

Meeting of the OLICAT Directors
 7th May 2021
 18:00 by video



Attendees: CD JB LD TB SR CL BN AW

Agenda item	Actions
1. Declaration of pecuniary interest/conflict of interest arising from agenda None raised.	
2. Minutes and Matters arising LD noted Chairs Action (point 3) did not record the decision of the Directors. Confirmed Directors agreed the exception in appointing the LAC Chair for an interim period to be reviewed at start of next academic year.	
3. Safeguarding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Covid 19 update TB reported schools decided to maintain measures and not relax these when term started. Some primaries requested they start to move layout from rows to groups due to impact on teaching and learning. They have had zero Covid issues at this time and feel it has improved teaching and learning. We are anticipating updated DFE guidance imminently. <p>Initial data collected shows no bubbles out at term start but cases are appearing in Bedford and increasing slightly in the secondary this week and 3 bubbles in TBCS Northants. We are still following guidance but have had to clamp down on events like sports days. Have allowed schools to make local decisions in consultation.</p> <p>There are initial indications we may need to do testing on return in September.</p>	
4. School Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. NLG feedback (Cathy Piotrowski) CP reported overall whilst challenging (a range of chairs with differing levels of expertise, experience and expectations) the coaction groups have been productive. Key point noted: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key benefit was networking and sharing ideas for improving practice particularly. • Focus is on being strategic, particularly through lockdown and how that shifts focus to an operational aspect. • Monitoring activities, particularly curriculum and 7 schools in RI status. Only Bedford schools have experienced new Ofsted framework. New framework is very demanding and expects governor knowledge of curriculum requirements and how governors monitor that. • Shifting mindset and focus from 20 plus item agendas to strategic focus. • SDP a major discussion point and how LAC monitoring activities build this in more constructively. • Suggestion coming from the co-action group - clerks group meeting. Has been useful bringing them into OLICAT mindset. Main challenge – agendas are for LAC chair and HT, not clerks. Balance of statutory and strategic. 	

- Impact is difficult to evaluate at this stage. Need to build in Sally Perkin's evaluation cycle.
- Potential areas for development/further work – wellbeing, governance self-review, understanding of governor role and contribution.

CD observed it is good to see all wanted to continue the exercise which shows value and will increase skill of governance.

BN observed this is an excellent piece of work moving shift to strategic and avoiding operational bog down. BN stated there are 2 key drivers to consider: external and imposed, and values and beliefs of trust as a whole. The external we have to live with, but the trust values will be adapted and expressed differently in each school and this filters to when chairs have meetings, and what actions/results are due to local interpretations of trust values. CP noted TB is keen still to organise the trust values day and LAC chairs very keen to be involved. Trust values filtered down to each school which then has a vision statement which should be driving strategy. Question has to come from board down – how do they fit within trust vision, reflect their own vision and how is it unique.

CD observed operations do tend to intrude into the strategic over last year but very important not to get bogged down.

TB confirmed plan is still in place to do a live version of vision day next term. After having lived the MAT for a while we might actually be in a better position to articulate this. CP agreed, and also allowed LAC chairs to get a feel for what the job is. Having systems like the HT report dealing with operational issues leaves agenda open for strategy and challenge to be evidenced.

CD queried if co-action groups like a frequent contact with directors or a once or twice a year event. CP confirmed LAC chairs have valued meetings held and is a good communications opportunity. Communications is an area we need to look at, but how is open.

CD queried overall have things improved. CP observed we may be a little bit premature but knowing what went before a period of adjustment is needed. For example the School Improvement briefing at the last meeting was very well received and understanding goals, initiatives, approaches has been vital for chairs to understand how they monitor. We're working towards joined up thinking. However there is still a lot of work to do.

LD agreed this has been a valuable piece of work and queried in terms of standards is considering a school to be OFSTED one of these? CP agreed and confirmed it has been one of the drivers seeing a number of schools are on RI and the Trusts desire to remove them from that category. Focus has been on what are the OFSTED requirements and what knowledge do governors need. LD observed the process of articulation to an inspector would be a valuable one.

b. Leadership

BG gave an update on current status at TBCS. As SI director BG had been working closely with TBCS SLT for past year. Key points to note:

- Focus has been on making sure we equip the leadership team with capacity and skills to form an effective leadership team with new head.
- 2 new AHTs appointed, both with mentors. 2 other associates to the SLT to develop into leadership – line managed and mentored by new DHT, in post for

one year to allow new head to craft team. This gives a framework and flexibility for a new head to establish their leadership. All will be on reduced timetables to give capacity to do the job.

- School has a legacy very rigid discipline structure, over which BG has some qualms, but felt best to retain over this uncertain period of change.
- 18 new staff in Sept, all of whom are strong. 2 induction days scheduled for them.
- School has been ambitious with curriculum which is challenging for staff, not in terms of volume but range of pathways on the timetable. Three year 10 pathways in a small secondary is unusual. The school is broadening horizons with a new elective programme.
- There is an improving sense of teaching to the top. One issue was around boys, and whilst much new research will say good teaching is good teaching irrespective of gender, but there is a predominance of boys and they are underachieving, masked somewhat by CAG.
- Sixth form, with a very small year 11 (90), the current y12 is 73. Pool to go to 6th is greatly reduced and we expect c40. Curriculum is ambitious and groups will be small. We have committed to vision and range of subjects as a draw to future year groups.
- The school feels less divided. There are many conversations about building strengths in the community and reflecting on building relationships. We have been isolated from Northants council and we are building bridges to bring expertise in. Part of that too goes to the discipline structure which is punitive and lacks investment in reward, reconciliation, restoration and forgiveness. One of the leavers is in charge of behaviour and we need to let him leave with dignity and recognise behaviour has been tackled and improved.
- Ethos – chaplain been working with parishes and bringing priests in with an emphasis on praying with staff.
- Dovetailing practice into monitoring visit. We have a big issue with SEND and only 5 students with an EHCP where we would expect 20 plus. Lot of work to do there.
- Summer school planned for send/vulnerable into year 7.
- Admission now at 168/180. Likely to fill.
- School is ambitious to move to good but we have got to anticipate it will take longer than people think to embed what is needed. We are uncovering issues under issues at the moment – foundations need to be addressed.
- Weekly meetings with LAC chair and a good focus on strategy.
- The important message for staff is slow down – not to slow progress, but do something, do it well and then move on.
- T&L – curriculum is mapped out, but learning is passive and controlled. Children are well behaved but no spark of learning. Questioning has improved but teachers need to be encouraged to take risks.

CD noted it is important for us to recognise surface gains can't be sustained without good foundations. BG agreed and referenced attendance as an example. On the surface it looks good but when you interrogate it does raise potential red flags, for example 15 moved to home educated.

JB congratulated BG on doing a great job, recognising the challenge you are up against and queried the sixth form offer to new y12 with the rationale of offering a wide curriculum to grow groups. How does it compare locally? BG confirmed if compared to the girls school there's is much wider because they have the numbers. Traditionally we have had a narrow offer, but are now offering law, BTEC science, and pre services/police course. JB queried group sizes? BG stated it ranges – 15/16 in science, 2 in Geography, English is low. JB asked if that reflects the learning experience? BG noted Geography teaching is quite passive, but Science is strong and English the strongest department – it appears to be a national trend.

JB asked about the new year 7 intake and if we are receiving 1st choice, 3rd choice, or no choice. BG confirmed 99 in first allocated cohort but there is a lot of movement in Northants. JB observed the risk of disaffected entrants who did not get their 1st to 3rd choices and what are we offering in year 7 to engage. BG stated we're building on feedback where we have it – that the school provides an environment where students are able to work and learn.

LD noted the level of work put in and the rationale to take a course of steady sustainable improvement and queried if in terms of priorities there were review points for activities to focus on. BG confirmed when the last years' SDP was reviewed it was hard to identify what had had an impact but this years plan is more focused. LD observed the range of 6th form subjects with small cohort could be a USP and queried how we market the sixth form. BG agreed we need to look at external candidates but we are short on sixth form space, and we're looking at areas around the school. The sixth form do compare the school with lavish offerings elsewhere. This is an opportunity for the next head.

BN noted consolidation is not slowing down. The question of discipline is that it impacts on staff too. That staff are being allowed to make mistakes and interact is a useful message, success can only begin if you start from where you are.

CL queried the children who went to home school and if there is a specific year or range. BG confirmed it is a range but is concerned over OFSTED viewing it as offrolling. The attendance officer is very meticulous and has a narrative for each. CL queried if lockdown had had an impact? BG explained a number are hard to reach parents, or a trigger caused conflict. We are working through the issue but it is a red flag.

TB thanked BG for stepping in and doing a remarkable job, one we could not have managed without her.

TB gave a brief update regarding Our Lady, Wellingborough. The school joined as Inadequate In January. The Head has gone off ill since Easter, and the DHT stepped up. The school is strongly supported by the SI team – 2 members of which are now based at that school. We are looking at putting increased support capacity in place which is important regardless of whether head returns in September. We can invite the Acting Head to the next directors meeting to update. CD good principle to hear directly from the people involved, but don't want to overburden or scare them off. Invitation is to inform.

Action: to invite Acting Head at OLWel to update directors at next meeting.

5. Finance

SR presented the finance update. Key points raised:

- Sixth form updated – broken down for high value courses. 6th form funding is not a simple per pupil calculation but linked to number of hours.
- Monitoring update is pleasing. When projected last year 8 were in deficit, and now is currently only 2. We understand why each position has changed. STE have small year groups and profound needs support. TBCS is >90k but orders are all closed for the year now.
- We have money in for universal FSM and a tranche of PP. Some schools will have a better outturn than predicted.
- June, July and August reports will be part of end of year.
- Trust capacity fund – sitting on reserves, but more costs coming through however no concerns.
- RPA funding for historic settlements are higher than anticipated so will help trust budget.
- 2nd tranche of condition funding arriving in June. Existing projects proceeding.

CD noted we are pleased to see less deficit than predicted but Directors' are aware of STMs difficulties in finances. It is also good to see SJR is more consistent and gives directors confidence picture is realistic.

CD noted looking at 5 year plans picture is always gloomy but the reality is year one you know where you are, year two is an estimate, year three onwards speculative. However it is a valid exercise to indicate where things could go.

SR updated that most budgets have now been reviewed and recommended by LACs, with a small number next week. Budgets attached and RAG rated:

- Our Lady, Wellingborough. Numbers are static, but staffing changes are feeding through. Anticipate some change throughout the year.
- St Brendans exchange a high outgoing year group for low incoming year group
- St Edwards have one low year group (15) working through that continues to impact.
- St Joseph's and St Gregory's follow a familiar pattern with a low intake.
- TBCS faces challenge of growth and lag funding. We will attempt to make a case to the DFE but with reserves this is unlikely.
- St Thomas More Secondary faces significant overspend again. Positive meetings regarding staffing going forward have taken place.

Final Budgets will go to DFE on the 28th. Directors agreed the budgets submitted.

BN observed falling rolls in Kettering seems surprising with the amount of house building taking place. The parish newsletter doesn't seem to reflect the school community.

SR flagged the internal audit report and no significant concerns raised – 2 amber and 1 red item all being addressed.

2 expenditure requests for approval:

- Laptop leasing at TBCS. Directors approved spend.
- Energy costs. These are rising and fluctuating wildly. Approval given in principle for when a suitable level is reached and Chair will sign off at that time.

Action: to flag with marketing person re parish messaging.

Directors confirmed they had seen minutes of LAC meetings.

CD confirmed he and TB met termly with the Duns Scotus Trust, and there are no issues to report back.

Redundancy committee has been formed (TB & JB). CD/CL/BN are the appeal panel should it be required.

AW reported on a data breach at TBCS. Breach met the threshold for reporting to the ICO. Breach is in the process of being mitigated and managed, but will be ongoing for some time. To update at next meeting.