

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at Homerton on Wednesday 6th December 2023 at 7.30pm

Present

Isa Garcia Crestani, Stefania Deidda, Sam Garyali, Tandy Harrison, Elizabeth Head, Suzy Hughes, Roger Lilley, Christine O'Farrelly, Ken Ong (Chair), Rob Payne and Alex Pearson (Head)

By invitation: Bernie Cafferkey

Clerk: Gwyneth Barton

Governors' challenge highlighted in green

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Ken welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Bernie Cafferkey, one of Homerton's teachers and the Centre's SENCo, who was attending as part of her continuing professional development; and Christine O'Farrelly, the newly elected parent governor.

Apologies for absence were received from Eirini Gkouskou, Mick Patel, Mitali Peckham and Surabhi Singh.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of 18th September 2023

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 18th September 2023 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 18th September 2023

All matters arising were covered later on the agenda.

5. Governor Appointments

- a) **Parent governors** – A parent governor recruitment process had taken place following the October half-term, as Eirini and Isa's terms of office had ended on 14th November 2023. Eirini had been eligible to stand again as she still had a child at Homerton. Governors were advised that two nominations had been received, from Eirini and from Christine O'Farrelly, meaning that both had been appointed unopposed. Governors congratulated Eirini and Christine on their appointment.

- b) **Co-opted governor** – Surabhi's term of office as a co-opted governor had come to an end on 4th December 2023. It was agreed unanimously to appoint Isa to the co-opted governor vacancy.

Isa/
Gwyneth

- c) **Associate member** – Surabhi had advised that she would be willing to continue to support the Governing Body, drawing on her experience in primary care and safeguarding. It was agreed unanimously to appoint Surabhi as an associate member, for one year initially, inviting her to attend all Governing Body meetings.

Surabhi/
Gwyneth

6. Governing Body and Committee appointments

A list of Governing Body and Committee appointments had been circulated with the agenda. The following points were agreed:

Gwyneth

- Christine to join the Curriculum Committee

Christine

- Ken to continue as the acting Chair of the Resources Committee
- Tandy to continue as the sole Vice-Chair of the Governing Body
- Christine to replace Stefania as the Lead Governor for the Nest and Owlets **Christine**
- Rob to become Deputy Lead for Special Educational Needs and Disability, supporting Tandy as the Lead Governor **Rob/
Tandy**
- Mick to continue as the Lead Governor for Health and Safety and Sam to continue as Deputy Lead
- Isa to continue as the Lead Governor for Equal Opportunities. Alex noted that Tamsin Fry was now the member of staff leading on Equal Opportunities. She agreed to arrange for Isa and Tamsin to meet **Alex/
Isa**
- Surabhi no longer to be on the Resources Committee or the Deputy Lead for Child Protection and Safeguarding.

Governors also discussed responsibility for the parent WhatsApp groups. Rob's wife, who is a digital property lawyer, had been working with Mitali to develop an Acceptable Use Agreement for the use of WhatsApp groups by classes at Homerton. At the last Governing Body meeting Rob had reported his wife's advice that it would be preferable for the WhatsApp group administrators to be governors who had children currently at Homerton. This was because they had a more immediate relationship with parents and were less likely than other Governors who did not have children currently at Homerton to be perceived as speaking on behalf of the Centre.

The current WhatsApp group administrators were Isa, Stefania and Eirini. As neither Isa nor Stefania still had children at Homerton, it was agreed that they would be removed as administrators and that Christine would be added, so that the groups were administered by the two parent governors who had children currently at Homerton. **Isa/
Stefania/
Christine**

Isa noted that the main role of the administrators was to ensure that the groups were used appropriately. She and Stefania had also used them to send out reminders to parents, usually the day before, of events coming up at Homerton such as raffles and cake sales.

7. Head's Report

Alex briefed Governors on a number of issues:

a) Children – Governors noted that:

- Four children were leaving the nursery. Three were moving away and one who had previously been half-time at Homerton and half-time at the Pelican was moving to full-time at the Pelican.
- Recent activities included the Storytrail, Diwali celebrations, firework and allotment visits. Music sessions had resumed and Ross Sargent was running sessions on Life Skills through Movement.
- Isa and Stefania were running Messy Play sessions, which were very popular and often oversubscribed. Alex led Governors in thanking Isa and Stefania for their efforts.
- Nine children were eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium and one was eligible for free school meals.

- There were eight children in the Centre with high levels of SEND, one of whom had an EHCP and five of whom received additional funding. A further nine were being monitored with plans in place for behavioural or speech and language support.

Governors commented that these levels of need were high. This was thought to be due partly to more children being identified with SEND nationally and partly to Homerton's strong reputation for its support for children with SEND.

Governors noted that as SENCo, Bernie worked hard to bring in additional funding for children with SEND but that the process had become harder this year, with significant amounts of evidence required. In addition, some children came to Homerton with needs already identified but many did not have their needs identified until after they arrived, increasing the amount of time and work needed to get support and funding in place. Governors noted that there was not a deputy SENCo but that in the past, a teaching assistant had provided some additional support. Governors suggested that Alex consider reintroducing this.

Alex

Governors agreed that it would be important to monitor overall levels of need to ensure that the Centre's capacity to provide excellent support to all children either with or without SEND was not exceeded.

- 69 children came from families with English as an additional language or where two languages were spoken. A total of 32 languages were represented across the Centre. Staff were celebrating a different language each half-term, focussing on those that were most prevalent. The current language was Spanish and after Christmas it would be Chinese.
- Breakfast club and Owlets were well used, with nine children attending in the morning and 17-23 in the evenings.

b) Staffing – Governors noted that:

- Roger, Tandy and Mick had completed the Head's performance review and financial recognition of her hard work had been agreed. Performance review and target setting had also been completed for all other staff.
- Debra Bennett, the Owlets play worker, would be retiring at the end of term after 18 years at Homerton. It was proving challenging to fill her post. The post had recently been re-advertised with different working hours, from 3.30pm to 5.45pm, and one candidate would be interviewed shortly. Contingency plans were in place if it was not possible to recruit, but it would be preferable to make a substantive appointment.
- Bernie was supporting the Ridgefield School SENCo and Alex had received a visit from staff at the Shade School in Soham.
- Two groups of Faculty students had visited the Centre this term and staff had also given a presentation.
- Mitali was working towards the National Professional Qualification (NPQ) in Headship and Bernie toward the NPQ in Senior Leadership. Three members of staff were working towards their Level 3 childcare qualification and one towards Level 2, with two more waiting to start Level 2.
- All staff had undertaken child protection training in September. Eirini had visited to lead a useful training session on outdoor play. Staff would be receiving training on 4th January 2024 on autistic spectrum disorders, which Governors were also invited to attend.

**All
Governors**

- Catering staff had transferred from Dolce to Homerton on 1st October 2023. A decision was needed on whether they should remain on their previous payscale or transfer to the local authority's. The latter was likely to be simpler to administer in future but more expensive. Alex was seeking further information and advice on this from EPM. Alex

- c) **Parents** – Recent events for parents had included a play talk, a parents' evening and information on curriculum goals and Planning in the Moment. A coffee morning for parents of children with SEND had been held for the first time and had been very well received. It was planned to repeat this termly.

A number of parents had contributed to circle time, including sessions on Diwali.

Parent had taken part in the Christmas Storytrail earlier that day. Other Christmas events would include a raffle, visits from Father Christmas, a play based on Jill Murphy's book Whatever Next and parties.

- d) **Nursery schools funding** – The future funding of maintained nursery schools was likely to be challenging.

The teachers' pay award had been confirmed at 6.5% and the award for support staff at 3.8%, plus a lump sum. The Government had recently agreed to fund the teachers' pay award for maintained nursery schools.

Ray Byford, the local authority financial adviser, had been researching the Government's funding for funded places for 2 year olds and had found that an hourly rate of £7.15 was proposed for Derbyshire, £8.15 in Cambridgeshire and up to £11.50 in some London boroughs. Governors expressed concern that costs in Cambridge were close to London levels and that the proposed funding was inadequate. Governors noted that Ray Byford had offered to attend the next Governing Body meeting on 6th February 2024 to discuss the figures in more detail and to establish how financially viable it would be for Homerton to offer funded places for 2 year olds from September 2024.

- e) **Centre Development Plan (CDP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF)** – These had been circulated with the agenda. Governors noted that good progress was being made against the CDP, with many activities now highlighted in yellow (underway) or green (complete).

- f) **Assessments** – Autumn baseline assessments had been completed for all children and work was underway on assessments for literacy and maths.

- g) **Air source heat pump** – The air source heat pump had been switched on and the Centre was warm. There had been some initial problems with the hot water supply but these had now been resolved by setting the hot water to come on an hour earlier. Currently no electricity readings were being recorded by the equipment on the roof, but this was being addressed.

Homerton's recent electricity bill had been much higher than previous bills but the Centre was no longer paying for gas.

- h) **Property management** – Homerton's new property management company, Cath Conlon, was proving proactive and helpful. They had recently been finding solutions to repair decking around the sandpit in the Nest garden and the nursery bridge.

- i) **Nest Admissions Policy** – The Governing Body had agreed at the previous meeting to close the Nest waiting list, since not all of the families already on the list would get a Nest place in the current year and there had seemed little benefit in adding more names to the list. The amendments had been intended to make the situation clear to parents, who would still be able to join the waiting list for future years.

Alex reported that the local authority had advised after the meeting that the list should not be closed, because this was not compatible with the wider admissions criteria, which prioritised some children over others already on the list, for example care experienced children.

In view of this advice, the Governing Body agreed to reverse the amendments to the Nest admissions policy made at the previous meeting but to continue to advise parents that the Nest waiting list was very long and that by joining it, they would be unlikely to obtain a place in the current year.

Alex

8. Update from Curriculum Committee

Tandy presented the minutes of the Curriculum Committee meeting held on 11th October 2023. The following points were highlighted:

- Eirini and Mitali had visited South Room to find out how the different attendance patterns were affecting children and staff.
- Tandy and Eirini would be carrying out a visit on the use and impact of the Early Years Pupil Premium.
- The Committee had discussed Governors' preparation for the next Ofsted inspection, which could take place in summer 2024 but was more likely to come in 2024/25. Tandy highlighted the need for Governors to be aware of the recent curriculum changes and staff members' work on curriculum goals. The Committee would also be reviewing the Ofsted folder for governors (kept in Alex's room) next term.
- The YMCA nursery at Blinco Grove had closed as they had been unable to recruit or retain staff. Some children from the YMCA had come to Homerton. The local authority was planning to carry out some refurbishment of the Blinco Grove premises and then retender them for nursery use.
- Linked to their review of the Outdoor Play policy, Curriculum Committee governors had been advised of a recent visit from Sportsafe, which had resulted in the swing on the tree in the garden being identified as unsafe for use. The swing had been removed but staff had felt that this was unduly cautious and had arranged a visit from a tree surgeon previously used by the Centre. He had carried out a professional risk assessment, had confirmed the set-up safe for use and had reinstated the swing, all free of charge.

**All
Governors**

Tandy reported that a further meeting of the Curriculum Committee had taken place earlier in the week. The minutes of this meeting would be brought to the next Governing Body meeting on 5th February 2024. However, there was one issue that the Committee wished to raise with the Governing Body now.

**Tandy/
Gwyneth**

Tandy explained that Homerton was receiving increasing numbers of requests from private schools for staff to complete online assessments of children in the nursery. Parents were seeking school places for these children from September 2024 but the deadline for completing the assessments was early in the school year, typically by the end of November.

Tandy explained that the Committee had felt uncomfortable about these requests for a number of reasons:

- They were time-consuming for staff to complete, especially as there was not one standard form used by all schools.

- Time spent completing the forms was not benefiting all children in the nursery.
- The assessments were not intended to aid transition but were essentially part of a competitive admissions process, which was not in keeping with Homerton's ethos.
- The requests were being made very early in the school year, meaning that even if staff did complete the assessments, there was a limit to how meaningful a picture of a child could be given.

Curriculum Committee had therefore recommended that Homerton should write to the schools making these requests and state that it was not appropriate for staff to complete the assessments. However, with the agreement of the relevant family, staff from a school could come and observe a child for themselves in the Homerton setting.

The Governing Body fully endorsed this recommendation. It was also suggested that with the agreement of the family, Homerton could share any data, such as baseline assessment, that was gathered as part of the Centre's own processes. **Alex**

9. Safeguarding

Ken noted that there were no safeguarding issues to report.

He had signed the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and would pass this to Alex. **Ken/
Alex**

10. Update from Resources Committee

The minutes of the Resources Committee meetings held on 17th October 2023 and 30th November 2023 were received. The following points were highlighted:

- Governors had agreed that funded places for 2 year olds should not be offered from April 2024, due to the uncertainty of the current year's budget. The Governing Body would be asked in February to consider whether funded places for 2 year olds should be offered from September 2024, based on the forecast outturn for 2023/24. Governors noted that Government funding for funded 2 year old places was lower than Homerton's current charge to parents. Alex had prepared a paper with suggestions for generating income to meet the shortfall, which would be included as part of Governors' considerations.
- A new budget system had been introduced by the local authority and it was not currently possible to produce reports or forecasts. Ray Byford was working to address this. **Governors expressed concern at the situation and hoped that useful information would be available early in the new year.**

11. Policy Review

a) **Code of Conduct for All Adults** – This was a standard policy provided by EPM. Governors approved the policy.

b) **Critical and Major Incidents** – Governors approved this policy, subject to the following points: **Alex**

- Replacing Roger with Isa on pages 17 and 20, as Roger no longer lived as close to Homerton as previously
- **Adding reference to the parent WhatsApp groups as a means of quickly cascading information to parents, plus the contact details of Christine and Eirini as the groups' administrators**

- The policy to be reviewed annually to ensure that names and contact details remain up to date.

Governors discussed the Centre's practical arrangements for responding to a critical incident. It was suggested that it would be useful for staff to talk through and test responses to a range of possible incidents, involving office staff as well as those in classrooms and also recognising that staffing arrangements varied during the year, for example when holiday club was running. Alex agreed to follow this up with staff.

Alex

- c) **Financial Responsibilities and Financial Procedures** – These two documents had been reviewed following the local authority financial audit. Governors approved both documents and agreed that they should next be reviewed in 2025.

Alex

- d) **Whistleblowing** – This was a standard policy provided by EPM. Governors approved the policy and agreed that it should be reviewed annually, as recommended by EPM.

Alex

12. **Any Other Urgent Matters** – none.

13. **Date of Next Meeting**

The next Governing Body meeting would take place on Monday 5th February 2024 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm.