



Downland Village Schools Federation

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the full governing body held on Wednesday 17th March 2021 at 3:30 pm

Present: David Bertwistle, Paul Brown, Jeremy Cogman, Edward Doyle, Steph Garwood, Rita Harrison-Roach, Chris Hawker, Susie McAuley, Kate O’Kelly, Sarah O’Malley, Neil Ryder (chair).

In attendance: Pippa Bass (clerk).

1. Welcome and apologies

NR welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were accepted from Trish Bancroft and Margaret Farwell.

NR reported that Margaret would like to resume her governor duties after Easter, which everyone was delighted to hear. Sarah O’Malley confirmed that she would be resigning from the board on 31st March 2021. Governors were very sad that Sarah had decided to step down but thanked her for many years’ service to the board and to Rake school. SOM offered to continue her support to Rake through the local school committee, which governors welcomed. NR also reported that, sadly, Debs Burles (parent at Rogate) had resigned from the Rogate local school committee. Ex-Rogate governors in particular praised the enormous contribution Debs had made to the school in various ways.

2. Declarations of Interest

None. Governors noted that any discussion about the future SLT structure would affect DB, PB, and SG.

3. Urgent matters not covered on the agenda.

None.

4. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd February 2021 were approved.

5. Matters arising from the last meeting

Governors reviewed the actions and agreed to carry forward those actions marked for post-federation:

Reference	Who	Action
2020.10.21-5b	DB/clerk	Circulate new remote learning policy and post on website. Complete.
2020.10.21-9	SG / RHR	Review existing safeguarding training courses and recommend training for governors. Complete. SG reported that NGA and WSCC had good courses and governors just needed to decide which ones to attend. The clerk would add this to the next agenda post-federation.
2020.12.02-9	DB	Follow-up with the office manager at Rogate about GDPR. Complete. PB had agreed to take on the DPO role.
2021.01.20-6d	NR	Circulate draft surveys for governors to review – to be issued as part of the federation consultation period. Complete.
2021.01.20-8	Clerk	Collate comments on any outstanding policies and send to NR. Complete.
2021.01.20-11	Clerk	Follow-up with the chairs and HoS about postponing the forthcoming LSF meetings a couple of weeks. Complete.

SG reported that the Christian ethos policy and the well-being & collective worship policy had both been reviewed. The clerk will add these to the next meeting agenda.

6. Federation proposal – decisions required

NR explained the current position with the federation discussions and asked for governors to approve the following aspects of the proposals:

- a. MOU. The MOU sets out the partnership agreement with Compton & Up Marden primary school (CU) for the period 20th March 2021 until the proposed federation of the three schools is complete. The SLT would take over the management of CU and DB would be the legal headteacher of all three schools. The Joint Federation Committee (JFC) would stay in force and take on delegated powers for all normal governor responsibilities at CU. The JFC would include up to four governors from each board of governors. Governors unanimously approved the MOU.
- b. Survey deadline. NR explained the rationale behind extending the survey deadline to 24th March 2021; there had been a low response from DVSF parents and some legitimate concerns raised by some parents, which possibly reflected the lack of detailed communication with DVSF parents whilst the consultation had largely focussed on CU issues. More information about the proposed SLT structure and its impact and some additional background to the proposals could be communicated to DVSF parents much more clearly now that the CU headteacher position had been resolved. However, the extension would mean that an additional GB meeting would be required on 24th March 2021 to finally make the decision about federation. Governors hoped that the extension would also provide the opportunity for greater clarity on CU's 3yr budget, the amount of WSCC funding of VR costs, and WSCC's proposed federation support package, which they would need before making the decision about federation. SM raised concerns for the CU staff who would be facing a longer period of uncertainty. SG felt that a little more time would enable more Rogate (and Rake) parents to be encouraged to respond to the survey. Governors unanimously approved the extension of the survey deadline to 24th March 2021.
- c. Parent letter, staff letter, and Q&A. The updated Q&A was approved, subject to resolving the slight contradiction around the SENCo role, and governors were encouraged to send NR any further questions/answers that could be added. The parent and staff letters were both approved.
- d. Governor selection. NR explained that this was not critical to agree at this point but the document would be included in the full federation proposal document that both boards of governors would consider on 24th March 2021. The proposed 'new' local school committees (LSCs) would be more formal than the existing forums; members of the LSCs would be associate members of the new board of governors and therefore entitled to attend GB meetings. SOM confirmed that she was happy to be on the Rake LSC. SM offered to cover both Rake and Rogate LSCs, which governors welcomed. Governors approved the governor selection proposals.
- e. Parent/staff governor elections. NR explained that the delayed federation decision (to 24th March 2021) meant that the process to formally elect parent and staff governors to the new DVSF board would need to start before the decision was made. The proposal was to issue the call for nominations on Monday 22nd March 2021 with an explanation that JC and Sarah Hill (CU) had agreed to stand as the two parent governors, and Richard Christmas (CU) had agreed to stand as the staff governor. Governors approved the parent/staff governor election process.
- f. Instrument of Government (IoG). NR confirmed that the explanation of how the 3 Foundation governors could be switched around would be included in the proposal document (as part of the 'statement of intent'). ED confirmed his agreement to the handling of the Foundation governors. Governors approved the IoG.

7. HT report

DB provided his report – see Annex A.

Q How bad do you think the gaps are in children's learning?

A It's too early to tell - the children have only been back a few days, but it is a mixed picture reflecting the level of support given at home during lockdown and the gaps would probably be as expected.

SG reported that the recent SENCo forum had made it clear that this last lockdown has had a massive impact on children's anxiety and the emotional impact on families should not be underestimated.

8. **Safeguarding**

RHR confirmed there was nothing further to add to the earlier discussions but re-iterated the point about the emotional impact of the lockdown and agreed that the decision was right to encourage the children to play on their initial return to school.

9. **Future meeting dates/times**

The next FGB meeting will be held on 24th March at 3:30pm. The meeting will consider the critical decisions around federation. NR agreed to circulate relevant papers as early as possible to give governors time to consider the information before the meeting. Everyone thanked NR for all the hard work on federation, which had not been straightforward, and wished DB good luck for Monday.

Approved by the full governing body and signed by A Neil Ryder

Date: 24th March 2021

ACTIONS:

Reference	Who	Action	By when
2020.09.16-8a	NR	Take over conversations with HP's staff members to follow-up on their well-being.	Post-federation
2020.10.21-5b	NR	Set up a small group of members from both school forums to take forward work on the websites.	Post-federation
2020.10.21-9	Clerk	Add item on safeguarding training courses to future agenda.	Post-federation
2020.10.21-10	JC	Discuss an outline plan for improving the school websites with HP.	Post-federation
2020.12.02-6b	DB	Provide recommendations for SLT pay progression.	Post-federation
2021.17.03-4	Clerk	Christian ethos policy and well-being & collective worship policy to be added to the next meeting agenda.	Post-federation

Executive Headteacher's report to Governors – March 2021

School Context

A great deal has changed since my last report and I am delighted to say that all the children are now all back in school.

During lockdown, the children were well supported by a staff who were all dedicated to the education and welfare of the children in their care and, often, their families. I have had a huge amount of compliments for the support we gave over the past 12 months. The fact that the schools had invested in the Microsoft 365 platform certainly put us ahead of many of the local schools.

I suspect that we are out of step with many schools who, since the children returned, are focussing on assessing gaps in children's learning, mainly I fear, through a series of formal tests. As a staff we agreed unanimously that what the children had missed most was the opportunity to play with their friends. For the first week back after the lockdown we allowed the children to play, to make and experiment for the majority of the time – the activities were structured and staff were making observations of the children to assess where any gaps may be.

Huge thanks must go to the PTAs of each school for their support through lockdown and for the end of day 1 parties for each class. ForSA also supplied cake, drink and snacks for the staffroom and planned a great initiative where teddy bears were photographed across the school during lockdown – when the children returned to school every child had a bear with their name on sitting on their desk. With the bunting and lights outside both schools there was a real celebratory atmosphere in the school.

This week all classes are undertaking a topic entitled 'New Beginnings' (bar one who is focussing on finishing their topic on volcanos by building, exploding and generally filling the classroom with lava!). This will continue the hands on, experimental, first-hand experience from last week, but will begin to build in more formal lessons in writing and maths. The topic will cover poetry, drama, art and the RE topic of Easter.

Easter Services have been planned for each school (**31st March - Rogate at 11.00am and Rake at 2.00pm**)

Both Edward and Trish have been taking virtual assemblies during lockdown and since the children have returned. These have worked exceptionally well and have enabled the children and their families to keep direct contact with the Rectors.

I have also booked a visit from Ranger Stu, a zoologist who brings animals into school. He has been into Rake at least twice before. The focus of this visit will be well-being and mental health of the pupils. It is hoped that the visit will take place in person, not virtually, and will happen across all three schools (should there be three at that point in term).

The number of children on role has risen to 69 at Rogate (with a parent of 2 children currently trying to relocate in the area just to get her children into the school!) and 103 at Rake (a Year 7 child with an EHCP was finally given a place in a school by Hampshire County Council).

Since their return attendance of the children has been very high. The highest absence was on a day when there were 4 children absent across both schools.

We are always concerned with the well-being and mental health of the pupils and their families. During lockdown many families suffered from being isolated and there were many tensions in homes. We marked

both Children's Mental Health Day and Safer Internet Day in both schools. In Rogate one family is having support from Children's Services and one family we have referred to MASH. Steph has made an increased number of referrals for support from the school nurse service.

The Senior Leadership team and other members of staff have taken part in a number of parent and staff meetings with Compton and Upmarden School. Although the attendance from Compton staff has been mixed, I came away from all those meetings with huge pride and a feeling that a tight and supportive team exists across both our schools. Although I have been prevented from meeting with the Compton staff, children and parents I am confident that the same ethos will be maintained with the addition of another school.

Governors should consider, however, the ongoing wellbeing of the staff over both schools. Lockdown aside, the impact of federation discussions, particularly on members of the SLT whose jobs were at risk, have had a far reaching impact on all staff who are now looking for reassurance that both Rake and Rogate Schools will continue as they are at the moment.

I judge the Leadership and Management of the school during lockdown and since the children have returned to be outstanding and, although no grade was given, this was supported by Louise Stallard, our LA advisor, who made many compliments about the schools at our virtual meetings this term.

This week we have celebrated, albeit in a low key way, World Book Day and will join in with Comic Relief on Friday. We were asked by parents not to encourage children to dress up as there is not the usual access to charity shops for costumes.

I have updated the Staff Handbook, the Summer Term Planner and my Action Plan prior to next Monday when I take on the role of Interim Headteacher at Compton and Up Marden. I have planned a staff meeting, learning walks, one:one meetings with staff and classroom observations for the first week – my on-line diary has never been fuller - and although I approach this new challenge with trepidation it is also a very exciting challenge.

One more thing – Neil has worked tirelessly to get the proposed federation to where it is today. It has been a long and difficult process. If it goes well much of it will be down to him, in fact this will be the second school he has saved from closure. If it all goes wrong All of it will be his fault!

David Bertwistle
March 2021