

**Minutes of the Extraordinary Governing Body Meeting of the Wimbledon
Primary Federation
20th May 2020 at 8pm**

Present

CHAIR: Jo Reynolds, (JR)

Executive Headteacher: Paul Lufkin (PL)

Lauren Clogg (LC) Susan Clucas (SC) Sam Dear (SD) Eric De Regnacourt, (EdR), Katy Gandon (KG) Gemma Isaac, (GI) Kate Johnston (KJ) Rachel Morgan (RM)	Emeka Okorochoa, (EO) Heather Ponsford (HP) Raj Sood (RS) Chris Tregilgas (CT) Emma Walshe (EW) Rosie Williamson, (RW) Yvonne Young (YY)
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In attendance (* denotes Associate Member)

Ankur Agrawal (AA) (*)

Lisa Kingsbury (LK) (*)

Steve Cleary, Clerk (SAC)

*The features of effective governance from the competency framework: -
Strategic Leadership, Accountability, People, Structures, Compliance, Evaluation*

All original papers are available on the LGFL MyUSO drive.

1. GOVERNANCE

The meeting began at 8pm¹ and was deemed to be quorate.

The Chair commented that the meeting had been called to discuss options and mechanisms for a proposed return to school on 1 June under guidance from the government. Governors confirmed that they had received and read papers received from the Executive Headteacher in advance.

No apologies were received or consented to.

In accordance with the Education (School Government) Regulations, governors were invited to declare any interest they might have in respect of any item to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

¹ Owing to government restrictions as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the meeting was held online via Zoom

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2. RETURN TO SCHOOL

Presentation by the Executive Headteacher

Governors received a comprehensive briefing from the Executive Headteacher on proposed arrangements for return to school and noted a range of initial considerations as follows:

- The context in which decisions are being taken are unprecedented in the history of the schools concerned and there is a significant amount of risk involved if decisions have not been reasonably tested;
- It is not good for children to have been off school since March and there is a genuine desire across the education community and beyond for children to return to school as soon as it is safe enough. The main issue is the balance between everyone's desire to get all children back to school and the critical question of how we can do this safely. Whilst school leaders need to take it on trust that the available medical and other evidence has been sufficiently weighed in the public sphere, nobody seems to be able to agree on the exact medical safety indicators that are required to give the reassurance that everyone in school communities need. This has resulted in quite adversarial debates happening between the government, unions, local authorities, school leaders and parents, often very unhelpfully through the national press;
- DfE and Government pushing hard for rapid and widespread reopening, although unions and most school leaders are urging greater caution and even advising members not to return on 1 June. Different local authorities have also taken different positions and Merton's position is to follow the government advice and require that deviation from this needs to be properly risk assessed;
- It is still not known if all the safety conditions that various parties have said need to be met by the 1st June (including the government's) will be. This isn't something that we can control – if it's not agreed then we won't open.
- Whatever happens, there is a need for a plan to restart sometime in June;

The Executive Headteacher continued by commenting as follows:

- There are two logical decisions that could be reached in relation to return – the first is to test the proposed approach to be taken by the federation and determine it to be the model which gives the greatest chance of managing risk within a complex situation. The second decision which could be reached is that it is felt that the evidence is that there could not be a safe return to school on 1 June and that consequently any model offered could not offer a comfortable way forward. Whilst it might be the case that other models could be chosen, this would be less of an option;
- The government's expectation and advice is that it is essentially completely safe for all schools to increase overnight to being 50% full (with nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6 children) on 1st June. Initial government guidance was highly prescriptive in terms of models.
- The leadership team has reviewed the government's proposed model in detail and concluded that expectations are unrealistic and that there is a significant

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dissonance between the national social distancing guidance and operational realities within classrooms. It is believed that school opening guidance which asks them to have children from 15 different households in a classroom space with no real expectation of 2m distancing for up to 6 hours daily is a significant risk;

- The school leadership, amongst others, consider that the government's choice of year groups is illogical, given that nursery is not statutory and the government's reasons for the choice of year groups (nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6) poor, shows little understanding of how schools operate and how children of these ages feel, develop and learn. It is considered completely inequitable that in the government's plan, years 2, 3, 4 and 5 may not return to school until September, at which point they would have been out of school for nearly half a year and the underlying assumptions made are not educationally sound.

Governors were advised that in all models to be followed, there would be a need to have an element of social distancing. The "bubble group model" presumes as follows:

- all children in a year group would come back full time and each class will be split into small "bubble groups" (the government suggests half the class or up to 15 children) which are fixed for the rest of summer term.
- Work is undertaken in one class base with one teacher (and one or more other adults if needed) and there is minimal contact with other groups or adults. This means that half, or more, of the children back in school would not be taught, and have almost no contact, with their class teacher. This approach is not considered by the schools to be a pastorally or educationally strong one.
- Essentially the school becomes separated into rooms and zones where bubble groups can be away from everybody else. The classroom lay out and teaching approaches will be designed to ensure that children in the bubble group are kept distant from each other and adults even in their class base.
- This will be a different style of teaching with the teacher always at the front of class (seated behind their desk), not able to move around and interact closely with children sitting all the time at one desk. There will be very limited resources/books used and these will be kept personal to every child wherever possible (travelling to and from school in their school bag every day).
- Inherent to the model is government advice that parents be informed that a school would not be able to guarantee social distancing throughout the school day despite whatever procedures are in place and that children attend school on this basis.
- Under the government model, there is no guidance for specialist provision and it is up to schools/Local Authorities. There is a lack of current guidance from the local authority and given the position of Treetops, any decision to reopen is effectively the school's, although this is difficult given the considerable complexities of behaviour management involved.

It is the view of the school leadership that the bubble model proposed by the government would have a considerable impact not only on the school environment,

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but also its operational aspects in terms of behaviour management (particularly in Y6) and learning. In response to the approach to be taken, the Federation has examined a number of logistical issues and established processes to cover these.

In response to the difficulties presented by the model proposed by the government, the Federation has devised its own approach which is intended to:

- Increase the number of children more slowly;
- Change the order of year groups coming back with children to be selected on the basis of need, staff and local environment;
- Operate a rota system with the intention that all children could be back for 40% of their timetable for the second half of the summer term. The rota system will ensure that children will have different schedules with their own class teacher;
- Gain much greater staff and parent confidence around safety, and be educationally much more equitable for all children at the school;
- Be more scaleable to all year groups²

Governors were appraised of comparable approaches being taken by other Merton schools and noted that the majority are going for a rota system as follows:³

- Rota 1 – Week A and Week B model⁴
- Rota 2 – 2 days Group A, 2 days Group B and a day with no children for PPA, staff training, extra cleaning and planning/adjustments for the following week
- Rota 3 – 4 days morning Group A, and 4 days afternoon Group B. One day with no children for PPA, staff training, extra cleaning⁵ and planning/adjustments for the following week

In all Rota systems, Key worker/vulnerable childcare (excluding Treetops) are continuing (for those these year groups not in school yet over 5 days per week), but with a fixed set of staff operating more in the bubble group approach. The criteria for key worker status is also to be tested.

The Federation Model

The Executive Headteacher presented the federation preferred model as follows (based on Rota 3)

- Treetops classes split with children allocated Mon/Tue or Wed/Thu full day places in school⁶. (WWPS)

² government model runs out of classrooms quickly

³ Governors noted a marginal increase in risk in a rota model in that they are with 30 children rather than half that number

⁴ The school discounted Rota 1 on educational grounds as well as potential impact on families.

⁵ Governors noted issues around cleaning at WPPS and the need for ongoing monitoring of risks around the health and safety of staff.

⁶ Based on educational psychology and transport considerations

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- Reception to Year 6 mainstream classes operating in two bubble groups – morning and afternoon, (with follow up daily homework tasks linked to the in-school lessons for the alternate am/pm)⁷. 45 minute break in between groups.
- Packed lunch only (either brought in or ordered at school) eaten in class
- No children apart from key worker childcare on Fridays to allow for planning and reflection as well as training.
- Continued home learning only for year groups not yet invited to be back in school. When children can come into school, they will be expected to do so and there will be no general distance learning offer.
- WWPS - Full time childcare to be provided in the nursery based on parental need (joined to EY key worker group);
- WPPS - Nursery – children invited in for 1 week in their key worker group for a transition and closer session (morning and afternoon sessions remain same as when they left – only for E4 children)

School return would be different in each school as a result of local circumstances and be phased as follows:

WWPS

- Week 1 – Year 1 and Treetops
- Week 2 – Year 1, Treetops and Reception
- Week 3/4 – Year 6 and hopefully other year groups could start back (depends on wider developments and announcements)

WPPS

- Week 1 – Year 1
- Week 2 – Year 1, Reception and 1 key worker group in nursery
- Week 3/4 – Year 6 and hopefully other year groups could start back (depends on wider developments and announcements), if announcements allow other year groups, delay year to the final 2 weeks

Governors were appraised of the advantages of the federation's proposed approach in terms of behaviour, learning focus, social distancing and risk as well as staffing workload as well as counter arguments. It was recognised that the reception and Y1 would be likely to be the most difficult years to settle and that this would be best achieved in the first couple weeks when there are the greatest number of space and teachers available. Roles were outlined and the need for sensitivity over staff vulnerability was acknowledged. The next steps were outlined, union responses highlighted and approaches to raising staff confidence noted, particularly in relation to potential staff absence and following HR advice.

⁷ Allocated homework tasks would allow for a better continuity of education.

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Governor Questions

A range of governor questions were raised on the proposed model and associated matters as follows:

- *What of breakfast and after school clubs?* There are no plans to start these yet.
- *What is the position of critical workers?* It is expected that this element will reduce over time as a result of changes in return to work and definitions;
- *What is the likelihood of children passing each other in the corridors?* There will be a 45-minute break in terms of lunchtime as well as a cleaning schedule in place;
- *In terms of the nursery, would it not be more disruptive for children to come in for just a week?* It's an option and we would be expecting most people not to take it up. It will be ideal if as few as possible nursery children attend the school. A group of 8 in the morning and 8 in the afternoon would work, although it is non-statutory anyway;
- *Has special consideration been given to staff from BAME groups in terms of risk, given the higher prevalence and impact of Covid-19?* This is definitely a consideration for the school.
- *Does lunch need to be a feature of a half-day or does it add additional complication?* As a social responsibility, we have to be able to provide free school meals for children, particularly under universal free school meals in reception to Y2 and in addition it also provides an opportunity for social interaction. There will be two teaching sessions – 8.45 to 11.45 and 12.30 to 3.30pm with two lunch sessions which will be held in classrooms.
- *What is the position in respect of home learning?* Both schools have tried to focus home learning on the resources that will continue, are not completely dependent on the school's creation of them and are more self-sufficient than others. It is not intended to continue significant home learning for a year group that is back in school, except in identified cases where there is a significant medical need or vulnerability and the child cannot attend school through no choice of their own. In respect of work sent home each day, it is intended to serve as a link to teaching for the next day. Such an approach is not intended to work for home learning;
- *if the number of returning children was low as a result of parents not sending them back to school on 1 June would any other model work better?* Potentially immediately, but it wouldn't scale as once groups are set, they would have to be fixed. Once a bubble is set, there will be a need to keep with it as long as the approach is being followed. The schools are working on the basis that the greatest number parents will not yet feel it to be safe enough to send their children to school, particularly since there are no sanctions attached to this, and it is the job of the school to build parent confidence. The scenario that we are trying to avoid is that 9/15 children in the bubble turn up on the first day and have a negative experience such that they don't return on the second day;
- *is there a sense of the numbers that are likely to return on 1 June?* Not yet, as parent letters are to go out on 21 May and do not specifically seek information

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on this issue. Indications from other schools are that the figure is between 10 and 70% although the reason for these variations is not fully known. The Federation is working on the basis of a 50% turn up.

- *is there enough time to apply changes with respect to social distancing?* Yes, it is currently underway;
- *what is the position on PPE?* PPE is only recommended in a limited number of circumstances where children need physical care or physical support of which there are some in Treetops. PPE equipment has been ordered, although it doesn't form a major part of the school's operations. In addition, other hygiene controls have been implemented.
- *Has the cost of return been assessed against the extension of home learning to the end of term?* The key issue is to ensure that children return to school and there is no delay to this, as this gives the maximum benefit to their education. The schools want to be able to open in the way described;
- *What account has been taken in the risk assessments of pre-hazard issues?* The key issue here has been around parent messaging to ensure that children with a potential or actual infection do not come into the school and to ask parents to continue their rigorous hygiene measures. The school also has powers to turn children or parents away at the school gates should there be any issue, although it believes that families have been through so much that they would be unprepared to take risks with either their own or other children.
- *What are the potential risks and consequences that could be faced by deviating from the DFE guidance or models followed by other Merton schools?* The position of Merton was that if you are to move away from the government model you need to be certain of your risk assessments. In discussing the Federation's proposal, governors can be confident that risk assessments undertaken are defensible. The overall decision to reopen schools on 1 June is essentially a national one and by following this decision, the Federation would be protected as it is following national guidance. So long as the Federation is following its control mechanisms in terms of risk assessments, it would not be deemed liable in the event that there are to be an outbreak. The Federation does not perceive a consequence in following a different model to anybody else and nobody at the local authority is suggesting that this will be an issue;
- *How are children to be selected for am or pm?* This can be done alphabetically or through other means and appropriate adjustments made for siblings who might be in different years or where there are specific pastoral needs;
- *How will the return of year groups be staggered?* It is likely that one year group will come in five minutes early, or via a different entrance;
- *How is staff welfare to be handled as well as peer discussions?* There has been an emphasis on gaining staff confidence and involving them in risk assessments. Underpinning this has been a desire to return to class teaching. The fact that the model builds in a Friday for training and coordination is also beneficial to staff welfare in that it provides space for staff well-being, although it is acknowledged that the specific logistics of the second week in terms of having more children and adults on site might raise issues around proximity and social distancing;

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- *at the end of week one what are the criteria for being able to say it is safe to move into week 2 to bring in another year group?* This aspect is not yet clear, although it could possibly revolve around the extent to which key principles have adhered to. The risk assessment on the Friday is key to determine whether or not the school is able to move forward to the next week;
- *how easy would it be to switch between different options?* Risk assessments are dynamic and it is a changing situation. If the risk assessment shows that it is better to move to another model that is more educationally beneficial, this could be considered, but it would need to be clearly demonstrable and not raise disbenefits in terms of health.,

Having reflected on the issues presented as well as the rationale for the approach presented, governors unanimously **RESOLVED** that both schools in the Federation return on 1 June using the federation preferred model as outlined by the Executive Headteacher.

3. CLOSING BUSINESS

No other business was recorded.

There were no confidential items discussed.

4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Meetings are scheduled to last for a maximum of 2 hours.

Governing Board

- 30 June - (committee business, SDP, policy approvals, Headteacher's report, next terms governance arrangements) - WWPS⁸ - 7pm

The meeting closed at 10.15pm.

Signed: _____ Print Name: _____
Chair of Governors

Date: _____

⁸ Potentially held offsite at a governor's home and to include a social event