

Board of The Mead Educational Trust

Minutes of the meeting held online on 14th December 2021 at 5.30pm

Present

Gemma Bhagalia	Hetal Parmar (Vice-Chair)
Kate Foster	Jerry Robinson
Tony Glover (Chair)	Carolyn Robson, CEO
Tina Jivraj	Kasar Singh
Hiten Mehta (from item 459c)	Lynda Valentine

In attendance

Cathy Brown, Director of Governance	Paul Ticher, Clerk
Sarah Ridley, Director of Primary Ed.	Dave Wyatt, Chief Financial Officer

Apologies for absence

Kirsty Holt

**Action
by**

453 Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Miss Jivraj and Ms Valentine, attending their first meeting as trustees. Apologies for absence from Kirsty Holt were accepted.

454 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of business or pecuniary interests in any of the agenda items.

455 Minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2021

A query was raised over item 448, relating to the format in which the budget is presented. This was clarified and no amendment was required. The minutes of the meeting held on 12th October 2021 were then **approved** as a correct record and the Chair was **authorised** to sign them.

456 Matters arising from previous minutes

[None]

457 Accounts and annual report 2020-21

Mr Singh reported on behalf of the Finance Committee that the accounts and draft annual report had been scrutinised in detail.

On the finances there were no material issues, but the Committee had noted a significant increase in reserves as result of spending that could not take place on account of the covid-19 pandemic. The Committee had asked for further information on how these funds would be applied. The Committee had also noted that work had not yet been completed on revising the presentation of the figures, but that this was underway.

On the audit, the Trust had received a clean bill of health, and the number of points to be addressed was small for an organisation of TMET's size. Mr Robinson, as Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, had attended the meeting and it had been agreed that in future scrutiny

of the audit report would be transferred to the Audit & Risk Committee. Mr Robinson concurred with Mr Singh's comments.

Mrs Robson asked whether the Board would follow her lead in writing to the finance team, thanking them for their remarkable work. The Board **agreed** to do so. Chair

A trustee **asked** whether it was acceptable that a low-risk matter from the previous year's audit report had not been resolved. Mr Singh indicated that this was not significant. Mr Wyatt explained the issue relating to a dormant account holding some £1,300 and gave details on the work being carried out to gain access to this.

Trustees **asked** about two other matters. Mr Wyatt explained that in each case it was a recurrence of a previous issue, but at a different school. Mr Singh indicated that neither was material and that TMET, as a business, was run well. Mr Robinson agreed that the issues were minor, but undertook to address them at the Audit & Risk Committee. A&R

Decision: The Board **approved** the Annual Accounts and Annual Report 2020-21 (Proposed by Mr Singh on behalf of the Finance Committee)

458 Tutoring rate

Mrs Ridley proposed an amendment to the Pay Policy, which had been agreed to in principle by the Remuneration Committee and would be taken to the Joint Consultative Committee if approved by the Board.

The proposed amendment would increase the rate paid to Trust staff who take on additional out-of-hours tutoring from £25/hour to £40/hour. Mrs Ridley explained that national funding was available to help vulnerable students catch up on learning affected by covid-19, paid at a rate of £18/hour per student. This funding would therefore cover the full cost of a group of three, including on-costs, and could not be spent on anything else. She pointed out that £40/hour was higher than most teacher salaries.

The Board **explored** the proposal, and established that:

- it offered above the general rate locally but that the teaching unions were supportive;
- qualified support staff would also be eligible; their unions have not yet been consulted;
- there would be a flat rate with no flexibility;
- the payment covers teaching hours only, not preparation;
- suitable candidates not employed by the Trust would be eligible but recruitment would be internal initially.

Trustees **commented** that the rationale set out in the proposal, which had been previously circulated was convincing and **asked** how the impact of the tutoring would be measured. Mrs Ridley explained that this would be possible through the vulnerability index which is reported to the Education Committee.

Decision: The Board **approved** the proposed amendment to the Pay Policy.

The Chair thanked the staff for developing this effective solution.

459 Trust update

Mrs Robson invited trustees to watch the Trust Christmas concert online at 4.00pm the following day. She then presented the Trust update and responded to **questions**.

a) Covid-19: Mrs Robson reported that the Trust's schools are still experiencing a high number of covid-19 cases among staff and students.

b) Rushey Mead: Mrs Robson reported that the school remains stable, despite its recent leadership issues after the unexpected resignation of its newly-appointed Principal. Vicky Barwell is acting up as Head of School for the rest of this academic year, with support from an experienced Associate Principal from December.

c) There has been progress on safeguarding, but further work is required on the Single Central Record. Recent audits have shown that there is no single way of maintaining this, and different auditors have different views. The Trust is developing a fixed format, with robust ways of verifying the required information, and may be able to establish a centralised recording system. Trustees **discussed** this in more detail and **noted**, among other points, that safeguarding is a standing item on the Education Committee agenda and that a school automatically fails an Ofsted inspection if the Single Central Record is deficient.

[Mr Mehta joined the meeting during this item]

d) A trustee **commented** on the success of the Teaching Hub, which is over target on recruitment, and with a new round of recruitment in the new year.

e) Progress against the Quality of Education Plan is considered at each Education Committee meeting and the full plan will be made available to trustees on. It was **noted** that many key external measures, including exam results, are available only annually and that these have also been affected by covid-19.

f) Admissions at Brook Mead are below the Pupil Admission Number. Trustees **explored** the possible reasons, including the delay in constructing permanent buildings, and the impact this might have.

g) The 'academy on a page' reports indicate that some schools are experiencing issues that might have an impact next year.

h) Staff illness and absence, and current difficulties in recruitment, require a long-term response, especially as the covid-19 pandemic continues. This led to a **discussion** on the importance and urgency of developing the capacity of the Trust to develop its own staff through an Institute of Professional Learning. A full proposal for this leading-edge proposal would be brought to the next Board meeting. The Board **discussed further** other methods of recruiting staff, both teaching and support.

i) A trustee **noted** that both Castle Mead and Kibworth Mead have raised significant concern about mental health. Mrs Ridley reported on plans for the coming year, recognising that teaching is a challenging profession, made more difficult by covid-19.

j) The vaccination rate within the Trust is very high, with only 5% unprotected. Only 5% of staff have been infected by covid-19 and no classes have had to be closed. Pupils are only required to be absent if they themselves have covid-19, and the Trust is well aware of the impact of covid-19 on children.

k) A trustee **endorsed** the direction of travel on personnel matters, and welcomed the emphasis on recruitment and in-house training. However, they **cautioned** that the gestation period would be two to three years. Other trustees **pointed out** the need to be mindful of the general problem of attracting and retaining staff, and the need to be realistic about how much the Trust could solve on its own. However, it was important for the Trust to control what it can.

460 Regional Schools Commissioner

Mrs Robson briefed the Board on the role of the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), the relationship between the Trust and the RSC, the role of the RSC Advisory Board, especially in the case of schools in special measures, and the key personnel at the RSC office. She pointed out the separate financial remit of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and how the RSC and ESFA coordinate their work.

461 Trust Strategic Development Plans

Mrs Brown explained that there are six key Trust plans. Three of these will fall within the remit of committees, and three will lie with the Board. However, since the People and Culture Committee is not fully established, four Plans were being brought to the Board.

Summaries of each plan had been previously circulated.

a) Governance plan: Mrs Brown acknowledged that this plan is ambitious, and that some actions around developing risk management are rated amber. A trustee **suggested** that there is a need for further clarity on where the responsibility lies for safeguarding controls.

b) Civic responsibility plan: Mrs Ridley indicated that the proposed Institute of Professional Learning is part of this plan.

c) Brand plan: Mrs Robson reported that the Trust has employed a marketing, public relations and communications professional, who is making progress with celebrating achievement and drafting responses to issues. The Trust's websites and social media presence have been improved. A trustee **asked** how the brand is being embedded in schools to achieve consistency. Mrs Robson acknowledged that there are some issues in this area, but individual schools are being supported and given advice. The Board **discussed** the role and the opportunities it brings, including on social media.

d) People & culture plan: Mrs Robson reported that Lisa Cochrane (Director of People and Organisational Development) is assessing the workload in this area with a view to building up capacity. In response to a **question** Mrs Robson indicated that there are detailed plans to underpin this.

462 Early Career Teachers Policy v1.0

Mrs Brown reported that this policy is required to be approved at Board level. Mrs Ridley clarified the professional development entitlement of all teachers and confirmed, in response to a **question**, that these are subject to reviews. She emphasised the importance of support, for retention and to prevent burn-out, and reported that the Trust is already losing fewer new teachers. In response to **questions** she gave more details of the support offered, both centrally and as bespoke personal support through tutors and mentors. She described the provision and development of tutors. Trustees **welcomed** the policy, finding it very thorough. They recognised the importance of new teachers being aware if they are not making progress, so that there are no surprises. Mrs Ridley added details of how the policy is intended to provide greater consistency.

Decision: The Board **approved** the Early Career Teachers policy.

463 Governance

a) Board and committee membership: Mrs Brown reported that, with 11 trustees, Board membership was now in a better position. In addition, several principals had joined committees as co-opted members; however, she had not yet managed to recruit academy councillors to committees.

The Board **discussed** possible new members and noted that there is no formal limit on the number of Board or committee members. The Board **confirmed** the need for a balance of skills on the Board, and **agreed** that Board membership should not be at the expense of committee membership. It was **agreed** that the Chair should explore the potential candidates and report back.

Chair

b) Committee reports: Committee chairs reported on key points from their recent meetings, summaries of which had been previously circulated.

For the Finance Committee, Mr Mehta reported on the level of unspent Pupil Premium and the discussion on allocating the funds appropriately, with the outcome to be monitored by the Education Committee. He added comments on the level of reserves and the Committee's concern over the absence of monthly cash flow and balance sheets. A short discussion took place.

For the Education Committee, it was clarified that the Committee had considered SEND in the round, not just the Designated Special Provision.

For the Audit & Risk Committee, Mr Robinson reported that there had been good attendance at the first meeting and indicated that the Trust risk register would be considered in March 2022.

c) Accounts: Mr Mehta, on behalf of the Finance Committee, assured the Board that the accounts for the most recent period raise no issues of concern.

d) Academy council reports: These had been previously circulated. Mrs Brown reported that she would be drafting feedback to each academy council, which she would share with trustees. A trustee **offered thanks** to academy councillors for the effort they put in.

A trustee **commented** that some academy council reports indicate what action the academy council is taking over matters of concern, in particular visits, and **suggested** that all academy councils should be encouraged to follow suit, in order to show how they are giving assurance to the Board. Other councillors **concurred**, drawing attention to the Orchard Mead report which records "observations by councillors" as evidence for their conclusions.

Councillors **agreed** that clarity over the respective roles of academy councils and the Board is important, and that principals need to know that their input into academy councils is worthwhile. A number of measures were **suggested** for ensuring that academy councils are aware of their value to the Board, including Board members attending academy council meetings.

There being no further business, on behalf of the Board the Chair thanked Mrs Robson, Mrs Ridley, Mrs Brown, Mr Wyatt and their teams for their work during challenging times. He thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution, wished them a good Christmas and new year and closed the meeting at 7.30pm.

Signed:

Date:

Next meeting: Tuesday 25th January 2022