

WILLIAM ELLIS SCHOOL



EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF THE FULL GOVERNING BODY held by video conference on Monday 1 June 2020

MINUTES

GOVERNORS		Present
Headteacher	Mr Sam White (SWH)	✓
LA	Ms Georgia Gould (GGO)	✓
Parent	Ms Sophie Jenkins (SJE)	✓
	Mr Stuart Taylor (STA)	x
Staff	Ms Jennifer Meechan (JMN)	✓
Foundation	Mr Richard Ault (RAU)	✓
	Ms Ronke Coote (RCO)	x
	Dame Karen Dunnell (KDU)	✓
	Dr Lee Elliot-Major (LEM)	x
	Prof Conor Gearty (CGE) Vice chair	✓
	Mr Omar Harmon (OHA)	x
	Ms Fiona Millar (FMI) Chair	✓
	Prof Daniel Monk (DMO)	✓
	Ms Selina Skipwith (SSK)	✓
Co-opted	Mr Jonny Woolf (JWO)	x
	Ms Imogen Sharp (ISH)	✓
ATTENDING		
	Ms Izzy Jones (IJO) Deputy head	
	Mr Bernie Lane (BLA) Assistant head	
	Mr Mike Hutchinson (MHU) Clerk	

1. Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

FMI welcomed everyone to this extraordinary general meeting of William Ellis School's Governing Body, which began at 5.03pm by video conference, in line with government advice on social distancing in the current coronavirus pandemic. Apologies for absence were received from, and permission for absence granted to, RCO, LEM, OHA, STA and JWO. SJE and JMN had apologised for a late arrival, and JMN had also apologised for an early departure. A quorum was present. There were no declarations of interest, pecuniary or otherwise, in respect of any items on this agenda. Both papers had been circulated in advance.

2. Agree virtual governance protocols

Governors **AGREED** the virtual governance protocols.

3. Approve risk assessment for wider of school

3.1 FMI confirmed that all governors had read this latest version of the risk assessment for wider opening of the school and asked SWH to introduce it, which he did as follows, answering questions as he did so.

3.2 Staff had been surveyed on their concerns about and thoughts around wider opening before the half-term break. Feedback had revealed some anxiety about a return, particularly in light of how “mini-WES” – continuing provision for vulnerable children and those of key workers – had been working.

3.3 The difficulty of encouraging and enforcing social distancing among students – and even staff – was of particular concern.

3.4 This risk assessment was in response to set questions generated by Camden Learning, informed by subsequent DfE guidelines. Camden headteachers had liaised positively on a range of ideas for the wider opening of their schools. Staff had reviewed and commented on a slightly earlier version of this document.

3.5 SWH thanked IJO and Mandy Seeburn (MSE – the school's director of operations) for their hard work on it.

3.6 In advance of the wider opening on 15 June 2020, the plan was to invite appropriate staff of each of the five tutor groups in to school for a day each, for training in the practicalities of wider opening (such as the stringent hygiene protocols), and to address any concerns, as highlighted by, among others, JMN.

3.7 From 15 June, eight “priority” students – those least engaged in home learning – from each tutor group would be invited to attend, each for a day a week. This pilot group would then be supplemented by others over the subsequent weeks.

3.8 One notable aspect of the return would be a relaxation of the rules on school uniform, as was currently the case for boys attending mini-WES. This was for various reasons, including hygiene – ties and blazers were expensive to decontaminate – and to encourage less engaged students to attend.

3.9 The general principles of the risk assessment were minimising social contact, maximising good hygiene and keeping the most vulnerable individuals safe.

3.10 The school was reassuring staff, parents and pupils that a return was as safe as it could be. It was not without risk. Y10 parents would be receiving a letter to this effect, assuming that governors signed off the risk assessment at this meeting.

3.11 Clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable staff had been identified. Camden had reviewed the school's list of students and identified seven who must not come in to school. Many vulnerable adults could work from home and staff given had been given the choice. The vast majority of teachers wanted to come in to school, or to have a combination of working at home and in school.

3.12 SWH introduced the concept of the “bubble”: minimising interaction between different groups by segregating staff and students by day of the week.

3.13 This worked for tutor groups, but the mini-WES cohort was more problematic because students were – or could be – in school every day, with a range of staff. Subject-specific teaching of Y10 could also see some problematic movement between staff and students.

[SJE joined the meeting at 5.10pm.]

3.14 the plan was to keep staffing levels high, with eight students to a room, depending on size. Most rooms could only fit eight. Few rooms were bigger. IJO added that rooms were the limiting factor to staff returning. The school would run out of rooms before it ran out of teachers.

3.15 SWH continued: student and staff toilets were all by the school's external doors, which allowed staff and students to wash their hands the moment they arrived.

3.16 Are outdoor lessons impractical [RAU]? The school had not planned for them, as the Y10 learning was largely computer-based, although daily PE lessons were planned to promote health and motivation. IJO added that mini-WES students were led outdoors when the activity was suitable. BLA pointed out that students moved outdoors at break and lunchtimes; unprotected extended exposure to the sun's ultra-violet rays could be a risk.

[GGO joined the meeting with apologies at 5.18pm.]

3.17 Is it worth having just eight children attending each day [KDU]? This was a pilot plan; the aim was to expand provision.

3.18 Why can't students be invited into school from next Monday [KDU]? The government had advised on a partial return to school a week later.

3.19 What are the educational objectives of returning [KDU]? The health and well-being of the students was the immediate focus at the moment.

3.20 FMI reported a question from GGO on Zoom's chat facility as follows.

3.21 Have staff started ringing priority parents, and if so, what reaction are they receiving [GGO]? IJO answered this: a questionnaire for parents was ready to go but calls would only begin after this meeting signed off the risk assessment.

3.22 How is the conversation with the unions going [GGO]? SWH replied that it was locally constructive. Staff volunteered to come in or otherwise: it seemed the healthiest way forward for the school to be as flexible as possible.

[JMN joined the meeting at 5.25pm.]

3.23 In practical terms, how could teachers balance split-site teaching: physical teaching of eight students on site, and online supervision of the remaining 110 at home [ISH]? This was a real challenge. Three live Y10 lessons a day was probably the maximum for any cohort, despite parental pressure. Some Y10 lessons might be dropped to supervise other years who were unable to attend school. The timetable for lessons on site was the same as for lessons online, but it was logistically complex.

3.24 That day Y7 and Y8 pupils had been coming in to school to pick up their packs – a self-selecting group, but still, in very positive numbers. Students were clearly keen for contact with their teachers and peers.

3.25 FMI reported a question from DMO on the chat facility as follows.

3.26 Do you have translators on hand for parents who do not speak English, considering that the households concerned are more likely to be multi-generational and so shielding older family members [DMO]? There were limited translation facilities for larger cohorts, of Bangladeshi and Somali origin, but not for all languages. Communications were normally through fellow students of the same group. This could form part of the Y10 questionnaire.

ACTION *Item 3.26* **BLA** to add question on multi-generational households shielding older family members to questionnaire.

3.27 Given loss of income from such activities as lettings, is the school keeping records of extraordinary expenditure in the hope of reclaiming some of it [RAU]?

Details of reclaiming were supposedly to follow. At the moment, savings balanced costs. On balance, partial closure would probably not be an additional cost burden.

3.28 FMI noted the sterling work of the school's premises team.

3.29 Does the school have adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and hygiene materials, in case the pandemic peaks again [FMI]? Schools were not a national priority for medical-grade PPE, but minimal supplies were needed for potential close contact with an infected individual, for instance in the case of first aid. Hand sanitiser and other hygiene materials had been ordered.

3.30 How are the premises team managing, particularly given the burden of additional cleaning, and particularly for the premises manager, Tony Avery, who manages both the William Ellis and neighbouring Parliament Hill sites [FMI]? Tony and his team were managing at the moment but it was early days. Workload due to further opening of the larger Parliament Hill site would require monitoring.

3.31 FMI noted that KDU had previously raised the educational value of a partial return to school.

3.32 SWH pointed out that face-to-face, on-site provision supplemented online, at-home learning, possibly for some time to come. The importance of some students' social interaction with their peers should not be underestimated. Other students needed encouraging to engage with learning. The longer that was left, the wider the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students would grow.

3.33 IJO noted that routine enabled better learning, as did a sense of students' connection with their teacher. For some students, coming into school to do the same work set online at home, but under a teacher's supervision, was valuable.

3.34 Is access to a laptop at home a factor that determines priority [DMO]? IJO answered this question: yes, because they were the students who were disengaged.

3.35 SWH noted that the school was encouraging good, efficient hygiene routines. Students were encouraged only to use sanitiser when they absolutely could not wash their hands, so as to not to run down stocks, so minimising the need to refill. They were also encouraged to wipe down computers after use, for similar reasons.

3.36 What is the policy on the wearing of masks in school, by staff or students [KDU]? SWH noted that this was a continuing issue. Official advice was that they were unnecessary, and could in fact increase risk. Minimising contact between individuals was much more effective. Any infection would be addressed by self-isolation.

3.37 Won't increasing the number of Y12 lessons with subject content increase contact from class to class, undermining the "bubbles" on which so much of safe opening seems to hinge [JMN]? The four schools of the LaSWAP sixth-form consortium were working together on this. There was a strong case for not having face-to-face Y12 lessons. It partly depended on the teaching group. Y12 might better be served by pastoral support, not face-to-face but live, online. Any student with good access to a computer might not need to come in to school.

3.38 Should the risk assessment consider staff and students' travel to school, and are there ways that the school can support travel to school without using public transport [GGO]? School would be starting later in the morning, after commuters' hours, which should help. The school was fully stocked with bicycle racks. Many students could safely walk to school. Staff, who tended to travel further, were a different issue.

3.39 IJO agreed: staff had been consulted on travel, and it had been a factor when considering who to ask to come in to school. So far, staff taking public transport had not been asked to attend, at least not if it involved long journeys. But many had offered to come in.

3.40 The issue was included in the questionnaire for Y10 students and their families. Students would be encouraged to walk rather than, for instance, taking the 214 bus.

3.41 If they did travel by bus, would they be encouraged to use a face covering, in line with public health advice [GGO]? The school would make clear that the public health advice was not the same as the advice on being on school premises.

3.42 SWH pointed out that many of the questions submitted by JMN in advance of the EGM – all valid questions – would be dealt with in a forthcoming staff meeting.

[JMN left the meeting at 5.44pm.]

3.43 CGE noted that the school would have a further challenge to manage staff's travel concerns if there was another spike in infection, but schools remained open.

3.44 Are the effects of contact-tracing, which could dramatically reduce staff numbers, built into the risk assessment [FMI]? This was a question of staffing levels. If the worst came to the worst, all those who were part of the affected bubble would have to go into self-isolation at home. None of its members could come in to school.

3.45 GGO, who is leader of Camden Council, added that the borough was piloting contact-tracing, and would shortly publish a local outbreak plan, in response to a government initiative to give councils more local responsibility for local lockdowns.

3.46 Would that mean that the whole school might have to shut down [FMI]? GGO thought not, but if there were an outbreak, the local authority public health team would be there to support the school.

3.47 FMI asked BLA to summarise the results of the consultation with staff, which he did as follows, answering the single question which resulted.

3.48 Of the 102 staff consulted before the half term break, 90 had replied. Generally, they welcomed the idea of a cautious, planned, partial return to school.

3.49 Of the 90 who replied, 19 preferred to work full-time from home:

- Two were extremely clinically vulnerable;
- Six were clinically vulnerable;
- Eight shared a home with someone who was clinically vulnerable;
- Three were in none of the above categories but were nervous.

3.50 One of the nervous members of staff just wanted reassurance and subsequently decided to come in to school.

3.51 Eleven of the 19 individuals who preferred to work entirely from home were teaching staff, three of them part-time, leaving plenty of teachers prepared to attend school to carry out the on-site plan for partial return.

3.52 Staff had asked 30 questions, the answers to which were either already in the risk assessment, or were subsequently addressed.

3.53 Staff's biggest concern was how the school would enforce social distancing.

3.54 A question to staff themselves who wanted to work full-time at home, on what contributions to the students' education they thought they could make, had yielded many useful suggestions. Most had been keen on a hybrid option, partly coming into school, and partly working at home.

3.55 Following assumed agreement by governors, the risk assessment would be updated as necessary, put to staff once more, and any further questions addressed.

3.56 FMI thanked BLA for his update and called for any questions.

3.57 What percentage of teachers prefer to work full-time from home [RAU]? Of the 63 teachers, 11 preferred to work at home – so 17 per cent.

3.58 Governors **AGREED** the risk assessment, which SWH promised to amend in light of the various comments over the course of the meeting. He added that minor amendments due to further guidance would be subject to consultation with FMI.

ACTION *Item 3.58* **SWH** to amend risk assessment in light of governor comments and consult FMI on any further minor amendments due to changing official guidance.

4. Any other business

There was no other business.

Next scheduled meeting: Thursday 2 July 2020, potentially at The Mill (if so, time TBC)

There being no further business, FMI thanked the school's senior leaders for their sterling work in consulting staff and compiling the risk assessment; thanked all staff for their heroic efforts for the school over the lockdown; thanked all present for attending; and closed the meeting at 5.53pm.

Signed.....

2 July 2020

Fiona Millar
Chair of the Governing Body, William Ellis School

ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE ABOVE MINUTES

ACTION *Item 3.26* **BLA** to add question on multi-generational households shielding older family members to questionnaire.

ACTION *Item 3.58* **SWH** to amend risk assessment in light of governor comments and consult FMI on any further minor amendments due to changing official guidance.