

**Meeting of Full Governing Body**  
**12<sup>th</sup> March 2020**  
**6pm**  
**Library**

**MINUTES**

<b>Governors Present:</b>	Julian Benkel, Jon Dee, Giovanni Franceschi, Alex Marsh (Chair), Hope McAdam, Ian Rodgers, Emma Warde-Robinson
<b>Officers:</b>	Teresa Dee (Clerk)
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Vicky Anstiss, Lynn Hill, Gareth Hughes, Andy Roberts

	<u>Agenda item</u>	<u>Actions</u>
1	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>a) <b>Welcome</b> Louise Tomlinson and John Lamb were welcomed to the meeting for items 2a and 2b.</p> <p>b) <b>Apologies for Absence</b> Apologies for absence received from Simon Bowes, William Deighan, Judith Ford and Emma McCrea.</p> <p>c) <b>Declaration of Interests</b> The declarations register was circulated. There were no declarations made relating to items on the agenda.</p>	
2	<p><b>Presentation from School Leaders</b></p> <p>a) <b>Equalities Lead</b> Louise Tomlinson provided an overview to Governors on her lead role on equalities supported by a tabled document listing the strategic plan in relation to equalities and the progress made on each to date. The following summarises the key points discussed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From the student survey the student groups with protected characteristics had less of a sense of belonging and strategies had been introduced around this.</li> <li>• Seven students from the black, asian and minority ethnic (BAME) group completed a mentoring programme at Sussex University. This was followed up by a roll out of peer mentoring overseen by three members of staff. Success stories were around students who had flourished on the programme despite initial reluctance to participate.</li> <li>• With the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual plus (LGBT+) group of students there was a partnership with stonewall for advice. An assembly was held with the trans cohort well represented. An equality group will be run by many of the LGBT + students.</li> <li>• Staff cohort representation at Varndean within the protected characteristics groups was higher than Brighton and Hove targets enabling students to connect with people like them and to feel more comfortable.</li> <li>• Students had been proactive in their approach on having their opinions heard on school equality initiatives.</li> </ul> <p>Comments and questions from Governors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the school create channels when students do not feel comfortable communicating with staff if discriminated against or want to talk to someone for reassurance?</li> <li>• What was the planned follow up from the University?</li> </ul> <p>Responses to Governor Questions</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff cohort had been positive in supporting the equalities work and there were many people that the students could go to. Additionally, there were student communities set up with feedback processes.</li> <li>• The university team were to go into school and train the students that were to do the peer mentoring. They had also trained staff on unconscious bias.</li> </ul> <p><b>b) Science Lead</b> John Lamb provided Governors with an overview of the science department and the journey over the past eighteen months since his appointment as head of department.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last year there had been a big focus on year 11 to ensure that they achieved the best GCSE results which led to the school being in the top 20% nationally for science outcomes.</li> <li>• Very much a team effort with skilled science practitioners enabling focus on pedagogy with professional development as a continued process with regular open discussion and monitoring through learning walks and book looks.</li> <li>• Expectations moving up with aspiration to build upon previous year.</li> <li>• Extensive programme of out of class activities including Lego robots, science club and life sciences society. Guest speakers including three doctors with students from year 7 to 11.</li> <li>• 50 or 60 students a week attend exam preparation sessions.</li> <li>• Challenge Partner participation had enabled support and training to be provided externally and helped with internal development.</li> <li>• Joint working with year 5 from Balfour School and year 7 at Varndean.</li> </ul> <p>Questions and comments from Governors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would be good to see other professionals coming in to talk to children. Why is it mainly Doctors?</li> <li>• Science had been a focus for Governors and a regular feature on raising attainment plans, it was good to see the progress made and the continuing trajectory of improvement.</li> </ul> <p>Responses to Governor comments and questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At making the grade sessions parents had been asked if they could support and this led to a number of doctors who were used to public speaking coming forward. In the pipeline were a space scientist an engineer and a food scientist. It was hoped that a chemist could be found who would be willing to speak with students.</li> </ul>	
3	<p><b>Last Meeting dated 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019</b></p> <p><b>a) Acceptance of Minutes</b> The Full Governing Body reviewed and approved six pages of minutes from the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> December. The Chair signed the minutes as confirmation of their accuracy.</p> <p><b>b) Matters Arising not Included Elsewhere on Agenda</b> Governor responsibilities - It was confirmed that no further Governors had approached the Chair regards their allocated areas of responsibilities. The action was closed off.</p>	
4	<p><b>Chair's Update</b> The Chair of Governors provided an update on business conducted on behalf of the Governing Body and emerging priorities and issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The city-wide secondary chairs' meeting had covered the disadvantaged gap which had been widening being an issue for all schools. This was a challenge for Varndean and Governors discussed at the previous meeting. The message from the Local Authority was that schools were taking appropriate actions to narrow the gap including focus on attendance and tailored interventions for individual students.</li> <li>• Public Health England had attended the Chair's meeting Student to cover of the impact of the three unexpected student deaths across the city. One of the actions arising was to provide a plan and tool kit for all schools on dealing with unexpected student deaths. Varndean had been commended for communication with the parent body on communication lines for support. The Deputy Heads picked up this issue in relation to the continuing</li> </ul>	

	<p>emotional impact on students and the support mechanisms in place. The wellbeing team would continue to work with the key groups affected. Governors picked up on the inaccuracy of some of the press reporting that became apparent after the inquest findings had been released. It was noted that it had been difficult in terms of sensitivity to countermand the reporting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter sent collectively from a group of headteachers about a concern over delays in building works.</li> <li>• Stage 3 complaint around equalities being reviewed in line with School’s complaints policy.</li> <li>• Recruitment of an additional deputy head to support a five school structure.</li> <li>• Coronavirus and managing the impact on the school had been an arising issue and conversations with school leaders had taken place. A draft coronavirus contingency plan was tabled for discussion. Summary of discussion follows:</li> </ul> <p><b>Coronavirus Contingency Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The plan was a work in progress developing as more central guidance received.</li> <li>• Two scenarios lead to different responses, an extended closure would happen following direction and a temporary closure after an infectious case.</li> <li>• During an extended closure the plan would be for staff to continue to work and for students to learn. Varndean being a google school would use the offsite learning platforms available. An alternative method of communication would be used for the ten families without internet access and consideration would be given to mitigating the issues regards lack of suitable devices to access online learning.</li> <li>• Confidence in being able to provide learning in the short term for students with further development if period of closure was extended.</li> <li>• The area of main concern was student preparation for GCSEs particularly those with a practical exam element. Art students currently in the 10 week preparation stage for exams.</li> <li>• Governors invited to read through the contingency plan and submit questions and suggestions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Comments and questions from Governors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was the school in a position for every student to do home learning?</li> <li>• Had school trips been cancelled?</li> <li>• Regular communication into the Governors group appropriate as the Local Authority did not always communicate directly with Governors.</li> <li>• Push for direction from Local Authority on plans for free school meals children in shut down scenario.</li> <li>• How would safeguarding issues be dealt with.</li> <li>• Possible third scenario where a high % of staff have to stay at home due to sickness and may not be able to teach remotely.</li> </ul> <p><b>Response to Governor comments and questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework had already been set on Varndean Plus and communication with parents by email. Some would miss out on e-learning so packs of resources would be put together for collection. It was not just about the learning, there was the question over how free school meals children would receive food. Also, a broader safeguarding issue had been built into the plan to protect those students on their own at home.</li> <li>• Changing situation regards school trips and would be guided by Government advice.</li> <li>• Communication with parents / from the LA would be shared with Clerk for passing on.</li> <li>• Public health helplines had been available during holiday periods and it was hoped that these would be in place during a shut down. Staff would still be working and could be contacted with referrals done in the same way. Pastoral staff would check in with the vulnerable children.</li> <li>• Priority would be around the youngest children and the exam group.</li> </ul>	
5	<p><b>Headteacher’s Report</b> Gareth Hughes presented the Headteacher’s report updating Governors on key issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An ex Varndean staff member had been referred to the teaching agency for historic inappropriate behaviour prior to his employment at Varndean. Governors asked about the</li> </ul>	

	<p>recruitment process and how robust the vetting was. In response Governors were advised that there was no knowledge of the incident prior to appointment and all steps of the recruitment had been followed. The allegation was made 7/8 years after the incident.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Separately there had been a safeguarding incident on a school trip over the half term which was reported by the students involved to staff on site who were able to promptly contact the safeguarding base for advice. Governors asked about the process of checking by the travel company and the students wellbeing. Governors were advised that the students were receiving school base support and that there were follow ups with the travel company.</li> </ul> <p>7.16pm - Andy Roberts arrived at the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A second permanent exclusion had been avoided with an agreed managed move. The incident was around a break down in relationships resulting in a physical confrontation on a staff member.</li> <li>Expansion of student numbers leading to recruitment of teaching staff including a deputy head, head of drama and director of music. Optimism around making strong appointments. Using the teacher apprenticeship route for appointments in English, science and maths.</li> </ul> <p>The regular Headteacher report was taken on an assumed read basis with Governors questions taken. Responses to questions were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students in the pupil premium group were making progress but in line with national trends the gap was widening though only slightly for Varndean.</li> <li>Predictions were based on learning cycle two data from pre-public examinations (PPE) and teacher assessments to provide a rounded judgement.</li> <li>PPE two data was just coming in with science and maths reporting a stronger position.</li> <li>Forecasting completed on a basis of stretching students.</li> </ul>	
6	<p><b>Behaviour, Attitudes and Personal Development</b> Vicky Anstiss presented the “deep dive’ report on the school improvement area of behaviour, attitudes and personal development.</p> <p><b>a) Safeguarding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>44% increase in number of students receiving safeguarding input with a particularly large rise in boys requiring safeguarding or pastoral intervention. This could be viewed as a positive response following the drive to students and their families to report any concerns. Prompt responses to issues raised.</li> <li>Safeguarding team expanded in response with the addition by the safeguarding officer increasing to fulltime and an additional net gain of 0.5 school leaders.</li> <li>Introduction of a tutor tool kit supported with ongoing training during Monday briefings had built capacity in tutor group to spot signs of students struggling.</li> <li>The band of brothers mentor programme was being used for a small group of boys.</li> <li>Year 10 had been identified as complex group with higher % of vulnerable students requiring intervention. Additional managed moves into the group had added some destabilisation. 48 students within that year group with 90% or below attendance.</li> <li>Year 7 were not requiring the same level of intervention as the previous year. The students with additional needs were being held well by pastoral team.</li> <li>The school had seen an increase in students presenting with self-harm or suicidal ideation. Regular triage sessions held to review individual students, their needs, the support being provided and next steps for them.</li> <li>Four well-being groups set up with membership from Dorothy Stringer School to support students affected by the student deaths with a safe space and therapy programme written by a primary mental health worker.</li> <li>Halfway through the developing emotional awareness and listening (DEAL) workshops with students, staff and parents. Feedback after sessions used to develop and improve the sessions. Students had requested some specific support and advise that would best be dealt with by primary health or CAHMS so the sessions were not quite levelling up with what they wanted.</li> <li>The school were pursuing the Carnegie Mental Health award and would be submitting for a gold award based on what currently doing.</li> </ul>	

- Pastoral teams had been engaging in monthly reflective practice sessions with pastoral staff. This would cover sessions on thinking about vulnerable students and considering own feelings. Feedback had been positive.
- An array of interventions available to the school.

**Governor comments and questions.**

- What was the current capacity on CAHMS referrals?
- Had there been interventions that had not been effective/ cost effective?
- The list of interventions was useful when reviewing exclusion decisions.

**Response to Governors comments and questions**

- With the unexpected death of two students there had been priority for connected students resulting in a prompt response from CAHMS. In general, the timeframe for getting a diagnosis for autism spectrum condition (ASC) was 12 months. The school was therefore operating on an assumed ASC diagnosis and putting in place support within available resources. Some students suffering from anxiety were unable to make it into school and therefore home tuition arrangements had been put in place whilst waiting for a diagnosis. There were also cases of families seeking private assessments in order to speed process up. Safety plans being created with modified timetables for individual students. Training also being sought for staff mental health first aid training.
- All interventions had a positive impact though this had not always been easy to measure. Most had been tried and tested and a real benefit.

**b) Student Behaviour**

- 70% of students had minimal behaviour points (5 or less) and a similar % had over 200 achievement points.
- Bullying incidents were required to be reported separated out into categories. Prejudicial incidents were not always targeted so not so appropriate to record them in the bullying log though they were recorded in the data within the Headteacher's report.
- Fixed term exclusions down on previous year. There were more cases of defiance particularly in the year 10 group. Modified timetable, social work and interventions put in place to settle vulnerable students at start of day.
- Year 9 level of defiance had reduced significantly possibly due to effective group work.
- Low level disruption continues to fall despite larger numbers of students. The vast majority of students were flourishing and functioning well in class.
- The Space provided a nurturing provision for any student struggling with fulltime in class, 76 students had been referred for a range of reasons including attendance, curriculum support, medical, new admission or social and emotional support.
- The behaviour policy as approved by the Headteacher was available within meeting documents for Governors' noting.

**c) Attendance**

- 250 students with 100% attendance.
- 900 students achieving the Varndean target for attendance of 96%.
- Attendance overall impacted by coronavirus self-isolations.
- Pupil premium group had a 5% gap on attendance, they were being supported by a breakfast club with efforts to identify any barriers to attendance.

**d) Equalities**

- The lead governor for equality confirmed that she had met with school lead to review the equality plan in relation to the public duty headings and that a revised document with more clarity would be developed.

**ACTION - Equalities Plan to next meeting.**

Note - item 9 was taken next as the meeting was about to become inquorate .

Signature.....Date.....

	<p><b>AGREEMENT - The Full Governing Body approved the Child Protection Policy and Safeguarding Policy and the Induction of Newly Qualified Teachers Policy</b></p> <p>8.12pm - The meeting became inquorate</p>	
7	<p><b>Financial Control - Finance Group</b> Discussions recorded within separate supplementary notes</p>	
8	<p><b>School Infrastructure</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Buildings Expansion - Update</b></li> <li>b) <b>Health &amp; Safety</b></li> </ul> Discussions recorded within separate supplementary notes</p>	
9	<p><b>Policies and Other Documents for Approval</b>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Child Protection/Safeguarding Policy</b> See 7 above</li> <li>b) <b>Newly Qualified Teachers Induction Policy</b> See 7 above</li> </ul> </p>	
10	<p><b>Any Other Business</b> None</p> <p>Meeting ended at 8.28pm Date of next meeting - 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020</p>	