

STAR MAT Board of Trustees

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 16th December 2019 at 5pm at Tadcaster Grammar School

Present: Clare Thornton-Eckford (Chair), Nick Sheppard, Alison Smith, Peter Wilson, Frances Dodd, Simon Peacock, Richard Coy (from item 4), Tom Fielden (from item 4)

In attendance:

Martyn Sibley (Chief Education Officer, STAR MAT) (from item 4)
Melissa Boyes (Chief Operating Officer, STAR MAT)
Deborah Hastie (Observer)
Iain Tessier (Clerk, Governance Advisor – STAR MAT)

1.0 Welcome, Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. There were no apologies. There were no declarations of interest in items of business, however, Mr Sheppard noted that he would need to update his register of interest to reflect the fact that a member of his family was now employed within the MAT.

2.0 Minutes of the Last Meetings – 22nd October and 2nd December

2.1 Resolved:

Trustees agreed that the minutes of the meetings, held on 22nd October 2019 and 2nd December 2019, were true and accurate records of those meetings. The confidential minutes from the meeting on 22nd October were also agreed to be a true and accurate record of that section of the meeting. The Chair was duly authorised to sign all the sets of minutes.

3.0 Action Points and Matters Arising

3.1

Action Points from the Meeting	Status
Chase outstanding Business Interest forms	All forms now received. The register for the year was completed and on the MATs website
Discuss suitability of current Scheme of Delegation to LGBs	It was agreed that the CEO recruitment group would look at this in due course.
Complete online safeguarding training	The Chair and Vice Chair acknowledged that they still needed to complete this training.
Validation process and quality assurance for curriculum development initiative	The CEO had this matter in hand
Address challenge on leadership and strategy plans for improving KS1 across the Trust	The CEO also had this matter in hand
Job specs for the new Trust co-ordinator roles	The CEO had this matter in hand
Pay policy query on terminology	This had been looked into and there was no issue
Prepare CCTV and Biometric Data policies for approval	These policies were on the agenda
Possible further revisions to Equalities policy	FD had sent material to the CEO. The CEO would pick this up at a convenient point.
Approach Cayte Mulhern about delivering a MAT safeguarding training session	CM could not officially start the safeguarding co-ordinator role until April. However, a training session for Trustees would be arranged.

ACTION

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Communicate intention to support group network meetings for governors with the same monitoring responsibility	There was a brief discussion on how to take this forward. The Governance Advisor was asked to send the Chair a list of governors or staff with the potential to provide capacity to support such meetings.
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Richard Coy, Tom Fielden and Martyn Sibley entered the meeting.

4.0 Governance Matters (originally item 5)

4.1 Resolved:

Trustees approved the following LGB appointments:

- Lisa Bulmer (Sherburn Hungate Primary)
- Alison Davey (Kirk Fenton CE Primary)
- Simon Hogg (Sherburn High School)

Post meeting note: Mr Hogg subsequently decided not to take up a governor position on the LGB

4.2 An application had been received from a Julie Charge. The Chair agreed to pick up the one-to-one with the applicant.

5.0 Sustainability and Growth and CEO Recruitment (taken as one item)

Various documents had been circulated to Trustees prior to the meeting.

5.1 The CEO gave a presentation on sustainability and growth and how decisions in this area would have a bearing on CEO recruitment and the type of person the Trust Board might recruit. Trustees had been given a document entitled 'What CEO's do'. The CEO reminded Trustees of their original determination to have a Chief 'Education' Officer, as their 'business' was rooted in education.

5.2 The CEO pointed out that, in the scheme of things, the STAR MAT was still a relatively young Trust on a steep learning curve. It was also relatively small pupil numbers wise, partly due to the number of small schools within its domain. The CEO reminded Trustees of the objectives as stated in the strategic plan and the commitments therein. Schools had been encouraged to retain their distinctive identities. Continual improvement was to be achieved through collaboration, rather than a top down, dictatorial approach.

5.3 As indicated, the core business was education and leaders had to keep honestly asking themselves how the Trust was performing for its young people. At present, overall, the Trust was just above average in terms of pupil outcomes. Within that, some schools were very successful, whilst others were hovering around the national average. Overall, no schools were delivering below average, however, there were pockets of underachievement within certain cohorts. Putting outcomes to one side, it was now all about nailing the curriculum offer and delivering a broad, exciting and engaging curriculum for children.

5.3.1 A Trustee challenged the CEO as to why the Trust was not delivering uniformly above average across the board. Given the general demographics in the schools, there was no reason for this not to be the case. The CEO replied that, quite simply, teaching was not strong enough in all areas. There was mostly very good teaching in the schools but the headteachers were having to challenge some less than good teaching. Some of the schools needed to look at their strategies for improving outcomes for certain cohorts, such as SEND or disadvantaged pupils. Building on that point, another Trustee asked what would ultimately drive teaching and the Trust forward? The CEO said that enhancing leadership capacity at school level was a priority. Headteachers had to be able to focus on delivering a brilliant curriculum, developing the staff to do that and challenge underperformance. At the moment several headteachers were juggling all aspects of leadership because they had a lack of other leaders to delegate to. Of course building capacity was a bigger problem to solve when there were lots of small schools and finite resources. Senior and middle leadership capacity was certainly a big barrier. The Trust was identifying ways to deal with that.

CT-E

- 5.4 The CEO began to talk about the overall mechanisms that could be adopted to solve the challenges the Trust faced. One solution was to increase centralisation to the point where there was almost total central direction for schools. Some Trusts that operated in this fashion were very successful. In a fully centralised model, the CEO was most important because it was they (and their central team) that would be driving the education and the direction of the Trust. The CEO and their team would create a blueprint – the ‘STAR way’ for example – and apply it to every school. You designed all the elements and dropped them in. This approach required experts in a central education team. The Trust would need a strong, well-resourced central support services team. The LGB role would be delivered and leadership would involve heads of school delivering the will of the Trust. This solution did lend itself well to naturally building leadership capacity over time from a central plinth.
- 5.5 The second solution was to retain and enhance the current model revolving around local autonomy. Expertise remained at school level. Leadership capacity was built through collaboration and local development. This model was looser and could take longer to have an impact. It also relied upon building consensus, which could be challenging and involved some compromises. There could be agreed principles but their application would be managed and delivered locally. This solution still required Trust wide structures to support consistency and deliver oversight. The role of LGBs would remain crucial as would the school’s headteacher. This model of autonomy and local leadership meant that the CEO was a facilitator, empowering others to take education forward.
- 5.6 The big question for Trustees was ‘what sort of Trust did they want STAR to be going forward. Once Trustees had developed an answer then they would know what type of CEO was required. The CEO indicated a preference for the current model as this was what the Trust had been founded on and how the communities would be best served – certainly in the foreseeable future. However, even remaining as they were in terms of structures would require investment in central services – due to the size and scale of the Trust and continued investment in collaborative projects, such as curriculum planning. This investment was as much about time as it was money. Investment in central services on the resources side would also allow the Trust to remove the burden on local leaders and allow them to focus on education. It also allowed a central team to identify savings because they would be looking at schools as a whole. The Trust also had to invest in the physical capacity of schools.
- 5.7 A Trustee asked whether the Trust still needed to grow, as this would also influence the type of person the Trust needed. If the Trust had to grow then the CEO could not simply be a facilitator, they had to be able to bring more skills to the role. The CEO acknowledged that the Trust did still need to grow, as this was the only way of affording the central services that were needed. However, this could not involve taking on more small schools. They were very resource intensive and placed a disproportionate demand on time and energies. Also, the Trust was unlikely to inherit the leadership capacity it needed to build. It was also not prudent to take on any more schools, regardless of size, that needed a significant amount of ‘turning around’. The current small capacity would be stretched even further and jeopardise educational improvement. Larger schools, in a good position, requiring low intervention, were the most attractive option. A Trustee agreed that this had to be the position now but the Trust had to retain the flexibility to move on from that standpoint as and when the landscape changed. The Trustee also did not see the benefit from implementing a totally centralised philosophy, as outlined in the first solution. Another Trustee said that if what the CEO was saying was the only realistic way forward, then the MAT might need to look at schools beyond the current geographic borders. Was the Trust prepared to do that? The Chair pointed out that this was something they would need to explore with the new CEO. The Trustee countered that surely the Trust needed to have formulated its view on this and other strategic elements before hiring a new CEO. There was a further exchange of views.
- 5.8 The COO had circulated a back office plan with various costing elements, for scaling up central services. A Trustee said that decisions in this area were fundamental to the CEO recruitment. Having and full or part-time CEO would impact on what investment might be needed elsewhere, weighed against what was affordable. Trustees debated how far centralisation could or should be taken. Several Trustees were of the view that, whilst indicators might improve, a greatly centralised

model would lead to schools that lacked identity and colour. Other Trustees could see the merits of greater centralisation and the synergies this could bring about. One Trustee held the view that the CEO was such a vital role and the individual had to be leader and not just a facilitator. They had to be someone that commanded respect and delivered on the Trust's objectives. Another Trustee maintained that empowering local leadership was as good a way of delivering the outcomes everybody wanted. The CEO understood the various points of view. Each had their merits, it wasn't one or the other being right. However, everyone had to buy into the philosophy in order to really drive through improvement. Currently, the consensus and the support in the schools was based on a model that built on local leadership and collaboration. This belief was something the CEO had committed to during his tenure. A Trustee acknowledged that fact and commended the CEO's leadership, however, in a changing environment the status quo was not necessarily the long-term best option.

- 5.8.1 Looking at the COOs plan, a Trustee queried whether the central staffing structure was affordable (circa £401k) in 2020/21? The COO believed that it would be if the additional funding arrived as promised. Ultimately, this would come from the schools' bottom lines in the form of the central service fee. Remarking on the line that costed the new CEO based on 3 days a week, the CEO was sure that this was the best option and commended it to the Board. His view was that the Trust should invest more in school leaders and leadership, rather than the CEO's salary. Further discussion followed. Frank views were exchanged. Trustees went on to debate the attributes required in the new CEO.
- 5.9 Turning to the question of recruitment support, the COO said that EPM had not quoted. Avec had quoted £5k but this did not include a headhunting service. Academics quote of £13k included headhunting. What did Trustees want to do? A Trustee was concerned about track records, where was the evidence that they had effectively helped to recruit CEOs – all the blurb talked about recruiting school leaders not the most senior leaders. It was noted that Academics had supported Hope with their CEO recruitment. Yes, the quote seemed like a lot of money but this was a company that could take them through the whole process. A Trustee had been impressed with their offer in supporting another Trust that they worked with. Trustees debated the matter. A Trustee noted the challenges other Trusts in the locality had faced when trying to recruit a suitable leader. Some had just gone with recruitment firms that basically provided advertising and low level support. One such Trust had spent £6k, failed to recruit, and had to re-advertise. A Trustee felt that they needed to invest the £13k (which was inexpensive in executive recruitment circles) and get that support right through the process. It was clarified that Academics fee included a 'second go' if they had to go out again. A consensus could not be reached and no decision taken on this issue.
- 5.10 The Current CEO job spec had been circulated, prompting a discussion, ahead of the panel meeting, as to whether it was the right set of requirements this time around. Trustees were moved by the Chair to discuss whether, in view of the fact that there were divergent views on the future direction of the Trust's modelling and the requirements thereof in the CEO, a further interim option should be explored through an internal candidate. The CEO felt that there were potential candidates who could successfully take the Trust forward in the short term. Trustees could see the merits of this, whilst a full job role and time contingent (i.e. full time or part time) were explored and agreed upon. Having more time to debate the future would avoid any rushed decisions being made. There was a consensus that the panel should be allowed to debate this option and make a recommendation to the Board at next meeting.

6.0 Policy Review

6.1 Resolved:

Trustees approved the CCTV and Biometric Data policies that had been adapted by the COO from the models put forward by the DPO, Judicium. The COO to ensure that these policies were flagged to school leaders and that they knew what aspects of personalisation were required.

Several other policies had to be carried over to the next meeting due to time constraints.

Panel

MB

7.0 Any Other Business

7.1 None

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 21st January 2020 at 5.30pm at Rose Cottage

The meeting closed at 6.50pm

	Action Points from the Meeting	Agenda Item	Person(s) Responsible	Date for Delivery
1.	Complete online safeguarding training	3.1	CT-E, NS	ASAP
2.	Possible further revisions to Equalities policy	3.1	MS	Due course
3.	Arrange one-to-one with Julie Charge (governor applicant)	4.2	CT-E	ASAP
4.	Panel to debate utilising internal candidate for CEO role on an interim basis (1 year)	5.10	Recruitment panel	Recommendation to next meeting
5.	Make policies know to school leaders and aspects of personalisation required	6.1	MB	ASAP