerton's local authority ICT support person had recommended that new computers should be bought for the Head and for the office. It had been suggested that the computers currently used by these staff be moved to the team room used by teaching staff. Alex had obtained a quote and three computers would cost £2,739. She would be seeking advice from Ray Byford at the local authority on whether it was preferable to include this cost in the current year's budget or the budget for 2022/23. **Governors agreed that the computers should be bought this year if possible.**
- The sandpit in the Nest garden needed replacing as it was becoming rotten. Two quotes had been received of approximately £7,000 each.

g) Centre Development Plan (CDP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) – These had been updated and circulated with the agendas. Governors noted good progress against the CDP. Areas for action included:

- Ensuring Governors continue to feel confident in their understanding and monitoring of the school in light of shift away from data focus – Alex explained Ofsted’s recent shift in emphasis away from data monitoring and the revised EYFS Framework’s very broad age bands, 0-3 and 3-4, which were not particularly useful for monitoring progress. She and Mitali were consequently considering ‘soft’ monitoring of children’s progress and how this could best be shared with Governors. It was felt that Governor visits would very much help with this, but visits had had to be curtailed due to the current Covid situation. It was hoped that this would improve after half-term. **Governors agreed that the Curriculum Committee should consider this further and report back to the Governing Body.**
- Succession planning – The appointment of Suzy Hughes as Office Manager replacing Sue Smith was a good example of succession planning.

h) Parents – Governors noted that:

- Fran Crouch, who had previously been a family worker, would be offering a parenting course consisting of three weekly sessions, with capacity for about seven families. The course would start after half-term and would be repeated as necessary. **Governors welcomed this course, noting that some parents could still be reluctant to speak to staff, despite the many invitations to do so in newsletters and other communications.**
- Parents were welcome to come in to the Centre to read to children, subject to DBS checks being completed, and some were doing this. Governors were already DBS checked and were invited to come in and read as well if they wished.
- The parents’ evening had been postponed until March, by which time it was hoped that it would be possible for this to take place in person, with each family having a 10-minute slot to talk to their children’s staff.

All

8. Policy Review

Governors approved the following policies, subject to the points noted:

- **Admissions to the Nest** – This had been updated to reflect the proposed change to sessional arrangements, as discussed under minute 7 a) above.
- **Admissions to the nursery**
- **Admissions to Owlets**
- **Safer employment policy** – This had been recommended by the Resources Committee for approval, subject to updating dates and the latest version of Keeping Children Safe in Education. Ken agreed to sign a paper copy once updated.

Alex/
Ken

9. Update from Resources Committee

The minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 28th January 2022 and the budget report for December 2021 were received. In addition to the points already discussed under minute 7 d) above, Governors:

- Noted that Homerton had agreed a new insurance arrangement with Zurich, which was significantly cheaper than the previous one.
- Thanked Roger for his recent contributions to recruitment processes at Homerton.

10. Any Other Urgent Matters – none.

11. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next Governing Body meeting would take place on Wednesday 16th March 2022 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 9.25pm.