



MINUTES

**The Challenge Academy Trust
Trust Board Meeting
Thursday 30 April 2020, 11am**

PRESENT:

Howard Platt (HP)	Steven Whatmore (SW)
Jane Griffiths (JG)	Matthew Grant (MG)
Linda Waterson (LW)	Tim Long (TL)
Sheila Yates (SY)	Adrienne Lang (AL)
Susan Richardson (SR)	Damian Maguire (DM)
Lacy Muir (LM)	
	John Monaghan (JM)

IN ATTENDANCE: **Lisa Adams – Clerk to Governors**

Part One – non confidential business

1. Welcome, absences and apologies

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Neil Pearson.

Gareth Harris and **James** were welcomed to their first meeting.

2. Declaration of personal interests

There were no declarations of interest.

3. CEO Appointment

Trustees were informed that following the appointment process Andy Moorcroft was appointed as CEO. The Chairperson noted that there are some comments for consideration around the structure of the CET which will be discussed in part two.

4. Emergency Trust Policies

5.

It was noted that some of the policies will be picked up under the relevant agenda item.

- Trust Guidance (TG) Overview
- Schedule and keeping in touch
- Communication within TCAT
- Interim Hub Workings
- TCAT staff working from home IT security
- TCAT Interim Safeguarding
- Safeguarding advice for display
- TCAT emergency data protection guidance
- Curriculum continuity by distance learning
- TCAT emergency health and safety

The HR policies need to be endorsed by the Trust Board.

- TCAT emergency staff absence policy
- TCAT emergency recruitment guidance
- Attendance

The Trustees noted and endorsed all the policies.

The Chairperson noted that it is fantastic to see all the work that has been done behind the scenes. MG felt that this brought out the strength of working collaboratively. Developing these policies as a single school/academy would have been difficult. MG reported that a number of these policies are being used by the Local Authority as good practice. The Hubs are doing a lot of work behind the scenes from grass roots upwards. MG expressed his thanks to everyone involved in putting these policies together.

6. Update on curriculum continuity

The curriculum continuity by distance learning policy has been produced to detail how the Trust is providing work so that the pupils can continue to learn during the pandemic.

VB reported on the primary curriculum. She noted that it is very impressive what has been taking place in all the academies. Each of the academies have completed a health check. Academies are offering online work and hard copies to all pupils to suit their individual needs. Discussions are ongoing on how the level of engagement of is monitored. Google classroom has been launched this week. CPD continues with staff receiving training on zoom, class dojo etc ... A wider offer of CPD will be shared with all staff shortly. The SEND and vulnerable children have been considered and work is differentiated. Welfare calls are carried out and engagement into learning is picked up through these calls. VB felt that the briefing update doesn't do the amount of work justice.

The safeguarding hub meets fortnightly and a lot of work is being carried out by the finance hub.

AM reported that it has been a huge challenge over the last 6 weeks not having pupils in school but still delivering a curriculum that is meaningful. It was felt that it was important to have a set of principles and objectives that could be adhered to. The Trust wanted to be able to provide an ambitious curriculum. AM reported that the curriculum offer has improved over the last 4 weeks and staff have responded positively. The provision needs to be in place for longer than just a few weeks as the situation could go on for months. It was felt that it is important the curriculum needs to be engaging. Trustees were informed that a specific approach hasn't been dictated to academies and each one is using what suits their staff, pupils and families. AM felt that staff have really stepped up and are being creative with the resources available.

AM informed Trustees that there has been a significant issue with the digital divide. At some of the schools it is a bigger issue and in some cases there are two curriculum offers available. It was reported that there are 90% of pupils engaging in the curriculum regularly in all the schools. It was noted that the level of engagement differs which needs looking at. AM reported that some of the schools within the Local Authority have a limited offer in place which is a concern.

MG reported that every student at Priestley was due to take an assessment at the end of the year. At that start of the pandemic the government announced that assessments wouldn't take place. Students are expected to complete the course in terms of content which should be finished by the end of this term. The next stage is to look at the progression for the 2nd year students. The main focus is to ensure that there are no gaps. He reported that as a Trust all the schools were well placed in terms of learning platforms. He felt that it is important that Year 11 and Year 13 students are not leaving with any gaps.

SR stated that it is good to hear what AM reported on the engagement of students. She noted that there will be some pupils who have done everything required and more and then there will be those that have done hardly anything. **SR asked** if consideration has been taken on following up with those not totally engaged. AM informed Trustees that praise and congratulations need to be given to the welfare teams in the schools. These teams are able to monitor which pupils have accessed the online learning platforms. The welfare team and schools are in continuous dialogue with each other to share any concerns. The team make daily calls to pupils to raise their expectations and talk through

any anxieties. It was noted that some pupils have expressed that they are anxious about not making progress and that in some instances households are in chaos. AM noted that in terms of closing the gaps which have been exasperated nationally it is more difficult. The Trust is looking at doing some baseline testing when pupils return. This baseline will inform the curriculum offer going forward and how schools can close the gaps.

SR asked about the situation in terms of making computers available and to what degree the schools have supplied pupils with tablets or laptops. AM reported that all schools completed an audit at the outset so were able to loan out as much equipment as was possible for SEND, vulnerable and those with no access. Some schools have purchased additional equipment to ensure no-one is without. The government scheme will support this but they are focusing on Year 10 and those pupils with a social worker. It was felt that the government scheme will take some time to come through. The Trust are keen to look at a long term solution.

LW asked how engagement for those that can't access online materials is being monitored. Pupils have collected work and are then dropping them back in school for feedback.

7. Centre Assessment Grading

AM reported that the government haven't issued any specific direction in terms of primary school assessment. A process will be in place but what this looks like is unknown. In terms of Year 11 more direction has been provided and the Trust have put together a policy for the application of grades. Documents have been produced to rank pupils as per guidance. It was noted that a huge amount of work has been done behind the scenes. AM reported that the Trust is confident that this process is moving forward in a credible and fair way for the pupils. Staff have been required to rank pupils in all subjects which has been difficult to establish these ranks. Once the schools have submitted the rankings the DfE will apply their own formula and the schools will not be able to dictate what grades the pupils will come out with. It is hoped that none of the pupils will be negatively impacted and that the grades will be similar to past outcomes.

MG reported that in terms of post 16 the same ranking process is in place for GCSE resits, AS levels and A2s. It was noted that ranking 250 sets provides its challenges and there are discussions nationally about this process. The adult classes are being integrated into the GCSE rankings. In terms of vocational qualifications advice was provided and further guidance was issued with consultation due to

close on 9th May. The Year 11 pupils will start the courses applied for and assessments will be carried out at the start of the learning to ensure pupils are on the right course.

It was reported that initially universities converted all offers to unconditional however the government stopped this.

MG reported that pupils will not be able to appeal against the decision. He felt that the post 16 process is robust and there is evidence to show that there has been a rigorous quality assurance process.

AM reported that the government have made it clear that the grades will not count towards the national tables and Ofsted will not make judgements on them.

SR expressed her concerns for the pupils who may lose out particularly those who should have been sitting GCSE results. **SR asked** what the appeal process would be. It was noted that schools can appeal against the grades but not the pupils. The only way to prove that a grade was incorrect would be to sit an examination but what this will look like is not yet known.

8. Admissions update

AL reported that the Trust Board are the admitting bodies. TCAT contracts the Local Authority to carry out admissions procedures on its behalf. The Local Authority are putting in place revised procedure to comply with the amended regulations. There are no actions required directly to be put in place other than to comply with the Local Authority amended processes. The Local Authority also carries out the appeals process at a charge per appeal. As a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, the government have amended regulations regarding school admission and appeals. The appeals process legally still has to go ahead but details around timescales and how they are carried out have changed. The key change is to allow the process to be carried out using video conferencing and members of the panel can be changed if a member becomes ill.

AL informed Trustees that the only school that is missing from the data is Broomfields Junior as this comes direct from the Local Authority. Great Sankey and Meadowside will be full in September 2020. Trustees were asked to bear in mind that these figures could change following appeals. RMB reported that there are 76 pupils due to join Broomfields Junior from Cobbs Infant which is lower than last year when 84 pupils were admitted. It was noted that based on the Year 1 numbers the following year there should be 85 pupils in September

2021. **HP asked** if the PAN was 90 and that the likely admission would be 76. RMB confirmed this.

SY noted that the PAN for Penketh High is recorded as 210 for September 2020 in section 2 however in the table it is 240. It was confirmed that this is an error and should both be 240. Following the consultation process the PAN in 2021/2022 will reduce to 180. The admissions criteria for the Primary schools with Nurseries has changed to include preference for nursery pupils applying for a place in reception.

If any school needs to change its admissions procedure as of September 2022 a full consultation process is required. The timetable is as follows:

- Initial proposals to the Trust Board in the autumn term
- Following approval, public consultation to take place for 6 weeks by the end of January 2021
- Trust Board to approve consultation and final proposals February 2021
- Revised admission procedures to be published to the Local Authority and on websites by 28th February 2021

LW asked in terms of unfilled places how this impacts on funding and how it compares from last year. It was noted that a reduced number of pupils means less funding however the picture is similar to last year.

9. TCAT Health Check

AM reported on the health check document that the CET have been completing and rag rating. It was felt that the health check keeps a sense of challenge during this period of change. There are also a number of supporting documents in place. The CET have looked at how to peer review these checks.

AM reported that transition from primary to secondary school is being looked at by the hub. This week the focus has been on looking at the curriculum offer for SEND and pupil premium children. The findings will be collated and identify best practice to share amongst the schools.

Trustees were informed that the Local Authority have asked if they can share the health check across its schools.

10. Pupil attendance

The pupil attendance report will be circulated to Trustees.

AM reported that the schools are open for vulnerable and pupils of key workers. AL collates the numbers daily. The numbers have fluctuated quite significantly throughout the weeks. All schools intend to be open on the May bank holiday for those families that require it. The attendance in terms of online distance learning is good and schools are working hard to address those not engaged.

VB reported that the age of the children in the school ranges from nursery to Year 6 which provides difficulties.

AL reported that the first week of partial closure there was an average of 86 pupils attending and this dipped to 45 during the Easter break. Yesterday there were 91 pupils across the schools. AL also reported that the number of critical workers is rising but the number of vulnerable children remain the same.

Action: AL to circulate the updated attendance report to Trustees

11. Staff well-being

VB reported that it is equally important to remember staff well-being at this time. A communication policy has been put together which has been shared with all staff. The staff newsletter is about keeping the lines of communication open. It was noted that the safeguarding hub is also picking up on staff well-being.

VB reported that there have been some serious covid cases within the Trust but these are on the mend. There are also some staff who have lost family members to the virus.

TCAT news is a newsletter for everyone and provides another line of communication. The staff newsletter also includes good news articles as well as key messages from the Trust and the government. The next communication is due to be circulated on 4th May. It is hoped that the newsletter will continue once the schools all re-open. HP felt that this was a good idea due to the significant number of staff employed by the Trust.

12. Bridgewater Expansion Project

TL reported that the funding agreement is nearly ready to go. He informed Trustees that regular meetings with the architects have been

held to ensure that when the agreement is signed off things are in place. A lot of planning has already taken place.

AL reported that there are two main issues which needed to be resolved:

- Assurances being demanded under the warranties were too wide

Jamie Otter has advised the following words be added to section 7

“There is no fact known to the trustees or senior management of the Trust or information held by the Trust not in the public domain or within the actual knowledge of the Council which has not been disclosed to the Council and which would reasonably be expected to be material to the Council making available the Grant for the Project”

- Method of recovery of the £562k and whether the claim mechanism in the document covered it. This has been resolved by including the detail of the works covered by the £562k in the schedules.

HP asked about the timescale for approving. It was noted that the agreement can be signed by MG on Monday on behalf of the Board.

SW asked if AL could talk the Trustees through the recovery method of £562k and how this has been made more accessible. AL reported that by including the list of what makes up the £562k it provides a claw back mechanism. A statement and invoices will need to be submitted to the Local Authority. AL informed Trustees that she already has the invoices for £350k of the works. Once the designs are approved the first lot of invoices will be sent for claw back.

SW proposed that Trustees approve the funding agreement and this was seconded by MG. All Trustees agreed.

13. Finance: Budget update, budget planning: deficit recovery update

DM reported on the finances.

It was reported that during period 7 up to 31 March 2020 there has been a lot of expenditure however some of this will be recovered as income comes through. All schools expenditure was in line however all were showing strains in terms of supply. Trustees were informed that it will be a different picture from 1 April 2020. DM reported that it is very difficult to forecast at the moment because guidance is forever changing.

DM reported that work has continued on the debt recovery plan for the 3 academies with brought forward deficits. Padgate Academy and Sir

Thomas Boteler are on track to have deficits recovered within the 3 year period due to the increase in pupil numbers and an increase in per pupil funding. Work is ongoing with Penketh High's budget. **ST asked** if the budget is based on the admission numbers quoted earlier. DM informed them that it is but there may be some slight variations depending on any appeals.

ST asked about the funding for 2021 and when the cut off point is. DM reported that the funding for 2021 is already agreed however with lag funding the money for these pupils won't be received until 2022. Padgate Academy have received some in year funding.

MG informed Trustees that the ESFA have altered some submission dates due to COVID-19. DM reported that a submission would normally be required in May however this has been cancelled. Budgets are due to be submitted on 31 July 2020 however this is under review. It was also noted that some of the rules in the financial handbook have changed and some restrictions have been relaxed. DM assured Trustees that he is looking at all the guidance available however the biggest problem is that it is only guidance and not binding. It was expected that guidance around catering would be provided yesterday but is yet to be received. The main issue is the lost income. The staff at Padgate Leisure centre have been furloughed and the government assistance scheme is being used to cover 80% of their salaries. It was noted that there may be a situation where staff at some of the other schools will be furloughed so that money can be claimed back.

DM reported that one of the big issues is the supply of stock once schools re-open. Another issue in terms of recovery is that additional income is only available for schools with a deficit budget this year and next year. Trustees were informed that full guidance about recovery will not be available until June. A record of all costs due to COVID-19 is being recorded. In terms of FSM vouchers the majority of the schools have transferred to edenred which means the money doesn't come from the Trust. It was noted that when the vouchers started they were purchased for £20 per pupil and then the announcement moved to £15 per pupil therefore additional costs have been incurred.

DM reported that the insurances are due for renewal. The Trust has moved to risk protect assessment with the DfE at £4 per pupil which is cheaper than current insurance so will save £30k. All schools had a number of trips planned for the summer term and insurance claims are being submitted. Trustees were informed that there still may be some potential for some losses.

DM reported that he is liaising with internal audit around the planned work. Any that can be completed online will be and everything else will be transferred to next year. ST noted that he appreciates that it is early days but feels that an in depth session is required to look at the impacts of COVID-19.

JC noted that in one of the documents circulated it identifies £800k savings at Penekth High. He asked that there is some sensitivity around this as it hasn't been shared with staff or governors.

14. Capital projects update

A capital update report was presented to Trustees. A number of the projects have been put on hold due to COVID-19. The list of proposed works may need to be revisited if the period of social distancing is extended. Some of the projects need to be carried out due to health and safety issues.

AL reported that there are 6 projects that are recommended to be approved with immediate effect:

- Additional fire prevention at Penketh South (£22,344)
 - Kitchen refurbishment at Meadowside (£19,000). The Local Authority is contributing £11,000.
 - Padgate canteen refurbishment as it complements the work carried out via the DfE funding (£25,000). This will make a significant difference for the students.
 - Great Sankey external lock replacement (£4,000)
 - Penketh South roofing, fascias and fire escape works (£150,000). This would mean that the majority of the urgent capital works at Penketh South would be completed. It is hoped that this work can be carried out during lockdown once a contractor has been assigned.
 - Penketh High front and elevation works to improve the overall look of the school to support pupil recruitment (£100,000). AL reported that she was at the school this morning with E3cubed looking at work that needs to be carried out. It was noted that E3cubed have some good ideas and there are some simple things that can be done to improve the look of the building.
- HP asked if the changes of getting a new school has receded due to COVID-19. AL reported that the bidding process is due to be announced next Spring and it very much depends on where the government feels the money needs to go.

LW proposed that the recommended projects are approved and this was seconded by MG.

15. Warrington update

AM reported that it is the Local Authorities responsibility to co-ordinate responses to COVID-19 and he has been asked to sit on the working group with Paula Worthington and Louise Corlett. The working group currently meets 3 days a week. He informed Trustees that the Local Authority are asking what TCAT are doing and using some of our policies as good examples.

16. Safeguarding and Free School Meals update

AM reported that the safeguarding hub is very active and working hard to protect the most vulnerable children. It was reported that the number of domestic violence incidents are on the increase. There has also been a significant increase in the number of referrals for mental health for children and their families. AM informed Trustees that there is a student at Beamont Collegiate who has lost their mum to coronavirus. Praise was expressed to the welfare team.

17. Good news

Trustees were informed that VB is overseeing the newsletter and the second edition is due out.

MG reported that the Trust is looking ahead and have had discussions about the future once lockdown ends. We are getting advice from lots of different people and agencies. HP noted that there is a huge amount of speculation about what it will look like when lockdown ends. MG noted that he hopes schools receive more notice about re-opening than they did for closing.

It is proposed that the committees will continue in the interim. AM suggested that the work of the committees will continue but in slightly smaller groups. A few subgroups have been added to the original structure.

Action: AM to circulate the proposals and ask for comments

LM thanked the Trust for the flowers and noted that it was lovely to know that their thoughts were with her.

SY asked that her thanks be passed on to staff for all the work they have done with the 3d printers making masks for the NHS.

SR expressed her thanks to all the Headteachers and principals for all their work. **SR asked** if the Trust had heard anything about the Free

School application. MG reported that they hadn't heard officially but didn't think we had been successful.



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Part two – confidential business

All Headteachers left the meeting.

18. CET Structure

HP reported that following the appointment of AM as CEO a draft proposal of the CET structure going forward was previously circulated. A copy of the e-mail response from NP has been circulated to Trustees.

SR queried the transparency and equal opportunities of the process. She also noted that she feels uncomfortable about slotting people into positions without due process. HP reported that both VB and TL are already in these roles and that this was more about formalising them. MG informed the Trustees that a year ago a paper was presented on the structure going forward with VB and TL being seconded to the Trust 1 day a week. At the same time it was agreed that the Trust required a Finance Director and Management Accountant which have been appointed. MG felt that the new proposal was about extending their roles and not creating new positions.

ST noted that the tone of NPs e-mail suggests that there hasn't been any communication with the Local Governing Board. AM reported that once the Trust has approved the proposals detailed conversations will take place with the Chairs of the Local Governing Boards of the schools involved. MG noted that in the e-mail it raises concerns about weakening the roles however these decisions have been made as the Trust feels there is capacity within these schools. It was felt that this proposal is providing opportunities within the Trust rather than losing key members.

HP asked if SR is re-assured by these comments. SR noted that it had.

LM felt that the Trust has to be realistic and that because of the calibre of the staff we could lose them at a moments notice anyway. She felt that this was a win win situation and would support keeping excellent people within the structure.

AM noted that there is nothing to say that this infrastructure is set in stone. He felt that it is important for our Heads to see that there is progression within the trust. HP felt that it is a measure of the Trusts success that we have retained staff.

Action: HP to respond to NPs e-mail

AM reported that the next stage is to engage with the Local Governing Boards. HP noted that he would be happy to attend the Local Governing Board meetings with either MG or AM.

SY noted that she fully understands NP concerns as the Local Governing Boards focus is on what is best for their school. The transition at Beamont Collegiate with AM and Gareth Harris worked well however it was a very different story at Penketh High. She felt that it is important that parameters are set around decision making. AM noted that if the proposal doesn't work and issues arise with the backfilling arrangements it is the responsibility of the Trust to review.

Trustees approved the proposed structure.

AM noted that the next stage will be to propose these changes formally to the Local Governing Boards and liaise with them. HP stated that legally the Trust aren't required to do this. SY noted that at the start it was made clear that TCAT was a meeting of equals and although we are not asking their permission it is about making the decisions together.

TL reported that 12 months ago the Local Governing Board at Bridgewater High agreed that TL would spend 2 days a week. They felt that this was confirmation that TL would have a key role within the Trust and welcomed and encouraged the secondment.

19. UTC

HP reported that there is a difference of opinion in terms of UTC. There are pros and cons for them joining TCAT but is a conversation that needs to involve the CET.

AM reported that the Trust have to express an interest to join the discussions and this could waste a lot of valuable time. It was suggested that a statement could be issued which states that the Trust can pull out of discussions. MG felt that with the current situation conversations may not start until September.