

Minutes of the joint meeting of the Quercus Federation Governing Board and St. Michael's, Playden Shadow Governing Board

Date: Tuesday 11th December 2018
Started: 17:00pm
Finished: 18:45pm
Location: Northiam Primary School

Present:

John Crouch (JC) Chair	Kevin Tomasetti (KT) Exec HT	Keith Cheetham (KC) Exec HT
Cherane Marshall (CM) HoS - St M	Julia Bray (JB) HoS - N	Allison Flack (AF) HoS - HG
Patricia Metham (PM) (Chair St Michael's)	Pippa Green (PG)	Jacqui Harding (JH)
Judith Koral (JK)	Emily Sparrow (ES)	Kim Weatherly (KW)
Ross Settles (RS)	Honey Clarke (HC)	James Bennett (JBe)
Lynsey Larkin (LL) Clerk		

Item	Discussion	Action
1.	<p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - JC welcomed everybody from each school to the meeting. - Everyone introduced themselves to each other, - Apologies for absence were received and accepted from: Judith Butler (JBu) Rev. Annette Hawkins (AH) Kirsty Doherty (KD) 	
2.	<p>Declaration of Business Interests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - None 	
3.	<p>Agreement of voting rights in respect of this meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - JC expressed to those present that he felt all attendees this evening had the right to a vote on the options to possibly federate in the future, these include the Heads of Schools. However, as we have received 3 apologies this evening if the outcome from the voting is in a larger proportion to one option than another, then we will have to revote with those absent, as the staff percentage is a significantly greater proportion than normally permitted. <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">✓ All present agreed that everyone will receive a vote this evening</p>	

4. To consider the options available to us, to help ensure the longer-term feasibility of retaining our small schools for the benefit of our rural communities.

To answer the following question by the end of the meeting:

Building on the existing Partnership, do the Governors support the proposal to move to a three-school federation from September 2019, and consequently agree to commence the consultation procedure with all stakeholders?

- HC asked if St Michael's wants to federate or would they like to stay as an independent school?
CM expressed that as the head at St Michael's, she believes they have had a good working relationship for the past 18 months in the partnership, it has been very successful working with the other head of schools in many ways including training together and supportive opportunities for staff. She believes St Michael's would not have progressed without the supportive relationship with Hurst Green and Northiam, not only as a school but also with her own personal development.
PM expressed that it is hard to operate a single school unless you are a larger school and believes that if St Michael's did not move into a federation that the school would become vulnerable.
AF explained that on 'The Key' this week there was an article on possibility of closures for smaller schools.
JB emphasised that within the current partnership the schools are within different catchments, they are not 'competing' against one another and it works well.
JK explained that it is an asset to share members of staff across the 3 schools and there is flexibility within the schools instead of having a member of staff for a set day of the week.
From a leader's point of view KT expressed that the partnership has worked well, it is in its 2nd year of being successful and this seems to be the next step in what is already in place.
- HC challenged if anyone had any concerns or feel there is a barrier in forming a 3-school federation?
KT expressed that the 3 schools would maintain their individualities, there will be no corporate identities. Each school has its own ethos and community and it works well.
CM explained that the distance between the schools can sometimes be an issue with meetings and training sessions, but is resolvable in insuring staff leave in considerable amount of time to get to the school they are attending. A majority of the meetings and courses are held at Northiam as it is the central school within the 3 of them. It was also mentioned that St Michael's is the most easterly school within the region.
JB explained that at present there is familiarity with the children at sporting cluster events, which benefits the children in preparing them for secondary schools in knowing other peers.
PG explained the pen pal system worked well last year between Hurst Green and Northiam and this will go ahead again this year.
The secondary schools are predominantly different for each school:
Hurst Green – Robertsbridge, Uplands and Heathfield
Northiam - Robertsbridge Homewood, Rye
St. Michael's – Rye
- KT expressed that operationally it all is working well, governance is the main focus to be looked at.

- It was challenged by RS that if there are other smaller schools closer to St. Michael's why are we not considering federating with them.
JC explained that there was a meeting earlier this year, where closer schools to St. Michael's were present and it was made apparent that St. Michael's was not invited to merge for some reason.
- KW raised that if St. Michaels merged with closer schools they would be competing for children which would be very difficult in that area of the region as it is not highly populated.
- KC expressed that he was pleased to see the positivity and honesty so far this evening and that he agrees we have 3 individual heads of schools and they work extremely well together. This now needs to reflect in a strong governing body for the 3 schools.
- KW challenged if we didn't federate, what would happen to St. Michael's?
CM expressed that if they didn't federate she would have to seek alternative partnership as she doesn't want to be isolated and vulnerable in the future. But in seeking alternative partnerships it would be hard to adapt to how other schools work in using different formats, different styles of SIP and SEF, policy formats. Moderating would also be extremely hard to adapt to.
JB and AF both agreed that if they didn't federate, that they would try and continue to work with CM as they do so much together already.
KT agreed that federating encouraged security in moving forward.
PM expressed that there is advantages with the distance between the schools.
JB explained that 18 months of success already proves that we are working well together and we are more efficient as a team.
- PM challenged if the Diocese would put pressure on the schools being closer together?
JC explained that at present the Diocese does not have the capacity to deal with all areas. It further explains the difficulties the Diocese has in the recruitment of Foundation Governors, hence why we still have 2 foundation vacancies within the 3 schools at present.
AF and ES expressed that during a recent meeting they were told that if you are unsuccessful in recruiting a Foundation governor to contact the Archdeacon, JC will look into this.
- JBe asked how long Hurst Green and Northiam had been federated for?
JC advised they had been together for 3 years and JB was brought in at Northiam and AF was acting as HoS at the time.
- JBe asked how did you get to be federated together?
JB explained that the schools were matched at the time, they had similar history, it had been a long progress but we now have a positive outcome. The relationships are growing and even the pupil voice is positive, which is lovely to see.
- HC expressed that from what she has heard this evening it is very positive and the most sensible option would be to federate.
AF agreed she feels that the relationship has grown and developed within the 3 schools.
- PG expressed her concern of how will we function as a governing body?
The 4 options were discussed at this point in the meeting.
ES challenged the future role of the Executive HT's, it was explained that they will be on the governing board and still be working with Hurst Green and Northiam.
HC raised that in the future we could include governor communications on school newsletters and social media sites with 'Why I am a governor' introducing who we are and what we do.
It was raised that some people find the governor workload a deterrent.
It was raised that a governor recruitment campaign within the schools needs to

be addressed, we currently have vacancies advertised through county. It was asked by a governor if we were not to federate could St Michaels recruit enough governors to be a 'working board'. It was explained that it would be a struggle to find people.

JBe challenged that in options 2 and 3 there would be a reduction in number of governors, what would happen to existing governors?

JC explained that we can decide our own Instrument of Governance and the proposals are just a draft at present. He expressed that he would not wish to have a governing board of over 20 people, however people can become an associate governor, which means they are involved but do not have a vote on items, and it would be an asset in having a few associate governors on the board. JC expressed the need to have a Board that is large enough to manage the workload of three schools but small enough to be managed in FGB meetings.

ES asked if we needed a parent from each school on the board, JC expressed it is essential to have 1 parent from each school, he feels governing bodies require parents involvement.

JB expressed that as a governing board we need to work backwards in ensuring we have all avenues covered including link governors, monitoring days, finance committees etc.

JC explained that if agreed then there will need to be a full Governor skills audit done in the summer term and link governor roles agreed prior to the summer holidays.

All members in the room voted on the following question:

Building on the existing Partnership, do the Governors support the proposal to move to a three-school federation from September 2019, and consequently agree to commence the consultation procedure with all stakeholders?

Yes - 15 votes

No - 0 votes

✓ It has been voted and agreed to form a 3 school federation from September 2019

The next steps are:

- To advise the Local Authority and Diocese.
- To hold a consultation with the parents at each school, the 3 head of schools have said that they will all attend at each school, along with some members of the governing body.

Initial plan is to hold these consultations mid-March.

RS challenged if St. Michael's parents are aware of the current partnership with Quercus?

JC explained that the parents were informed but the numbers of attendance was low at the consultation meeting.

We need to ensure that the invitation context is informative and positive future for the 3 schools 'we are building on the strengths of our 3 schools'

JC to liaise with Head of Schools for dates for the consultations.

A future meeting will be arranged to discuss the federation and complete skills audit and confirm roles and responsibilities within the federation.