

The Priestley Academy Trust – Trust Board
Company Registered Number: 10410830

Minutes and Actions

Trust Board/Academy	Trust Board
Date	Monday, 14 December 2023 at 17:30
Venue	PAT Head Office
Trustees Present (alphabetical)	Javed Ahmed (JA) (attended via Teams) Ruby Bhatti (RB) (attended via Teams) Sarah Bradley (SB) (attended via Teams) (left at 18:16) John Hinchcliffe (JH) (joined at 17:46) Peter Lambert (PL) Steve Wadsworth (SW) Jason Walsh (JW)
Others in attendance	Michael McCarthy (MMc) – Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mathew Atkinson (MA) – Interim CEO Rowena Dixon (RD) – Chief Finance Officer (CFO) Lorraine Martin (LM) – Headteacher, Margaret McMillan Primary School (left at 17:58) Tracey Parry (TP) – Chief Operating Officer (COO) Richard Walker (RW) – Deputy Head, Margaret McMillan Primary School
Chair	Steve Wadsworth
Clerk to Governors	Charlotte Heap – Governance Professional and Projects Officer
Papers Circulated	Margaret McMillan reduction in PAN consultation RSE/PHSE curriculum update Minutes of previous meetings 2 October 2023 and 10 October 2023 2022/2023 Financial statements CEO Report Finance policies for ratification: Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy v3.0; Asset Management Policy v1.0; Investment Policy v2.0; Financial Procedures v5.0; Statement of Accounting Policy v3.0 FAR Committee Terms of Reference updated COO Report Estates management Governance paper LGB Terms of Reference updated School Improvement Committee Terms of Reference

The meeting commenced at 17:30.

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees. Introductions were made.


Agenda Item	Minutes including agreements, actions and challenges	Action
18/23	Apologies for absence and their acceptance Apologies were received and accepted for Alex Hallam (AH) and Ash Rahman (AR). Apologies were received and accepted for Chris Walker, PAT Governance Lead.	
19/23	Any other business and requests for agenda order variations	

Signed: 

Name: Steve Wadsworth

Date: 29 January 2024


	No other business was raised. Items 28/23 and 29/23 were brought forward.	
20/23	Declarations of interest for items on this agenda There were no declarations of interest made.	
21/23	<p>Margaret McMillan reduction in PAN consultation – LM Margaret McMillan Primary School is currently a three-form entry, having 90 pupil places in each year. Over the last couple of years, the number of pupils admitted in Reception has been lower. The indications are that both locally and nationally admission numbers are falling due to the falling birth rate. Therefore, it has been proposed and consulted on to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) to 60 from 2025/2026 onwards. The decision was agreed at Local Governing Board (LGB) level, with the CEO and a PAN consultation has been completed. Fifteen responses were received to the PAN consultation. Trustees make the ultimate decision to adopt the proposal and reduce the PAN for Margaret McMillan.</p> <p>Is this in the headline forecast? Yes, the income has been reduced. It is unlikely that 90 places will be filled in Reception and this will have a financial impact on the school.</p> <p>How many pupils have been admitted over the last three years? This year's Reception has 75 pupils; the forecast was for 59. Mobility is quite high and is increasing across the Trust schools. There are 66 pupils in the current Year 1 and 89 in Year 2. There are three schools on the same street as Margaret McMillan and this is starting to have an impact. Class sizes over 30 impact the curriculum, which is designed on whole classes.</p> <p>What happens if the birth rate increases again? Margaret McMillan was a two-form entry school until 2010 when it increased the intake to 90. The Local Authority (LA) do have bulge years and will ask if a school can take a bigger year group ad hoc, so this is a possibility. There is space in school to take a bigger year.</p> <p>Would the LA give the school notice? Yes, the LA will look at the birth rate.</p> <p>If the average intake is 75, would it not be an advantage to take in 75 pupils, three classes of 25, to attract more pupils in the future? The financial implications of a class size smaller than 30 pupils would be considerable.</p> <p>Would it increase the school's reputation? Most of the other schools in the immediate area are not running at full capacity. Only one school is full, due to serving a large housing estate. A class size of 25 would be good in theory but a school has to balance from a financial point of view.</p> <p>If all the SEND funding is received would this support it or can reserves be used to increase the quality of education? It is an element of risk management. It was a surprise this year to admit 75 pupils in Reception. Reducing the PAN to 60 will make the school more financially efficient.</p>	

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	<p>The LA's prediction for places in the area was 510 for Reception in September 2023, however, there are currently only 416 pupils on roll in the area. With the reduction in PAN for Margaret McMillan there will be 480 places for Reception. The pupil forecast for Reception in the area for the next five years is 399 pupils in 2024/2025; 413 pupils in 2025/2026; decreasing to 382 pupils in 2026/2027 and reducing to 374 pupils in 2027/2028.</p> <p>Is there a risk of having the capacity for 60 but only admitting 50 pupils in Reception? Margaret McMillan is a popular school as it is generally the school of choice. Providing that this continues, the 60 places should be full.</p> <p>Trustees unanimously supported the reduction in PAN from 90 to 60 for Margaret McMillan Primary School from 2025/2026 onwards.</p>	
22/23	<p>RSE/PHSE curriculum update – LM</p> <p>A lot of work has been done over the last couple of years on personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculums. Consultations, in the form of focus groups, were completed in June 2023 regarding updates to the curriculum. These consultations were really useful and parents were engaged. Feedback from staff and parent surveys was positive. Resources and links to the curriculum are being refined for teachers and RSE leads; this will support with Ofsted inspections making by sure staff have a high level of confidence in the curriculum.</p> <p>So, the driving force was the Trust and schools, it did not come from a Board context? The first consultation in February 2020 was in response to the Government bringing out a statutory framework. This was negotiated by the schools in the Trust as a group. The Trust listened and responded to the needs of parents and were mindful of the needs of the communities. Working together, the schools have been able to support each other.</p> <p>The Chair thanked LM for all her work on the RSE curriculum; as well as all her dedicated hard work as Headteacher of Margaret McMillan Primary School for the past 17 years.</p>	
23/23	<p>Minutes of the previous meeting</p> <p>The minutes of the meetings held on 2 October 2023 and 10 October 2023 were approved by the Trust Board as a true record.</p> <p>Agreement was made that electronic signatures could be included.</p>	Gov Prof (Done)
24/23	<p>Matters arising from the minutes not elsewhere on the Agenda</p> <p>Item 11/23 – As the Trust has high reserves, the CFO reported she had looked at general annual grant (GAG) pooling and wanted the Trust Board's approval to move this forward. Following discussion with MA, the CFO's proposal is to create a fund from the reserves to be invested in school improvement for a period of time. The fund would be approximately £195,000 which would come from reserves created by the schools and central team. The fund would be distributed to the schools. Each school will have a raising attainment plan for the next two terms, listing the costs against each element of the plan.</p> <p>The senior executive team (SEG) are meeting with Headteachers on 15 December 2023 to discuss this approach.</p>	

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	<p>What is the total cost? The approximate amount of the fund is £195,000, which equates to £15,000 per form entry. Schools have been asked to be ambitious with their raising attainment plans.</p> <p>Are there any sensitivities with GAG pooling as this has not been done in the Trust historically and what is the expected response from Headteachers? The SEG will try to managed any sensitivities and make sure there is the least amount of impact on schools. Schools are being asked for a small contribution from their level of reserves.</p> <p>If another school within the Trust was to be graded as Requires Improvement by Ofsted, the risk would be shared across the schools within the Trust. The raising attainment plans will support the schools. It is about working as part of a team in terms of finance.</p> <p>Is there a concern around the timing of this with new leadership in schools and some of these people may not have the depth of experience around finance? How will new members of the leadership team be supported? The CFO is producing some graphs to support discussions with Headteachers and will have a meeting with each one to gain their feedback.</p> <p>Are you confident you can sell the idea of GAG pooling to Headteachers? The primary driver is to improve outcomes for children. There needs to be financial stability. The impact will be felt by the pupils in school. One school will receive a smaller faction of the reserve fund, but it will not affect their plans for their reserves. This is a first step towards soft GAG pooling. There are benefits of GAG pooling and these can be looked at in more detail.</p> <p>What is the total of the central reserves? Central reserves are £600,000.</p> <p>Why not just spend the central reserves and put this into school improvement? This can be afforded in the short term but the central reserves are declining. The contribution from schools does not cover the costs of the central team. In order to grow the Trust, the Trust needs to invest in the central team.</p> <p>The plan is for one year to aid discussions around the concept of GAG pooling. The Trust has high reserves and to get the maximum out of this, the Trust is to look at school improvement.</p> <p>Outcomes are really important. Ofsted inspections are a risk to all schools. It is in the best interests to support each school, as long as it does not affect the Headteacher's plan for their school. Central reserves need to be used now and used to support the central team offer.</p> <p>However, as pupil numbers decrease and with the planned PAN reductions, the income to the central team will reduce. An amount in reserve is needed to entice people to join the Trust.</p>	
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	<p>Trustees approved the proposal to pool an amount of GAG funding, approximately £195,000, to be invested in school improvement for a 2023/2024.</p> <p>Item 12/23 – The COO reported she is working with the Estates Officer on different options and a succession plan for when the Estates Officer retires.</p> <p>What is the timeframe for this? The Estates Officer has agreed to stay until July 2024. More information will be brought to the next Trust Board meeting on 29 January 2024.</p> <p>Will the current Estates Officer’s experience and knowledge require a transition period? Yes, this is being built into the work that is being done. It will be very difficult to find someone else with the current Estates Officer’s knowledge and experience of the schools in the Trust as he helped to build some of the schools. The key risk is the loss of expertise regarding the school buildings, two of which are grade two listed.</p> <p>Can the transition processes be started before you bring someone on board? Transition has started with the COO liaising with other trusts as to how they manage their estates and protocols. If the transition is not in place before the Estates Officer leaves, it will be a key risk.</p> <p>Item 03/23 – Membership of the FAR Committee being increased to four Trustees was discussed. It was suggested that if a meeting was not to be quorate for any reason, a call out for another Trustee to join that particular meeting could be made.</p> <p>Item 03/23 – The CFO confirmed key performance indicators (KPIs) will form part of every report she provides for the Board.</p>	
25/23	<p>Chair’s Correspondence and Actions SW has had various communication regarding the change in CEO, making sure everyone has been kept up-to-date with MMc’s departure and MA becoming the Interim CEO. Communications have gone out to members, trustees, headteachers and governors. SW has also met with a DfE representative.</p> <p>On behalf of the Trust Board, SW thanked MMc for his work in the Trust, for his passion for teaching success for the children across the Trust and wished MMc success in his new role. Adding that the DfE representative had been very positive about MMc’s contribution.</p> <p>SW formally welcomed MA as the Interim CEO, stating he is looking forward to working with MA. There are lots of leadership changes across the Trust to achieve the outcomes that are required and SW has already met with MA to discuss the next steps.</p> <p>SW also reported that he sat on the panel for the new Executive Headteacher of Green Lane Primary School and attended the FAR Committee meeting as an observer. He thanked the CFO for the clean audit.</p>	

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	<p>Regarding the recruitment process for a CEO, SW and other trustees have had a meeting with three agencies to chose one to lead on the recruitment process. An advert is to go out in January 2024, with interviews likely to be held in March 2024.</p>	
<p>26/23</p>	<p>2022/2023 Financial Statements The CFO reported that the financial statements were discussed at length with the external auditor during the FAR Committee held on 20 November 2023. The Trust is in a strong financial position and reserves have increased. However, there is a pension adjustment. The Trust has just over 20% of income in reserves.</p> <p>What will happen due to the high reserves? There could be more involvement from the DfE as it could question the Trust on its effective management and governance regarding reserves. This money should be spent on the pupils currently in school. Reserves should not fall below 5% of income and not be higher than 20% of income. The Trust is being proactive and looking at short term investment in curriculum and there are risks around premises. Three condition improvement fund (CIF) bids have been applied for. If these bids are successful, the Trust will have to contribute 10% of the costs of the works. If the bids are unsuccessful, the cost of the work is £1million. The Trust is in a strong position and has received a positive audit report but needs to take some action.</p> <p>Will the school improvement fund bring the reserves under the threshold? If the school improvement fund is ringfenced, it is part of the reserves? The school improvement fund will bring the reserves down, as these funds are committed.</p> <p>Will the money be invested in further growth for people in the Trust? It is about investing the money in a managed way. More teachers could be recruited but reserves would decrease quickly. The Trust will not be in the same position next year.</p> <p>Trustees need to be confident in the budget, how accurate is the budget? The Trust did not have a full time CFO for the second part of the last academic year, therefore, it was difficult to ascertain the actual budget position. Staffing and recruitment is the largest cost.</p> <p>Is there a vacancy process? Headteachers have to complete a request to recruit. The CFO will now ask that planned appointment dates are included in all requests to recruit to assist with budgeting.</p> <p>Why are supply staff costs so high? Teaching vacancies have to be covered.</p> <p>Were the increasing costs of energy uncertain? The previous CFO was very cautious and did over budget in some areas. The CFO is now looking at new budgeting software in order to get a real time budget position.</p> <p>The financial statements for 2022/2023 were signed by the Chair and CEO at the end of the meeting to be sent to the external auditors.</p>	

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<p>28/23</p>	<p>FAR Committee report and policies for ratification JA, as Chair of the FAR Committee, reported the FAR Committee discussed the external auditor's report and financial statements for 2022/2023, which is covered by item 26/23.</p> <p>The CFO reported that it is important that Trust policies meet the standards set out in the Academy Trust Handbook. Following the FAR Committee's approval of the financial policies, the CFO proposed a further update to the financial procedures, before being formally ratified by the Trust Board. The Trust's current procurement threshold is that anything costing £25,000 or above must go to tender. This threshold has not changed for a period of time; however, the cost of goods and services have increased, therefore, more goods and services now require a full tender process. The consequences are that this process is slowed down as it requires a number of people's input. The CFO proposed the threshold be increased from £25,000 to the value of £40,000 or above.</p> <p>The second change to the financial procedures proposed by the CFO is the addition of DfE procurement frameworks, to allow schools to access these frameworks to make awards to the contractors listed in the frameworks to save schools money. Utilising the DfE frameworks also mitigates risks. Currently the financial procedures do not refer to the DfE procurement frameworks.</p> <p>The Trust Board approved the increased of the procurement threshold requiring a tender from £25,000 to £40,000, plus the additional referencing of DfE procurement thresholds.</p> <p>The Trust Board formally ratified the PAT Anti-fraud & Corruption Policy v3.0; PAT Asset Management Policy v1.0; PAT Financial procedures v5.0; PAT Investment Policy v2.0 and PAT Statement of Accounting Policy v3.0.</p>	
<p>29/23</p>	<p>FAR Committee Terms of Reference The CFO reported that due to the Trust's Scheme of Delegation (SoD) being re-written, school budgets should now be approved by the Trust Board. Under the previous SoD, each school's budget was approved by their LGB.</p> <p>The school budgets now come to the FAR Committee but approval stands with the Trust Board. The school budgets were submitted promptly by October 2023 and Headteachers require the Trust Board to feedback to them quickly in order for them to move forward. However, the requirement that the budgets come to the Trust Board for approval causes delay. The CFO proposed that to maintain engagement from Headteachers, the SoD be adjusted to give the FAR Committee the authority to approve the school budgets.</p> <p>The Trust Board approved the adjustment to the SoD to give the FAR Committee the authority to approve school budgets.</p> <p>The Trust Board approved the updated version of the FAR Committee Terms of Reference.</p>	
<p>27/23</p>	<p>CEO report Pupil attendance is positive, due to the hard work that has been done by schools over the last couple of years. This year's attendance figures do not quite meet the national average, however, if the attendance figures for pupils with SEND and mobility are taken out, the positive work can be seen; 70 more pupils have been in school across the Trust.</p>	

Signed:



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	<p>Regarding sponsorship work with Farfield Primary School, an interim report and implementation report have been completed by relevant departments.</p> <p>Further discussion regarding sponsorship work and Trust growth is recorded in a confidential minute.</p> <p>The Trust secured a significant amount of increased SEND funding from the LA. This is a positive result for the Trust and pupils. Headteachers understand how the Trust has supported the schools with this. MA has led this project.</p> <p>Is there more work do be done on the SEND underfunding? MA confirmed yes, there are various elements to SEND funding. There have been some significant changes to the finance team within the LA. The funding is not correct for pupils on the SEND register; this is a large piece of work and will be a key part of the SEND role within the Trust.</p> <p>Regarding the raising attainment plan for the Trust, there are four key areas and actions to be undertaken. Recruitment has taken place whilst the plan was being written. The financial element of the raising attainment plan will be discussed by MA and the CFO early January 2024. There are development and induction plans for those new to headship. The school improvement team is starting to pull together. The School Improvement Coordinator, together with subject leads the Trust is developing, will provide a team of people to go into schools to look at the quality of education in their particular area in schools. The School Improvement Coordinator is building a rigorous handbook across the Trust. The external school improvement support provided by Kate Lounds last academic year will continue.</p> <p>Is this the model for the longer term? This is a stronger model. The challenge will be getting the team together and doing the school visits. This year the School Improvement Lead and School Improvement Coordinator, together with the Interim CEO, will discuss each school and plan the team and look at any themes. The Lead and Coordinator will complete follow up work with the schools and prepare data.</p> <p>MMc thanked the Trust Board for their support, challenge and guidance. He thanked SW for stepping up to be the Chair and his support.</p>	
30/23	<p>COO Report The COO reminded the Trust Board that it is a requirement for each person to undertake yearly GDPR training. The system will send out reminders to PAT emails to anyone who has not completed their training.</p>	

Signed:




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Date:

29 January 2024

	<p>The COO reported that the catering tender has started with the first set of school site visits. A couple of contractors have pulled out as they do not feel they have the capacity to take this on. A working group has been set up involving staff, parents and governors. A group of pupils will also be involved from across the Trust. If Trustees would like to be part of the working group, they should email the COO direct. The COO will update the Trust Board on the progress of the tender.</p> <p>What is the value for the year? The value of the contract depends on free school meal (FSM) eligibility across the Trust.</p> <p>Regarding health and safety and the number of incidents, could we have an annual view? Is there a long-term trend? The COO is to provide annual view to ascertain any peaks and troughs.</p>	COO
31/23	<p>Estates Management In previous Board meetings, the COO has been asked to provide a report regarding the safety of the schools' buildings and identified works following Buildings Condition Surveys. The LA carry out the surveys on the Trust's behalf and provide comprehensive reports that list identified works in fine detail.</p> <p>Following the surveys, the COO has created a list of the works on the Trust's intranet that can be manipulated. This is a different way of working with the schools and shows how the Trust can support the schools in getting identified work completed. The information in the report allows some support to be moved in to the Trust, allowing Headteachers to continue working on school improvement outcomes.</p> <p>What are the arrangements for the fire doors at Miriam Lord Primary School? The fire doors were highlighted in a risk assessment audit and are one of the condition improvement fund (CIF) bids that have been put in by the Trust.</p> <p>Is this to replace every door in the school? Yes, the CIF bids are generally successful.</p> <p>If the fire doors have to be replaced and the heating at Lilycroft Primary School but the CIF bids are not successful, does the Trust have the funds to carry out these works? That is one of the benefits of moving to GAG pooling, which schools need to deliver school improvement outcomes and then school compliance.</p> <p>Have these CIF bids been rejected? No, these CIF bids are new, together with the rewiring of Lilycroft Primary School. The three CIF bids were submitted the week commencing 11 December 2023. A lot of evidence has been submitted with the bids and the DfE's guidance on estates has been followed. The heating system at Lilycroft is over 100 years old, the Trust would have to find the money for this to be replaced if the CIF bid was unsuccessful.</p> <p>When do you find out if these CIF bids have been successful? The results of the CIF bids will be available in May 2024.</p>	

Signed: 

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	<p>Regarding the fire doors, can we afford to wait until May 2024? There is a standard gap of 7mm, the fire doors at Miriam Lord are only slightly out. If the auditors thought this could not wait, the Trust would have closed the school. Margaret McMillan Primary School have gone through the same process for the same reason.</p> <p>The buildings are in a generally good state of repair. The Headteachers monitor the buildings as the key assessment is being conducive to learning in.</p>	
32/23	<p>Safeguarding and Health & Safety It was agreed this was covered by items 27/23, 30/23 and 31/23.</p>	
33/23	<p>Governance Paper Trustees confirmed they had received and read the paper. Trustees present confirmed that the declarations of interest register is up to date. All Trustees have now confirmed they have read the Code of Conduct.</p> <p>Following the update of each school's SEND Policy these were approved by the LGBs in October 2023. According to the new Scheme of Delegation these should now be ratified by the Trust Board. As it stands, this would require the Trust Board to approve six separate SEND policies. It is proposed that the Scheme of Delegation be adjusted to allow each LGB to formally ratify their own school's SEND policy.</p> <p>The Trust Board approved the adjustment to the SoD to give each LGB the authority to formally approve their school SEND policy.</p>	
34/23	<p>LGB Terms of Reference Following the change in the Trust's Scheme of Delegation, the terms of reference for the LGBs have been updated to reflect these changes.</p> <p>The Trust Board approved the updated version of the LGB Terms of Reference.</p>	
35/23	<p>School Improvement Committee Terms of Reference The terms of reference for the School Improvement Committee have been reviewed but there are no changes.</p> <p>The Trust Board approved the School Improvement Committee Terms of Reference.</p>	
36/23	<p>Any other business referred from item 04/23 No other urgent business was raised.</p>	
37/23	<p>Dates and venues of the next meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. 29 January 2024 at Lilycroft Primary School B. 18 March 2024 at Miriam Lord Primary School C. 3 June 2024 at Margaret McMillan Primary School <p>These three meetings to start at 16:15.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> D. 15 July 2024 at Westbourne Primary School <p>The fourth meeting is to start at 17:30, following the School Improvement Committee meeting at 16:15.</p> <p>The Chair thanked everyone and for attending the meeting. The meeting closed at 19:18.</p>	

Signed: 

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Outstanding actions:

Agenda Item	Action	By who	By when	Completed
30/23	Annual view of the number of health and safety incidents to ascertain any peaks and troughs.	COO	On going	

Signed: *S.S. Wadsworth*

Date: 29 January 2024

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