

FOWLMERE PRIMARY SCHOOL

EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY Via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday 27 May 2020
7.30pm in School

Present:

Philip Atkin (PA), Head Teacher
Sarah Burge (SB), Chair
Bruce Gilliam (BG)
Jo Grazebrook (JG)
Clare Hobro (CH)
Ashley Meggitt (AM)
Andrew Page (AP)
Nico Schonken (NS)
Hayley Woods (HW)

In Attendance:

Lisa White (LW) (Camclerk)
Lynsey Perkins (LP) (Associate Member)

1. Apologies for absence

The Chair opened the meeting at 7.30pm. Apologies were received and accepted from Gill Heathcote.

2. Declaration of Interest in relation to the agenda

There were no declarations of interest in relation to the agenda.

3. Re-opening of Fowlmere School on 1st June 2020

Current Government, DfE and Local Authority Advice / Risk Assessments / Staff Wellbeing

The Chair passed the meeting to PA and asked him to provide an update on the situation with regards the wider opening of the school.

PA advised that whilst the legal position is that schools are still closed, the Government are now asking schools to implement a plan for the wider opening of schools. This wider opening covers Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils as well as the childcare element for key worker and vulnerable children that is already being provided. In addition, to this, PA explained that the school will need to continue to provide home learning to the remainder of the pupils in Years 2 to 5.

PA reminded governors that there is no formal attendance so parents are free to choose whether their children should attend and on this basis there is no legal recourse for parents or for the school.

Signed



Date

12/7/2020

Senior Leadership Plan for 1st June and how this was formulated

PA then explained that based on the ever-evolving Department for Education (DfE) and Local Authority (LA) advice, the school has undertaken the following:

- Assess what the school is able to offer in terms of staffing and space available within school and carry out a risk assessment on that basis. This information is shown on the possible wider opening plan document and the risk assessment document shared with governors prior to the meeting;
- These draft documents have been shared with staff for their feedback and have been updated to incorporate any thoughts / feedback from them;
- The Government has provided schools with a priority list of which pupils should return to school, namely, key worker and vulnerable children, followed by Reception, Year 1 and then Year 6;
- Fowlmere is not able to offer provision for any Year 6 pupils as there are not sufficient staff or classrooms available to ensure the social distancing requirements are adhered to;
- A current challenge is the school's childcare provision, as this is approximately 12% of the population who wish to attend school. As more people return to work after 1 June, it is expected that this number will grow. The biggest barrier is the maximum size of the bubble, which is limited to 15 pupils. Fowlmere's childcare group has already grown beyond this number. Although there will not be 15 pupils in on any one day, this group will still need to be split into two;
- The intention therefore, is to run two childcare groups (Reception and Year 1). This is based on the decision that Year 1 pupils do need 2 adults in the room with them (following a discussion with the LA);
- Due to the low number of support staff at Fowlmere, the school is unable to open beyond lunchtime for Year 1, but this will be reviewed;

Governors asked:

Question:

How are the childcare groups split? Is it by age?

Answer:

I am trying to set up childcare group 2 to be a Monday to Thursday group as I am struggling to get sufficient staff to cover this group. The other group will be Monday to Friday including After School Club.

These 2 groups are separate bubbles and therefore only one group can attend After School Club. It is very difficult to split by age.

Question:

What is our legal requirement in terms of the childcare provision if you have these 2 groups, with no more than 15 pupils who can stay the whole day, Monday to Friday?

AnswerY

We could run an additional bubble for After School Club, but I would not be able to have year 1 in school as their Teaching Assistant is needed for one of the other bubbles.

Technically, we do not have to provide After School Club at all and there is no expectation in the guidance on this either.

Question:

If we do not offer After School Club, what is the impact?

Answer:

The impact will be on the families who need this provision. They will therefore have to cope without After School Club childcare.

Signed



Date

12/4/2020

Question:

If we did not provide After School Club, would we be able to extend the provision to our Year 6 pupils?

Answer:

No. It would just make having the 2 childcare bubbles easier to manage.

Currently we do not know the membership of childcare 1 and childcare 2 but we have to be aware that we will have these 2 bubbles. Hopefully, one will run from Monday to Thursday only, with Reception children full-time and Year 1, part-time. In addition, the school will close at 12pm on Fridays to allow for Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time.

A governor queried whether the TA who has been assigned to work mornings only would be able to amend their hours to two full days and one half day and PA explained that this TA usually works afternoons but has agreed to work mornings. In addition, PA advised that Cambridgeshire as a county prefers pupils to be in school every day rather than for a split week.

It was noted that whilst other areas of the country are offering a split week for pupils, this is not in line with guidance.

PA then advised that the wider opening plans need to be approved by the Governing Body but that ultimately, the decision rests with the school and must be approved by the LA. PA also explained that a further review of the situation will take place at the end of the week.

Governors asked:

Question:

What happens if more parents wish to send their children back to school?

Answer:

We have risk assessed based on accepting up to 14 pupils per bubble and looked at how we would lay out the classroom based on this, so there is capacity to do this if necessary.

We have surveyed parents as to whether children will be returning, but it is possible that this will change once people see that it is safe to return to school and we will see some drift upwards.

Question:

With regards offering provision to our Year 1 pupils in the afternoons, do you have any existing volunteers who would be happy to come into school to help provide this?

Answer:

This is something that we have considered, but now is not the ideal time to have volunteers in school as we could be subjecting them to a lot of potential risk.

Question:

How comfortable are the teaching staff with this situation, for example with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and space?

Answer:

We have staff who are confident that they can manage the situation and happy that the risk assessment is in place, but we also have staff who are nervous about the situation.

As noted above, all staff have been surveyed and the plans and risk assessment have taken into account their thoughts and concerns.

As Staff Governor, JG provided governors with some information as to how staff are currently feeling, stating that the majority of staff are feeling nervous but are confident that they can manage and support the children. JG also stated that the risk assessment being in place has served to reassure staff and ensures staff know what needs to be done.

Signed



Date

12/7/2020

Question:

What is our risk of forcing staff to come into work when they really do not feel comfortable? Are we at risk of creating a work place stress environment?

Answer:

There are 2 members of staff in particular who have expressed concerns and the SLT are in regular contact with them to help address these concerns.

Fundamentally, there is a conflict in the guidance as the adults in the setting will need to social distance, but pupils will not be able to social distance fully, irrespective of the environmental changes that we have put in place. This is the disconnect that is causing staff concern. In addition, it appears that we are asking teaching staff to do something different to every other member of the workforce.

Question:

What are the unions saying?

Answer:

There was a lot of input initially with the guidance not to engage with the wider opening of schools. We have also received a survey for completion.

It was noted that the school will be closed for staff training on Monday 1 and Tuesday 2 June and PA explained that given the concerns raised by staff, it is important to provide sufficient training on the procedures needed for the wider opening of schools. However, PA advised that the childcare provision will continue to be offered on these days.

Governors asked:

Question:

How do you plan to monitor staff wellbeing during this time?

Answer:

There is an element of people keeping an eye out for each other, which is why we wanted 2 members of staff in each class.

We will also continue weekly staff meetings (not necessarily virtually, but maintaining the required social distancing) and we will review our risk assessment regularly. Some of the anxiety from staff, relates to a fear that any decisions that they make (with regards who goes out to play, how many times a child washes their hands etc) will result in a serious issue such as a death further along the line.

Question:

If something like that was to happen, is there any liability to the staff?

Answer:

No. Fundamentally, it is the LA that will be liable, as it is their final decision as to whether schools open more widely, so staff are protected.

It is not the legal implication but rather the moral implication of the situation that is worrying staff. If staff refuse to work, we may have to change our offer.

Question:

From a wellbeing perspective, what are the staff break areas like? Are we able to provide them with calm and comfortable areas?

Answer:

We can, but we definitely need additional kettles.

It was noted that a brief discussion followed regarding asking the community to donate items such as kettles, mini fridges etc., and it was agreed that NS and HW would put something together to include on the school Facebook page. ACTION NS / HW

Signed



Date

12/7/2020

LP then explained that another reason to have 2 members of staff per bubble is so that they are able to take a break without worrying about the children.

Question:

What about your safety and wellbeing as Head Teacher?

Answer:

My contact with bubbles has to be low. If we get a suspected case, then the people involved in that bubble, have to leave school for 14 days. This has been explained to parents and this could happen at very short notice.

We have taken the decision therefore that the caretaker and I will not have contact with bubbles. If either of us are in contact with a suspected case, then we will be isolated at home for 14 days and the school will therefore have to be closed. Without the caretaker, the school will not be cleaned.

My protection is therefore not getting involved, but it will be a challenge to support staff if they have an issue and it will also be difficult to monitor what is going on.

Question:

If you have a pupil in childcare 1 for example, who is in contact with someone with a suspected case and they are told to self-isolate, and their sibling is in Reception, will you also be sending Reception home?

Answer:

No. The sibling will be sent home and the whole family should self-isolate.

Question:

Is Friday afternoon sufficient time to prepare for home learning and for the next week's teaching?

Answer:

There is a bit more scope than that as there will be a teacher who will be free in the afternoons.

We have tried to create enough capacity. This is why the childcare 2 group only needs to be in school Monday to Thursday. Class learning will be similar to home learning.

Question:

How can we ensure that the policies / risk assessments are being followed to prevent any recourse?

Answer:

Our best endeavours is all we can guarantee. I can add a line to the policy / risk assessment to cover this.

Question:

What is the next step?

Answer:

I fully anticipate that the Government will give the go ahead for the wider opening of schools. Our plans need to be approved by the LA and the Governing Body before we are able to open to more pupils.

Question:

What happens if the infection rate starts to rise again? Are you in a position to revisit / reassess this and close the school if necessary?

Answer:

Fundamentally, we do have a power of veto, but we have been advised that the Government will reassess this. If it is a local infection rate increase, then we would expect the LA to make this decision.

Signed



Date

12/1/2020

A discussion followed where governors considered the possibility of whether the wider opening of schools is too soon and whether waiting a further week for more scientific evidence may allay some of the staff's fears.

It was noted however, that this needs to be balanced against the need for Reception and Year 1 children to return to school and that any decision also needs to take into account those vulnerable children who are safer in school.

In addition, it was noted that there are social benefits for the school being open for the wider community and a greater number of children and that the school is not just taking account of scientific advice.

Governors were in agreement with this but it was felt that further discussions need to take place once key indicators are in place.

PA explained that if cases of infection rise, the local Public Health team will be aware and will be considering the next move i.e. whether to close schools again.

A governor asked:

Question:

Why rush to open the school more widely?

Answer:

Of the parents surveyed, 50% are happy to send children back; 25% need to work but are anxious about sending their child back; 25% are keeping their child at home and the national picture is similar.

It was noted that parents have a choice as to whether to send their children back to school, but that teaching staff do not and their safety and wellbeing is also very important.

PA advised that in terms of the safety of children, the risk assessment that has been undertaken ensures the school is doing all it can to protect pupils and staff.

LP also explained that in school, as well as managing pupils' return to school, supporting them with this, the children's wellbeing and mental health will also be considered.

It was noted that the Chair proposed that the following other items will also need to be addressed:

- Decision chain;
- Red lines;
- Re-evaluation of the situation;
- Government proposal that every child will return to school before the end of the Summer term.

PA advised that the latter is not a viable option given the current situation as there will be little possibility of being able to socially distance that number of children.


Governors asked:

Question:

I know you have to prioritise Year 1 over Year 6, but is it possible to allow Year 6 in, even if it is for one week only and keep Year 1 at home?

Answer:

This is not possible as there is potential for cross contamination between bubbles. We could possibly arrange a social get together (socially distanced of course) for the Year 6 pupils though.

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Question:

Will there be an opportunity for the Year 6 pupils to have an online lesson / get together?

Answer:

We need to be considerate of staff workload as this is something that would have to take place after school hours.

It is a case of looking where the guidance goes. Under the current guidance it is not an option, but should this change, I am happy to reconsider.

LP then advised that she has put together information for new parents and pupils on eSchools, including videos, meet the teachers etc.

Redlines

A discussion then followed regarding redlines which would mean instant closure of the school and the following were noted:

- SLT or caretaker absence;
- Information from Public Health England advising of an increased rate of infection;
- A confirmed case at the school.

During this discussion, governors considered whether to ask parents to check their child's temperature before attending school.

Governors asked:

Question:

What can we ask parents to do in advance of coming in to school? How should they prepare their child?

We will provide parents with information around what they can and cannot bring into school; what time to arrive, as we will have staggered start times; what to do when they arrive at school. The main way to reduce the risk of infection is to make sure parents do not send children to school if they show any symptoms. I will address this group by group as that will be easier.

It was noted that the school will not look the same as it usually does and that parents will need to prepare children for this. Governors considered whether a video or photos of the classrooms should be shared with children, but it was decided that this was not ideal. It was also noted that there will be differences for the childcare pupils as they will now need to wear school uniform.

Governors asked:

Question:

Do we need to inform parents (especially for the older children) that 100% compliance with regards handwashing for example, is expected?

Answer:

This is in progress, and an appendix will be added to the Behaviour Policy and Home School agreement as to what is expected from children. It is a safety issue so we can ask children to adhere to this.

Question:

What about our SEND children?

Answer:

This is also covered in our Behaviour Policy. They will still need to adhere to the safety considerations and this has been included in the risk assessment. If there are any individual children who we are specifically concerned about, we will risk assess them.

Signed



Date

12/7/2020

Home learning for children not at school

PA explained that a lot of discussion on this matter has taken place this week between staff. PA advised that following this discussion, the school has been able to organise home learning as the school is offering Year 1 pupils a part-time provision. The intention is to offer corresponding home learning with the learning in the classroom, with different staff taking on different responsibilities.

PA further explained that whilst this is currently manageable, it may need to be reassessed going forward depending on how the situation changes.

A governor asked:

Question:

What happens over the summer holidays? Will the school remain open for our key worker and vulnerable pupils?

Answer:

This is not yet known.

Further discussion took place surrounding this and it was noted that it was felt that staff need to have a break and given the expectation that holiday clubs and childcare providers will be open, this should take the pressure off schools to remain open.

A governor asked:

Question:

If After School Club want to offer a provision over the summer holidays at the school, is that possible?

Answer:

Yes.

The Chair asked if a further update is needed before the scheduled FGB meeting in July and it was proposed and agreed that given the ever-changing situation, an additional meeting would be arranged for Wednesday 17 June.

A governor asked:

Question:

Is there a risk of staff needing time off with short-term stress?

Answer:

Currently, I believe the risk of that is low.

Changes / additions to Safeguarding Processes and Policies

A further governor asked whether there were any Safeguarding updates in respect of the current situation and PA explained that with more pupils in school, Safeguarding should be broadly easier. PA added however that the school will still be monitoring those children who remain at home through the home learning as previously.

Another governor asked:

Question:

Are there any vulnerable children who are not returning to school that you are concerned about?

Answer:

There is no-one who I am overtly concerned of.

A governor queried whether there were any updates or new Safeguarding policies in light of the current situation and PA clarified that updates have been appended to existing policies and that the school is working to guidance provided by the DfE and the LA.

Signed



Date

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The Chair then asked governors to vote on whether they were happy with the plans for the wider opening of the school.

It was noted that with the exception of LP who is not eligible to vote and PA who abstained, the Governing Body unanimously approved the plans for the wider opening of Fowlmere Primary School.

4. Expansion of provision in the future

It was noted that this was covered under the previous agenda item.

5. Any other business

There was one other item of business:

i. Reception intake for September

PA advised governors that 16 reception places have been confirmed for September, with 14 pupils currently in Year 1 and 14 in the current Reception cohort.

PA explained that the SLT are considering operating a mixed Year 1 / Year 2 class (i.e. Class 2) for the next academic year and a straight Reception class of 16. PA declared the caveat that this would not necessarily be the pattern going forward but that this would be an ideal situation for the forthcoming academic year. PA explained that on this occasion, splitting Year 1 is not based on a numbers argument, but a consistency argument.

Governors expressed concern over changing the class structure again this year but PA explained that as the policy is in place already to amend the class structure based on numbers, and if communication on this matter is handled carefully, this should not be an issue.

PA further advised that the option is a straight Reception or a split Year 1 class but if the numbers do not support it, they do not support it.

A governor asked:

Question:

Are we expecting any new pupils for the current Reception and Year 1 classes? By having a straight Reception class in 2020/21, are we at risk of turning pupils away? How many children can we take in Class 2?

Answer:

Admissions is not currently open for any in-year transfers so we have no way of knowing this.

The maximum number in KS1 is 30, but there are situations where we can take additional pupils during the year.

A discussion followed surrounding the benefits and disadvantages of having a straight Reception class.

A governor queried what would happen if the school opted to change the class structure in this way now and then the situation changed. PA explained that if on 31 August, new pupils wished to join the school, the school would legally have to change the class structure. On 1 September however, the agreed class structure would remain and the school could over-admit if necessary.

Governors noted the need to ensure parents are aware that this is a continually changing situation.

Signed



Date

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PA added that there are 2 spaces in Class 2 which should be a sufficient buffer should governors decide to proceed with a straight Reception class.

A governor asked when a decision needs to be made and PA explained that as this is a strategic decision, it would be ideal if governors can decide whether to proceed with the change in class structure at this meeting to provide sufficient time to inform parents.

Following a vote, it was noted that the Governing Body unanimously approved the change in class structure to a straight Reception class for the 2020/21 academic year.

6. Time and date of next meeting: 7.00pm Wednesday 8th 2020.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.30pm.

Signed



Date

12/7/2020