

Cantell School
Minutes of the Whole Governing Body Meeting
held on Wednesday 13th December 2023

Present:

Harry Kutty (Head)
Glynis Alexander (Chair)
Emma Bradshaw
Julian Bryant
John Groves
Peter Hilditch
Nicola Hunt

In Attendance:

Michelle Burt (Clerk to Governors)

Apologies:

Matt Bunday
John Draper

27/24 Declaration Pecuniary or Business Interests

Action

There were no declarations of Pecuniary or Business Interests.

28/24 Minutes of the Meeting held on the 8th November 2023

Governors APPROVED the minutes of the meeting held on the 8th November 2023 as a true record of the meeting, which were SIGNED accordingly by the Chair.

29/24 Matters Arising

All Matters Arising from the last meeting are either complete, on the agenda or ongoing.

30/24 School Trips and Visits 2023/24

Governors NOTED information provided relating to school trips and visits for 2023/24.

The Head commented that the number of trips and visits carried out are wide and varied, although here is a balance to what can be provided, it is very important post pandemic, to get students out on trips. The Head added that the situation is positive and will continue to be positive

The Chair informed Governors that she looks at the cover list every morning to see how many trips are happening, which can be an issue when there is a lot of sickness. The Chair added that taking children on trips is the best thing that can happen to them. The Head responded that staff sickness is high, but low compared to other schools and industry sickness is even higher. The Head added that they have just appointed another cover supervisor and are planning to employ another, which will reduce supply costs.

A Governor said that the variety of trips and visits is fantastic and the issue was also discussed at the recent Finance Committee meeting with Sarah Bradshaw, in terms of parents knowing what trips are happening that they might want to send their children on. The Head responded that it might be possible to inform parents in advance about the bigger trips that happen well in advance, but unfortunately the paperwork and bureaucracy is so time consuming, involving teaching and support staff, it wouldn't be possible for all trips.

Trip Co-Ordinator

John Groves – Science

John reported that he had a good visit with the Science team and written a report. John explained that the visit was everything you would expect and he wouldn't go in and pick fault with the team and after speaking with them, everything was really positive.

John saw Year 7, 8 & 10 classes, who were all really involved in their lessons. One thing he did notice was the memory work being carried out and how important it is for each year group. Kat Cox and her team were amazing.

The Head informed Governors, following Dave Gill leaving, they are not reappointing to SLT, but will bring people up and as a result, Kat Cox is moving up to look after data and is bringing with her Rob Pickering, who will be head of science and Catherine Jones, who is now second in the department. **The Chair agreed that it is good to bring people up.** The Head added that it is good as they understand the systems and are very Cantell.

Emma Bradshaw – Maths

Emma reported that she had spent some time with Catherine Merrell-Jones, which was very interesting and Catherine explained what they are working on at the moment, which were very clearly demonstrated. They visited higher and lower Year 11 classes and it was very clear that it is all about getting students to achieve their best.

Emma added that it is very clear and interesting to see the same approach carried out in different ways for each group. Catherine explained that they monitor each group from Year 7 from their SATs to make sure they know all the correct stuff and how they monitor the progression by using the SATs to monitor progress and trajectories. This information is fed back to students to let them know what to focus on, by giving them indicators. Emma commented that it is really interesting to see how students are being empowered in the classroom and given directional progress.

Emma informed Governors that she will visit Computer Science next term.

Nicola Hunt – English

Nicola reported that she had visited English in September and spoke with Pru and Sara, the Faculty Leads and then met with the rest of the team in the English office. It was nice to arrive before school started and to see staff working together, particularly the more established staff working with the trainee teachers, checking in with them.

Nicola explained that they spoke about changes in English, including introducing poetry in Year 9 rather than at GCSE. They visited Year 8 classes where there were looking at the Christmas Carol and then L2L, where Nicola spoke with some of the students. It was really nice to speak to students about what they want to do next and what skills they will need to set up their own business. Nicola added that she also spoke to Rebecca Toland, who provided some feedback on Phonics and Reading Intervention – Rebecca only started at Cantell in September and had previously worked as an Early Years specialist and is looking at SATs and Access reading sets and is also meeting with groups of students on phonics.

The Head explained that there are a lot of young people who have come to Cantell with the reading ages of 6 or 7 and we work with them on phonics, so it is good to have an Early Years trained expert, who is doing a fantastic job. The Head said that he teaches oracy himself and knows the young people in the programme and is able to see the amazing difference it makes.

Nicola said she also spoke with Amy Taylor about the Reading Buddies school for Years 7 – 10. The team work with 100 students across the school, helped out by Year 9 & 10 when the university students aren't available. Amy had informed Nicola that 50% of students have increased their reading age and some have doubled their reading skills.

Nicola also spoke to Megan Brett about the mobile library – it was nice to see students coming up to the stand and taking out books. Megan has also introduced a really nice newsletter which also goes out to parents.

A Governor commented that a few years ago, there was a change to the exams board in English to better texts for young people – the last he heard was that it was going well, how has it been? The Head said they moved from AQA to Edexcel who are more young person focused, although the content isn't easier or dumbed down. **The Governor asked whether the switch had been positive.** The Head agreed that it had been positive, although they had experienced some issues with marking.

The Head thanked those Governors who had visited school added that visits are good and make them feel that they are working together. The Head asked that once a visit is complete, that Governors write up their report and send it to the Faculty Leader first so that any questions can be addressed before bringing it to WGB to see if there still any queries. **The Chair commented that showing Faculty Leaders the reports will further enhance their own knowledge and assure them that what they say is taking place, is actually being done.**

The Vice Chair Informed Governors that he was planning to visit SEN this term, linking it to a meeting with the Head to talk about a financial report – he will now do this in early January.

The Chair asked John Groves, the Parent Governor, how he is finding his role. John responded that it is very interesting and he is able to relate a lot of the information they received to what is happening with his son.

The Head commented that this is good to hear, as there used to be some mistrust and he knows that if there is any discrepancy, John will raise it at Governor meetings. **The Vice Chair added that it also works the other way and is a good way of tracking if what is said at Governors, is really happening with students.**

The Head said that they are really grateful for Governor visits, so a huge thank you.

32/24 **Complaints Policy**

Governors APPROVED the Complaints Policy as RECOMMENDED by the Staffing Committee.

33/24 **Report of the Finance Committee Meeting held on the 22nd November 2023**

The Chair of the Finance Committee reported that the Committee met for the first time with Sarah Bradshaw, the new School Business Manager – they usually meet on Teams but thought it would be useful to meet in person for the first meeting.

The Committee looked at the budget, making sure that spend was on track, along with income, which they are. The Chair of the Finance Committee added that it was a good first meeting and the Committee felt that although Sarah has a huge amount to get her head around in a short amount of time, she has done so and was able to have a good

discussion about where funding is coming from and it was good to see that the finances reflected what is going on. **Action**

The Committee also discussed the pressures on the budget, which is due to the uncertainty of some of the money being clawed back in relation to the PFI contract. They are allowed to claw back some money, but are demanding an unreasonable amount with no notice. The Chair of the Finance Committee said that he will produce a summary for Governors about the situation.

The Chair of the Finance Committee said that Sarah is on board and getting to grips with things and is doing a good job – there are some parts of the budget that are unknown, but which are being planned for and they the Committee is confident that this is being done well.

The Head informed Governors that they have also got the projected costs of utilities, which they will talk more about, but the potential from one year to another is an £80,000 increase.

Governors NOTED that Sarah Bradshaw worked previously at a local primary school – the Head said that PFI is something she has to get her head around, but because she is from the local area, she knows people and can ask questions, which is encouraging.

A member of the Finance Committee commented that she was really impressed by Sarah who was able to provide really thorough answers to questions.

The Head informed Governors that he meets with Sarah weekly to go through any issues and offer support – she's great and although she has a lot to learn, she is learning very fast. It is great for the Trust that someone has come up from primary to secondary and she is currently being mentored by the SBM from Redbridge.

The Chair commented that she has also met Sarah in relation to safeguarding – there were no issues and Sarah knows what she is doing.

34/24 **Finance & Staffing Committee Terms of Reference**

Governors NOTED that the search for an additional Governor for the Finance Committee is still needed. **Ongoing**

Governors APPROVED the Finance & Staffing Committee Terms of Reference as RECOMMENDED by the Committees.

35/24 **Head's Update**

The Head presented a letter that he is sending out to parents before the end of term, which he read out for Governor information.

In relation to the Head mentioning the Christmas Concert in his letter, a Governor commented about the wide variety of acts at the concert and how wonderful the concert was, adding that the commentary from the two students was fantastic.

The Chair asked whether anything will go on the website. The Head responded that photos will be put on Facebook.

The Head also mentioned his heartfelt gratitude to the school staff, who go above and beyond for the Cantell family, which is important for Governors to know. The Head

commented that the job feels much tougher than it used to, with staff having to do an extra 25% just to maintain where they are. The Head added that attendance in secondary schools nationally is at 92%, which is lower in poorer communities. The challenge of managing attendance is difficult and it's all about the young people who don't do as well when they're not in school in their exams or social development – staff think outside the box to motivate students. The Head informed Governors that Cantell parents have sent in five/six boxes of food for staff, along with some gift vouchers.

Reading was another area that the Head mentioned in his letter and how important it is to raise the profile of reading. The Head informed Governors that one in nine children don't have a book at home and they need to do everything they can to make sure reading is a priority.

The Head added that student equipment is another area where they have been thinking about, in light of the cost-of-living crisis and as a result, they are introducing a stationary shop for students to purchase pens, pencils and other equipment at a reduced rate.

Governors NOTED that Homework is another area for improvement and such, homework clubs are being run. The Head commented that this is not punitive, it is to help young people do their homework, which is a really important area for the school and our young people

The Head also mentioned student rewards in his letter, which can include a House achievement point post card, or a House reward.

Another area the Head talks about in his letter is Year11 and the heavy load and exacting time they have had. The Head commented that although Year 11 have been very busy they are dealing with it really well. The Head also made the point that students with 92% attendance or above get a higher grade in their GCSEs than those below this percentage.

Governors NOTED that there have been a few permanent exclusions and the Head commented that although it is always difficult to make these decisions as Cantell is hugely inclusive, it can be necessary so that other students are allowed to move forward.

The Head summarised that it has been a hugely successful term, with lots of challenges.

A Governor commented that the recognition for staff is great and it is worth adding from a parent's perspective, that her children have received postcards and phone calls home, which is really good for them as a family and goes out on their WhatsApp group. It is a bit of visibility for them and the teachers go to the trouble of taking the time to do this and they appreciate it because it is going the extra mile.

The Chair agreed that it is good, because parents don't always see what is going on in school and she is a great believer in saying, "well done". It is important to anyone to feel that you are doing a great job.

Another Governor commented that she was sitting a couple of seats away from Dr Barnes at the concert and had thanked him for the Science Clubs. Luke Wilson was on the other side chatting to her daughter.

The Head responded that Dr Barnes is someone who has developed as a teacher to a point where he has been given a special project for the Chinese visit. Dr Barnes' heart

is in research and the Head said that he can't wait to see what he can do outside of the curriculum to raise himself to another level. The Head added that it is really important to keep people engaged and make them want to stay at Cantell. This is why the school's retention rate is really good.

Action

36/24 **Any Other Business**

Ofsted

A Governor asked whether there has been any news in relation to the Ofsted enquiry. He added that they have had reasonable Ofsted experiences at Cantell, but a lot of schools don't and he'd heard about a support network in the city for schools. The Head responded that this has been set up by the Aspire Trust and is called the 'Caversham Covenant'.

The Governor asked for the Heads views on the impact of Ofsted to Cantell and other schools. The Head responded that the Trust has created a support network as part of the Caversham Covenant and as such there is a network for Headteachers to phone up before, during or after an inspection. The network includes 3 Co-opted Trusts and 5 inspectors.

Governor Visit Reports

A Governor commented about Governor visit reports when specific points are raised. The Head commented that there was one report where this happened, but has now been dealt with. The main clarification should be for visit reports to the Faculty Leader initially, so the points can be addressed and not misinterpreted. **The Chair commented that Governors aren't writing about their faculty areas, they are writing with them.**

Agenda Item next meeting

The Head summarised that John Grove was correct in his report that Governors aren't coming in looking for faults and there should be discussions about any concerns.

37/24 **Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 21st February 2024, 5.30 p.m.

That concluded the business of the Meeting. The meeting closed at 6.45 p.m.

Page No	Minute Number	Item	By Whom	By When
1.	20/24	Parents to be informed of overseas or large trips well in advance.	Travel Co-ordinator	As required
6.	25/24	Governor visit reports agenda item for next meeting	Clerk	21 st February 2024

Ongoing Matters Arising

2	04/24	Head to look for a replacement for Finance/Staffing Committee	Head	Asap
6.	08/24	Governors to arrange visits with the Link Faculties	All	When available

