

BCAT Board Meeting – 22 March 2021

Minutes

Present: Anthony Abrahams (AA) Paul Clarkson (PC) (Chair) Lesley Glover (LG), Pat Jones (PJ), Mark Kiteley (MK), Jasmin Masih (JM), Christine O'Reilly (CO'R), Ian Pryce (IP), Kay Rodger (KR) Gill Scobie (GS)

In attendance: Anne Day (Trust Accountant) Mary Langley (Head-teacher Wixams Tree Primary), Claire Nash (Business Manager BCAT) Rachel Nicol (Company Secretary), Paul Spyropoulos (PS) Principal, Wixams Academy,

Company Secretary

Rachel Nicol

No	Item
BCAT/14/21	<p>Apologies There were no apologies for absence.</p>
BCAT/15/21	<p>Declaration of interest Ian Pryce, Kay Rodger, Pat Jones (directors), Rachel Nicol (Company Secretary) and Dave Roffey (Project Accountant) are employed by Bedford College.</p> <p>Mark Kiteley is a non-executive director and Chair at BCS Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bedford College.</p> <p>No other declarations were made.</p>
BCAT/16/21	<p>Headteacher's report – Wixams Tree Primary</p> <p>The report was confirmed as read.</p> <p>1 Pupils have returned, some attachment issues in the second week were noted.</p> <p>2 Staffing - 37 applications to date for advertised jobs.</p> <p>The Head-teacher was congratulated on the report and the success of the re-opening.</p> <p>The Trust accountant confirmed that funding for additional classes would be picked up as part of her report later in the meeting. A decision as to whether additional classes can be opened will be provided to the Head-teacher as soon as possible.</p>

	<p>Parents – A recent survey had been carried out and detailed findings set out in the report. The overall results were considered positive with 100% engagement in the survey.</p> <p>The Board thanked the Head-teacher</p>
BCAT/17/21	<p>Principal's report Wixams Academy</p> <p>The report was taken as read and highlights provided:</p> <p>Pupils – reopening has gone well with pupils being resilient and mature. Thanks were given to the Business Manager and volunteers for the efficient Covid testing operation.</p> <p>Ofsted have announced that full inspections will not be carried out until September at the earliest. PS encouraged governor involvement in the SEF.</p> <p>The Board questioned the approach to admissions appeals given the admissions in year. The Principal confirmed the approach. The cases that have been admitted have been at the top of the list to fulfil vision to provide places to local children. It was explained that in general terms these admissions have been of children in Wixams and doesn't take classes to more than 30. It was agreed the admissions for 2020-2021 will be looked at and a proposal made to formalise the approach to admitting above our agreed intake number.</p> <p>Capital programme – Lap tops have been ordered for the year 7 pupils. The Principal is meeting the consultant from the College with a view to developing a covered area for the quadrangle and a covered dining area.</p> <p>LAB – The Principal had provided some thoughts on the operation on the LAB and emphasised the need for effective information flow from the LAB to the board on areas of statutory responsibility.</p> <p>The Board commended the success of testing and re-opening. The social media postings were noted to be positive with likes on face book and other social media. The Principal passed thanks to the Marketing Manager for her involvement in this.</p> <p>Disappointment was however expressed in the lack of a dashboard in the report and the impact on the reputation of the Trust. It will be included in future papers.</p> <p>The report was noted</p> <p><i>The Head-teacher of WTP left the meeting</i></p>
BCAT/18/21	WA Staffing budget

	<p>The paper was presented and it was confirmed that there is no proposal for additional management posts. It was noted that although the Principal had worked with the Trust Accountant, he had requested that the Accounting Officer prepare their own analysis of the benchmarking. The Board had therefore received and had to consider 2 reports.</p> <p>The Principal emphasised that the basis for the report was to provide assurance around the appointment of teachers and learning support and the planned appointments to support exams, data management and a library. It was recognised that WA has more EHCP pupils than other local schools.</p> <p>The proposal outlined was confirmed to equate to 78.25% of the overall budget compared to the financial framework which sets the limit at 75%. The Principal outlined the position in terms of the income percentage and believed this to be within the 70% parameter although it increased by 3 percentage points against the previous year under the proposal.</p> <p>The Board discussed the calculations in some detail. Trust income is understood to come from the learner number census. It was noted that the cost of staff working across the two schools are kept separate from the allocations to the individual heads, and other support staff working for the Trust had been excluded from the Principal's report.</p> <p>The Principal explained that the reasons staff budgets are not affordable were as a result of an increase pension costs of circa 20 to 30% and the third year key stage 4 curriculum being more expensive to provide. Members of the Board expressed concern in respect of the lack of explanation on affordability. They also noted that the Principal had requested the Accounting Officer to prepare a separate paper instead of identifying areas of agreement and areas for discussion. The view was expressed that staff costs ratio should be falling now the most expensive posts have been filled and that financial controls are extremely important. The pace of increase in support staff costs relative to the growth in student numbers was also questioned and no explanation given. The expectation that the costs should be managed within agreed frameworks and principles established by the Trust for sustainability was reiterated. It was also explained that a teachers' pension grant offsets the increase in pension costs referred to.</p> <p>The Principal asserted that the financial information had been amended the day before the papers were due in and that he was presenting the most up to date and accurate position.</p> <p>The Accounting Officer presented her report and explained the rationale in respect of the benchmarking already presented and the comparisons with substantially larger schools. The history of the financial controls, including the need for a framework to ensure the affordability of base pay and long term sustainability was outlined.</p> <p>It was understood that the Principal's comparison in terms of the income benchmark ignores Trust staff and central resource, although the Principal asserted that he had used the same methodology that the</p>
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	<p>government uses to allow the Board to nationally benchmark the Academy.</p> <p>Concern was expressed that each year the Board has discussed financial and budget management issues with Wixams Academy. The Principal confirmed he has struggled to recruit adequate staff. He also made reference to difficulties with the SENCO provision. It was pointed out that the Board had previously agreed to have an additional member of senior team to lead on SENCO so expressed concern if this has not been implemented.</p> <p><i>Post meeting note -The Board had not been provided with a report on SENCO and previous decisions and assurances to be reviewed.</i></p> <p>The Accounting Officer provided assurance that other comparatively sized schools are managing budgets within similar frameworks successfully.</p> <p>The proposal to increase significantly the number of learning support assistants above the general increase in pupil numbers was explained as relating to the number of pupils with an EHCP. These appointments did not need to be agreed at the meeting.</p> <p>Concern was expressed that this is the fourth year where the Board has heard arguments from the Principal with a mismatch of understanding in respect of how the business is being run, undermining the operation of the Board. It was emphasised that passion has to be harnessed within the agreed framework.</p> <p>The Board expressed the desire to pick up future discussions on the number of EHCP learners and how the relationship can be better managed with the Local Authority. Assurance was sought that all costs related to EHCP learners are being claimed. It was confirmed that the Trust Accountant has also factored in the targeted support funding. The Principal confirmed that the value of EHCPs are negotiated. The General Annual Grant is however lower than expected due to a change in deprivation indices, impacting on the affordability of provision. The Trust Accountant confirmed the EHCP income and local authority top up goes to the school.</p> <p>In conclusion it was agreed that the Principal is authorised to proceed with recruitment of additional teachers provided overall staffing costs are maintained within 75% of budgeted expenditure cap.</p>
BCAT/19/21	<p>Policies</p> <p>The policies had been placed on Governor Hub for review</p> <p>Assurance was given by the Business Manager that there has not been any major changes. The Business Manager did ask that the Lettings Policy prices are reviewed. The Board agreed that provided prices are maximised and will not damage the reputation of the Trust and schools</p>

	<p>these do not need to be subject to board approval. Maintenance of the 3G pitch was raised and the Business Manager confirmed the 3G pitch is not BCAT responsibility.</p> <p>A board member identified that the website link on the Child Protection Policy is out of date. It was explained that in addition to policies the schools have their own internal procedures for the management of child protection.</p> <p>Complaints procedure: the Board questioned whether complaints should be in writing only. The Business Manager will follow guidance and look at the issue from an accessibility point of view.</p> <p>Data Protection: it was questioned whether the policy is a BCAT or Academy Policy as the Principal is responsible. It was confirmed that in the data breach policy under section 5 reports can be made to a generic email address. It was suggested that 2 emails, or suitable system is used to avoid the risk of a breach not being actioned.</p> <p>Health and Safety Policy: the Covid appendix was not attached but it was confirmed that these differ for each school.</p> <p>SEND policy: it was noted that WTP is not included and it was understood this is a Trust policy.</p> <p>Behaviour policy: no makeup and discreet watch, urged to consider religious differences to ensure considered.</p> <p>Subject to the Business manager resolving the points raised the policies were approved.</p>
BCAT/20/21	Minutes The minutes of the meeting 5 February 2021 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.
BCAT/21/21	Trust performance monitoring 2020-2021 The Trust Accountant presented the report and the current financial year was noted to be progressing well. The WTP funding elements were noted to have been amended. Allocations have now been received from the ESFA. WTP will receive slightly more than expected as funding has been based on a hybrid of actual and forecast numbers. The Trust were expecting funding for 390 pupils, then 297 and have now received an allocation of 363 pupils. The funding is based in simple terms on 12 classes.

	<p>The various reiterations of impact on finances depending on additional classes opening at WTP were outlined.</p> <p>The options presented to the Board were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Continue to support opening of additional 3 classes, one in each of year 4,5 and 6 with potential for additional budget requirements.</i> <p>The Headteacher outlined benefits for pupils coming in and the local community, reducing work in terms of appeals. Concerns around budget being tight and risks around children on waiting lists not coming in were discussed. Opening additional classes now will help recruitment if the new build proceeds. There is however very little information on the potential new build as the price has not been agreed with the contractors. Facilities are available for additional classes within the existing building. The Trust Accountant confirmed that due to the circumstances the staff costs limit will rise to 78% maximum for one year to allow for recruitment, <i>This will be noted as a temporary exception to the financial regulations.</i> It was considered unlikely that additional funding will become available within the year. The Head-teacher confirmed that once all classes are open the capacity is 420 pupils. The profile of teachers between more experienced and newly qualified will be carefully managed</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. <i>Maintain the status quo</i> <p>The Board resolved to proceed with Option 1:the opening of additional classes.</p> <p><i>The Headteacher will work with the Trust Accountant on the budget.</i></p> <p>The Trust Accountant highlighted the changes to deprivation funding with a reallocation to high deprivation whereas Wixams has a higher percentage of low deprivation. The funding has reduced by over £90k for each school and further work is required to address how the shortfall can be managed.</p> <p>It was confirmed that in line with previous safeguarding discussions a barrier is going up on site over the holidays. The schools are continuing to work on travel plans.</p> <p><i>It was agreed that PS and ML will draft a letter about barriers and safeguarding issues and check the same through Marketing Manager for the website as required.</i></p>
BCAT/22/21	<p>WA Sixth Form</p> <p>The project group has been working on viability of a Sixth Form in September 2022. No report had been prepared as the feedback group had only met on the Previous Thursday. <i>It was however confirmed the slides will be sent to RN for circulation.</i></p>

	<p>A brief power point presentation was given by the Principal of Wixams Academy setting out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1. Context and background including the funding agreement and Trust ambitions, - 2. space available for a potential sixth form in September 2022 and future development in 2024. Noted from the presentation that there were descriptions of where some current space in existing buildings may be used for the 6th form but that additional buildings would need to be built. Ideas for additional buildings proposed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. A BCAT building for wrap around care with nursery and 6th form provision that was equidistant from the 6th form and Primary school. b. Alternative eco-pod style buildings. - 3. Proposed vision for the 6th form. - 4. Project group membership split into different teams. - 5. Findings and recommendations of different project groups including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Affordability and viability of a potential curriculum for 2022 and the longer term subject to positive recruitment numbers. b. Student numbers and funding: 261 prospective Wixam students but the Principal confirmed that the Sixth form was only viable if it could attract students from other local schools. c. The presentation included a recommendation that the funding be changed from 224 to 300 students as the funding was based on 1/3 if the 6th Form at full capacity. - The Principal expressed the view that the Sixth form would attract from outside because of the quality of other local schools. <p>-3. Marketing sub team looking at demand, interest, population forecasts with increasing numbers as well as Wixams specific data, travel distance and overall potential demand. Survey results for years 9 and 10, suggested between 70 and 86% would select Wixams as first choice. Parent survey feedback, 100% respondents saying a sixth form should open. Community survey, 98% respondents positive about opening a sixth form.</p> <p>-4. Building team – additional space requirements and different options. It had been identified that by 2024 there may be potential for a separate sixth form block.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Short term options to accommodate a sixth form in 2022 including recommissioning the top floor as 6th form suite with alterations to accommodate the curriculum. Given previous representations that the school is at capacity the recommissioning of the top floor would mean additional facilities required to be constructed on site.
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	<p>b. The team had looked at various building options from "curriculum pods" to more permanent structures. Images of considered designs were shared and the potential for the secondary and primary to share the buildings was referenced.</p> <p>5. Finance project team, reviewed affordability of revenue budget and capital required. Modelling was based on funding agreement numbers and funding on one third of published 6th form number. (one third of full capacity in first year, with double the actual first year intake in the second year) The Principal asserted that the Trust would receive an additional £367k. The Board questioned, based on earlier representations on staff costs, the affordability of the proposal. The Trust Accountant confirmed the calculations are based on many assumptions at this stage. It was confirmed they would expect the Academy to have 112 pupils but would pay for 75. The Principal confirmed that on the basis that allocated funds were received the revenue budget was believed to be manageable. Early thoughts on capital funding and progress were outlined.</p> <p>The Board confirmed that they had requested in principle a review of a future sixth form but had not stipulated a date of September 2022.</p> <p>The Board wanted to see the Market research. Although demand in the area had been identified there was no information on how this will translate into actual numbers. They also questioned what will attract individuals from outside the area and how the impact on 11 to 16 year olds will be managed.</p> <p>The Board noted financial concerns over the need for 6 additional teachers and the requirements for new buildings. The Board asked about the capacity of current science labs etc and need for an estimate of additional facilities by subject. The Curriculum team had worked on a curriculum generally, applicable whenever the 6th form opens although it was noted that little work can be done on curriculum until the financial costs are known. There was also a concern raised over making the curriculum significantly smaller because of the impact this will have on demand. It was agreed that whenever the 6th form is to open there is a need to be able to afford a minimum breadth and depth of curriculum.</p> <p>The expectations of founder pupils and parents were discussed and assurance given that communication has been clear and that a Sixth form in 2022 has not been promised.</p> <p>The Board commended the work done by the team but raised the issue of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. risk, 2. dates, particularly in terms of managing the post Covid impact on education, 3. the need to focus on existing pupils and performance 4. management capacity to oversee such an involved project. 5. The lack of available facilities raised concerns that the Academy is not yet in a position to market a sixth form in
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	<p>addition to the volume of work required to secure capital funding. This includes further investment in terms of detailed work streams, financing and decisions from the Borough and the DfE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. The Board was mindful of the need to secure long term sustainability. 7. The Principal raised the potential for reputational damage given the perceived expectations in terms of an “unbroken journey”. <p>The Board reiterated their support for a Sixth form in principle but noted that there was insufficient evidence and confidence that one could be opened in September 2022. The Trust reiterated that the Academy should continue working with the community, local authority and employers to look at funding and curriculum needs. The Marketing Manager will continue to look at potential for applicants from a wider area, support from students and parents.</p> <p>The Board appreciated that there will be disappointment for the affected cohorts but that the risks financially and educationally are too great.</p> <p>It was agreed that there is need for coherent and coordinated publicity to ensure the rationale is clear and the message positive. The message to current cohorts needs to be upfront with the focus on building a future centre of excellence. The Board was clear that there should be no misquoting, that tone, timing and audience were key considerations; there should be “one voice – one message”. It was agreed that the Principal will go through the Chair with Marketing advice regarding any statement and that the Chair would address the Local Advisory Body once the statement is agreed.</p> <p>It was noted that the working groups are a strong basis to look at the longer term (5 to 10 years) and consider the availability of funding to develop an excellent Sixth form. The Chair strongly encouraged the working groups not to be disbanded so they may assist with further planning. The Board also reiterated that staff recruitment should look ahead to future sixth forms.</p> <p>It was agreed that careers guidance will continue to be robust</p>
BCAT/23/21	<p>Marketing proposal – website</p> <p>The Marketing Manager attended to present the report.</p> <p>The proposal for an integrated multisite approach was outlined. The current position for the Trust is 3 different websites hosted on 3 different platforms. This has led to a number of issues. The proposal would develop one integrated site to support:</p> <p>-Stronger and more coherent branding for the Trust and schools.</p>

	<p>-Future proof the Trust and its development by ensuring additional schools can be incorporated easily, thus enabling growth. -Consistency of content while allowing personalities of schools. -Simplified processes and efficiency in making amendments. -Well managed content.</p> <p>The Marketing Manager also recommended that redesign of the logo is considered at the same time. In terms of budget to work with Anne.</p> <p>The proposal was approved and the Marketing manager will work with the Trust Accountant to agree the budget to take the project forward.</p>
BCAT/24/21	<p>Governance update</p> <p>The report was presented and confirmed as read.</p> <p>It was confirmed that Lesley Glover and Jasmin Masih be re-appointed for a further 4 year term of office.</p> <p>Audit Committee membership was approved as, Mark Kiteley, Christine O'Reilly and Ian Pryce</p> <p>The Members resolution to re appoint the auditors was noted.</p> <p>The role of the LABs is planned to be considered. The Chair asked the Board to think about what should be delegated and how this should be managed. Considerations might include whether directors chair local advisory groups and where the balance lies between monitoring and management. A separate discussion is required to ensure the governance structure remains fit for purpose and feedback is received from the LABs and decisions carried out.</p> <p>The Board was updated on progress in regard to the planned appointment of a Chief Executive, agreed by the Board. IP had talked to the new schools network for advice. IP will focus on the appointment to concentrate on strategic planning and implementation of Trust decisions.</p> <p>Meeting closed</p>