



Ripon Grammar School Governors

Full Governing Board Meeting

Monday 18th March 2024

MINUTES

Governors present:

Matthew Bean (MB), Vikki, Barton- Brown, Tom Cavell-Taylor (TCT), Andrea Edmondson (AE), Ian Charlton (IC), Elizabeth Jarvis (EJ) [Chair] Eric Medway (EM), Robert O'Hare (ROH), Victoria Pang (VP), Helen Stiles, Josh Stott, Jonathan Webb (JMW), Dave Winspear (DW).

In Attendance: Graham Livesey (GL) DSO and Clerk to the Governing Board

1. Welcome and apologies for non-attendance

The Chair welcomed all governors to the meeting. It was noted that since the last meeting she had met with JMW regularly - combination of face to face, virtual and telephone meetings, totalling 12 hours. 4 governors had attended tea with boarders prior to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Adele Laurie-Wilson and Sinay Jayan with consent.

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes of the last FGB meeting held on 4th December 2023.

The minutes were approved – proposed by TCT, seconded by HS.

4. Matters arising and update on action points not otherwise on the agenda

None

5. Update on Governor Membership and Committees

The Chair updated the Board on the nomination Amy Tweddle Bray to the board as the governor representative for the Local Authority. The board heard from EJ and EM, positive recommendations following their meeting with Amy, and unanimously approved her nomination to the board.

6. Headmaster's Report

The Head was thanked for circulating his presentation, prepared in advance of the meeting, which was available within the meeting documents.

Specific discussion occurred around.

a. School role and admissions (including boarding numbers)

Governors asked about boarding recruitment – and whether the headmaster had targeted Ashville College where boarding has ceased. He has not.

Governors asked about the strategies being employed to support the 14 Y7 boarding applicants. After initial optimism numbers have already fallen to 7 – the Head was encouraged to engage with parents of these students to enquire as to the reasons.

Governors asked about the gender imbalance for Y7 offers – with significantly more boys than girls securing offers. It was agreed that the validity of the assessment would be reviewed via the admissions committee.

ACTION EM – Admissions Committee

b. Sixth Form Numbers

Governors were pleased to note that there had been 115 internal offers made for Y12 which was better than expected. It is likely numbers will be around the 100 following results. This, alongside a high number of external offers, means a record of 230 offers for Y12.

Governors asked whether these numbers could be accommodated. It is expected that not all will achieve the grades – but with 15 additional offers – we would expect an intake of around 175 which can be delivered.

c. Boarding numbers

Remain a concern – with 97 currently anticipated for September 2024.

Mainly due to those being offered places in the Y9 not meeting the required standard.

Y7 boarders are lower than expected - the school felt that the delayed response by NYC in offering places to those on the waiting list had meant the school had lost out - JMW is pursuing this to ensure that school can manage this situation in the future.

d. Teaching and Learning

Digital strategy - *in response to the parental survey regarding this, governors asked about options for students using their own devices.* Concern was expressed that parents may be reluctant to financially commit to a separate device for school use.

JMW explained that challenges associated with this with regards to cyber security but nevertheless agreed to explore this further.

Governors felt that the robust insurance cover associated with the school- linked device (like for like replacement in the event of damage) would be attractive to parents and make the proposition more feasible.

e. Attendance

Governors noted the attendance data presented and were reminded of the statistic that a 10% reduction in attendance equates to a grade difference in terms of performance.

The RGS data follows the national data exactly but at a 4.5% level higher.

Governors were delighted to learn that the school had received a National School Attendance Award (fft) for the autumn term – top 25% of similar FFT secondary schools in England.

The Head informed governors that sixth form attendance was less good – with more students being late and missing tutor time.

Governors asked about lesson attendance. The Head felt this was good. *Governors asked for data on this to be presented* – it was agreed this could be followed up in the pastoral committee.

ACTION – TCT to follow up sixth form attendance in pastoral

f. Pastoral Matters

Governors reviewed data on suspensions and were disappointed to learn of 43 suspended days relating to 30 students. 18 of these episodes relate to vaping.

Governors asked how disrupting these are for students' learning. Undoubtedly, they are – most suspensions are for 1 day – there are very few repeat offenders and so the impact is low. Governors noted it also to be burdensome on staff – with the requirement to send work home.

Governors asked about the impact of internal exclusions – there are increasingly used – and are very unpopular with students. The developments to the pastoral centre will enable these to be used further. Governors asked the Head to explore this and bring data on the impact of internal vs external sanctions – particularly with regards to 'reoffending rates'

g. Strategic Development Plan

This was included in the Headmaster's report for information. The Head described how this would be reviewed in preparation for the next academic year.

The Headmaster summarised the SDP for 2022 to 2026 and the amendments

The strands remain the same.

- Quality of Education - with focus on SEND and embedding quality first teaching, developing, and delivering the ICT strategy, mapping the school day.
- Behaviour and Attitudes - Student Values, Form Tutoring, Bullying - grass roots project
- Leadership and Management - developing middle leaders, CPD programme, staff wellbeing and parental engagement and communication.
- Personal Development - c-curricular engagement, mental health schools award, student voice
- Sixth Form - developing programme to support competitive university entries, refinement of the EPQ programme, personal development programme and careers programme.
- Boarding - embedding tutoring programme, medication audit programme, weekend programme and the fabric upgrades to the Houses.
- Estates - classroom upgrades, IT suites, fitness suites and development of the staff room
- Community and Outreach - access at Y7, fundraising, future governance arrangements

All agreed the strands and priorities were appropriate - the Chair asked all committee chairs to refer to the SDP strands within their agendas to ensure support for delivery of these.

7. Safeguarding

A safeguarding meeting was held during the week prior to the meeting. There were no safeguarding issues to bring to the attending of the Board.

EM confirmed that Board members were compliant with statutory training.

8. Finance

a. Monitoring Report

ROH presented the report (08a) – governors noted the slightly improved financial position based on full data now being available to the year end – this is due to a release of unspent budget and a reduction in supply costs. Costs associated with non-teaching staff were higher due to workload (staff not being able to take time back) and sickness cover – the same also being applicable to boarding staff. Cover costs for teaching staff were lower than expected due to the use of internal cover supervisors. Governors are grateful for the continued support from FORCES to support the capital projects (Geography Classroom and IT).

Options moving forward are limited – there are no additional savings to be made without an adversarial impact on core operations – which are increasingly dependent on support from the school development fund. It was noted that contributions to the development fund came from only 15% of the school population – the head was asked to ensure continuous requests for support at all opportunities. The F&P committed continue to explore options for growth.

b. Boarding Fees

Paper 08b – boarding fee proposal was presented to the Board. The fees have been set based on non-profit and clear assumptions – the F&P committee confirmed their satisfaction with the process. Having been scrutinised in detail at the F&P committee, and with the ongoing commitment to investment as per the boarding development plan, the Board were reassured by the degree of scrutiny and unanimously accepted the proposal.

Governors asked about the risk of pupils leaving boarding because of financial challenge. It was agreed that this needed to be added to the financial risk register

ACTION GL to add boarding income to financial risk register.

c. Start Budget

- EJ explained that the start budget had been worked through in detail by the F&P committee, including through additional committee meetings, so get to a position where a realistic budget could be submitted. She explained that the submission of a deficit budget was the only option, after all financial mitigation strategies have been exhausted. ROH explained that he, the Head and the Chair had met with the LA Director of Finance to explain the position.
- Summary Paper 08c described the budget assumptions.
- Governors asked about future years – with a worsening financial forecast. ROH explained that in the absence of any plan for any increase in delegated funds and rising costs, we have predicted our worst-case scenarios.
- ERM went on to describe the work he has led achieve some financial benchmarking of our position compared to other local NY schools. Whilst our position is very concerning, we are not alone, with other schools in NY having been in deficit budgets for some years.
- EJ explained that in submitting a deficit budget, we will be required (and would, as part of prudent financial governance) to produce a financial recovery plan. This will be led by the F&P committee. EJ confirmed that she has asked for regular meetings with the LA finance team to support this.
- The budget was approved.

9. Strategic Matters

a. School Uniform Review

The headmaster explained that the review had taken place (see paper 09a). The decision of the SLT was that the policy should be unchanged. The matter of shorts has been explored. The options are poor, and this is not offered by any other local school. Instead, the option of short sleeved shirts will be emphasised and the threshold for a 'shirt sleeve order' plus other 'warm weather provisions' will be lowered to ensure safety and comfort of the students in school. The Chair asked the headmaster to ensure that this decision and the rationale be presented back to the School Council – and they be given the opportunity to ask questions and comment.

The issue of the school dress was highlighted by several governors. The nature of the fabric (synthetic fabric), along with the style and sizing results in a poor fit for many girls in school. The Chair asked when the dress design had been reviewed. No one knew – but it was concluded that the last review was greater than 15 years ago.

ACTION – school dress design and fabric to be reviewed for summer 2025 with students – JMW

b. Review of the School Day

The headmaster updated the Board on the progress with the review of the school day (see paper 08b). The likely proposal will be an early finish on 1 day per week for students, to release 1 hour of mandatory staff development time each week. Governors were clear, after a long discussion, that this, by enabling time for staff to come together, collaborate and train, as well as giving time to appraisal and career development, would have a positive impact on students.

It was agreed that the Head would put together a formal proposal for governors to consider. Agreement by the Board is required before this can be progressed. The Chair agreed that an extraordinary meeting can be called for this item, if a decision is needed prior to the next scheduled meeting of the FGB.

10. Student and Parental Engagement

Detailed notes of the parental engagement meeting were provided in paper 10. It was noted that this group of Y9 parents had not yet had the opportunity to come into school for face-to-face meetings, and that our meeting occurred prior to the 'Y9 options evening'. This was at least partly the reason for the large amount of discussion around communication.

The detail of the meeting has been fed back to the SLT.

It was agreed that the meeting would be repeated annually.

In response to the feedback, the head of Y9 will issue a 'start of the year letter' to parents – outlining the plan for the year but also including contact details for communication and key information.

It was noted that ALL the parents attending the meeting confirmed that they WOULD STILL make the same decision to send their children to Ripon Grammar School.

ACTION JMW to ensure feedback to HOY re communications

11. Governors' Committee Meetings

a. Admissions Committee - 21 February 2024

The full minutes are available (paper 11a). ERM highlighted areas of focus – in particular

- Y7 in catchment testing – the Head is going to review percentage taking the test -based on a feeling of lower uptake in harder to access groups – ensure that he visits the in catchment primary schools in the Spring and early summer term to try and promote uptake.
- The admissions officer has already had a positive impact
- Y11 retention – work being done positively influence Y11 students to stay at RGS. Governors had emphasised the need to achieve Y12 numbers of 160 in September 2024 and had asked the Head to work with his teams to enable this.

b. Boarding Committee - 7 February 2024

The minutes were available in paper 11b. MB recorded his thanks to Mr Mike Spiers who was able to present a full operational report to the meeting in the absence of the Assistant Head Boarding who was unwell. There were no safeguarding concerns, the committee are anxious to remain involved in any discussions regarding the Ripon AFC proposal.

c. Curriculum – 28 February 2024

ERM had provided summary notes in addition to links to the full minutes (Paper 11c). Of note is the attainment and progress data at GCSE of RGS students compared to students at 24 comparable schools – ranking near the bottom for attainment at KS2 but near the top for GCSE outcomes – with particularly good progress in the relatively large group of middle achieving students.

The committee continues to fully assure the quality of teaching and learning and is looking at post 18 outcomes for students leaving RGS.

Safeguarding within the curriculum – data from lesson registers missed was reviewed. The percentage missed has reduced by half, but half of those missed are attributable to 8 teachers, despite them having been in receipt of warning emails from the headmaster. Governors asked the headmaster to move to issue formal verbal warnings to these staff.

ACTION – JMW to issue sanctions

d. Finance and Personnel Committee – 22 January and 11 March 2024

The minutes are available (paper 18d ii and ii)).

ROH highlighted the discussions around Solar for Schools – further information is awaited but it is likely a proposal will be brought to approval to the next FGB following review in both EDC and F&P meetings.

We await further information regarding the Ripon AFC planning proposition

Cleaning Retender process – will be started summer 2024

Catering – the catering company has been taken over by another organisation – the school are working alongside the company and exerting high vigilance.

The IT Project continues to be worked through – with great financial oversight

SFVS has been completed

e. Pastoral – 13 March 2024

TCT presented highlights of the minutes (paper 13e). Of note – vaping education is planned for all year groups in Autumn term. Detailed discussion around the safeguarding report occurred with focus on exclusion and suspension data and the value and impact of the behaviour policy and sanctions. Bromcom and CPOMs data is now being routinely used to provide quantitative data to allow assurance alongside the qualitative narrative – and to ensure monitoring and progress data can be clearly delivered.

f. Health and Safety

DW described ongoing concerns regarding fence climbing – and work he is doing alongside the H&S team in school. There have been some ‘near misses’ recorded which have prompted further review.

12. Governors with specific areas of responsibility

a. Child Protection and Safeguarding

EJ reported the recent safeguarding visit from the LA advisor – no issues of concern were identified. She confirmed the plans for regular meetings with the DSL and the DSL team.

b. CEIAG Governor

TCT reported on an extremely positive careers evening – which was busy with students and parents. 70 exhibitors including 20 universities were represented. Thanks were recorded to the careers team. It was suggested that for future events, exhibitors be asked for financial contributions.

ACTION GL to liaise with careers team

c. H&S Governor

DW has met regularly with GL and the team and provided a comprehensive report to the FGB. He confirmed that the approach to H&S in school is reasonable and proportionate. He assured governors that in his reviews he had assurance that H&S was now embedded in the culture of the school.

d. Inclusion

HS has met with the SEND team. She highlighted the value of the pending neurodiversity week which was an excellent resource for all members of the community. The Send Policy and Report have been reviewed in detail by the Curriculum Committee and recommended for approval. It was unanimously approved.

e. Staff Welfare

AE reported on planned meetings with the Head and Staff Welfare Lead.

13. Complaints

A complaint hearing was held by a governor panel. There were no issues to report to the FGB.

14. Governor Training

All governors have completed KCSIE and PREVENT training.

EM informed governors of the requirement to familiarize themselves with the IT policy – this will be sent out and governors asked to confirm and sign.

ACTION -ALL GOVERNORS TO COMPLETE

15. Policies for Review

None

16. Off site visits

There are no visits for governor approval

17. Calendar

Governors noted the comprehensive list of events which included:
11/6/24 – KS 3 recital 1900 hours

11 and 12 July – Junior Drama Production – 1900 hours

18 July – Speech Day and Prize Giving– all governors required to attend, please – 1330 hours

18 July – Commemoration Service – Ripon Cathedral - 0915

18. AOB – none

Next meeting 10th July 2024 (date amended due to chair unavailability).

The meeting closed at 2125 hours