



## East Reading Federation

### Minutes of the Meeting of the Full Governing Board

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025. 4pm

**Present:** Dave Dymond (Chair); Robert Howell (EHT); Laura Kerr (HoS); Andrew Burrell; Katherine Fowler; Aaron Hatherley; Simon Higgs; Kris Jones; Steph Mitchell; Vincent Onuchi; Chris Robinson.

**Apologies:** Francis Jakeman; Adedayo Benson; Zoe Watling.

**In attendance:** Alice De Croos (SBM); Liz Newton (SBM); Michelle Champion

**Clerk:** Deborah Savage

Agenda Item	
1.	<b>Welcome &amp; Apologies.</b> Everyone was welcomed to the meeting, including our newly elected Staff Governor, Simon Higgs. Apologies in advance had been received from Francis, Ade and Zoe and these were accepted. No one had heard from Jonathan Dewsbury and <b>ACTION: CoG would contact him.</b>
2.	<b>Declarations of Interest.</b> Those present were reminded to declare any conflicts of interest and the chair would try to make changes to the agenda so items could be discussed in a different order allowing those with any conflicts to leave the meeting prior to the discussion. No conflicts of interest were declared.
3.	<b>Minutes of the Meeting held 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025.</b> The Part 1 and Part 2 Confidential minutes of this meeting had been shared in advance. They were accepted as a true record. Actions were reviewed – all had been completed. <b>ACTION: CoG to sign minutes in GovHub ASAP.</b>
4.	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Revenue and Capital Report ASPS.</b> This report along with notes had been shared in advance of the meeting. One governor had submitted questions in advance and these along with the answers provided by staff had also been circulated to governors prior to the meeting. The chair invited the SBM to make any comments or draw governors' attention to key points in the report. The SBM informed the meeting that there is currently a healthy in year balance which is about £30-40K more than expected at budget setting. This means that the expected carry forward for this financial year would be approx. £400K (which equates to roughly one month's staff salary costs). There had been a huge number of staffing changes over both schools this year, which was hard to manage and predict financially, so the

school is very pleased to have the staffing line come in at close to budget allocation. Income for SEND was much greater than expected.

**Governor Question:** Have you begun your financial forward planning? Draft funding figures were only sent to us by the LA today, and by the end of March we will have drafted the budgets for next year. We submit these to the LA by 1<sup>st</sup> May. We will also draw up a 5-year budget plan.

**Governor Question:** ASPS has a surplus – do you think this surplus is the right level to hold? Bearing in mind many of Reading's schools are just breaking even or in the red? We have heard of neighbouring authorities that have seized the surpluses of some schools to give to those schools in financial straits. Funding should be spent for the benefit of the children currently in the school. Our 5-year forecast puts ASPS in the red by year 4, even with this level of current surplus. We feel, because of this, we still need to be careful with our spending. In the past, the LA has told schools to spend if the LA feel their surplus is too great – we have not been told to do this. 5-year forecasts are hard to do, but we expect that this surplus will disappear to a large extent due to increased staffing costs that are not funded.

There followed some discussion about the possibility, in theory, of holding one federation budget instead of two separate budgets for the schools. It was noted that the surplus in ASPS would wipe out the deficit in Redlands. It was also noted that, during the consultation, parents at ASPS, who were concerned about the financial situation at Redlands, were assured that ASPS would not be supporting Redlands financially. It was noted that the best way to secure funding was to ensure that the school rolls were always full – which ASPS has worked hard to do over the last few years. It was also noted that changes to staffing might be needed again, with additional staff to support SEND children.

**Governor Question:** Is this report a projection or does it also include commitment figures? It does include fully committed funds.

**Governor Comment:** Regarding aggregating the two budgets – we promised the public we would not do that so it would not be right to pursue that now. Our budget should put the needs of our children first.

**Governor Question:** SEND funding in both schools was more than expected – are we spending this on the children who need it? Yes – we have employed additional staff to support SEND children but have also seen the number of children with EHCPs rise from 11 to 17, which has seen an increase in funds. We may need to employ additional staff.

5.	<p><b>3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Revenue and Capital Report Redlands.</b></p> <p>This report along with notes had been shared in advance of the meeting. Some of the questions submitted in advance were on matters in this report. The chair invited the SBM to make any comments or draw governors’ attention to key points in the report. The SBM informed the meeting that the staffing changes at Redlands during this year were enormous and that, combined with low numbers in the Nursery, had made this year very challenging. It was hoped that a balanced budget could be set for Redlands for the 2025/26 year but doing this would remain challenging.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> Do you hope to see the numbers of children at Redlands increase? Yes – hopefully. On our parent tours and open mornings at ASPS we do redirect families to Redlands if we think it unlikely they will get a place with us and also as parents are considering one federation with two schools that offer the same education but with a different “feel”. We are fortunate that we are able to move staff within the federation and therefore have options when it comes to deploying staff – moving a staff member from Redlands to ASPS a little while ago saved £30K from the Redlands budget. There are pros and cons to this and the situation with the Redlands budget has fluctuated a great deal.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> the IT project you discuss – do you hope to see this bring savings? Hopefully it will – Kris Jones (Governor) and Simon Higgs (ICT staff lead) have been helping us put together a spec for companies that will include moving to cloud based storage over the federation and new websites and email addresses for the federation. We have spoken to a number of companies and are awaiting quotes. We are also working with the University of Reading on a branding project for the Federation.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> Do you have a timescale for the IT project? Our current contract ends on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2025.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> You say you hope to set a balanced budget for next year – where will the savings come from? At ASPS we expect to be able to set a balanced budget. We are worried about Redlands however. We do have an idea to increase the numbers of children at Redlands nursery by offering separate afternoon sessions but we need at least 5 children to attend afternoon sessions to make this viable. We hope to make savings via staffing costs.</p> <p><b>Governor Questions:</b> Having 5 children attend afternoon nursery session would make this cost neutral? Yes</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> Is reception full? We run the EYFS as a complete unit at the moment – an EYFS practitioner can have 13 children whereas a teacher can have 30. It’s a matter of balancing staff &amp; numbers.</p>
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	<p><b>Governor Question:</b> What marketing have you done? We have posters in doctors' surgeries and clinics and also with health visitors who carry out 2-year checks on children.</p> <p><b>Governor Comment:</b> It might pay to use social media – I can help with that. <b>ACTION:</b> The nursery recruitment poster produced to be sent to governor.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> With limited budgets are there any particular items that are needed that can be fund raised for? Sometimes grants are also available. We do know that grants are sometimes possible but it is a matter of considering the possible negative press and being careful what we ask for funding for. For example, seeking funding for stationery might encourage parents to think that we can't afford exercise books for their children. <b>ACTION:</b> schools to think about possible items that could be fund raised for and produce a list. With regard to grants, it was noted that a recent grant to improve school WIFI was only available to rural schools, but it is hoped that now that school staff have extra capacity there will be time to investigate possible sources of additional funding more thoroughly.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> Can you give me a reason for the large Redlands deficit – how has this happened? Governors were informed that the deficit has been a few years in the making when Redlands had, at various times, no headteacher or deputy head and a series of interim senior staff who were very expensive. The school really had a run of bad luck with a DH being off sick for a long time and then this person's redundancy.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> This sounds as if this is a situation that could happen in any school – what are the checks and balances in place to prevent this happening? There are systems in place – the LA send people in to schools, but during Covid this did not happen and what had been a long period of decline at Redlands was not picked up when it should have been due to the fact that advisors could not get into the school. There was also a break down in the relationship of the Redlands Governing Board at the time at Redlands and the LA.</p> <p><b>Governor Comment:</b> This feels like a situation that could happen at any time in any school, so it appears that a "slush fund" is necessary – but the question is how much should this be. We need a future plan.</p> <p>The SBM informed the meeting that the LA do give schools guidance on how their finances should be managed, including instructions to spend funds if the LA think that their surplus is too great.</p> <p><b>Governor Comment:</b> Schools are expected to set a 3-year balanced budget -a surplus is required in order to do this.</p>
6.	<p><b>Resources Report.</b></p> <p>A Resources report covering a number of Finance, HR and site issues had been written and circulated to governors prior to the meeting. It was noted in the report that two</p>

	<p>members of staff had been thanked for stepping up over a period of time to assist with the smooth running of both schools. These staff are Jake Dawson and Michelle Champion. There was some discussion on how to mark their significant contributions and <b>ACTION: it was agreed that a letter from the CoG would be sent to each staff member.</b></p> <p><b>Governor Comment:</b> The report mentions the need to consider the future leadership structure – surely the best route would be to assume the current structure moving forward? We would actually like to set up a small “think-tank” or steering committee to look at this – with people who are familiar with the schools and staff capability and capacity. We need to look at the ISRs and consider these in a school context – which should be a separate discussion – but at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p><b>Governor Comment:</b> Both schools have had H&amp;S audits but from different auditors? Yes – but they do work closely together and we have known both these people for some time.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> You mention the cleaning of Redlands has not been good – can you elaborate? There is a particular member of staff that we would have gone down the capability route with had we not decided to seek external contractors. We have spoken to HR about our current directly employed staff – there may be TUPE protocols to follow. We feel that an external contractor would actually save us money as we would no longer have to manage cleaners in house.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> Have you spoken to other SBMs about the companies they use for cleaning? Yes – and the company used by ASPS has been brilliant.</p> <p>The meeting was informed that the expected roof works on the ASPS Junior Hall would not now start until Easter – a scheme of work has not yet been supplied to the school.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> What will be the impact of the school of this major building project? It will have an impact on classrooms during the day and the number of extra-curricular classes we will be able to offer whilst the work takes place. However, until a scheme of work is supplied, it is hard to predict and to plan ahead.</p> <p>The meeting was also informed that the roof works needed at Redlands would be carried out in the Easter break too – but a living roof would not be installed as the school could not afford it.</p> <p>The meeting noted that the PTAs in both schools had been very active and the Friends of Redlands had just funded a major £20K library project which has been given some television coverage. The ASPS PTA has given £10k for playground equipment.</p> <p>There was a discussion on the pupil numbers and it was recognised that funding levels are dictated by the number of children on roll. ASPS is full and has no additional</p>
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	<p>capacity. Outline figures for expected numbers for the next academic year will be published by the LA soon.</p> <p>Governors were informed that finding someone to audit both schools' private funds was proving very hard. Few people want to take on a relatively small job. The meeting was asked if anyone knew of an accountant that might help. Mention was made of Henley Business School as a possible source of auditors.</p> <p>Governors held a discussion on the accident data that was included in the Resources Report. It was noted that the rates of accidents in each school were quite different. Redlands seemed to have too many accidents for the number of children but a governor noted that the data was not detailed enough or robust enough to be able to make a full analysis to pin down underlying issues. It was noted that both schools are statutorily compliant with the accident data they record and report to the LA – who do hold more robust data but do not share it with governing boards due to data protection.</p> <p>It was noted that the LA have asked staff working with SEND children to report on incidents that they previously might not have reported as staff understand that a child with SEND needs might behave differently to another child. Staff are being re-assured that children will not get into trouble for incidents like this, but it is important they are recorded so that the LA gets a clear and accurate picture of the SEND situation in Reading schools.</p> <p>The SBM informed the meeting that ASPS has had a review of letting charges, which have not been reviewed for many years. There have been no price increases for 8 years now and with increased utility costs and staffing costs it was felt that an increase is needed now. The proposed increases would take effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April, if approved by governors. It was noted that prior to Covid there were many more private lettings, but these have not picked back up to previous levels. <b>DECISION: Governors approved the increases to ASPS lettings charges.</b></p> <p>At this point, the financial benchmarking site supplied by the government was put up on the screen for governors to discuss the results. It was noted that ideally you wanted schools to be in the middle of the range of comparative schools i.e. not dramatically over or under spending on any area when compared to similar schools. It is also important to look at school outcomes when looking at expenditure figures. Governors noted that ASPS has a lower catering cost – due to the fact that staff are not employed directly. ASPS does spend higher than average on admin staff – due to the Medical Administrator which appears to be quite unique for primary schools.</p> <p>It was noted that the Redlands expenditure on non-educational support staff was the highest in their comparison table but this was due to the expensive temporary staffing costs that were spent on the interim HT, HoS and DHTs. There was nothing of concern in either school's benchmarking.</p>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Review of pupil numbers over the Federation.</b>

	<p><b>Governor Question:</b> Could ASPS increase its PAN? Not in KS1 or 2 no; only in the nursery and we always have to have a big push to fill to the numbers that we achieve.</p>
8.	<p><b>Federation Risk Register.</b></p> <p>A strategic Federation Risk Register had been circulated prior to the meeting. It was noted that it covered both schools and was a work in progress.</p> <p><b>Governor Comment:</b> I think you should include a column for a timeframe to be recorded and also the mention of a “flu” epidemic should just be termed a “pandemic”.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> Do you also look at opportunities as well as risks? Yes – we do regular SWOT analyses as a management team.</p> <p><b>Governor Comment:</b> I would like to see some metrics against some of these and include probability v impact although it was recognised that it was hard to put a number against some of the risks included.</p> <p><b>Governor Question:</b> Should the RR link to the SDPs? It can reference SDPs but should not link directly.</p> <p>It was noted that the current Ofsted consultation about future Ofsted reporting includes 5 colours in the proposed new format – which might be a consideration. However, Ofsted have made no final decision yet.</p> <p>The meeting was informed that the RIG (Rapid Improvement Group) set up at Redlands was closed in February 2024 as the LA were satisfied that the triggers that prompted the setting up of the RIG were no longer in place.</p> <p>It was noted that a RR is a mechanism to help prioritise issues and that the RR helps everyone gain a workable understanding of both schools based on reasonable judgement by those who know the schools well.</p>
9.	<p><b>H&amp;S audit in both schools.</b></p> <p>The reports from both H&amp;S audits had been circulated prior to the meeting and governors asked if these had produced any surprises. It was acknowledged that staff had worked very hard to ensure compliance over both sites at a time of under-staffing. External contractors had also been used where necessary. There was an especially huge amount of work needed at Redlands as there had been a large number of issues to deal with. On a positive note, a Caretaker has been recruited for Redlands who starts on 10/3/25.</p>
10.	<p><b>FRA actions at ASPS.</b></p> <p>Governors were informed that the actions included had either been completed or were underway.</p>
11.	<p><b>SFVS.</b></p>

	A date is needed to complete the SFVS for both schools and it was mentioned maybe doing this on 18 <sup>th</sup> March when governors are in both schools for a governor day. This is to be confirmed.
<b>12.</b>	<p><b>Policies for Approval / Adoption.</b></p> <p>Governors were reminded that even though most of these policies come from the LA, Governing Boards are still required to have oversight of the policies and to approve them for adoption.</p> <p>(5.15 – at this point, Andrew Burrell left the meeting.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Financial Procedures Manual. <b>Governor Comment:</b> Names have been replaced by roles – is this right? It saves having to update when staff leave. <b>Governor Question:</b> Has an asset management register been completed at both schools? Yes – and this is checked annually. <b>DECISION:</b> Governors approved the adoption of the Financial Procedure Manual.</li> <li>b) Grievance Policy. There had been no changes to this policy. <b>DECISION:</b> Governors approved the adoption of the Grievance Policy.</li> <li>c) Managing Poor Performance. <b>DECISION:</b> Governors approved the adoption of the Managing Poor Performance Policy.</li> <li>d) Staff Code of Conduct. <b>DECISION:</b> Governors approved the adoption of the Staff Code of Conduct.</li> <li>e) Staff Disciplinary Policy. <b>DECISION:</b> Governors approved the adoption of the Staff Disciplinary Policy.</li> <li>f) ASPS Lettings Policy. As discussed earlier in the meeting, there were changes to the charges for lettings. <b>Governor Question:</b> is the phone number for the Site Manager up to date? Yes. <b>DECISION:</b> Governors approved the new Lettings Policy for ASPS.</li> </ul>
<b>13.</b>	<p><b>Issues for Parents/Confidentiality.</b></p> <p>There were no issues to be communicated to parents and nothing requiring confidential part 2 minutes.</p>
<b>14.</b>	<p><b>Any Other Business.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The chair asked the meeting to consider the idea of having a sub-committee for H&amp;S across the Federation to include staff such as the Site manager as well as link governors for H&amp;S. This could look more closely at the causes of accidents and try to improve measures to prevent these. Governors were reminded that their role is strategic rather than operational. This would be discussed more at a future date.</li> <li>b) The clerk informed the three new governors of dates of new governor and finance for governors training being offered by BfFC.</li> <li>c) A working group to look at future management structures was agreed and the chair would be in touch to arrange this.</li> </ul>
<b>15.</b>	<p><b>Date of Next Meeting:</b> Pay Committee 17<sup>th</sup> March / Governors in schools day 18<sup>th</sup> March / next FGB 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2025.</p>

Meeting closed: 5.32pm



**Actions:**

<b>Action:</b>	<b>Responsibility:</b>	<b>Timescale:</b>
CoG to contact Jonathan Dewsbury	DD	ASAP
GoG to sign Parts 1 & 2 minutes from 28 <sup>th</sup> Jan in GovHub	DD	ASAP
Send nursery poster to Steph	LK	ASAP
Consider items that could be fundraised for	LK/SBM	ASAP
Thank you letter from CoG to two staff to be sent	Clerk/DD	ASAP

**Attendance at FGB meetings Jan-July 25 (3 meetings to date)**

Dave Dymond	3 of 3 meetings
Robert Howell	3 of 3 meetings
Laura Kerr	3 of 3 meetings
Adedayo Benson	1 of 3 meetings
Vincent Onuchi	3 of 3 meetings
David Colwill	1 of 3 meetings
Zoe Watling	1 of 3 meetings
Chris Robinson	3 of 3 meetings
Katherine Fowler	3 of 3 meetings
Francis Jakeman	2 of 3 meetings
Aaron Hatherley	3 of 3 meetings
Kris Jones	2 of 3 meetings
Jonathan Dewsbury	0 of 3 meetings
Andrew Burrell	2 of 2 possible meetings
Stephanie Mitchell	2 of 2 possible meetings
Simon Higgs	1 of 1 possible meetings