

STAR MAT Board of Trustees

Minutes of the EGM held Monday 1st June 2020 at 10am via Google Meet

Present: Clare Thornton-Eckford (Chair), Nick Sheppard, Alison Smith, Peter Wilson, Simon Peacock, Richard Coy, Deborah Hastie, Tom Fielden

In attendance: Martyn Sibley (Chief Education Officer, STAR MAT)
Melissa Boyes (Chief Operating Officer, STAR MAT)
Ian Yapp (Chief Education Officer Designate, STAR MAT)
Iain Tessier (Clerk, Governance Advisor – STAR MAT)

1.0 Welcome, Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

1.1 Apologies were received and accepted from Frances Dodd. There were no declarations of interest.

2.0 Approval of the 'Re-opening' (widening access) of Schools

Prior to the meeting Trustees had received the following documents and links for scrutiny:

- Diocesan Legal Update
- Risk Assessments for Schools
- Full report to Trustees on Planning (including key dates and site checklists)
- Staff Protocols
- DfE Guidance

Trustees also had access to other Covid19-related paperwork via the Trustees Google drive.

The Chair invited the CEO to address Trustees.

2.1 The CEO explained that the executive was looking to secure two resolutions from Trustees in relation to this matter. The first resolution was a formal endorsement of the executive's recommendation to 'reopen' the primary settings – widen access, for those year groups in accordance with the DfEs formal guidance and with the consent of Public Health England. The executive was not in a position to make a formal recommendation with regards widening access to its secondary schools. Further discussions on this matter were planned for this week. Reception age children would access settings from tomorrow. Y1s would be invited back from 15th June. Y6s would be invited back from 22nd June. This was considered a pragmatic response to the Government's guidelines and the CEO acknowledged that the executive was not recommending launching into the full widening access scenario immediately. The pragmatism would allow the Trust to review how the risk assessment for Reception was playing out ahead of much wider access as the month went on. The second resolution revolved around formal approval of the risk assessments for each individual setting (the preparedness for reopening). All of the recommendations To Trustees were in line with the approaches being taken by neighbouring local authorities.

2.2 Having read the meeting papers and heard from the CEO, the Chair asked if there were any initial questions or observations Trustees wished to make ahead of making a decision against the first proposed resolution.

2.2.1 What was being taught in terms of the curriculum? This would vary dramatically depending upon pupil numbers on site - this made a difference on the effectiveness of learning and what could be covered. The first week would focus on getting children back into routines and new routines. There would be some PSHE around interacting with their peers in the new set-up. Beyond that, the focus would be on basic English and Maths skills – the core curriculum. It was acknowledged that there

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would be a limited offer due to all the safeguards that had to be put in place. For example, there were impracticalities to teaching where social distancing had to take place. Would the distance learning continue in parallel? Yes initially, however, that would become harder to maintain as staff had to focus on teaching and learning for those pupils on site.

2.3 Resolved:

Trustees approved the 're-opening' – widening access – of the MATs primary settings, in accordance with the recommendations and timetable set out by the executive.

Mr Yapp was invited to address Trustees about the general principles underpinning the risk assessment process.

2.4 Mr Yapp noted that countless guidance documents had been released in various quarters and this had made it very challenging to negotiate the planning and preparation and make sure everything was covered. Since releasing paperwork to Trustees, the executive was already on to a third version of its report - as the weeks went by matters evolved quite rapidly. For the risk assessments themselves the MAT had used the NYCC template, which in turn followed DfE guidelines etc. School leaders had been given three weeks to follow through the process. Mr Yapp noted that the language in DfE guidance centred on 'should' and 'give consideration to' – there was very little that was definitive and that in itself presented difficulties navigating the process. Things were open to quite a bit of interpretation.

2.5 The high risk areas were as follows: sufficiency of staffing to deliver the offer and maintain safeguarding, delivery of cleaning duties, maintenance of sufficient stocks of PPE and hygiene products, health control and hygiene practices. The latter had to be monitored and observed.

2.6 Mr Yapp spoke about the criticality of limiting mixing between pupils and staff. Social bubbles had to be established and observed. Class sizes were limited to 15. In Nursery social bubbles had to be a maximum of 8. Different bubbles had to be kept separate and not mix for any reason. To support this, each setting had to ensure that the classrooms being used had good, clear, external access. Other measures included staggered entry times and break times. One group of staff would service each bubble and they too would not mix. Lunches would also be within bubbles. Social distancing to be in place in class wherever possible – although this was not the expectation in EYFS. If a child fell ill then the whole bubble would have to self-isolate. If bubbles were kept separate then one such illness would not result in an entire setting having to close. Fire doors would be kept open for ventilation. Many of the soft furnishings and other non-essential items would be removed from classrooms to reduce possible transmission.

2.7 With regards hygiene practices and in support of them, all settings had been provided with flip top bins, sanitising wipes and other hygiene materials for use by pupils and staff. There was also a first aid room care package for each setting. Staff would not typically be wearing PPE, unless they were involved in intimate care or certain first aid situations. Further details on all this was in the documentation circulated. Schools were being asked to keep a close eye on the level of hygiene products they had. Hand dryers had been taken out of commission. There were social distancing banners and signs at schools. Spacing tape would be available. Additional sanitising stations had been built in where a classroom did not have ready access to a sink. The Trust was moving to the use of alcohol based sanitising products – this was ok according to the guidance so long as children did so under supervision. Rob Holah had completed a site checklist for each setting.

2.8 Mr Holah was invited to speak about the risk assessment process. Mr Holah said that he had performed a risk assessment pre-visit with all Headteachers and had been supporting heads to finalise their critical procedures (such as fire evacuation) and complete the risk assessments themselves. The approach of a phased return of year groups has been welcomed across the board. Mr Yapp added that the phased approach was necessary in light of so many positive responses from parents re: taking-up of places. It would have been completely unmanageable to have gone from 20 students to 200 students overnight.

2.9 Mr Yapp spoke about the tightness of the deadlines and acknowledged the fact that the meeting had 'gone to the wire' in terms of the timescale on making decisions. Unfortunately, there had been no way around this. Trustees were understanding of the situation. It was noted that the staff teams in schools had been very positive with leadership in terms of engagement and support.

Questions and comments were invited.

2.10 Schools had access to testing. Presumably though this was only for staff? No, the testing offer included children and the under-fives. What happened in the event of a suspected case with a pupil? The child would be sent home and if the case was confirmed as Coronavirus then the whole bubble would have to shut down. The MAT would have to keep checking the guidance around next steps. What if a parent refused to take their child for testing? The MAT would have to take advice on this. The Trust could envisage a similar issue when it came to adherence within the Track and Trace system – they would simply have to cross those bridges when they came to them.

2.11 A Trustee had read the documentation, looking for specifics around safeguarding. Was the Trust factoring in the DfEs further guidance in its planning and training for staff? The MAT had only received the training package from NYCC over the past week. Cayte Mulhern would be rolling out virtual staff training during this week. The updates to guidance were not available when the risk assessments had been first compiled but they would be factored in going forward. Mr Yapp offered to share the training slides with Trustees via Google docs. Trustees welcomed the offer. Would further amendments be required to the Trust's safeguarding policy/addendum? This was a fair point and Mr Yapp agreed to take up this matter with Ms Mulhern.

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2.12 The Chair had previously raised concerns around the level of contact schools were having with non-vulnerable children. The revised access to schools meant that things would not change for the vast majority of pupils and therefore the Trust needed to keep an eye on this.

2.13 With the revised class sizes and strict use of social bubbles etc, a Trustee noted that staffing would be tight. Would there be sufficient coverage in the event of even a small amount of absence? Was there mitigation for this within the risk assessments? Mr Yapp pointed out that there was some flexibility to move staff week by week between bubbles, although in-week movement was not advised. Ultimately, it would come down to prioritising if staff shortages for the new systems became apparent. For example, maybe the schools would not be able to accommodate Y6s as planned on the 22nd. If there was no space or capacity to support a particular year group then it was not clear from the guidance whether the MAT should speak to other schools within its group about their capacity or speak to NYCC or simply say to parents that their child could not come in. At this time, most settings were looking at broadly a 50% return rate so capacity would be ok. However, if numbers increased then there was a chance that schools would run out of space or staff.

2.14 Key workers: was the Trust expecting a surge in these numbers? If larger numbers of adults were identified as key workers then how would the Trust manage that upswing? Mr Yapp acknowledged that the executive leadership would have to watch this situation carefully. They would look to ascertain parents' roles to assure themselves that they were key workers. Some key worker posts were becoming 'live' again following furlough. Maybe the Trust would not have enough space to maintain its bubbles once all key worker children came in. Again it would come down to prioritising according to the order of categories set out by DfE.

2.15 What was the scope of the Trust's liability around drop-off? Mr Yapp reiterated that there would be staggered start times. Only one parent could come to drop off their child. The risk assessments for each setting stipulated the drop-off point and this was where it could be considered that the school took over and therefore assumed liability. The schools would always be looking to retain flow and minimise contacts. It was worth stating that if the settings followed their risk assessments then RPA insurance would defend any settings against potential claims. Was the Trust communicating to parents in an attempt to prevent chatting and congregation at the schools gates? Yes. Although staff could not be out policing this. Schools had been permitted to use the phraseology they felt would best register with parents.

- 2.16 Was the Trust potentially extending its liability by offering support around car sharing? The Trustee felt that whilst this might be the kind and compassionate thing to do, it was questionable whether it was the wise thing to do. Mr Yapp explained that the passage in question was a direct copy across from the DfE guidance, which spoke about limiting car sharing and use of public transport etc. It was pointed out that the Trust had to cover all elements of the DfEs guidance in its own paperwork in order to be fully covered by RPA. However, Mr Yapp accepted the Trustees point as valid.
- 2.17 What was the situation regarding out of hours provision, which was sometimes delivered through third party providers. Would they be coming on site in the holidays for example? Mr Yapp confirmed that, in principle, before and after school clubs could resume, however, none of the MATs provisions would be restarting until at least September – despite the loss of income that had to be absorbed in the budgets. It was not viable for any provision to be taking place in the summer holidays at Riverside or Brayton. Whilst the schools would not want other offsite private providers jeopardising the bubbles, some of this was beyond the Trust’s control.

Rob Holah left the meeting

- 2.18 Prior to approving the risk assessments and making a decision on the preparedness for re-opening, the Chair asked if the executive had any concerns for any of the Trust’s schools. The COO replied that she had concern around the cleanliness of Appleton Roebuck in particular because the school had not yet arranged for a deep clean to take place. The COO was led to believe that this had been now been arranged for later today. Responding to a Trustee query, the COO confirmed that the Trust could claim cleaning expenses through the COVID expenses scheme, commencing in June.

- 2.19 **Resolved:**
Trustees approved the risk assessments for each of the primary settings and agreed that the primary schools were sufficiently prepared to ‘reopen’ and widen access to certain year groups as per the recommended schedule.

- 2.20 The CEO said that in the event that the risk assessments were not working ‘on the ground’ and/or a setting or settings had to close once again due to either an inability to meet the terms of the risk assessment in the eyes of the Headteacher or because of a spike in illnesses, the Board need to be able to move with fleet of foot to respond to this and make further decisions. The Governance Advisor explained that he had outlined to the CEO a mechanism whereby a Task Force Group could be established (operating much like a committee) with delegated powers to make recommendations to the Trust Board or to the Chair for the Chair to take action in accordance with Article 105 (as utilised previously). The Governance Advisor added that this would allow the Trust the option to streamline its in-play decision making. Terms of Reference for the Task Force Group had been drawn up within the GAs team at CYC and these could be brought on stream. Such terms were in line with NGA guidance. Trustees welcomed this option.

Resolved:
Trustees approved the establishment of a Covid Task Force Group, which could act on behalf of the Trust Board with the delegated powers as noted in the Terms of Reference. Additionally, the Group would have delegated authority to advise the Chair re: the decision on the initial ‘re-opening’ – widening access – of secondary schools. Trustees approved that the Chair could take action in light of the Group’s recommendations in accordance with the stipulations in Article 105.

The meeting closed at 11.05am