

Homerton Early Years Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at Homerton on Wednesday 13th March 2024 at 7.30pm

Present

Isa Garcia Crestani, Eirini Gkouskou, Elizabeth Head, Suzy Hughes, Roger Lilley, Ken Ong (Chair), Rob Payne, Alex Pearson (Head) and Mitali Peckham

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, Tandy Harrison, Christine O'Farrelly and Surabhi Singh.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of 5th February 2024

The minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 5th February 2024 were approved as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes of 5th February 2024

Governors noted that the Safeguarding training session had been deferred as Surabhi was unable to attend this meeting.

**Ken/
Surabhi**

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 Centre was currently full.
- For September 2024, 31 families had requested 30-hour places in the nursery. Of these families, 7 wanted 2½ days at the beginning of the week in East Red; 9 wanted 2½ days at the end of the week in East Blue; 3 wanted mornings only in South; and 7 additional families wanted 2½ days in South.

Alex noted that the 3 families wanting mornings only in South was a significant reduction from the 11 families wanting these places at the same point last year. She asked Governors to consider whether the mornings only session should continue to be offered, given that if there were no change before September, it would mean running sessions for only 3 children on Thursday and Friday mornings.

Governors agreed that it would not be cost-effective to run sessions for only 3 children, given that the staffing ratio for this age was 1:8. One option might be to place mornings only children in other classes, a hybrid arrangement that would be more cost-effective but could be less settled for the children and for staff.

Governors asked Alex to contact the 3 families wanting mornings only, to see if they would consider changing to 2½ days at the beginning of the week or whether they would no longer want a place at Homerton if mornings only were not offered. Governors agreed that at the next Governing Body meeting they would review responses, see whether more requests for mornings only had been received and make a decision on whether to offer mornings only from September 2024.

Alex

- Staff would continue to advertise the availability of nursery places for September, including at the open morning on Saturday 27th April 2024. Alex asked Governors to let her know if they were able to help with the open morning.
- In the Nest, more families were wanting full-time places for September than part-time places. Families were aware that Homerton would not be offering funded 2 year old places, except to targeted children. To date no families had raised major issues over this.

All
Governors

Alex sought Governors' views on whether the number of children in the two Nest classes should be increased from 12 to 13 from September. This was possible as the staffing ratio for this age group had increased from 1:4 to 1:5. One additional child in a class would bring in an extra £11,000 a year.

Governors felt that the classes would be busier, especially as each class was already expecting to have one child needing 1:1 TA support from September. However, given the financial situation Homerton faced, it was important to consider ways of increasing income. Governors agreed that Alex should discuss this suggestion with staff and report back. A decision would be taken at the next Governing Body meeting.

Alex

b) Staffing – Governors noted that:

- Alex was asking staff about their plans for September. One TA in the nursery would be retiring and one TA in the Nest was planning either to retire or to request a transfer to the nursery.
- The consultation period was underway for Homerton's two catering staff to transfer to Cambridgeshire payscales. If there were no objections, this would be brought to the next Governing Body meeting with a recommendation that the transfer take place on 1st May 2024. There would be an increased cost to Homerton in 2024-25 of £1,392, which had been included in the draft budget.

Alex

c) Training – Governors noted that:

- Eirini had run two staff training sessions on outdoor learning and Tandy had run a session on intensive intervention for children needing 1:1 support.
- Two members of staff were undertaking Level 3 training and three were undertaking Level 2.
- Bernie Cafferkey had almost finished her National Professional Qualification (NPQ) in Senior Leadership. Mitali was working towards her NPQ for Headship and Michelle Cooper was working towards her NPQ for Early Years.
- Placements for a PGCE student and two Duke of Edinburgh volunteers were going well. A placement for a Long Road student had been less successful as she had not attended for the latter part.

d) Events – A number of successful events had taken place including:

- A Goldilocks play put on by staff.
- Celebrations of Carnevale, lunar and Chinese New Year, including a concert of Chinese music played by Dong Sun, and Mothering Sunday.
- A parents' evening on Maths led by Mitali. Mitali agreed to consider circulating slides to all parents.
- Parent consultations for nursery children were taking place that week. Parent consultations for Nest children would take place as they turned three.

Mitali

Upcoming events included the Eggstravaganza and a raffle. Governors thanked Suzy and Tracey for all their work to organise and wrap raffle prizes.

e) Property – Governors noted that:

- Retrospective planning permission was being sought for the roof safety barrier, following a complaint from a neighbour. Governors noted that this had been installed by the local authority.
- There were continuing issues with the air source heat pump. Heating was not consistent across the Centre and rooms were typically cold, leading staff to wear coats indoors. The electricity bill remained high, £3,230 for March, although lower than the £3,890 for February. Data was still not being received from the solar panels.

Governors expressed frustration at this situation. They noted that the local authority was advising Homerton to issue a liquidated damages letter to the contractor, setting out the ongoing issues to be resolved. Alex also noted that contractor representatives were due to visit the following week, giving another opportunity for these issues to be raised.

- The gas meter was due to be removed as it was no longer needed. Removal would cost £315 but would lead to savings of £100 per month.
- The Nest sandpit had been painted and roofed and the decking mended. Both this decking and the bridge in the nursery garden would need to be replaced next year.
- The Centre's phone system would need to be transferred to VOIP. A quote had been received of £2,500 to set up in the first year and £1,500 per year thereafter. It was proposed to accept this quote as the company was recommended by the local authority's ICT service and they would support it.

f) Funding – Alex had met Anthony Browne MP during half-term to discuss Government funding. He had been very aware of the issues surrounding the Government's offer of free childcare for 2 year olds and had agreed that Homerton should not offer places if this would worsen the Centre's financial position. He had agreed to write to Jeremy Hunt and Gillian Keegan raising his concerns.

g) 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).

On the CDP under Governance, 'Ensure Governors and Centre are Ofsted ready', Alex confirmed that Tandy would be working with Curriculum Committee to refresh the

**Alex/
Tandy**

Ofsted reference file for Governors. Elizabeth noted that she would shortly be attending a Governor training course on preparing for Ofsted.

6. Governor Visit Report on Equalities

Isa presented a report on her recent meeting with Tamsin Fry, Homerton's ENCO (Equalities Named Co-ordinator). Isa particularly welcomed the arrangements the Centre had in place to monitor the progress of children for whom English was not their first language. She had suggested that parents should be made more aware of this monitoring, so that they could be more actively involved and help to support their children at home.

Governors thanked Isa for her visit and report and endorsed her recommendation.

Alex

7. Governor Visit Report on South Room Arrangements

Eirini and Mitali presented a report on their recent review of arrangements in South Room. Historically South Room had run only as a mornings only class, but this year new arrangements had been put in place with the South morning class running Monday to Friday 8.45 to 11.45 and the South Red class running Monday and Tuesday 8.45 to 3.45 and Wednesday 8.45 to 11.45 or 3.45, according to parental choice.

Eirini and Mitali explained that they had spoken to the South teacher and TA, to the two members of staff who worked on Monday and Tuesday afternoons and to one parent with a child in South Red.

They reported that their findings had generally been very positive. They highlighted some points for further consideration:

- There was a notable contrast between morning and afternoon numbers, 16-24 children in the morning as compared with as few as 4 on a Wednesday afternoon.
- Children attending the smaller afternoon sessions benefited from more focussed adult attention; however, it would be important to ensure that these sessions kept their educational benefit. This might be improved by stronger and more directed planning across the whole of the South week, including the afternoon sessions.
- There was no structured time for communication between staff working in the mornings and the afternoons and this would be difficult to arrange. However, the visiting Governors had found that staff were managing well to communicate informally and had suggested that more directed planning across the week would also help with this.
- Financially, offering the afternoon sessions had generated an annual income of £1,836, and it was thought that it would not have been possible to fill the morning only sessions without making the afternoon sessions available. However, financial viability could be improved by encouraging more children to stay on the Wednesday afternoon.

Governors thanked Eirini and Mitali for their report, which was especially usefully given the question raised by Alex earlier in the meeting on whether to offer morning only sessions from September. On the short term, it was agreed that Alex would e-mail parents including those with children in East Red, to see if greater take-up of Wednesday afternoons could be achieved for the summer term. Going forward, Governors would keep in mind the points raised in this report when considering the running of South Room from September 2024.

Alex

8. Safeguarding

Ken noted that there were no safeguarding issues to report.

9. Budget Reports

Three budget reports had been circulated shortly before the meeting:

- A revised budget monitoring report for February 2024, replacing the version previously circulated
- A draft budget for the nursery for 2024-25
- A draft budget for the Nest for 2024-25.

Ken also tabled a budget overview that he had prepared, summarising the nursery and Nest budgets for 2023-24 and tracking total income and expenditure and the carry forward from 2011-12 to the present.

Ken introduced the reports, noting that under the new financial management system implemented by the local authority, 'revenue' referred to the nursery and 'extended' to the Nest. He focussed firstly on the budget monitoring report for February 2024, highlighting the following points:

- The carry forward from 2022-23 had been split between the nursery and the Nest, £83,000 in the nursery and £36,000 in the Nest, total £119,000.
- In the nursery, total revenue income for 2023-24 was forecast to be £632,000, £55,000 higher than the £577,000 anticipated when the budget was set. This was in large part because the local authority funding instalment had been returned from its 2022-23 dip to the level of previous years.
- Revenue expenditure in the nursery was projected to be £687,000 at year-end, £57,000 higher than the £630,000 anticipated. Significant variances contributing to this were £10,000 for teaching staff, £31,000 for educational support, £4,500 for electricity and £8,000 for ICT. There had been some areas where spending had been lower than anticipated, most notably a saving of £7,500 on supply teachers.
- Overall, the in-year overspend for the nursery was projected to be £55,000.
- In the Nest, total revenue income was projected to be £334,000 and total expenditure £354,000, meaning an in-year overspend of £20,000.
- The combined in-year overspend for the nursery and Nest was forecast to be £75,000 (£55,000 plus £20,000). This deficit would have to be offset using the carry forward, reducing it from £119,000 to £44,000 going into 2024-25, the lowest it had been in over a decade.
- The capital budget had begun the year with a carry forward of £11,000. The February budget report showed an in-year increase of £73,000 and projected a year-end carry forward of £84,000. However, Alex and Suzy explained that this would reduce by £33,000 as a final instalment had been paid to the air source heat pump contractors that day. The remaining carry forward would have to be kept separate from the nursery and Nest budgets and could be used only for capital projects.

Governors reviewed the budget overview prepared by Ken, noting that:

- Expenditure had risen year on year since 2018-19, the first year shown. Income had also risen each year, with the exception of 2022-23 when there had been a dip in local authority funding due to a change in accounting for children's start dates. This had been rectified for 2023-24.

- The historic carry forward had decreased each year from 2011-12 to 2015-16, when there had been a significant increase to fees and charges. The carry forward had then risen again until 2020-21, the first year of the pandemic, after which it had fallen each year.
- Income had not increased significantly from 2022-23 to 2023-24 - £961,000 to £966,000 – despite the local authority funding being restored to the 2021-22 level. Governors asked why this was. It was suggested that there had been a significant reduction in parental voluntary contributions to the School Fund, from £60,000 in the previous year to almost nothing, possibly due to cost of living pressures. [Post-meeting amendment: parental voluntary contributions were in fact £2,981 in 2022-23 and £4,893 in 2023-24].

Governors received the draft budgets for 2024-25 for the nursery and the Nest, noting that final versions would be brought to the next Governing Body meeting on 24th April 2024 for formal approval. Governors noted that at this stage:

- A balanced budget was proposed for the nursery for 2024-25. This was based on the current staffing structure and included cost of living increases, although Alex had suggested that more should be allowed for increased electricity costs.
- The Nest budget for 2024-25 projected a deficit of £14,000 by year-end.
- Deficit budgets were projected for both the nursery and the Nest from 2025-26 onwards. Both restructuring and increased charges were likely to be necessary to address these.

Governors considered a number of options to reduce expenditure or increase income for 2024-25.

Governors agreed:

- To end the current external provision paid for using the Early Year Pupil Premium (EYPP) and to put this funding to alternative, more effective use, possibly in-house. **Alex**
- To request financial contributions from parents for music sessions. **Alex**

Governors agreed to defer decisions on the following proposals until the next Governing Body meeting on 24th April 2024, when the final end of years figures for 2023-24 would be known and a formal decision on the budget for 2024-25 would be required:

- Whether to renew the temporary contract for the 0.53 FTE teacher in South, due to end in August 2024. Governors noted that that the postholder could be re-employed as a teaching assistant. However, they expressed concern that this would have an adverse impact on other teachers, whose workloads would have to be redistributed to provide some ongoing teacher input in South.
- Whether to run South Room sessions on Thursdays and Fridays, as discussed under Minutes 5 a) and 7 above.
- Whether to take an additional child in each of the two Nest classes, raising numbers in each class from 12 to 13, as discussed under Minute 5 a) above.

Governors did not support the deployment purely on the basis of cost of lower paid over more highly paid members of staff who were on the same grade.

10. Policy Review

The following policy documents were approved:

Alex

- Health and Safety
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, subject to the date in the footer of page 1 being updated **Alex**
- Disciplinary Procedures relating to Misconduct of all Employees
- Best Value Statement
- Schools Financial Value Standard.

11. Any Other Urgent Matters – none.

12. Date of Next Meeting

The next Governing Body meeting would take place on Wednesday 24th April 2024 at 7.30pm.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.