

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

HARBINGER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Minutes of the Full Governing Body meeting held at the school on Thursday, 24th March 2022 at 5.00pm

Governors

Ms Rebecca Abrahams*	Executive Headteacher
Mr Benedict Brickley	Co-opted Governor
Mr Shantanu Deo*	Co-opted Governor
Ms Caroline Hurley*	Co-opted Governor
Mr Vaughan Pilikian*	Co-opted Governor
Fr Tom Pyke*	Co-opted Governor
Mr Martin Young (Chair)	Co-opted Governor
Ms Susannah Abdelouahed*	Parent Governor
Ms Jasmine Islam	Parent Governor
Ms Kiran Rahman (Vice-Chair)*	Parent Governor
Ms Srividya Srivathsan	Local Authority Governor
Mr Eddie Miller*	Staff Governor

* Indicates attendance

Also in attendance

Ms Nimesha Nagahawatte (Head of School)
Ms Mai-Anh Dien (School Business Manager)
Mr Angus Huck (Clerk)

The meeting commenced at 5.12pm, and was quorate.

In Mr Young's unavoidable absence, Ms Rahman took the chair.

1. **Presentation on Speech and Language Therapy**

Governors received a presentation on Speech and Language Therapy (SALT).

The following points were highlighted for particular attention:

- Harbinger engaged a specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SALT), Ms Katy Corbishley, who came into the school every week on Tuesdays. There were also two very experienced SALT TAs, one of whom worked on SALT full-time and the other who worked on SALT for half a day every day, and in addition there was the occasional support of a Speech Therapist from the Tower Hamlets Early Years Service;
- The areas of focus were mainly speech production and vocabulary acquisition, though there were other areas too. The provision was split into three consecutive "Waves". Wave 1 children were given Quality First Teaching, Wave 2 was split into English as an Additional Language (EAL) groups and conversation groups, while Wave 3 was given two-to-one pre-teaching with a TA, along with a range of other things;

- Those who were non-verbal or who used very little language comprised a big cohort at Harbinger. These children were not necessarily autistic but they spoke very little. The approach that was employed was Quality First Teaching using gestures, signs and symbols. Wave 2 was given all of the above while Wave 3 was taught with Pictoys. Quality First Teaching was also used to teach Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) children. In Wave 2 there was Zones of Regulation work. The staff had all had training on that. The TAs ran sessions every week for a term-and-a-half. Four colours were used to identify how children were feeling and there were strategies to regulate emotions. Wave 3 went deeper, teaching problem-solving skills using cooperative games. Narrative groups and language bags were also used. Attention and listening were very important skills that were taught throughout the Waves;
- Previously, Ms Corbishley had only been engaged on a bi-termly basis. Now that she was in the school for the whole year it was possible for her to reach a bigger cohort of children. At present, 86 children had speech and language (SAL) needs, of whom 68 were on the SALT Register. That was 79% of all SAL pupils, and that figure did not include those children in EYFS who had yet to be diagnosed with SAL needs. SALT was very expensive. A full-time SALT cost £43,000 per annum; and
- It was hard to prove what the impact was. To do this, the school had bi-termly targets in place, there were annual reviews, and there were termly SEND meetings with class teachers where targets could be reviewed and new ones set.

In response to the following question from a Governor, the following answer was given:

Is 2021-2022 the first academic year in which the school has had the capacity to work with children in EYFS?

Yes. The school can now meet more children’s needs. There is a very high number of SAL children in the Nursery and Reception. Those children can be reached because of the SEND TAs. SAL has always been an issue in EYFS, but it is much greater now because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the first year that the school has been able to put those children with specially trained staff.

Governors were told about a child who was selectively mute. She spoke at home but not in school. Following much persistence by the SALT Team she was now beginning to speak in school. The school was very pleased by this greatly improved outcome for this particular child.

2. Presentation on Phonics

Governors received a presentation on Phonics.

Mr Miller and Ms Abrahams highlighted the following points for particular attention:

- Harbinger taught the THEP Phonics programme. It was split into five Phases and was based on the “Letters and Sounds” document. However, the DfE had an approved list of Phonics schemes, and “Letters and Sounds” was not on it. Harbinger was teaching the THEP scheme that was awaiting validation by the DfE;

- Phase 1 started in the Nursery where the children were taught about sound discrimination, such as telling the difference between environmental sounds and instrumental sounds. By the time that the children reached Reception that should already have happened. Phase 2 normally started in Reception, but not all the children were ready for it, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. By the end of Reception all the children should have completed Phase 4. That was a very high expectation. In Phase 4 no new sounds were taught. The focus was on making words longer. In June 2022, the school was required by the DfE to run a Phonics screening test. The children had to read 40 words, 20 of which were nonsense words. To pass, they needed to score 32 out of 40. In December 2021, the Year 3 cohort sat the test and 79% scored the pass mark. The school was more hopeful about the current year's cohort;
- Academic studies published recently had challenged the government's position on Phonics. It was considered that the government had become very inflexible in its approach to teaching Phonics, even to the extent that some OFSTED Inspectors would cast doubt about a school's provision if it taught Phonics in anything other than the approved way; and
- There were two approaches to teaching Phonics. One was to give the children a long list of rules. The other was to give them many examples. What worked most effectively was giving the children the whole words rather than breaking them down into their component parts. That was how the human brain worked.

A Governor stated that he had never done Phonics at school but that he had learned how to read. He said that he had been a very poor speller at school but that when he attended university he was introduced to grammar and that changed his ability to spell. He felt that both the rules-based and examples-based approaches to teaching Phonics ought to be combined.

3. Welcome, apologies for absence and declarations of pecuniary interests

Ms Rahman welcomed everybody present, including Mr Deo and Mr Pilikian, who both wished to be considered for appointment as Co-opted Governors, and Mr Huck, the Cover Clerk, who was standing in for Ms Nicol.

For the Cover Clerk's benefit, everybody present introduced themselves.

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Brickley, Ms Islam, Ms Srivathsan and Mr Young, and they were accepted.

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests in any of the Agenda items.

4. Minutes of the Governing Body meeting held on 25th November 2021 and matters arising

Governors received the draft minutes of the Full Governing Body meeting that took place on Thursday, 25th November 2021, as circulated prior to the meeting.

It was **AGREED** that the draft minutes of that meeting be approved as a true and accurate record, and they would be signed by the Chair of Governors as soon as was practicable.

5. Governing Body matters

Vacancies for two Co-opted Governors

It was **AGREED** that Mr Shantanu Deo and Mr Vaughan Pilikian be appointed to the vacant posts of Co-opted Governor to serve terms of four years.

It was **AGREED** that Mr Deo be appointed to the Finance and General Purposes Committee and that Mr Pilikian be appointed to the Curriculum and Standards Committee.

Link Governors

It was **AGREED** that the following Link Governor appointments be made:

Curriculum	Mr Pilikian
Behaviour and Anti-Bullying	Ms Rahman
Health and Safety	Mr Brickley
Literacy and Numeracy	Ms Hurley
RSE	Ms Rahman
Safeguarding	Fr Pyke

6. Headteacher's Report

Governors received the following papers, as circulated prior to the meeting:

- Headteacher's Report Overview Spring 2022
- Monitoring, Assessment, Evaluation and Development Schedule: Autumn 2021
- Harbinger SEF: March 2022

The Executive Headteacher highlighted the following points for particular attention:

- Self-Evaluation Form (SEF). The SEF set out the best summary of where the school was. It covered each area against which the school was measured. The most recent OFSTED Inspection had given the school a rating of "Requires Improvement" (RI). The next Inspection would be a Section 5 Inspection. It would run for two days and would include the Inspectors asking the Governors about the school. This required the Governors to give the Inspectors a consistent perspective. The most important part of the SEF was the section on the quality of education. The Inspectors would be conducting deep dives and would only tell the school what these would be on the Monday prior to the Inspection. A deep dive was a very intense look at a specific area. The Inspectors would undertake a Learning Walk, they would look at children's books, and they would sometimes pull children out and ask them questions about how they were being taught and how they were applying their learning in that subject. The first thing that the Inspectors did before coming to a school was look at the school website;
- The most recent update of the School Development Plan (SDP) had been presented to Governors in November 2021. Implementation of what was in the SDP had been going well, and it was hoped that some outcomes could be shared with Governors by the end of the year. There was an update on actions. The

school was very pleased about the two THEP Teaching and Learning Reviews that had taken place. There had been one in the Autumn Term of 2021 and another one on Tuesday, 1st March 2022, both led by Ms Alison Gawthrope. The first Review had focused on the teaching of Reading, the second on the wider Curriculum. Ms Gawthrope and her colleague, who was an OFSTED Inspector, met the Subject Leaders on 1st March 2022, and were genuinely deeply impressed by the extent of progress in the planning and implementation of the Curriculum. The school had presented clear evidence that what was planned was delivered and the children were learning it. Mr Miller and Ms Nagahawatte deserved special praise for this. The progress that the children had made was phenomenal. Ms Gawthrope and her colleague expressed their confidence that were OFSTED to undertake deep dives the outcome would be positive. One or two subjects were still being developed but it was expected that by Autumn 2022 all the subjects would be at the standard where the school wanted them to be;

- School roll. This continued to be a serious issue for Harbinger. The PAN was 45. That meant that there was more than one year group in one class. However, the roll had risen since the Autumn Term of 2021, but it had not risen as much as it had the previous academic year. The largest share of school funding was driven by pupil headcount. If classes were short on pupils, they still had to be open and there had to be adults in them. If a year group had a large number of vacancies, but enough children to have to open an additional class, that was a very serious concern. How could Harbinger maintain the pace of change to get the school where it wanted it to be when faced with a falling roll? It was reasonable to suppose that once the school was graded “Good” by OFSTED, parental interest would increase once again and the school would be more sustainable;
- Attendance was not as good as the school would like but it was higher than the national average. The School Office was working very hard to improve it; and
- Exclusions. There had been none since the previous Report.

In response to the following questions from Governors, the following answers were given:

Does the school have the space to increase the PAN to 60?

The really worrying issues are the Nursery and admissions at Reception. The data this year are very concerning. All local schools with the exception of Canary Wharf College have seen a big drop in the number of applications this year. In 2021, the total number of applications across the schools on the Isle of Dogs was 1,380. Harbinger only had 99 of these.

What is the reason for these drops in applications?

That is unclear. Canary Wharf College has seen an increase in applications.

Have all those missing children gone to Canary Wharf College?

That would appear to be the case. Canary Wharf College received 136 first preferences. No other school on the Island came anywhere near that.

The following further comments were made:

- Parents read the OFSTED Reports and made their choices based on those;
- The data were very out-of-date;
- One of the main issues for parents was after-school provision;
- Harbinger had just undertaken a survey looking at parental interest in an after-school club. The initial response had not been helpful. However, the school would press ahead with it. Wraparound care made an enormous difference;
- Parents had little idea how to assess an OFSTED Report, yet that was the primary source of information that parents were using. It would be good to have prospective parents come into the school and look around. One had to have a feel for a school; and
- Canary Wharf College had the attraction of long holidays that facilitated parents who were not British nationals taking their children abroad for extended periods.

Governors asked what Harbinger's unique selling point (USP) was.

It was **AGREED** that Harbinger's USP be an item on the Agenda of the first Full Governing Body meeting in the Autumn Term of 2022 and that a joint Governing Body meeting be held with St Luke's.

7. Policies for approval

Governors received the following draft Policies, as circulated prior to the meeting:

- Acceptable Use for Parents
- Anti-Bullying
- Critical Incident Plan
- Equalities
- First Aid
- Governors' Allowances
- Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

The Executive Headteacher stated the following:

- The most important of these draft Policies was the Equalities Policy. This was statutory and the school was required to publish it on its website. Ms Abrahams was proposing to focus on the most disadvantaged children in the school. She wanted to ensure that everyone at Harbinger did well and that they caught up as much as possible.

It was **AGREED** that all the above draft Policies be approved and adopted, and they would be signed by the Chair of Governors as soon as was practicable.

8. Committee Reports

Governors received reports from the following Committee meetings:

Finance & General Purposes – Thursday, 3rd February 2022

In the unavoidable absence of Ms Srivathsan (Chair of that Committee), Ms Abrahams reported as follows:

- There was a discussion about the Schools' Financial Value Standard Self-Evaluation Form (SFVS SEF). There were a couple of points that needed amending and this was done subsequent to the meeting;
- The year-end deficit was reported to be £17,000. This was attributable mainly to the overspend on teaching staff caused by the redundancy payments that the school had needed to make. Against that, a couple of school trips had been cancelled and some of the money spent on them was clawed back; and
- Subsequent to the Committee meeting, Ms Abrahams had attended a meeting with Tower Hamlets at which Tower Hamlets agreed to give the school £35,000. At the end of each quarter the school had to share with Tower Hamlets information about its financial position. At the end of the first quarter of 2021-2022, Tower Hamlets had stated that it considered Harbinger's forecasts too optimistic. However, when Ms Dien (School Business Manager) looked at the school's income streams earlier in the day it appeared that they were coming in over budget. It was not entirely clear what the position was at present. There was clearly sufficient money in the bank to make all the BACS payments over the following weeks and to pay all the March salaries. It was therefore hoped that the year-end position would prove to be not as gloomy as initially reported. Harbinger was in a perilous financial position because of the unfilled places and the PFI arrangement.

In response to the following question from a Governor, the following answer was given:

What will the consequences be for the school of being in deficit?

The school will have three years to clear it. It must not get any bigger. There are certain things that the school had to pay last year that it will not have to pay this year. The school is doing its very best to trim expenditure as much as possible while maintaining the quality of provision. There are another six years to go before the PFI arrangement ends. Those years will be very challenging.

Governors **AGREED** the draft completed SFVS SEF, and it would be sent to Tower Hamlets by the end of the month.

Curriculum & Standards

It was reported that Governors had received a very good presentation on Reading and were happy with the draft Policies put before them.

9. Partnership with St Luke's

The Executive Headteacher stated the following:

- The Partnership had been established some 18 months previously to cover a period of two years. Ms Abrahams had been enjoying working with Harbinger. She considered that some considerable progress had been made. An OFSTED Inspection was likely to take place shortly, but it might not happen before the end

of the year. It might be viewed as defeating the purpose of the Partnership to bring it to an end before an Inspection took place. No plans had been made to end the Partnership. Tower Hamlets was very much in support of it continuing. The proposal was to make the partnership indefinite but with a two-term exit clause. Two terms would enable Harbinger to go through a proper recruitment process.

It was **AGREED** that the partnership between Harbinger and St Luke's continue indefinitely but with a two-term exit clause.

10. Reports from Governors

Fr Pyke (Safeguarding Link Governor) reported that he had looked at the Single Central Record (SCR) and was able to confirm that everything was in order. He considered that the system was very well managed.

The Executive Headteacher reported that she and Mr Young (Chair of Governors) had both attended a meeting at Mulberry Place with Mr Steve Nyakatawa (Director of Education, Tower Hamlets).

Ms Rahman reported that she had participated in a ZOOM training session for parents. She said that the session had included a presentation on Prevent.

11. Items for the next Agenda

The following items were suggested:

- Budget 2022-2023
- Harbinger's USP

The meeting ended at 7.20pm.

Chair's signature: _____ **Date:** _____