

ST IVO ACADEMY LOCAL GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING – WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2023 at 4.30 p.m.

ROOM 2, MAIN BLOCK

ST IVO ACADEMY

Membership: Claire Burke, Duncan Evans, Paul Mumford, Frank Newton, Philip Speer, Elaine Warriner, Heather Wood

Clerk: Emillie Newell

Distribution: Ben Brown, Chair of Trustees

In Attendance: Rowena Hackwood, CEO, Jo Myhill-Johnson, Regional Director,
Clare Sherwood, Vice Principal and Mike Craig, Vice Principal

Agenda

Item	Subject	Format
1	Introductions and apologies Apologies received from Philip Speer, Duncan Evans, Elaine Warriner and Ben Brown	FN/ALL
2	Declarations of interests	FN/ALL
3	Curriculum Changes and Reduced GCSE Options a. Lack of information supplied to the LGC. b. Limited timescale re - information to Parents/Carers and Staff c. Arrangements and structure for the Options Evening on Thursday 23 rd February 2023 (now postponed until the 9th March 2023)	FN/All
4	Risks Communication: trust between parents and school	FN/ALL
5	Parents Forum a. Official Complaint – How might Astrea respond. b. Astrea’s plans to discuss/communicate with this body.	FN/ALL
6	Any Other Business Details of any item should be issued to Emillie Newell prior to the start of the meeting.	ALL



**MINUTES OF THE ST IVO ACADEMY LOCAL GOVERNANCE
COMMITTEE MEETING
SPECIAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2023 at 4.30 p.m.
ROOM 2, MAIN BLOCK**

Members Present: Claire Burke, Paul Mumford, Frank Newton, Heather Wood

In Attendance: Rowena Hackwood, CEO, Astrea Academy Trust, Jo Myhill-Johnson, Regional Director, Mike Craig, Clare Sherwood, Emillie Newell (Clerk)

ITEM	DISCUSSION
1.0	Introductions and Apologies
1.1	<p>Mr Newton opened the meeting at 4.45 p.m., introductions made.</p> <p>Apologies received from Mr Speer, Mr Evans, Mrs Warriner, and Mr Brown (Chair of Trustees for Astrea Academy Trust).</p>
2.0	Declarations of interest
2.1	There were no declarations of interest in relation to any of the agenda items.
3.0	Opening statement by Rowena Hackwood, CEO
3.1	<p>Mrs Hackwood expressed her appreciation that committee members were able to attend this meeting at short notice. The LGC was informed that this St Ivo Academy is under pressure to make improvements as identified during the Ofsted inspection of November 2021 and subsequent Trust quality evaluations. She noted that this is not restricted to Personal Development, Behaviour and Attitudes, but also to some, not all areas of the curriculum for which outcomes were available in summer 2022 that were not available at the time of the inspection.</p> <p>She noted that historical outcomes in English, Maths, and other qualifications, when comparing St Ivo Academy results with students nationally, are not at the standard we should expect. She explained that the changes to the curriculum offer are designed to ensure students get the best possible outcomes and prepare them for their next phase of study or work. Communicating the necessary changes to parents has triggered a high number of emotive responses directly to Mrs Hackwood and other members of the school's leadership. Mrs Hackwood confirmed that she had responded to all the emails she had received personally, politely, and thoroughly. Parents have been provided with information about the changes, but that reflecting on the feedback received, the options evening has been pushed back to 9 March 2023.</p> <p>She reiterated that the intention is to create a good school that is financially secure and academically excellent, allowing students to achieve the best possible outcomes.</p> <p>Mr Newton advised that the committee would like to work together with the school to support this, taking the school forward and supporting staff. Mr Newton asked how the committee can be used to the best advantage.</p> <p>Mrs Hackwood noted that the role of the committee is to support leaders and provide challenge and scrutiny on the implementation of its improvement plans, with the aim of enhancing life opportunities of students. She added that an important role of the committee is to support school leaders with communication and supporting positive perceptions within the community.</p>

4.0	Curriculum changes and reduced GCSE options
4.1	<p>Mrs Hackwood acknowledged that the level of feedback regarding the changes to the options blocks was unprecedented. Both she and Mrs Myhill-Johnson noted that it is normal within the education sector for leaders to reshape the KS4 curriculum on a regular basis, looking at a range of factors including quality of provision, availability of teachers with certain specialisms, Ebacc compliance, availability of facilities and affordability. She also noted that a 3-option-block model is normal in the sector.</p> <p>In light of the feedback, however, the Options Evening has been pushed back to 9 March 2023 to allow leaders to consider and respond to feedback. Mr Newton raised his concern that the committee had not been made aware of the change of date, as communicated to parents on 21 February 2023.</p> <p>Mrs Myhill-Johnson advised that the rapid communications to parents regarding the curriculum changes would not normally be a matter discussed with the LGC.</p> <p>Mrs Wood advised that there should be a plan in place to handle messaging going forward, to ensure that a loss of control of communication does not happen again in the future.</p> <p><u>ACTION: Mrs Myhill Johnson to work with Dr Craig and Miss Sherwood to continue to ensure communication with parents takes place.</u></p> <p><u>Mr Mumford questioned why, on this occasion, the level of response has been as high as it has.</u></p> <p>Mrs Myhill-Johnson commented, that last year, St Ivo Academy offered a number of listening sessions to parents, these were not well attended at times.</p> <p><u>Mr Mumford stated that the announcement to the changes to GCSEs, was announced shortly before the deadline for options.</u></p> <p><u>Mrs Burke commented that lots of parents/carers of children attending St Ivo Academy, are aware that the standards are not as they should be. A change, such as this one, is then put in place and parents do not see how these changes will raise standards. They believe they will in fact, have the opposite effect, as students will only be studying for eight GCSEs. There should have been more explanation as to why and how these changes will raise standards.</u></p> <p><u>Mrs Wood raised the issue that within the community, there is an element of stability, with this change, the sense of control and how it was communicated was lost on this occasion.</u></p> <p>Dr Craig advised that some curriculum models accessed by successful students suggest St Ivo's KS4 curriculum risks spreading students' GCSE learning too thinly and may not give students the best chances of success. The 4-option block model can limit the time available for English, Maths and Science, and the options themselves. He also noted that the school should be compliant with the national curriculum expectations around PSHE, RE and PE.</p> <p>The committee were advised that the school day could be lengthened, and Mrs Hackwood stated that the trust would support and finance any such proposal.</p> <p>Dr Craig discussed the historic performance of students, in terms of attainment and noted that whilst there have been some recent improvements, performance has not always achieved national average level. The school's Progress 8 figure, whilst positive in 2022, has been negative for a number of years. All involved with St Ivo Academy want it to be a high performing school, giving the community what it deserves.</p> <p>Whilst the new model explicitly assumes children will take 8, 9 or 10 GCSEs, it was recognised that parental concern was focused on the reduction in option blocks from 4 to 3. Mrs Hackwood noted that St Ivo Academy has not been explicitly compliant with the National Curriculum for KS4 in the past, with the Ofsted inspection highlighting that there was no evidence of Religious Education at key stage 4, for instance (Mrs Myhill-Johnson added that previously, this was taught outside the curriculum through 'Learning4Life'). In ensuring that the school is delivering the national curriculum, this reduces the number of lessons available for teaching other subject options by one per week, which has led leaders to re-evaluate the curriculum offer.</p> <p>Dr Craig advised there is a requirement by the DfE to build Ebacc take up year on year, which means ensuring that the majority of children take a language option as well as English, Maths, Science, and a humanity. Dr Craig reminded the committee that St Ivo's Ebacc take-up is currently at 50%, against a current national target of 75%, rising to a national target of 90% in the next few years.</p>

Mrs Wood asked how we compare with other schools in relation to EBacc take up, and what happens when the take up is not sitting at the 90% target.

Mrs Hackwood advised that DfE requirements are intended provide students with appropriate academic challenge and ensure that they keep their options open for Sixth Form and beyond. The DfE believes that is achieved by securing academic foundations in mainly EBacc subjects and equipping students in the best way possible, so they are able to make decisions about what to do next. St Ivo has a particularly broad offer at present which does not facilitate take-up of the EBacc for the majority of students.

Mr Newton commented, that had the information regarding the changes, been communicated to parents with this level of detail, they would not have responded to the extent that they have.

Mr Mumford added that the ten or so reasons, the information regarding affordability, and the fact that the current model did not work well for students, should have been communicated to parents during a meeting. The email sent to parents did not even get close to explaining any of these reasons.

Mrs Myhill-Johnson explained that usually this would have all been discussed at the Options Evening, but that parental activity on-line had led to the school needing to communicate with parents ahead of this.

Dr Craig informed the committee, that the key change was the reduction of option blocks. He advised that the booklet to go alongside the recent email to staff provided deeper rationale. Dr Craig took on board that the vision, on this occasion, could have been communicated more clearly.

Mr Mumford asked leaders as to why they thought parents responded at the level they did.

Dr Craig explained to the committee, that the key theme of parental communications, was the reduction of one option block..

Mrs Burke informed the committee that the changes were even being discussed by primary school parents with children in years 5 and 6. Mrs Burke commented that some schools, offer more GCSEs and have high standards, therefore there must be other ways to raise standards.

- **Arrangements and structure for the Options Evening on Thursday 23 February 2023 (now postponed until 9 March 2023)**
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Mr Newton referred to the communication to parents, advising them that the Options Evening had been postponed, to allow leaders to review the situation.

Mrs Hackwood explained that the situation will be reviewed; there was never any intention to upset students and parents but comes from a genuine aim to enable more children to do better at St Ivo Academy. Mrs Hackwood explained that St Ivo's curriculum has to be compliant with national curriculum, high quality and affordable. Leaders need to be confident that the curriculum offer is high quality across all subjects in order to secure a strong Ofsted 'Good' rating at the next inspection.

Mr Mumford commented that the RE aspect of the change to options was very confusing. The changes to options, particularly for students with older siblings, who have not had to take RE, has increased the level and strength of feeling.

Mrs Hackwood advised that RE has to be part of the curriculum because of the National Curriculum expectations but clarified that it is not a compulsory GCSE.

Mr Mumford asked what this looks like in practice.

Dr Craig advised that for this year's year 9 cohort, leaders are looking into how changes can be made to re-instate the loss in option block 4. He hoped that adjustments could be made in the short term, but there is no promise that this will be the case in the future. This was due to an annual curriculum review process looking at various considerations, for example subject quality, financial constraints, staff capacity, and outcomes. He stressed that he was listening to parents' views in terms of the choice of subjects on offer.

Mrs Burke asked whether there are other ways to raise standards without the need to reduce choices.

Mrs Hackwood advised that students only have twenty-five hours a week to cover all subjects. Discussions then took place regarding extensions to the school day, and the reduction of lunchtime.

Mr Mumford referred to the backlash, following the reduction in lunchtimes.

ACTION for 9 March 2023

Mr Newton requested that leaders at St Ivo Academy are supported by Trust colleagues at the curriculum evening.

Mrs Myhill-Johnson advised that she will be present at the evening, and parents will be informed of all of the decisions behind the change to the options for key stage 4.

Mrs Wood commented that the level of concern from parents is based on the reduction of options, and specifically for those students who lean towards the arts, and the fact that their range of choice has been limited. Mrs Wood asked whether outside of the curriculum, there would be anything else that could increase opportunities in the arts, even if it was in a voluntary way.

Miss Sherwood advised that since September 2023, there has been work undertaken on whole curriculum enrichment and electives after school. Covid has previously had a big impact on what is available. Electives are available for the Sixth Form, and this will extend to the rest of the school. Mrs Myhill-Johnson added that there has been misinformation regarding the arts at GCSE; the key stage 4 offer has not been reduced.

The committee discussed that there must be a plan in place, to clearly communicate the necessity to make these changes to parents, and that this in time will rebuild trust.

This led on to a discussion around the implementation of the behaviour and culture policy, and the fact, that at this time it has attracted negative feedback, despite the fact that school leaders stressed the significant programme of communications with parents about this.

Mr Mumford advised that the way this has been done makes parents feel that there is an overly strict approach at looking after their children.

Miss Sherwood advised that parents have been invited into school, so they can see what is going on throughout the school day, with the hope that this will change current perceptions.

Mrs Burke suggested that there needs to be clarification regarding personal development, PSHE and RE, to define the differences between these areas.

5.0 Parents Forum

5.1 The committee discussed the communication received from the newly formed Parent Forum, and the action that has been taken to date.

Mr Mumford advised that this was an opportunity for St Ivo Academy, to improve communication and present the alignment between the school and the trust.

Mrs Hackwood reminded the committee that there is no distinction between the school and the trust; we are not two separate entities, and whilst supporting St Ivo, LGC is constituted as a Trust committee. In terms of responding to the forum, Mrs Hackwood advised that a small number of representatives would be invited to attend a meeting at St Ivo Academy, to listen to concerns of both parents and their children and that she and other leaders would be in attendance.

Mr Mumford spoke of the concerns of year 7s, in relation to sanctions and the anxiety amongst some of them.

Miss Sherwood advised the committee of the work currently taking place to re-assure year 7s, in order to reduce this anxiety. Students have been informed that morning address is a time for them to raise their concerns to staff, and they will be supported appropriately.

Mrs Wood referred to the number of listening sessions that have been made available to parents previously. Parents have not taken advantage of what has been offered by the school, as the level of take up has been low.

Mr Mumford advised that the meeting with the Parents Forum, should involve Mrs Hackwood, Mrs Myhill-Johnson, and the Vice Principals.

Mr Mumford asked whether there would be an opportunity to review the behaviour policy, to change it, or whether it has to remain as it is.

Mrs Hackwood advised that feedback will be taken on board, and it may be the case that some adjustments may be made. Policies in place are based on research by educators, informing us what measures make sure students are safe in school, so they can flourish. Problems with behaviour in schools, usually occurs during social times. Mrs Hackwood reported that having visited St Ivo and having an opportunity to observe lessons, behaviour in classrooms is charming, with studious atmospheres and students learning well. There is also evidence that the quality of pedagogy is improving.

Mr Newton thanked all for attending and their contributions.

Meeting closed at 18:43