



**GOVERNING BODY OF HARBINGER PRIMARY SCHOOL
MINUTES OF GOVERNING BODY MEETING**

Date of Meeting	23 rd March 2023
Venue	Harbinger Primary School
Chair	Martin Young
Clerk & Minutes	Sabrina Begum
Time	5:00 p.m.

MEMBERSHIP:

Governor	Category
Martin Young (Chair)*	Co-opted
Rebecca Abrahams (EHT)*	Head
Benedict (Ben) Brickley	Co-opted
Caroline Hurley*	Co-opted
Vaughan Pilikian*	Co-opted
Rev Tom Pyke*	Co-opted
<i>2x Vacancies</i>	Co-opted
Lawrence Houldsworth	Associate member
Kiran Rahman	Parent Governor
<i>2x Vacancies</i>	Parent Governor
Srividya Srivathsan (Vidya)*	Local Authority Governor
Eddie Miller*	Staff
Also, In Attendance	Role/Title
Nimesha Nagahawatte (Head of School)	Observer
Mai-Anh Dien (School Business Manager)	Observer
Sabrina Begum	Clerk

(* represents attendance)

Part 1 – Open Section

	ITEM
1.	Welcome, Apologies for Absence and Declaration of Pecuniary Interest
	The Chair welcomed everyone in the meeting. Apologies for absence was received from Kiran Rahman. Lateness was accepted from Vaughn Pilikian and Caroline Hurley. Noted the absences of Ben Brickley.
2.	Declaration of Interest
	There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3.	<p>Membership</p> <p>The Chair noted that the resignation of Shantanu Deo as a Co-opted Governor from 20 January 2023 resulted in a vacancy. The Chair noted that there are now two co-opted governor vacancies and asked the Board to forward their suggestions of anyone they think suitable.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Nafisa Ayub, the new parent governor, whose membership would begin from 23 March 2023. The Chair also noted the other parent vacancy and enquired on the recruitment for this. Mia-Ahn reported that it was difficult to recruit last time because of the lack of interest, but another election could begin in the summer term.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Action: School Business Manager</p> <p>The Chair enquired Nafisa on what parents know about being a Parent Governor. Nafisa replied that parents have a lack of awareness and knowledge about being a governor. Vidya added that the Local Authority are working with a company to create films to increase the profile of governors for the community.</p>
4.	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising – 17 November 2022</p> <p>The Minutes of the meetings held on 17 November 2022 were agreed and would be signed by the Chair via GovernorHub.</p> <p>There were no matters arising not discussed elsewhere in these Minutes.</p>
5.	<p>Significant Updates from Committees</p> <p><u>Finance & General Purposes Committee – 2 February 2023</u></p> <p>Vidya (Committee Chair) reported that the Schools Financial Values Standards (SFVS) was reviewed by the committee and approved by the Governing Body via email.</p> <p>Noted that at the time the school was projected to close the year end around £99,000 deficit but this would no longer be the case. Mai-Anh and Vidya had been working together on the budget and discovered that there could be a cash flow issue which the Local Authority could support on as required.</p> <p>The Executive Headteacher (EHT) noted that staffing had been the largest expense due to staff illness and not being able to cover staff with ease. There was a restructure in the past to create more capacity, but those staff members went on maternity leave and no covers were available for them. However, the budget was impacted more through inflation and mostly the unfunded pay increases which happened midway through the year. Rebecca noted that the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) annual fee had also increased adding more complication and pressure to balance the budget.</p> <p>A Governor enquired on the repercussions if the PFI charges were not paid. Vidya responded that Harbinger would not have the political or financial strength to tackle the repercussions and the money for the school is managed by the Local Authority.</p> <p>Vidya added that paying the PFI charges would provide the school better infrastructure for the premises management and maintenance. For Harbinger, the playground was refurbished</p>

which the school could not pay out of its own budget. Vidya further added that they had been looking to let the school property out of school hours to raise some income which came about after many negotiations. Harbinger had entered the PFI through the Local Authority so the schools could not be the direct contract negotiators. However, the PFI contracts will come to an end in 2026 and the Local Authority are planning the exit strategy.

The Chair suggested that a report on the PFI charges and the services received by the school over the last three years and the projected costs and services for the next three years may be helpful. Secondly, the Chair would like to know what Harbinger could do to stop those payments.

Vidya further added that the report could show the values if the school were to employ the service directly instead of via PFI. Vidya suggested that this could be discussed at the next finance meeting and then brought to the Governing Body meeting to make informed decisions. The Chair agreed to this and noted that the PFI contract should be maximised in the meantime.

Resolved to refer to the Governing Body meeting in May for discussion.

Action: Clerk

Vidya reported that there were no contracts or SLAs to approve. There was supposed to be a change in the payroll, but it was decided to remain with the Local Authority. The only change had been with the management information system, where the school had moved from using Bromcom to Arbour.

Resolved that the End of Year accounts and the Draft Budget would be brought to the next Governing Body meeting.

Action: Clerk

Curriculum & Standards Committee – 9 March 2023

The Head of School reported that she gave a presentation around lesson structure and the school had been practicing and developing this in the last year. This included understanding cognitive load theory and Rosenshine's Principle. Rosenshine was an educator and researcher. Harbinger was already following most of the principles, but phase leaders drew up new lesson structures. There were also peer reviews where teachers observed a lesson in a different year group, and this also included senior leaders from other schools observing and giving feedback. They reported that the retrieval practice was good but there would need to be more work done around the modelling practice. The feedback had not been shared with staff yet.

The Committee Chair reported that the Curriculum Standards Committee was not quorate and so there were no decisions made. The discussions at that meeting focused on the lack of funding on SEN especially Early Years. She further noted that the lack of funding would be highlighted in every meeting, but there were no actions. **She enquired** the board on how to keep SEN funding on the forefront.

The Chair suggested that there could be further allocations of money to SEN within the parameters when it comes to setting the budget. Vidya suggested that the work with the agencies must be pushed continuously, and SEN could be an ongoing conversation for the Governing Body to see where it is making improvements, and what could be done to compensate the lateness of funding and reservations.

	<p>The EHT reported that there would be more capacity after Easter. There would be an SLA with the Local Authority for the summer term to have additional SENCO support two days a week. This would help Harbinger through until September whilst the budget is finalised to see if there could be a full SENCO post or part-time post to work alongside the SLT.</p> <p>A governor enquired if there are external organisations providing access to early years help in the borough. Rebecca responded that the Parent Advice Centre is supportive for SEND, and guiding parents to that could add more pressure to the Local Authority.</p>
6.	<p>Executive Headteacher’s Report</p>
	<p><u>Attendance</u> The Chair highlighted page five which mentioned Parent Governors supporting attendance.</p> <p>The Chair asked parent governors in the room regarding supporting this and Nafisa stated that she would support this approach.</p> <p>The EHT clarified that the conversation between Parent Governors and parents do not need to be formal.</p> <p>The EHT reported that Harbinger’s rank in attendance had come to 51 out of the 62 schools in the borough. Attendance had become a national problem after covid but attendance on the Isle of Dogs had always been quite low. All the Isle of Dogs schools were last on the list. Rebecca would like to find the reasons for this through parent-to-parent conversations than the school leadership approaching the community.</p> <p>The EHT stated that persistent absences were high in Year 1 with less than 91% of pupils attending. Year 1 was a crucial year in learning phonics and each lesson is planned thoroughly, so catching up on missed learning would be difficult.</p> <p>The Chair asked if Governors are allowed to know the parents of the persistent absence pupils. The EHT responded that this would not be allowed for the parent’s own safety and privacy.</p> <p>The EHT reported that a member of staff had put in parent meetings, and videos on the website about the impact on missing school. Parents have been brought in to have conversations, received written letters and other forms of communication, however but it was not shifting the culture.</p> <p>The EHT shared that there were more requests for travelling abroad than the school had ever had before and families could not afford to go during holiday times due to the high costs, so they are going during school term.</p> <p>A Governor added that the Local Authority stated that the school would need to accept that parents would go on holiday during school term without permission and they would be fined. However, the fine is a small amount per parent and does not add to the savings parents are making when booking the holiday. Therefore, families are willing to pay the fine because there are no serious consequences.</p> <p>The EHT suggested a leaflet should be produced and handed to all parents as an indirect approach to the conversation on what schools can do to encourage higher level of attendance. A governor highlighted that the phrasing on the leaflet should be opening the</p>

parent's views on what a school is. It should be seen as a social entity that both parents and children are a part of and by bringing their children to school regularly, parents are contributing to their children's cohesion of that group.

Another governor concurred and suggested that Harbinger should reach out to community leaders to inform their groups and communities. The Chair agreed that community leaders would take this seriously and agreed with the other governors' views.

Vidya added that if the school would return to a financially stable position, they could consider rewarding families with high attendance with a trip to the Tower of London or London Zoo. This could be advertised to parents at the start of a new academic year and the attendance benchmark would be decided reasonably.

The staff governor reported that he had spoken to a lot of the children who said that they are unwell, but minor symptoms. Parents are increasingly getting anxious if their child catches any signs of sickness and taking children out of school immediately. In addition to that, there are more people at home post-covid so it would be easier to keep the children at home. He further added that there was a period of low attendance some years ago and the school had put in health workshops for parents where they could speak to GPs and nurses about children's health. This had helped parents to understand when it was a good reason to leave the child at school or at home. The teachers are not the right people to reassure parents so bringing in health professionals again would be beneficial.

Vidya stated that she would seek out a contact from the Healthy Lives Team in the Local Authority and share it with the school to explore their outreach programmes.

Action: Vidya

The Chair concluded that a leaflet would be made and handed out by Governors to parents.

Action: EHT & Head of School

A governor observed that the EHT's report showed that there were two pending cases regarding SEN and **sought clarification**. The EHT stated that the Local Authority has a backlog of plans which are not being delivered within the statutory time frame. The school continued to chase them which resulted in delays in receiving funding and backdated payments.

The EHT also stated that Harbinger, as well as other schools, faced a large number of children with significant needs who had not seen a health professional due to the pandemic. As a result, when they started school, evidence was gathered prior to the assessment. The lack of available Education Psychologists had also added to the delays and difficulties on making applications for the Education Health Care Plan.

There was a two-year wait for Autistic Spectrum Disorder assessments. All of these services are underfunded, and parents would rather pay for expensive private assessments.

The Chair asked if the responses on the staff wellbeing have been analysed. The Head of School replied that this had not yet begun.

The EHT brought the Governors' attention to the Isle of Dogs Partnership. The EHT recalled and summarised that the Isle of Dogs community schools were looking to form an informal federation, but Covid-19 had paused this, and other changes occurred which had subsided

the plans. However, many schools on the Isle of Dogs have continued to meet. The partnership would involve Arnhem Wharf, Seven Mills, St Edmunds, Harbinger, St Luke's, and George Greens Schools. The schools met every half term to engage in activities focused on the curriculum and teaching, but also leadership. The School Business Managers, as well as other leaders, met on a regular basis. All of the schools saw themselves as being in a very distinct geographical area, and all of the schools served the same community, so it was in everyone's best interests to collaborate and work in close partnership.

The EHT further reported that parents had shared their views that the collaboration between schools was strong. The EHT and other Heads had been working together to demonstrate their commitment on the partnership and how to involve Governors to this commitment as well. At this point, the schools were only formalising the sense of partnership rather than forming a multi academy trust or a federation. The EHT shared that she would like Governors to attend the meetings so there would be a better understanding.

A governor asked whether the partnership focuses on best practice. The EHT expressed that this would be a great foundation to begin with before it develops into a more formal partnership in the future. The EHT believed that it made sense to do this partnership especially with the pressures on budget and resources.

The Chair noted that although Harbinger and other schools on the island are unique in their location and community, they should not disconnect with the rest of Tower Hamlets. It could lead to a disadvantage in social cohesion.

A governor inquired at what stage would all the schools form together as an academy. The EHT shared that schools felt that becoming a multi academy trust was less of an option and more of a requirement some years ago but in recent times, with the current government, that momentum had slowed down. However, the academisation agenda could surge again so it would be best to formalise the partnership to create a solid foundation.

The Chair sought further information regarding the Anti-Racist pledge. The EHT stated that this pledge had come from the Local Authority, and she had brought to this meeting for awareness before it would be shared on the website. The school is committed to this cause and had already been working with the Local Authority to raise it in the curriculum.

The Chair asked for an update of the Equalities Action Plan mentioned at the end of the report. The EHT noted that the date should say by the end of 2023 and not 2022. This, again, had come from the Local Authority, and this would be embedded into the School Development Plan.

School Uniform

The Head of School reported that parents have asked about school uniforms over the years and there is an existing school uniform, but this had been optional for families. In the autumn term many parents asked for a uniform, and this was brought to the last Governing Body meeting where it was suggested by Governors to carry out a consultation. A survey was circulated and asked parents, staff, and children the reasons for and against having a school uniform.

The Head of School handed out copies of the anonymous results from the survey to Governors. Majority of those who responded were in favour of a uniform but there were reasons why a uniform would be difficult, such as for the parents of a SEND child could have

	<p>a reaction to cheap fabric. Others thought that it does not let children express their individuality. The Head of School thought the colours from the school logo could be incorporated into the jumper and children could choose a colour to express their individuality.</p> <p>Staff and parents also noted that the cost would be an issue so there would need to be some research into different suppliers and offers. The school has a fleece and a jumper with a logo but there could be an option to wear one without the logo. Some responses also stated that a uniform would be cheaper as there would be less pressure to continuously buy new and trendy clothes for their children.</p> <p>The Head of School further reported that the uniform policy would need to be inclusive, particularly for the SEND children and she would need to find out what other schools practice to create that flexibility for families. The Head of School enquired to the board if there should be further consultation with the parents.</p> <p>The Chair inquired about the number of responses, and the Head of School responded that 54 people had responded. The Chair and other Governors commented that the lack of responses makes it difficult to come to a final decision.</p> <p>A governor commented that the school should consider on whether the non-uniform would be a distraction or cause hazard during their learning. Vidya agreed that cost should also be considered and if the school chose the branded items, then families could struggle to purchase these.</p> <p>Another governor asked how the consultation survey was circulated to staff and parents. The Head of School replied that it was on the e-newsletter. Vaughan suggested that it should be a physical copy since e-newsletters are often missed.</p> <p>The Chair stated that a leaflet would be sent out stating that the school uniform would be made mandatory in the next academic year with details of options or cost unless the school receives objections in sufficient numbers and validity. The leaflet should also mention that the decision was based on the result of the recent survey, and it should include a deadline for responses. It should notify that parents can reach out to the school to discuss this further.</p> <p>It was also agreed that further consultations and discussion on the uniform’s appearance would happen once the results are clear.</p> <p>Resolved that the Head of School to draft up a leaflet for parents and staff and to circulate this to Governors as well.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Action: The Head of School</p> <p>To defer decision making to the next Governing Body meeting.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Action: Clerk</p>
7.	Policies
	<p>The EHT noted that the Equality policy would not be due until September 2023 and the Chair deferred this policy to the next academic year’s meeting.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Action: Clerk</p>

	<p>The following policies were received for review and approval:</p> <p>Complaints Procedure Flexible and Phased Retirement Policy Resolved to approve the above policies.</p> <p><u>Policies reviewed at Committees</u></p> <p>The SEN Report. Resolved to approve the SEN Report.</p>
8.	<p>Reports from Governors</p> <p>Caroline Hurley reported that she attended an Oracy visit to see what Fiona had been introducing to the school. She had met the students who had great confidence and oracy. The pupils also knew the purpose and importance of oracy.</p> <p>Vidya Srivathsan reported that she attended a training on carrying out investigations as she was keen to know what this involved.</p> <p>Caroline reported that she attended a Conscious Inclusion training which she found to be energising and uplifting. She recommends Governors to attend this as the facilitator had great experience and thought-provoking conversation around inclusion.</p> <p>Governors were encouraged to book relevant training via GovernorHub. The following training sessions could be of interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wellbeing Session – 29 March 2023 at 5:30pm virtually - Pupil Disciplinary - Exclusions Panel Session – 20 April 2023 face to face
9.	<p>Chair's Actions</p> <p>The Chair approved the two responses on the strike days and the arrangements put in place by the EHT and Head of School provided for those in need on those days. The Chair hoped that there would be a resolution on this dispute soon.</p> <p>Resolved to agree the Chair's Action</p>
10.	<p>Date of Next Meeting - Thursday 25 May 2023 at 5:00pm</p>

The meeting closed at 6:52 pm

Chair's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____