

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on Zoom on Wednesday 7th December 2022 at 7.30pm

Present

Isa Garcia Crestani, Sam Garyali, Tandy Harrison, Suzy Hughes, Ken Ong (Chair), Mick Patel (from 8.05pm), Rob Payne, Alex Pearson (Head) and Mitali Peckham (until 8.35pm)

Clerk: Gwyneth Barton

Governors' challenge highlighted in green

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Stefania Deidda, Eirini Gkouskou, Elizabeth Head, Roger Lilley and Surabhi Singh.

Governors remembered Rachel Rigby, Homerton's former music teacher, on the first anniversary of her death by listening to a piece of music she had recorded.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Governors would be asked at the next Governing Body meeting to be held in person to sign paper copies of their declarations of interest for the register.

Gwyneth

3. Minutes of 21st September 2022

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 21st September 2022 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 21st September 2022

All matters arising were covered later on the agenda.

5. Head's Report

Alex briefed Governors on a number of issues:

a) Children – Governors noted that:

- The nursery would be full from January 2023 with 24 children per class. Nearly all 3 year olds currently in the Nest would be moving up to the nursery. The Nest would also be almost full. Homerton would continue to be proactive in advertising places and it was proposed to hold another open day in the spring term.
- Take-up of breakfast club, Owlets and holiday club was high.
- Recent activities included the Storytrail, held earlier that day, Diwali celebrations and fireworks. Ross Sargent's Primal Play sessions had restarted and were aimed primarily at children in receipt of the Early Years Pupil Premium. Messy Play sessions had also restarted on a Friday morning, led by parent governors Isa and Stefania. Alex led Governors in thanking Isa and Stefania for their efforts.
- Four children were eligible for free school meals, two more than in the previous year.
- There were eight children in the Centre with high levels of SEND, receiving 1:1 support, and a further eleven being monitored with plans in place for behavioural or speech and language support.

- High numbers of children had English as an additional language. This was proving a particular challenge in the Nest, where some children were needing additional support and struggling to settle. Eirini had addressed this in her recent Governor visit report (Minute 6 below).

b) Staffing – Governors noted that:

- Performance review and target setting for the Head and all staff had been completed.
- Two teaching assistants were leaving. The vacancies had been advertised but no realistic applications had been received. Alex asked Governors to consider whether they knew anyone interested in taking on these roles. Rob and Isa both asked for job descriptions to pass on to someone who might be interested.
- Two members of staff in the same room were on long-term sick leave. Alex thanked all those who were stepping up to help, including the lunchtime supervisors, Bob the caretaker and volunteers.
- Two groups of Faculty students had recently visited the Centre.
- Staff had recently taken part in training on equalities, Persona dolls and curriculum planning. Eirini would be coming in to lead a session on outdoor play. Alex was continuing a six-session leadership course. Mitali was also undertaking this course but had deferred her National Professional Qualification in Headship for the time being.

**Alex/
Rob and Isa**

c) Parents – Parents had attended a play talk on 9th November 2022 at the end of the nursery parents' evening and had taken part in the Storytrail on 7th December 2022. There would be a number of Christmas activities including a raffle, visits from Father Christmas and parties.

d) Nursery schools and the future – The teachers' pay award had been confirmed at 5% and the award for support staff at 4.4%, backdated to April, plus a percentage of £1,925 for FTE. The cost of this would need to be covered in the current year's budget, but it was hoped that additional funding would be made available for it from 2023/24.

Additional funding was being made available to schools to help them to become more energy efficient; Homerton already had work in progress to install an air source heat pump. However, there were no additional funds to help with rising energy bills. The Centre had turned the heating down slightly and it would be on less when children were not present. The boiler had been serviced at a cost of £1,900.

Governors noted that Ray Byford of the local authority's Education Finance team would be visiting the following week. He had already advised that all schools were in a similar position in relation to rising costs.

e) Centre Development Plan (CDP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) – Governors noted that good progress was being made against the CDP, with many activities now highlighted in yellow (underway). **Governors asked whether Alex had been able to have any half-days working from home, as proposed under 'Leadership and Management'. Alex explained that with the current staff ill-health, this had not yet been possible.**

f) Assessments – Baseline assessments had been completed for all children and the data would now be entered on the system.

g) Air source heat pump – Work to strengthen the roof was complete. The roof would need to be cleared and checked by a surveyor annually for the guarantee for the work to

remain valid. There was no further news on the installation of the air source heat pump and a date for a presentation on this was awaited.

6. Update from Curriculum Committee

Tandy presented the minutes of the Curriculum Committee meeting held on 1st November 2022. She noted that the Committee had discussed staffing, as covered above; had approved a number of policies; and had welcomed the return of events and the wider community to Homerton.

Tandy also reported that she and Eirini had carried out a very useful Governor visit on 18th November 2022 on Planning in the Moment. Their reports had been circulated to Governors. Alex commented that it had been especially helpful to have their two different perspectives.

Tandy explained that Planning in the Moment was about identifying ‘teachable moments’, when a child had identified an activity and an adult responded and supported the child to extend learning. The reports included a number of concrete examples of how this was applied at Homerton. Governors noted that the approach could also be used with pairs or groups of children, and with non-verbal children, as the adult could respond to interest they showed through body language and gesture.

Tandy reported that overall, they had found that Planning in the Moment was working well for 3 and 4 year olds. Eirini had proposed some modifications to the approach taken with 2 year olds in the Nest, to reduce the amount of paperwork and make more time for the staff to focus on the children. Alex noted that these proposals had been very much welcomed by Nest staff.

Tandy noted that she and Eirini planned to visit again later in the year, to see how the proposed changes were working.

**Tandy/
Eirini**

Tandy encouraged all Governors to take part in visits, especially in view of the hiatus caused by the pandemic. She and Rob were planning a visit in January to look at support for children with additional needs. Other topics for possible visits might be outdoor play, the new music lessons, helicopter stories and how well the new class with two groups of children attending for different hours was working. Governor visits could also be more informal and not specifically topic-based.

**Tandy/Rob
All
Governors**

7. Safeguarding

Ken noted that there were no safeguarding issues to report.

Stefania had recently attended a local authority training course on Safeguarding: A Governor’s Role. She had shared the notes with Alex and with Ken and Surabhi as Lead and Deputy Lead Governors for Safeguarding and Child Protection. Ken confirmed with Alex that she was up to date with the material provided.

8. Update from Resources Committee

The minutes of the Resources Committee meetings held on 5th October 2022 and 22nd November 2022 were received. Governors also received the budget report for October 2022 and accompanying notes.

- a) **Budget** – Ken drew attention to the rising costs set out by Alex (Minute 5 d) above) and also noted that the Centre’s internet provider costs had recently increased from £3,000 to £5,000, as these were no longer subsidised by the local authority.

Governors considered the budget profile details report and noted that both income and expenditure so far this year had been higher than anticipated. Overall, the projected

revenue outturn at year-end had improved by £39,000 from -£96,000 to -£57,000. The deficit budget was offset by Homerton's historic carry forward, which at the beginning of the year had been £137,000. Governors noted that Homerton was likely to be expected to run down the carry forward and that further fee increases were likely to be needed in due course.

Governors were advised that other Cambridgeshire nursery schools were facing similar or greater challenges. The issues were being discussed at the Schools Finance Forum, with Ray Byford advising schools that the local authority would make loans to them if they were unable to achieve balanced budgets.

- b) **Audit** – Homerton had recently had a local authority financial audit, a process carried out about every 10 years. The auditors had found that procedures were being followed appropriately but had wanted to see more paper trails, for example the receipting of goods received. They had commended the Centre's personnel records as some of the best they had seen. Alex reported that Suzy had addressed all of the points raised by the auditors and thanked her for her efforts.

9. Any Other Urgent Matters

- a) **After school and holiday club places/staffing** – Suzy noted that some parents being offered places in the Nest were not taking them up because there were no after school care places available. She suggested that it might be appropriate to take on an extra member of staff for after school care, if one could be found, to increase the number of places. Ken suggested that parent governors could talk to local parents to gauge how widespread an issue this was. Suzy noted that the office was also planning to contact parents on the waiting list for next year to find out how many of them would want after school care and how many would not be able to take up their place if this was not available.

**Parent
Governors**

Suzy/Alex

Alex noted that a member of staff was also needed for the February half-term holiday club. Staffing was a challenge for all local nurseries, especially for the end of the school day and during the holidays. It was suggested that it might be useful to do a leaflet drop to Homerton's neighbours to advertise the vacancies.

Suzy/Alex

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next Governing Body meeting would take place on Monday 6th February 2023 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm.