

**Minutes of the Retford Oaks Academy Committee meeting
held on Monday 20th November 2023 at 5:30pm at the Academy.**

Governor name	Initials	Governor category	A = absence
Mr A Knight Chair of Governors	AK	Appointed	
Mr D Cartwright Vice Chair of Governors	DC	Appointed	
Mrs P Bryn-Jones	PBJ	Appointed Parent	
Mr A Silcock	AS	Appointed	
Mr W Spooner	WS	Staff	A
Miss N Ward	NW	Appointed	
Mrs J Bennett	JB	Appointed	
Mr J Purle	JP	Appointed Parent	
Mr K Morgan	KM	Appointed	

In attendance	Initials	Position	
Mrs H Widdup	HW	Executive Principal	
Mr L Dickinson	LD	Principal	A
Mrs S Whitaker	SW	SENCO	
Mrs A Brammall	AB	Assistant Principal	A
Mrs N Benson	NB	Governance Professional	

<i>Quorum numbers</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Governor's present</i>	<i>8</i>
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AC/12/2324	<p>The chair notified the committee members of his intention to bring an agenda item forward in order that Mrs Whitaker (SENCO) could introduce herself formally and present an update to the board in relation to SEND within the Academy. There were no objections from the committee.</p> <p>Mrs Whitaker introduced herself to the committee and gave an overview of the work going on to drive improvement in SEND. With regards to provision and progress, Mrs Whitaker informed the committee that she has been focusing on 3 areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compliance – to ensure that all gaps are identified, and measures put in place to close them. 2. Raise quality - by listening to feedback, in particular to SEND and the bespoke needs and requirements of individual students and making necessary reasonable adjustments. 3. Profile of the team - SENCO email address was set up but feedback from parents was that they preferred to email the personal email address of the SENCO due to the often sensitive nature of communications. <p>Mrs Whitaker went on to explain that the team are working on updating EHCP's and have brought forward some annual reviews to improve quality and the long-term vision is to obtain both dyslexia friendly and autism friendly kite marks.</p> <p>Upskilling staff has been approached in a variety of ways and Mrs Whitaker explained how she has shared a document with staff (hard copies provided). This document identifies 9 SEND needs and outlines teaching strategies that have been developed for teachers to use to better support these students. Drop-in clinics have been set up for staff to attend as well as students, communication has been improved and Mrs Whitaker told the committee that she has visited Alternative Provisions and has invited external professionals to the academy to share knowledge and ideas.</p>	

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	<p>Mrs Whitaker went on to explain that a new positive step has been a regular slot for her in the Monday morning briefing. This enables her to update the whole school on any SEND related needs and ensure that all staff are on the same page. The team are working at improving consistency in messaging alongside continuous feedback and improvement.</p> <p><u>The Governors asked</u> for more information about the one-page profile. Mrs Whitaker explained that she is rolling out the programme provision map which contains information about approx. 200 students on the SEND register (this number could increase to 250 following new applications placed on the GDA pathway). Each child has a one-page profile which provides the students voice, these are updated annually and this is being rolled out electronically. By the end of December, all of year 7 should be updated to secondary school voice.</p> <p><u>Mrs Bryn-Jones added</u> that she met with Mrs Whitaker last week and said there appears to be an issue with regards students being marked absent when on Alternative Provision. This will impact the attendance figures <u>so how can attendance figures be relied upon</u>. Attendance may actually be better than the figures suggest in the instance.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup confirmed that attendance figures prepared by local authority AP's are backdated. Mrs Bryn-Jones added that she intends to meet with relevant staff to discuss attendance in the coming weeks. <u>Mrs Bryn-Jones acknowledged</u> that SEND has come a long way in a short time <u>but shared her concerns</u> that she did not want to see Mrs Whitaker burn herself out and stated that she needs to have the right support. All governors were in agreement that they want to support Mrs Whitaker and understand the importance of the right SEND provision in the academy.</p> <p>Mrs Ward added that the new Alternative Provision at HQ looks to be working very well as she has seen this first hand recently, sharing the building with Thrumpton Primary. She noted that students appeared to be well mannered and polite during the brief time she has spent around them.</p> <p>The chair of governors thanked Mrs Whitaker for her contribution to the meeting and said that she may leave if she so wished. Mrs Whitaker elected to stay for the duration of the meeting.</p>	
AC/13/2324	<p>Apologies for absence</p> <p>Mr Spooner, Mr Dickinson and Mrs Brammall sent their apologies which were accepted.</p> <p>Mr Kemp has not responded to recent communications and has been advised in writing that should he not attend today he will be removed from the committee. Governors agreed to remove Mr Kemp. The governance professional will initiate this process. [AP-NB]</p>	NB
AC/14/2324	<p>Declaration of interest and notification of any changes to declaration made.</p> <p>Mrs Bryn-Jones notified the committee of a change to her role with the New College Learning Trust from the audit committee to the advisory group for Doncaster, the chair acknowledged the change in role and as the organisation continues to be the same educational provider, accepted that this did not require there to be any further actions.</p>	

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AC/15/2324	<p>Trust Training Attendance Training – A webinar produced by Patrick Knight (Strategic Development Leader, Safeguarding) was shown to all attendees.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup followed this with an academy specific overview of what is happening with regards attendance at ROA.</p> <p>Last year overall attendance at Retford Oaks was 86% for the entire cohort. The data from half term 1 this year shows entire cohort attendance at 90.23% Pupil premium for last year was at 80% The data from half term 1 this year is 86% This shows a slightly higher rise than the whole cohort. A member of staff has been specifically detailed to work on pupil premium attendance which is having an impact.</p> <p>SEND for last year was at 80% and so far, is reporting at 84% Non-SEND for last year was at 87% so far is reporting at 91%</p> <p>The gap between pupil premium and non-pupil premium in attendance last year was 7.6% and is currently 5.8% The gap between SEND and non-SEND in attendance last year was 6.6% and is currently 6.3%.</p> <p>Persistently absent students refers to students' absences that are greater than 10%. Persistent absence is calculated cumulatively as the year goes on so will appear to improve for many individuals as the year progresses.</p> <p>A significant rise has been identified in the number of 'in term' holidays being taken. Last year in the first half term, 313 days were lost across the whole academy to holidays. This year the number of days is 383 in the first half term. What has been startling to see and is something that will need to be addressed next year is 'in term' holidays for year 7 students. Last year 33 year 7 days were lost in the first half term to holidays, this year the number of year 7 days lost in the first half term has been 110.</p> <p>On a more positive note, last year persistent absence was running at 37% across the whole school in the first half term and despite the number of 'in term' holidays taken the overall figure for the first half term this year is 29%.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup summarised by explaining that attendance appears to be moving in the right direction but has still not recovered to pre covid levels. <i>The governors were interested to understand</i> what has been identified as working for the academy. Mrs Widdup explained that students classed as persistently absent have been categorised differently. A child on holiday is not treated in the same way as a child with anxiety or long-term sickness or injury for example. Given the reasons for the absence the academy can then look to either tolerate or treat the issue. Mrs Widdup went on to explain that previously when a student was identified as being at risk of becoming persistently absent, a process would be initiated which relied firstly upon warning letters and phone calls home. However, it has been recognised that the point of making a difference is when parents are asked to come into the academy for a meeting, as a result, this stage of the process has now been accelerated. It is also important to identify the barriers that prevent students coming to school so that the cause can be treated where possible. <i>The governors asked</i> if family liaison officers are available to the school and Mrs Widdup explained that these exist to support primary schools not secondary schools and added that whilst they might add value, the resource available versus the volume of students is an issue. <i>The governors then acknowledged</i></p>	

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	<p>that having Mrs Whitaker in post and the work she is currently doing will help to make a difference.</p> <p>Mrs Whitaker added that the attendance officer is building a rapport with parents and students in a similar way to the family liaison officer role and from a SEND point of view Mrs Whitaker is working with parents to help students back into school and building up to boosting their timetable working with students in a more bespoke way. Mrs Widdup then added that the same process is replicated by a specific member of staff focussing on pupil premium students and another member of staff working with young carers to understand their needs and develop adequate support.</p> <p>The Academy Improvement Review is coming up for Retford Oaks next week and Patrick Knight will be working on culture and case studies with the academy.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup stated that it was important to bring attention to rewards. Rewards are an important aspect of this as it gives students a further incentive to be part of the academy and a sense of belonging. <u>The governors stated</u> that they were pleased to see that rewards are issued on improvements in attendance rather than achievement so as not to alienate those students whose attendance issues are out of their control. Mrs Widdup added that there is a spreadsheet that the tutor can show to students so they can see how many days they need to get into school to improve beyond the PA category and encourage them to attend and then receive rewards.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup explained the ERM report that will be provided for the next meeting will focus on attendance.</p> <p><u>The governors asked</u> if there had been any research into in term holidays is a pattern of behaviour and if it was visible nationally and across the trust. Mrs Whitaker acknowledged that the cost-of-living crisis appears to have had a significant impact as it is so much cheaper to pay the fines and go away during term time and potentially parents may perceive that the impact on a student in year 7 missing school is not too significant. Mrs Widdup added that primary schools in some areas may authorise the first holiday before issuing penalties and this may feed into the perceptions.</p> <p><u>The governors and Mrs Widdup</u> noted that the data available can demonstrate to parents the impact of missed days on grades achieved, however parents may then respond with complaints about days missed through strike action, recent flooding and pandemics etc.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup summarised the discussion by saying that encouragement appears to have better results than sanction.</p>	
AC/16/2324	<p>Training</p> <p><u>The chair asked governors</u> if they had any feedback to share with regards this method of delivering specific training at the committee meetings. There were no comments. It was confirmed that further training will be delivered once each term at the meetings.</p>	
AC/17/2324	<p>Actions / Feedback from link governor visits</p> <p>Mr Knight briefly updated the committee on his recent link visit, his report will be shared. [AP – NB]</p> <p>Mrs Bryn-Jones intends to meet with attendance team in December.</p>	NB
AC/18/2324	<p>Update on progress against Governance Action Plan</p>	

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	<p>The chair reminded governors to review the governance action plan. One of the activities identified was to improve attendance at governor training. Hence the change in delivery of specific training at meetings. [AP-Govs]</p> <p>The chair suggested that they may be advantage in asking link governors to meet and greet their respective staff members in a brief session prior to the next committee meeting to help develop and build those relationships. The governance professional will make the necessary arrangements and communicate them [AP-NB]</p> <p>Mr Silcock was reminded to arrange his Health & Safety Link visit [AP-AS]</p>	<p>Governors</p> <p>NB</p> <p>AS</p>
AC/19/2324	<p>Meeting start time A suggestion was made to move the start time of the Academy Committee Meetings to 5pm rather than 5:30pm as this is the latest start time of all committees in the trust. A number of governors responded that they would struggle to make an earlier start time and it was agreed to keep the meeting start time at 5:30pm.</p>	
AC/20/2324	<p>Minutes of the meeting dated 25th September 2023 The minutes of the meeting that had previously been received were approved and signed by the chair.</p>	
AC/21/2324	<p>Matters arising AC/03/2324 to note, Mr Purle has agreed to pick up the GDPR link role. complete AC/03/2324 all governors were reminded to sign and return the code of conduct to the governance professional. Carried forward. AC/03/2324 all governors were reminded to complete the declaration of interest for 23/24 Carried forward. AC/04/2324 The governance professional will contact governors individually to confirm which specific training requirements are due for completion and the 2023/24 training programme will be communicated when it is available. Carried forward AC/07/2324 Mr Dickinson agreed that the mailbox had been set up but had not yet been communicated and confirmed that it would be communicated to parents. Update from Mrs Whitaker it was agreed that a deputy would be nominated to pick up Mrs Whitakers emails in her absence but feedback from parents revealed the SEND mailbox is not the preferred method with parents for contacting the SEND team.</p>	
AC/22/2324	<p>Principal's report Mrs Widdup explained that she would be discussing the principals report in Mr Dickinson's absence. As attendance had been covered earlier in the agenda there were no further questions from governors on this element of the report. Mrs Widdup went on to provide a brief overview to the key sections of the Academy Improvement Plan (AIP). Behaviour There is currently one permanent exclusion pending and fixed term suspensions are on a downward trend compared to last year. Antisocial behaviour/social behaviour sanctions are reducing. Alternatives to suspension have been adopted by utilising the in-house Alternative Provision being delivered at the headquarters building which provides bespoke programmes for students that are close to exclusion looking at cause and effect. This has reduced reliance upon external Alternative Provision. Sometimes students accessing external providers end up with fewer qualifications than students at the academy full time, however if it is the right provision for the child and allows the student to move forward it is the best solution to provide better life chances for the student.</p>	

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	<p>Mr McGuiness is doing work around student voice and training students to be student ambassadors. Enabling students to talk on a peer-to-peer basis to see if it brings back better-quality data and this will be rolled out across the school.</p> <p>Support for SEND students Mrs Whitaker has already presented an update on this element of the AIP at the start of the meeting and added one final comment for governors to be aware of in terms of the AIP. Work continues on the upskilling of staff to understand that SEND is everyone's responsibility and that where appropriate teachers need to adapt teaching as a first port of call.</p> <p>Engagement and enjoyment. Mrs Widdup said that the academy is looking at ways to get the students to want to come to school. It is important to ensure that students are able to access the secondary curriculum, Fresh Start and Star Reader is looking at bringing students to the right reading age first of all and this is an important piece of work. Mrs Whitaker added that staff training on fresh start is being delivered and reading clubs have started alongside smaller targeted provision for pupils flagged as needing extra reading support from the data.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup went on to discuss the current outcomes projections in the report which currently show a similar outcome for this year compared with last year. The SLT have looked at this and are working with staff to begin 'live' marking and feeding back to students while they are working. This is an ongoing piece of work. Another concern identified that Mrs Widdup wanted to explain to governors was the notion of knowledge acquisition versus knowledge application. Due to missed learning during covid there seems to have been a shift towards providing more and more knowledge to students to try and catch up but not teaching them the skills to develop their understanding of the information being given. In some cases, teaching has slipped back into a lecturing style, teaching from the front. Students need to be helped to interpret and understand the information being shared. <u>The governors acknowledged that</u> feedback from one student received was 'they tell me a lot of stuff, but they don't teach me anything'.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup added that mock exam results will be available to share with governors at the next meeting.</p> <p>DTL (Dedication to Learning) scores are showing that most year groups have an increased dedication to learning.</p> <p>Mrs Widdup explained that homework continues to be a difficulty. The academy is starting to look at something more project based which can be applied cross curricular. <u>The governors shared anecdotal feedback</u> from conversations they had shared with teachers from other academies. One teacher had said that rather than setting one, hour long, piece of homework to students, the work had been split into 3 separate 20-minute pieces of homework and they had found as a result more homework being completed. <u>The governors expressed concerns</u> that often homework reported on weduc will often refer to handouts given in class, this means any student that missed the class cannot access the homework and may fall further behind. Mrs Widdup acknowledged that this was an issue and told the committee that the Head of Business and ICT (an ex-student now teaching at the academy) had given a presentation at the SLT earlier in the day about the One Note System. He has put all his lessons alongside a full suite of resources in one place. This includes videos, revision techniques, quizzes, tests and applications to help students to access everything that they need. Mrs Whitaker added that</p>	

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	<p>the project-based task will be offered on a chilli pepper system so students can choose the level that they want to work at. Mrs Widdup reminded governors that the AIP is a one-year plan and the academy is half a term into it.</p> <p>Complaints There is 1 live complaint at the time of writing the report and this is currently being investigated by the chair of governors. There have been no data protection breaches.</p> <p>Cat C trip update Spain 27th April to 3rd May 2025 to Costa Brava. The trip will be a cultural and languages visit, with the aim to take 40 year 8 students, 4 staff at 1 to 10 ratio, Anna Brammall leading the trip. This is a coach trip with many excursions including museums, the Olympic stadium, archaeological sites, Barcelona aquarium and other activities. All excursions and half board accommodation is included in the price which is £745. Passports will be needed, spending money to cover meals beyond the half board will be additional. The initial deposit of £100 is requested before the end of the year and a payment plan is available. <u>Governors were concerned about the cost but agreed</u> that if it is advertised to parents early enough it would allow them time to pay for the trip. <u>The governors agreed</u> that trips such as this should be promoted as it is good for encouraging the uptake in modern languages. Mrs Widdup added that the academy would be open to discussion with parents regarding securing places and the timing of the deposit. <u>The governors asked</u> if a smaller deposit could be requested given the time of year and Mrs Widdup said that the academy would be open to discussions on a case-by-case basis but for the trip to go ahead, the academy will also need to pay a deposit. Mrs Widdup agreed to discuss deposit options with the team planning to trip [AP-HW]. <u>The governors asked</u> if there was a gifting option; for example, granny has paid so much towards the trip as a gift. Mrs Widdup agreed to look into this as an option and feedback [AP-HW].</p> <p><u>The chair asked governors</u> if they have any objections. <u>Governors agreed</u> the trip should go ahead. The chair added that there is financial help available to disadvantaged students as part of pupil premium, students can apply this to support with the costs of trips. <u>The chair asked</u> the committee if they have any questions about the pupil premium report issued in advance of the meeting. <u>The governors wondered</u> if there is any way the budget applied to pupil premium could be increased throughout the year and Mrs Widdup confirmed that the budget is allocated for the year. <u>The governors then asked</u> about the cost of energy for the academy. Mrs Widdup explained that at Retford Oaks, the energy cost comes as part of the PFI cost and therefore usage doesn't alter the cost.</p> <p>Health & Safety Fire evacuation completed as planned with no issues. A further evacuation took place following an incident with a battery charger. This was reported to Nottinghamshire County Council and no further action was required. The school took the decision to close early on 20th Oct due to flooding in the surrounding area, risks were reviewed as required. A feasibility study is underway to look at expanding the size of the dining hall. <u>The governors asked</u> if this plan included taking out some toilets to make more space and Mrs Widdup added that the mezzanine area is also being surveyed to see if can be utilised for dining space with the increasing student numbers and the risk of going over PAN in year 7 next year. All plans and suggestions will be brought to governors. <u>The governors added</u> that maybe a change to</p>	<p>HW</p> <p>HW</p>

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	<p>furniture systems could be considered and discussion held about providing standing areas to eat at as this might be a much cheaper solution.</p> <p>Any other business <i>The governors asked</i> if the academy is on target with the budget as figures have not been shared recently and given the potential alterations to the building is there potential for the academy to fall below budget. Mrs Widdup said that the funding for an additional 30 students in the current year 7 was provided in advance which has been a significant help. As things stand the budget is on track work is currently ongoing to look at the budget for next year and whether staffing will need to be increased to support additional students. <i>The chair added</i> that following his most recent meeting with Mr Dickinson he was aware of no budgetary issues, the budget for cover was in hand and the saving in AP costs of around £145k has been significant. Governors said they received a summary last year to understand the budget. It was agreed that a note would be made on the report to trustees with regards the need to see a summary of the finances.</p> <p><i>The governors asked</i> if any progress had been made to recommendations given to the academy with regards offering as waiting area for parents/carers rather than being left in reception. Mrs Widdup explained that space is an issue so timing of the meetings should be considered. Mr Knight agreed to talk to staff at reception to look to see if the initial contact can be made more welcoming. [AP-AK]</p>	AK
AC/23/2324	<p>How have governors held the school leaders to account? It was agreed that the governors held the school leaders to account with discussion and robust challenges on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ SEND provision and support ➤ Attendance ➤ Homework and access to learning resources ➤ Cost and timing of deposit requests for the Spain trip ➤ Budget summary 	
AC/24/2324	<p>How have the VMV of Trust / Equality been upheld? It was agreed that the VMV of the Trust & Equality has been upheld.</p>	
AC/25/2324	<p>Complete report to trustees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Governors would like to understand the current situation with regards the budgets for discussion. Governors still want to see updates/summaries to understand the latest financial position of the academy. ➤ A welcome was extended to Mr Morgan, appointed to committee by email vote. 	
AC/26/2324	<p>Determination of Confidentiality Equality Act consideration Nolan Principles Trust mission, vision, and values Governors considered whether anything discussed during the meeting should be deemed as confidential. It was resolved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There were no confidential items discussed. - There had been no Equality Act implications. 	
	<p>Date and time of next meeting: Date <u>22nd January at 5.30pm</u> at Retford Oaks Academy</p> <p>The meeting closed at 19:11pm</p>	

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	<p>Signed...  (chair) Date..28/11/2023</p> <p>Print.....Andy Knight.....</p>	