

CHELMSFORD COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Minutes of a meeting of the GOVERNING BODY held in the School and remotely via Microsoft Teams at 8.00am on Friday 13th October 2023

Present: Steve Miles Chair of Governors (T) = via Teams
Svetlana Warhurst Vice Chair of Governors (T)
Stephen Lawlor Headteacher
Mary Argent (T), Andrew Bonwick, Richard Brown, Sarah de Souza-Ingle (T),
Niamh Dobson, Melanie Gulliver, Jason Oster (T), Priya Rangaswamy,
Aisha Sohail, Richard Vass

In Attendance: Jo Cross Deputy Headteacher (Academic)
Fiona Harrison Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral)
Melissa Mulgrew Business Manager
Wendy Newton Clerk to Governors

Apologies: Funmi Osilaja, Manish Unhale

1. The Chair of Governors opened by welcoming Melanie Gulliver in her new role as a Nominated Governor and member of the Curriculum Committee. A formal farewell was voiced to Richard Vass, ex-Vice Chair of Governors and ex-Chair of the Finance Committee, who was leaving his role of Nominated Governor at the end of the Autumn Term after nearly 12 years on the GB due to family relocation away from Chelmsford. Richard was thanked for his work and commitment to the School during his time on the GB. The meeting was informed that Richard had kindly agreed to take on the role of Member when the new Company structure was initiated.

ITEM 1 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Funmi Osilaja and Manish Unhale.

ITEM 2 – DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

3. There were no declarations of business interest further to those already stated on the Register of Business Interests for 2023-24, or conflicts of interest, or receipts of gifts or hospitality. The Clerk confirmed that all Governors except one had returned their annual declarations for 2023-24.

ITEM 3 - MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

4. The minutes of the meeting held on 14th July 2023 were agreed as a true record.

ITEM 4 – MATTERS ARISING

5. Item 6, Para 14a – Removal of Selection Ballot. The Business Manager advised that a risk analysis on the benefits of being in a joint ballot group with KEGS for the removal of selection was not feasible due to the lack of demographic information.

ITEM 5 – CHAIRS’ ACTION & EMAIL ACTION

6. Item 5.1 – Chairs’ Action. A list of all Chairs’ actions taken since the last Full GB meeting was received and noted.

7. Item 5.2 – DfE & ESFA Letters. No ESFA or DfE letters requiring Governor attention had been sent to the School since the last meeting.

8. Item 5.3 – School Management Accounts. Governors confirmed receipt by email of the School Financial Management Accounts for June & July 2023 and had noted the content.

ACTION

ITEM 6 – GOVERNING BODY MATTERS

ACTION

9. **Item 6.1 – GB Membership.** Details of GB and sub-committee membership were reviewed. The Clerk advised that two Nominated Governor positions would be vacant by the end of the Autumn Term and the removal of employee Governors last term had reduced the overall number of Governors on the GB; this had resulted in two of the GB sub-committees currently being one member light. The need for additional Governors was discussed and one suggestion put forward.

10. **Item 6.2 - Associate Member - Decision.** With Mary Argent's consent, the Chair proposed the re-election of Mary Argent as Associate Member of the GB for 2023-24 and this was unanimously **approved** by the Full GB.

11. **Item 6.3 – Headteacher's Performance Review – Decision.** The Headteacher's Performance Review Panel currently comprised of the Chair and the Vice-Chair of Governors. The meeting **agreed** that in light of the recent change of Vice-Chair, the Chair and Richard Vass would continue to act as the Headteacher's Performance Review Panel for 2023-24 with the current Vice-Chair of Governors would act as an observer for transition purposes. Andrew Bonwick **agreed** to act as the Headteacher's Performance Review Appeal Officer, if required. The meeting discussed the need for an external adviser, and it was **agreed** that an external adviser was not required.

Chair
R Vass
Vice-Chair
A Bonwick

12. **Item 6.4 – Company Structure.** The Clerk advised that a reply had been received from DfE that week. Whilst the DfE had accepted the proposed new Funding Agreement, they had rejected two items in the proposed new Articles of Association for the Company. The first item was a technicality which was to be challenged by the Clerk. The second was that the Company's second Object had been queried as it did not match the DfE's model. This was considered unusual as the Objects had remained the same since the School converted in 2011, and had therefore been previously approved by the DfE, and were also the same Objects as other local schools which had already been accepted by the DfE. The issue was discussed, and the Clerk **agreed** to challenge the issue with the DfE. It was also **agreed** that in light of the delays by the DfE, the change of Articles would now need to become effective from 1st January 2024 and the Clerk **agreed** to produce a revised Special Resolution.

Clerk

Clerk

ITEM 7 – GB GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS

13. The Terms of Reference (TORs) for the Full GB and each sub-committee were presented for annual re-approval. Committees who had already met this term had reviewed and approved their TORs and the remainder would be reviewed at their first meeting later this term. The GB Standing Orders, GB Scheme of Delegation and Governors' Code of Conduct were also presented for re-approval. It was noted that the TORs and Scheme of Delegation would need to be re-written when the Company re-structuring was approved.

14. Decisions.

- a. The TORs for the Full GB and GB sub-committees (Management, Curriculum, Facilities & Finance, Staff & Student Matters, Staff Pay, Staff Pay Appeal, Audit, Staff Disciplinary, Staff Disciplinary Appeal, Governor Panels and Governor Panel Appeals) were **approved** as presented.
- b. The GB Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation and Code of Conduct were **approved** as presented. By approving the Governing Body Code of Conduct it is deemed that all Governors **agreed** to abide by the Code.

All

ITEM 9 – FINANCIAL MATTERS (Taken out of order)

15. **Item 9.1 – Revised School Budget 2023-24.** Following the Government's miscalculation of school funding for 2023-24, the Business Manager presented a revised School Budget for 2022-25. The miscalculation had produced a negative variance of £60,000 to the 2023-24 funding. In addition, lower than predicted Year 12 student numbers had resulted in £18,000 less income for 2023-24 and £57,000 for 2024-25. Two Year 11 students had also left the School which had produced a further loss of £12,100 income. Overall, an in-year deficit of £9,735 was predicted for

2023-24 and a £92,207 deficit for 2024-25. However, it was hoped that the School would be able to break even by the end of 2023-24. The Chair thanked the Finance team for their diligence and hard work in keeping control of expenditure. It was stated that there was very little that could be done about the financial situation apart from keeping very close control over School expenditure.

8.55am - The Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher (Academic) left the meeting to attend Assembly.

16. It was noted that the largest School expenditure was on teaching costs and the funding of staff pay increases was debated. The Business Manager advised that some savings could be expected from the future reduction in gas costs and that additional income is likely from higher than assumed 16-19 funding income. Governors noted that the budget would change through the year and that the financial outlook for future years looked worse than previously but historically the School had generally managed to improve on forecast figures as future funding was unknown. The School worked very hard to secure a Year 12 cohort of 160 students for September 2023. Given the challenges of the 'free market' reality in post-16 education, with students able to choose to attend another school or college, often close to home, a Year 12 cohort of 151 students was secured. (Thinking about this across the Sixth Form as a whole: the headline target would be 320 students, with 160 students in Year 12 and 160 students in Year 13. Our current Sixth Form has 315 students – 5 students fewer than our target). The effect of reduced Sixth Form numbers was deemed the most significant issue at this point as it had a two-year effect on School finances. There was one more year before there would be a cohort of 180 students in Year 11 which would hopefully then increase Sixth Form numbers. The meeting discussed the issue of Year 11 students leaving and the reasons behind their departure. It was reported that this academic year had been extremely difficult in relation to Sixth Form admissions and details were received. The issues of Year 11 retention and Sixth Form admissions were discussed at length. The Business Manager concluded by advising that this year's School accounts were due to be audited the following week and would be received by Governors in due course.

17. Item 9.2 – CCHS Financial Regulations 2023-24 - Decision. The CCHS Financial Regulations Manual and Scheme of Delegation 2023-24, which includes the Governors' Allowances Policy and Best Value Statement, was received for annual approval with only date revision and was **approved** as presented.

18. Item 9.3 – Whistleblowing Policy - Decision. The Whistleblowing Policy was presented for annual approval with one minor Juniper HR amendment. The omission of one word was also noted and the Clerk **agreed** to revise the wording. With the correction, the policy was **approved**.

Clerk

ITEM 10 – CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

19. Fundraising for the swimming pool had continued with a successful film night, but overall was slow due to the current financial climate. An application by ECC for grant funding, which included two CCHS requests relating to the swimming pool, had been rejected. Sport England had rejected a capital development funding request as the School did not have a Pay-As-You-Go facility for the pool. Parents continued to be approached for financial assistance towards the pool project. The long-term insurance claim relating to the pool had ended in an impasse and the School had agreed to a £9000 cash settlement which would be out towards pool repair work. The swimming pool Calorex unit had failed again last week and had cost £3000 to repair, a new unit would cost around £40,000. The meeting was advised that if the swimming pool boiler failed, lettings would cease. A new boiler would cost £35,000 and the associated gas work an additional £30,000. School Alumnae and local businesses were to be approached in the next phase of fundraising. It was stated that swimming pool profit was in the region of £20,000 and was used to support the School GAG. The meeting discussed the swimming pool issue in relation to the availability of pools in Chelmsford. The Chair thanked the Site Team for their efforts to keep the swimming pool open and their general hard work over the Summer holiday.

ITEM 11 – AUDIT ACTIONS

20. The meeting received the Juniper Schools Internal Scrutiny Programme for 2023-24 and were

advised that the Management Committee had agreed that this year's financial audit would be banking and the non-financial audit would be HR policies. The Business Manager confirmed that the School was happy to remain with Juniper.

ACTION

ITEM 13 – POLICIES

21. **Item 13.1 – Child Protection Policy - Decision.** The Child Protection Policy dated September 2023, previously approved by Chair's Action to allow publication at the start of term, was formally received and **approved** as presented.

22. **Item 13.2 – Admissions Policy 2025 - Decision.** The Admissions Policy for entry in September 2025 was received for approval. There were no major changes to the policy, only date amendment and some re-arrangement to improve the document. One word omission had been reported and the Clerk **agreed** to amend the document. With that correction, the policy was **approved**.

Clerk

ITEM 14 – RISK REGISTER

23. **Decision.** The Full GB section of the CCHS Risk Register was received and **approved** as presented.

ITEM 15 – GDPR

24. The Business Manager advised that there was nothing material to report on GDPR issues. There had been a few Freedom of Information requests relating to the Year 7 Entrance Test and more would be expected after the test results and in March when places were finally allocated.

ITEM 16 – GB SUB-COMMITTEES

25. **Decision.** The minutes of the following GB sub-committee meetings were received and **approved**:

- a. The Staff & Student Matters Committee meeting held on 28th June 2023, and
- b. The Management Committee meeting held on 29th September 2023.

ITEM 17 – SENIOR SPEECH DAY

26. The Clerk advised that Senior Speech Day was to be held in Chelmsford Cathedral on 17th April 2024. The Headteacher later confirmed that The Reverend Dr Caroline Hammond, a CCHS Alumna and Dean of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, had agreed to act as guest speaker.

ITEM 18 – SCHOOL ACTIVITIES – VISITS & TRIPS

27. A list of residential and overseas trips for 2023-24 was presented for approval. It was noted Chair's Action had already approved the German Backnang Trip as it had been necessary to send details out to parents earlier in the term. All the trips listed were repeat, curriculum-related trips.

28. **Decision.** The list of residential and overseas trips for 2023-24 was **approved** as presented.

ITEM 19 – GOVERNOR REPORTS

29. **Item 19.1 – Governor Visits.** No formal Governor visits had taken place since the last meeting, however the Chair, Vice Chair, Jason Oster and Manish Unhale had supported the New Year 7 Parents Welcome Evening in September. The Chair commended the evening stating that it was well-balanced and showed that the School was caring and supportive of its students. It was suggested that the Chair of the PA, Catherine Carby, would be an ideal Governor if her work commitments permitted. The Business Manager **agreed** to discuss the concept of governorship with Catherine Carby. The Chair stressed the importance of regular school visits by all Governors. Any requests for a visit should be sent via the Clerk.

M Mulgrew

30. Item 19.2 – Governor Training. Aisha Sohail advised that she had recently viewed an ECC Safeguarding webinar and was also currently undertaking an online Safeguarding training module. The Clerk reminded the meeting that all The Key and NGA Learning Link training modules were free, but that other paid courses were also available. Governors were encouraged to undertake any courses that might interest them.

31. Item 19.3 – Safeguarding. Aisha Sohail, Link Safeguarding Governor, and advised that she was due to meet Fiona Harrison, Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral) and the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), in the near future. The DSL advised that the School was busy with assemblies and Meet The Tutor Evenings and that the same safeguarding message was passed to everyone. Details of recent safeguarding activity were summarised for the meeting. Governors queried the current level of counselling provision for the School. It was reported that obtaining external counselling was still a major issue and that the School continued to push for help when required. The range of safeguarding help provided by the School was summarised for the meeting. Whilst Governors were formally covered for safeguarding training until January 2024, all Governors were **requested** to undertake the NGA online training to be aware of September 2023 safeguarding changes, primarily on phishing and filtering.

All

9.12am – The Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher (Academic) re-joined the meeting.

32. Item 19.4 – SEND. Svetlana Warhurst, the SEND Link Governor, presented meeting notes from her visit with the SENCO on 5th October 2023 and summarised the main issues. It was reported that the new SENCO, Heidi Pocock, had started in September and had settled in well to the role, she was being well-supported by the Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral) and the SEND Assistant. There were currently 42 students on the SEN Register including 3 students with an EHCP. It was reported that the Years 11 to 13 cohorts had the largest number of students on the SEN Register. The Headteacher confirmed that the annual meeting with the ECC Engagement Officer had taken place that week and had gone well even though all three ECC personnel were new to the School. An external SEND assessor had been arranged for the School until the new SENCO was fully qualified. The Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral) gave additional details on a student who had now left CCHS to be home-schooled.

33. Item 19.5 – Parents' Association Matters. The Business Manager reported that the PA was very busy with fundraising activities, the proceeds of which were used to finance additional items for the School. Activities included a Film Night, a Halloween Disco and the Christmas Fayre in December. It was reported that there had been record fundraising in 2022-23 raising £37,000. The Chair thanked the PA for their continuing support of the School.

34. Item 19.6 – Building a Future for our Community Committee. Jason Oster, Chair of the Building a Future for our Community Committee, presented a written summary and advised that the fundraising activities relating to the swimming pool were to be broken down into discrete smaller projects in order to gain more support from parents. The Committee had met several times this term and now planned to focus on three groups: Alumnae, local businesses and parents. The work of the Senior Prefects on the Committee was highly commended, and a video they had produced was to be used to communicate the fundraising project to other people. It was confirmed that excellent feedback had been received at the New Year 7 Parents Welcome Evening and that the efforts of all involved in the evening would contribute significantly to the fundraising goals.

ITEM 8 – HEADTEACHER'S REPORT TO GOVERNORS (Taken out of order)

35. The Headteacher's Report dated October 2023 was presented and specific points were brought to the attention of Governors. Year 12 student numbers had eventually settled at 150 (rose to 151 after the meeting was held), 10 students less than had been planned, and additional context was given about the issue. The Headteacher stressed the ferocity of the Sixth Form admissions process this year and gave additional details concerning students' decisions to leave the School after Year 11. It was reported that the admissions situation had also been the same in other schools. The significant and sustained amount of work undertaken by School staff in order to attain 150 students was highlighted and commended. Lessons had been learnt and new approaches were to be introduced to encourage retention of Year 11 students and additional new

students entering Year 12. It was noted that there was likely to be one more year of uncertainty in relation to Year 12 numbers before the first CCHS 180-student cohort reached the point of Sixth Form entry. It was stated that some Year 11 students leave for good reasons, such as subject choices or home location, but others left due to the misconception that they would achieve better A level grades elsewhere, which was demonstrably not true. Details of the main competitors to the CCHS Sixth Form were summarised.

36. The Deputy Headteacher (Academic) had recently co-ordinated a survey on behalf of GSHA of nearly 100 GSHA schools and their curriculum offers. Results had shown that the CCHS A level subject teaching provision was no longer in line with most of the other schools, 9-10 teaching hours per subject was now the norm. Further to the increase in teaching hours made last year for Science and Maths A levels, more A level subjects were to have increased teaching hours this year. It was hoped that this would have a positive effect on final A level results. Linked to the issues of Year 12 entry this year, the meeting was advised that the School had found that some students had rejected the CCHS Sixth Form because of the requirement to study 4 A level subjects in Year 12. Currently Year 12 students start by studying 4 A level subjects, but 67% of them drop to 3 A levels by the start of Year 13 – which is a sustained pattern over the past six years. The School had reviewed its Sixth Form offer and was to introduce a new A level Twin Pathway with effect from September 2024 and details were received. The Deputy Headteacher (Academic) presented additional background data on the decision to introduce an A level Twin Pathway which gave Year 12 students the option to study 3, 4 or 5 A levels. Feedback from students showed that an option for 3 A levels+ would be well-received by many students as it would allow them to focus on their 3 primary subjects from the start of Year 12. Governors put forward various questions on the new A level Twin Pathway programme which were answered by members of the SLT. It was confirmed to Governors that 3 A levels+ would not be a hinderance to successful university entry, including Oxbridge.

37. The Headteacher also advised that more work was to be undertaken to address the lack of Oxbridge offers this year. The School was to identify strong students from Years 9 and 10, build their confidence and give specialist support in relation to Oxbridge applications. Governors questioned the success of the new Year 7 Entrance Test. The Deputy Headteacher (Pastoral) reported that it had gone very well.. Feedback on the test had been positive and marking of the creative writing element by School staff was currently underway. A query was raised on the effect of the increased teaching hours for A level subjects in relation to cost and effect on the rest of the School and the Headteacher confirmed that as a growing school some of the increased staffing had been covered already and that some staff were able to teach more than one subject to an expert level which gave flexibility in relation to timetabling. The outcomes of certain subjects that had performed lower than expected were queried and details of how the School DSEF (Department Self-Evaluation Form) process and subsequent action planning addressed such issues were explained. It was confirmed that specific actions had been taken in relation to Chemistry.

ITEM 12 – YEAR 12 ADMISSIONS

38. Data was received on the Year 12 entry for 2023, including the previous schools of new students. Thirty-nine students had left at the end of Year 11 and 35 new students had joined Year 12, making a total of 150 (now 151) students in Year 12. The Deputy Headteacher (Academic) reiterated the issues encountered during the Year 12 admissions process and stated that student changes were still taking place up to 3 weeks into the term. It was reported that other local sixth form establishments were recruiting CCHS students well after the start of term. Details of the recent CCHS Sixth Form Open Evening were received. The evening had attracted 164 students from other schools (up from 123 in 2022) and 138 from Year 11, and very good feedback had been received from students and parents about the event. Additional details were also received about CCHS Sixth Form marketing and planned changes for the future. Governors queried if the new STEM criteria for the Sixth Form (to have at least one Grade 8 in a GCSE science subject if taking two A level science subjects) had prevented any students joining the Sixth Form. It was confirmed that twelve students did not meet the STEM criteria, but had still chosen to remain at CCHS, studying different A level subjects.

ITEM 20 – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTION

39. Item 20.1 – School Development Plan 2023-24. The first review of the School Development Plan 2023-24 was received for information. The next review would be received in March 2024.

40. Item 20.2 – Public Examination Review 2023. The Public Examination Review 2023 was received for information. It was noted that the 2023 examinations were the first set of true examinations post-Covid and that the School was to be commended for an excellent set of results, higher than those achieved in 2019, the last fully comparable year. Governors recognised that the Year 13 students had not sat any formal public examinations previously due to the pandemic. The relentless work of staff to support the examination cohort students prior to the examinations was praised. The School's Achievement Strategy continued to focus on the needs of students post-pandemic. The Headteacher stated that issues had been identified with the exam boards and that formal appeals were being put forward for A level History, Music and English Literature. The Deputy Headteacher (Academic) also advised that there had been many requests by students this year for examination marking views which had resulted in changes to marks and grades, which is known to be a nationwide issue.

ITEM 21 – ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

41. No other items of business were raised for discussion.

ITEM 22 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

42. **Decision**. It was **agreed** that the next Full Governing Body meeting would be held at 8.00am on Friday 22nd March 2024. The meeting was also reminded that the Governors' Conference was currently planned to take place on Saturday 27th January 2024.

All

The meeting closed at 10.09am.

Steve Miles
Chair of Governors

22nd March 2024