

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at Homerton on Monday 6th February 2023 at 7.30pm

Present

Isa Garcia Crestani, Stefania Deidda, Sam Garyali (from 7.50pm), Tandy Harrison, Elizabeth Head, Suzy Hughes, Roger Lilley, Ken Ong (Chair), Mick Patel, Rob Payne, Alex Pearson (Head) and Surabhi Singh
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 Eirini Gkouskou and Mitali Peckham.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

As this was the first Governing Body meeting in person since September, Governors were asked to sign paper copies of their declarations of interest for the register. Gwyneth would follow up with those Governors not present.

Gwyneth

3. Minutes of 7th December 2022

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 7th December 2022 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 7th December 2022

- a) **Additional staffing for after school care (Owlets)** – Governors had been advised at the previous meeting 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 available. There was already a waiting list for places in the current year. Office staff had contacted 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 had also been asked to gauge informally the extent to which this was an issue.

Suzy reported that 50 nursery places had now been offered for September and Owlets would already be full. It was likely that after school care would also be requested by some Nest parents, with Nest children requiring the higher staffing ratio of 1:4.

Governors agreed that it would therefore be helpful to seek an additional member of staff for Owlets, from September or from April if possible. Hours for this post would be 3.30pm to 5.45pm, Monday to Friday. The new staff member would not need to have professional qualifications as existing staff were appropriately qualified.

Governors agreed to advertise this vacancy via a letterbox drop in the local area. Other advertising possibilities included the local sixth form colleges, the Queen Edith's weekly e-mail bulletin, the community noticeboard outside the Queen Edith's shops and posters in local supermarkets and the Rock Road library.

Alex/Suzy

Governors also discussed wider publicity for Homerton. Alex advised that an open morning was planned for Saturday 22nd April from 10.00 am to 11.30 am. Governors were asked to come and help if possible. Places at Homerton could also be advertised in the same way as the Owlets vacancy and in the Queen Edith's quarterly magazine. Governors agreed that it would not be appropriate to advertise places for children in publications for areas covered by other nurseries, such as Trumpington, even though a significant proportion of Homerton's children came from out of catchment.

**All
Governors**

5. Head's Report

Alex briefed Governors on a number of issues:

a) Children – Governors noted that:

- The nursery was currently full. The Nest was also full; one child would be leaving at half-term, but this place had already been filled. Children who had started or moved up in January were settling well. However, Alex suggested that in future it might be useful to arrange visits for parents whose children were eligible to move from the Nest to the nursery, to make them aware of the larger nursery classes and different staffing ratios.
- A number of illnesses were circulating including chickenpox and sickness and diarrhoea. Four staff had had Covid.
- 50 nursery applications had been received for September, higher than the 41 received by the same time last year. All of these parents had been contacted and 37 had responded requesting 30 hours. It was planned to continue to offer the same sessions in the nursery and in the Nest as for 2022/23. South was currently less full, as was usual at this stage. The number of applications for children with SEND was high and it was possible that two children with SEND already at Homerton would stay for another year, although this was being reviewed by the local authority. Governors noted that The Castle School now had additional provision for Reception aged children with SEND at The Fields, two classes with ten places each. New provision was also opening in Cottenham.

Governors noted that the aim at Homerton was to have one place for a child with SEND needing a 1:1 TA in each room, although this could be increased to two if necessary and possible to staff. Homerton had a strong reputation for supporting children with SEND, possibly encouraging more parents of children with SEND to apply.

b) Events – Governors noted that:

- Several events had been held for Chinese New Year, with a number of Chinese parents involved.
- The Life Bus would be visiting Homerton on 8th and 9th February. This was a mobile classroom run by the local authority, focussing on personal, social and emotional development and health. It had visited Homerton prior to Covid but had been fully booked last year. Governors noted that the cost of the visit was being met from parental contributions. Alex invited all Governors to come and see the bus.
- Staff would be putting on a performance of Goldilocks, linked to the curriculum, on 1st March.
- Parents' evenings for nursery children would be taking place in March and for Nest children in the summer term.

All
Governors

c) Staffing – Governors noted that:

- Three members of staff were on long-term sick leave or phased return to work, all in the same room. Alex thanked all staff who were helping to cover these absences.
- Staffing in the Nest was being supported by lunchtime staff. A new TA had been appointed from April who would be coming from Sancton Wood.

- One member of the lunchtime staff was moving to London and so this vacancy was being advertised.
- The Centre was also advertising for a Level 2/3 qualified member of staff for holiday club. Holiday club was covered for the coming half-term, using agency cover on one day.
- Alex would be discussing with the local authority whether lunchtime staff currently covering for TAs could be offered apprenticeships. Homerton had offered to take on a PGCE student from March to June but this had not yet been confirmed.
- Recent and planned staff training included a session on attachment on 11th January; a session on wellbeing to be held in Histon jointly with the other nursery schools on 20th February; and a session on helicopter stories jointly with Histon Nursery.

- d) **Air source heat pump** – The final proposal for the air source heat pump project was being prepared and would need to be signed off by Ken as Chair of Governors. It was not yet known when the work would take place, but purchases would have to be made before the end of the current financial year to be grant-eligible.

Governors stressed the need for clarity over the project's timeline and end date and to manage the site safely around children and staff. Alex and Roger noted that site visits by the contractors were ongoing. Sam offered to attend any planned meetings.

Alex/Sam

- e) **Charges** – Governors discussed whether to increase charges for the nursery and the Nest for 2023/24. Three relevant papers had been circulated: full details of Homerton's current charges, a note from the local authority setting out hourly rates to be paid from Government funding for funded children, and the budget summary for the period to 31st December 2022. As background, Governors discussed a number of points:

- Hourly rates had been increased for 2022/23, from £6.50 to £7.50 in the nursery and from £7.50 to £9.00 in the Nest.
- The lunch charge to parents was currently £2.50. Dolce, Homerton's caterers, would be increasing their charge per meal to Homerton from £2.15 to £2.33 from April 2023. It was not yet known if their management fee of £500 a year would also increase.
- Homerton's 2022/23 budget had been set anticipating an end of year deficit of £96,000. This had reduced in-year but an end of year deficit of approximately £50,000 was still forecast. Homerton's historic carry forward had reduced substantially in recent years, by £100,000 in 2020/21 and by £28,000 in 2021/22 to £137,000 at the start of 2022/23. It would not be sustainable to continue to offset deficit budgets by using the carry forward for much longer. In addition, long-term Government funding for maintained nursery schools remained uncertain and costs were rising in many areas, including food and energy bills.
- It was difficult to compare Homerton's charges with those of other nursery schools as their ways of offering hours and days were different; however, it appeared that Homerton's current charges were generally on the lower side. **Governors expressed concern that high charges in the Nest could put parents off, when the viability of the nursery depended on significant numbers of children coming through from the Nest.** It was noted that parents of funded two year olds were encouraged to take all of their hours over two days, rather than every morning, to reduce the cost of lunches.

With these points in mind, Governors reviewed Homerton's charges and agreed the following from September 2023:

Hourly rate for the nursery:	£8.00	(increase of £0.50)
Hourly rate for the Nest:	£9.00	(no change)
Lunch charge:	£3.00	(increase of £0.50)
Tea and Owlets:	£18.50	(increase of £1.00)

Governors also reviewed Homerton’s arrangements for taking deposits from families of children accessing extra hours. Currently deposits were calculated individually, as the cost of the extra hours accessed for 2 weeks, and were refunded in full by deducting them from the final bill when the child left Homerton. Governors noted that requiring a deposit was useful in securing families’ commitment to a place at Homerton. The deposit could also be retained if families did not pay their bills, although the recent audit had highlighted the need for a clearer debt management policy.

Governors noted that the other maintained nursery schools in Cambridgeshire also charged a non-refundable administration fee, payable when a place was offered. Furthermore, other nurseries charged an administration fee just to join their waiting list. Governors were not supportive of charging a non-refundable administration fee. However, it was felt that the system of taking refundable deposits could be simplified, as it was time-consuming and costly to calculate and reimburse them.

Following discussion, it was agreed:

- To require a £200 deposit for 30-hour children accessing additional hours, refundable when they leave Homerton
- To require a £100 deposit for 15-hour children accessing additional hours, refundable when they leave Homerton
- Not to charge a non-refundable administration fee
- To ask Resources Committee to consider further Homerton’s policy on late and non-payment of bills by families and on debt recovery.

**Roger/
Alex/Suzu**

f) Policies – Governors reviewed the following policies:

- Admissions to the Nest
- Admissions to the nursery and over-subscription criteria
- Admissions to Owlets.

All were agreed, subject to aligning the over-subscription criteria for two year olds in these documents consistently to place ‘children of contracted members of staff and governors of the Homerton Early Years Centre’ above ‘children living in the catchment area of the school’.

Alex

Governors also approved the Safer Employment Policy, noting that one amendment had been made to refer to the latest version of Keeping Children Safe in Education. The document would be signed by Ken as Chair.

Alex/Ken

g) Centre Development Plan (CDP) – Governors noted updates under the following headings:

- Quality of education – Eirini would be running a session on outdoor learning at a staff meeting. The new arrangements for South class were working well and would be offered again for 2023/24.

- Behaviour and attitudes – Parenting workshops were likely to be postponed due to a staff member’s bereavement. Bernie Cafferkey would be reviewing the Behaviour Policy and leading on STEP training.
- Leadership and management – Governors asked whether they should be liaising with the local authority and other maintained nurseries’ Governing Bodies, particularly in relation to funding. Alex noted that the other maintained nurseries were generally in a worse financial position than Homerton and so more likely to raise funding with the local authority. She would discuss this with colleagues at the joint training day in Histon. **Alex**
- Wider community – The weekly bulletin had been reformatted to include key messages at the top. The open morning planned for 22nd April was likely to be instead of a community event in the summer term.

h) Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) – Progress against the SEF was ongoing. As advised by the local authority, Alex would be sending out information to parents about online safety for young children, using information provided by Childnet and the NSPCC.

6. Update from Curriculum Committee

Tandy presented the minutes of the Curriculum Committee meeting held on 30th January 2022. She highlighted the following:

- The Committee had welcomed the Play Policy, prepared by Mitali. It was agreed that this should be added to the website as an accessible summary of Homerton’s approach. **Alex**
- Alex had reported on the recent local authority Keeping in Touch visit, which had been useful with constructive advice and suggestions on recruitment and on outdoor play.
- Governors had heard that the suggestions made by Eirini following her Governor visit were being implemented and welcomed in the Nest. Tandy and Rob would be carrying out a joint Governor visit in March on support for children with additional needs. Tandy encouraged all Governors to take part in visits, suggesting music provision as a possible topic. **All Governors**
- On music, Governors felt that the recent appointment of a new music teacher had been very successful. Her current contract was until April. Alex noted that the Centre was keen to continue for another year, but suggested that given budget pressures, it might be appropriate to reduce the number of weeks per term that the teacher visited. Governors agreed that savings from a slight reduction to hours would be minimal and that given the importance of music as part of Homerton’s offering, the contract should be renewed on the same terms as this year if possible. **Alex**
- The Committee had been pleased to see curriculum goals being embedded in weekly planning by staff, as recommended by Ofsted. Details had been shared with the members of Curriculum Committee; Tandy agreed to forward them to all Governors. Isa noted that she and Stefania were also planning Messy Play sessions to link to learning currently taking place within the nursery. **Tandy**

7. Safeguarding

Ken noted that there were no safeguarding issues to report.

8. Update from Resources Committee

The minutes of the Resources Committee meetings held on 24th January 2023 were received. Roger noted that a number of the points covered by the Committee had already been discussed, in particular charges and the air source heat pump project. The Committee had also discussed:

- An insurance scheme to cover prolonged staff sickness – The Committee had agreed that this would not be necessary for now.
- A change to Homerton’s property management company – An alternative company, Cath Conlon, which already provided services for several other maintained nursery schools, had made a competitive offer provided that all six nursery schools signed up. Governors had agreed that this should be pursued and the new arrangements were likely to come into effect from April.
- The Schools Financial Value Statement (SFVS) – The Governing Body approved the SFVS subject to the addition of notes in sections 6 and 7, which stated that Homerton’s budget was ‘realistic and sustainable’, that this was the case only due to the carry forward, which was reducing over time. Governors noted in relation to section 9 that in the local authority’s view, Homerton’s budget for 2022/23 was ‘balanced’ despite anticipating a in-year deficit, as the deficit would be offset by the carry forward. **Alex**

9. Any Other Urgent Matters

Cake sales – Alex agreed to discuss with Stefania and Isa the timing and running of fund-raising cake sales. **Alex/Isa/
Stefania**

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next Governing Body meeting would take place on Wednesday 15th March 2023 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 9.25pm.