

# The Calcot Schools

## Minutes of the Full Governing Body Meeting 24.3.

**Held on Thursday 21 March 2024 at 9.30am at the school**

**Present:**

Julia Kidd (JK) (Joint Chair)  
 Joe Lally (JL) (Joint Chair)  
 Florence Rostron (FR) (Headteacher)  
 Hugh Baxter (HB)  
 Nicky Bate (NB)  
 Clive Taylor (CT)  
 Carolyn Purchase (CP)  
 Mark Hazelton (MH)  
 Akeelah Shadoobuccus (AS)  
 Miriam Sheikh (MS)

**In Attendance:**

Alice Elliott (AE) (Clerk)

Item	Minutes – Meeting chaired by Jo Lally
1.	<p><b>Apologies for absence and completion of attendance sheet</b></p> <p>1.1. Apologies were received from Katie Dean (KD) but not from Nabila Azam (NA).</p>
2.	<p><b>Declarations of conflict of interest</b></p> <p>2.1. MS and AS have children at the school; JL has a daughter working at the school.</p>
3.	<p><b>Matters to be raise under Any Other Business</b></p> <p>3.1. <b>JL reported on a national news item regarding RAAC in school buildings.</b> Because funding will now be spent on afflicted schools, it is highly unlikely there will be money available for new school projects. FR had heard nothing about this from WBC to date.</p> <p>3.2. <b>JK asked about GovernorHub usage and whether it is offering value for money.</b> Governors confirmed it is of benefit with useful emails keeping them informed and updated. It was agreed the subscription will be continued.</p> <p>3.3. Approval of changes to the Register of Authorising Officers as a result of resignation of the Finance Officer and changes to the Financial Management Policy. These were agreed.</p>
4.	<p><b>Minutes of previous meeting (7 December 2023)</b></p> <p>4.1. Governors confirmed these minutes were a correct record; they were signed by the Chair.</p>
5.	<p><b>Matters arising from previous minutes (if not an agenda item)</b></p> <p>5.1. <b>JK noted the meeting regarding improving Governor Induction had not yet happened. This will be arranged for the summer term now that new governors had attended their WBC courses.</b></p> <p>5.2. FR invited governors to the Safeguarding Training during the next INSET Day (Thursday 28 March). She will focus on the Calcot context rather than WBC.</p>

	<p>5.3. A new Clerk has been appointed: Lloyd Mason-Boardman.</p> <p>5.4. – 24.2.7.3. FR will liaise with CP regarding the IDSR.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p><b>Headteachers Report (verbal)</b></p> <p>6.1. <u>Assessment week</u> was last week, after what had seemed to be a short term. Curriculum continues to be delivered fully with learning adjusted to timetables and events.</p> <p>6.2. Year 1 productions are happening this week. FR had been involved in the Year 3 production, The Jellicle Ball. Reading week has been phenomenal with authors visiting, poetry workshops, Watermill Theatre shows and many visiting ‘readers.’ Unfortunately, there was little financial contribution from parents which will make this curriculum enhancement week hard to sustain without enough funding.</p> <p>6.3. Reading for Pleasure continues to be an ongoing focus in literacy. Poetry is now planned throughout the literacy curriculum and children have regular exposure to a wide range of poetry, music and art through our weekly cultural capital assemblies. There are also termly poetry recital assemblies. Amazing poetry talents had been revealed, and this term many of the poems shared were original. The choir performed at The Hexagon in the Music Festival and the narrator selected a poem written by one of our children about ecological environmental issues to include in this concert.</p> <p>6.4. <u>Attendance</u>: The DfE published a statutory 90+ page document in February aimed at schools putting in place systems to prevent barriers for attendance. The document leaves many decisions to the discretion of the headteacher and gives somewhat contradictory advice in places. It talks about having clear consistent procedures, but being mindful of individual circumstances. This is in line with how Calcot currently operates, but puts substantial decision making and follow-through for members of school staff to manage. The school’s Attendance policy has been re-written as a result. FR wishes to delay sending this to parents before it has been trialled first, taking account of all feedback, including from governors. It will need reviewing annually. The Home School Agreement also covers attendance, which may have to be adapted.</p> <p>6.6. Persistent absence in the Juniors and the Infants has reduced. It is necessary to be mindful of mental wellbeing, but also how to be discretionary due to parental reporting. There are many parental meetings about attendance as parents are questioning decisions about authorisation of absences and hopefully the new policy will be much clearer for parents to understand and follow.</p> <p>6.7. <b>JL asked how this affects Safeguarding</b>. The school is supposed to refer a child to Social Services if their attendance drops, as this could constitute a need for additional support. Often children with persistent absence had additional needs for support and this will already be in place. The suggestion is that a My Family Plan will be created for families, which is managed by the school, however this support is run on a consensual basis, and parents are entitled not to engage with this. <b>JL noted the necessity of maintaining good relations with parents.</b></p> <p>6.8. Currently Calcot is in the lowest band of schools for attendance, which is a barrier towards becoming Outstanding at the next OfSTED Inspection. WBC have asked the school to provide transport to collect children, but there is not the funding or capacity to do this for the numbers of children who are persistently absent in the school. <b>CP asked what the reasons were for poor attendance.</b> Wellbeing, mental health, illness, and a wide variety of other reasons. Many children are genuinely poorly, but some families take holidays to see families abroad. All this impacts on the school’s data.</p> <p>6.9. <b>JL asked about young children as carers.</b> Some children are worried about their parents, and some parents want their children at home to look after them, particularly when the social care facilities fail.</p> <p>6.10. <u>Monitoring behaviour</u>: the priorities have not changed. The therapeutic approach is used to support struggling children, and behaviour is well managed. There are children who find things difficult, and the processes are robustly embedded about how to manage them.</p> <p>6.11. <u>Feasibility</u>: FR confirmed there has been no further communication. In line with the national</p>

announcement (see 3.1.), **MH suggested a formal request for an update.**

6.12. Pupil Intake Sept 2024: FR reported 63 children had put Calcot as their first choice, and 19 as their second. FR has discussed admitting over our PAN, WBC has said they will not support this. The impact of the reduced 60 PAN could mean the loss of potential children who cannot join their siblings. FR has asked WBC about increasing Nursery provision during the summer term due to high demand, however WBC has been clear about their reluctance to support this proposal due to the admin required to transfer children and funding, which will affect other nurseries. Governors questioned whether WBC are actually supporting parental preference or just following their own intentions. They do not appear to be supporting the school. This could have a huge effect financially for Calcot. FR reported the Early Years Head at WBC has left and the replacement is not yet in place. Hopefully this can be resolved quickly, and the provision will be able to go ahead.

6.13. After discussion it was agreed that the governing body should officially write a letter expressing disappointment with the lack of support from WBC regarding the delay in the Feasibility Study and the impact this has had on the school in terms of capital improvements required and the impact that the reduction to 2 form entry on the school's finances (down £150k this year). **MH is keen to focus on the energy inefficiencies impacting on school expenditure.**

**ACTION – Official letter to be written to WBC regarding implications of delaying Feasibility Study decision**

6.14. Budget: Reduced pupil numbers has had a significant impact on being able to produce a balanced budget. The effect of the recruitment freeze in WBC has affected many services, in particular HR support is reduced and slow to respond.

6.15. Recruiting new Finance Officer: Following a disappointing recruitment process it has been decided to put this on hold. The SBM will analyse capacity within the admin team to explore ways of filling gaps in house. **HB expressed concern that the SBM would take on more than she can manage. JL noted appointing someone with little experience would also mean extra workload for training.** FR said the situation will be reviewed in six weeks, by not recruiting now it could offset having to make redundancies in the future.

6.16. **JK noted it has been about 5 years since WBC made a decision to look at the feasibility of physically combining the two school buildings.** This has affected how the school plans for the future, and the reduction of the school's PAN to comply with provision of a 2-form entry school building is affecting our financial stability. The school has become popular within the local community and although WB's pupil predictions in 2023 may have been correct, the forecast reduction in pupil numbers for 2024 does not appear to be correct and there continues to be more house building locally. **JL stressed the importance of parental choice.** Parents now consider Calcot to be the best school for their children, and we don't want to lose eligible children because of the WBC directed PAN.

6.17. FR noted because the current Reception has 42 children, this may result in mixed aged group classes if we were to over admit in Sept 2024, which is something not wanted by parents or school staff.

6.18. Staff Wellbeing: NB noted the first term was good, but the second term has taken its toll. **JL had noted a lot of staff illness.** FR reported the staff are still struggling with their wellbeing, and now the school is no longer buying into staff absence insurance due to budget pressure, mental health counselling is no longer available which will make it difficult to offer this support to staff going forward.

*(AS left)*

6.19. Reductions in support staff hours going forward may result in higher exclusion rates, as there will be less support available for teaching staff. **JL highlighted the disproportionate amount of financial support the school receives for children with high levels of needs (max. £6K p.a.),** whereas a specialist placement can cost the LA over £100k. Planning for September to make the budget balance has been very difficult. Ten schools in the area are now in deficit, and Calcot will hopefully avoid a deficit

in 2024-25, but at a cost.

6.20. **MS asked what wellbeing activities could be done for staff. CP asked about the Wellbeing Days.** These are in place, but the SLT need to cover for these. NB reported there have been Wellbeing Boards and Wellbeing Baskets, but this is merely a sticking plaster which doesn't solve the problem.

6.21. It is necessary to build in more time for staff, TA remuneration is low, and they feel undervalued. Most have more than one job. TA salaries are dictated by WBC pay scales and the school cannot give teachers more PPA time. Pre COVID parents were more supportive, but now a small minority of parents cause a great deal of stress for staff.

## 7. Committee Reports

7.1. Finance Committee: We are in a minority of schools with a positive surplus (70% of schools are now in deficit). Three-year planning shows that next year predicts a small surplus, but after that the school falls into deficit. To produce a balanced budget there has had to be cuts to support staff hours and only recruiting where absolutely necessary. **HB expressed concern about our sustainability. MH asked if there was a clawback on the surplus.** No. **CP noted three years is a long time in education. JK noted the 42 children in Reception has had a big impact** and hidden any increases we could have seen in the Budget.

7.2. **JK highlighted the very good summary report provided by the SBM for the Budget next year. MH noted the biggest costs were because we have two inefficient buildings,** and we should have been generating our own energy by now. With funding so tight, it is necessary to put constraints on new projects. **JK also highlighted the unreliability of Sports Funding every year.** We are continuously fighting to keep fundamental things which make a good school, such as extracurricular activities, which may have to be cut due to lack of capacity. **JK noted this also affects the wellbeing of staff.** This impacts on illness, attendance, capacity, and children's education. Any carry-forward in school is put at risk. Budgets are so tight due to uncertainties it is virtually impossible to forward plan.

7.3. Schools Financial Values Standard: This has incorporated recommendations from the recent Finance Audit and presents a positive picture. With no comments this was formally approved by the FGB.

7.4. Curriculum Committee: Charlotte Dent's presentation about Writing has been deferred to the next meeting. CP is unable to attend and requested MS to feedback. Observations are due on 6 June to look at Writing. Design Technology observations are to be completed for Years 2 and 4 next term. Last weeks' observations showed some fascinating work: breadmaking in Year 6, bird boxes in Year 5 and shell structures in Years 3 and 4. **CP commended the ECT in Year 6 for her preparation across three classes:** phenomenal use of technical vocabulary.

7.5. Personnel Committee: The committee continues to review staff absence levels and the significant impact this has on the Budget and other staff members who cover. The change in HR provider has been delayed due to the amount of notice we need to give WBC. FR expressed her dissatisfaction with the HR provision she has been receiving.

7.6. FR and JK attended a meeting about academisation. Both agreed they saw no advantages for the school to become part of a MAT, we already have good collaborative working with other local schools and can offer our staff a structure for progression. There is no financial advantage for us, a MAT needs 3,000 children before sole responsibility for the Capital Budget can be given. FR is reluctant to enter into something which could impact us negatively as too many WBC schools are too small. Both FR and JK felt that if our collaborative working group of schools wanted to look into academisation, then we would join in the conversation, but no-one appears to be rushing into this. **HB asked if this had been on the agenda.** Yes, we had looked at this before whilst the Schools' Bill was a proposal, but this white paper was dropped by the DfE. **CT asked if the MAT needed to be WBC schools.** Yes, six schools in a steering group which are all Good or Outstanding. This is difficult to support without the necessary

	funding or SLT capacity, not to mention the emotional wellbeing. (MS left)
8.	<p><b>Safeguarding Update</b></p> <p>8.1. JK noted that AS will deliver a written report to Governors by the end of term. She is gradually finding her feet with this role and is doing the necessary training. The school is continuing to manage Safeguarding well, as its highest priority.</p>
9.	<p><b>Pupil Premium Update</b></p> <p>9.1. Funding continues to be a problem. The school has written a letter to parents to encourage more families to sign up, especially for those moving up to the Junior school. <b>JL asked how PPG affected attendance.</b> WBC has asked about assisting children to school via the minibus, but this is too expensive and would be difficult to manage as it would require two drivers, and there are only 14 seats. With over 100 PPG children how would the school prioritise. The multiple school runs would have to start at 7.30am to get everybody in. It is unlikely there would be any funding support from WBC for this.</p>
10.	<p><b>Policy Review</b></p> <p>10.1. <u>Attendance Policy</u>: FR has sent the most recent version to Governors. It will be discussed at the next Curriculum Committee.</p> <p>10.2. <u>Health &amp; Safety Policy</u>: This was in a new format. With no queries the policy was formally approved. <b>CP asked about the teachers' swimming qualifications.</b> All those involved have received the specific training required.</p> <p>10.3. <u>Financial Management Policy</u>: The SBM has updated this in line with recommendations from the Finance Audit. With no queries this policy was approved.</p> <p>10.4. <u>School Fund Policy</u>: This is a new policy on how the school manages voluntary contributions and donations that do not fall within the remit of the main school budget. With no queries this policy was approved.</p>
11.	<p><b>Governor Training Reports</b></p> <p>11.1. <b>CT reported he had attended the New Governor Training offered by WBC.</b> It had been one-way training delivered by slide-set online. The delivery had been competent, and the information had been useful.</p> <p>11.2. <b>JK reported AS had attended Finance Training.</b> The tutor had suggested whole FGB finance training. <b>MH noted the high levels of financial expertise already in the FHSP Committee.</b> FR suggested HB could do a presentation for the FGB to bring them up to speed with the financial situation, and JK also has experience in school finance. JK will ask AS for the slides from her training and we can consider a Calcot-based training session.</p> <p>11.3. JL noted that there hadn't been a Governors Training Day for a while. This should be placed on the next agenda.</p> <p><b>ACTION – Governors Training Day on next FGB agenda</b></p>
12.	<p><b>Any Other Business</b></p> <p>12.1. This had been covered.</p> <p>12.2. The next FGB meeting, to confirm the Budget, will be on Thursday 25 April 2024. CP sent her apologies in advance.</p> <p><i>The meeting closed at 11.20am.</i></p>

	<b>ACTIONS</b>
6.	6.13. Official letter to be written to WBC regarding implications of delaying Feasibility Study decision.
11.	11.3. Governors Training Day on next FGB agenda.