

Taw Valley Federation



A meeting of the Full Governing Body was held on Monday 18th April 2016 at 7.00pm at High Bickington Primary School.

Present: Sally Anoyrkatis (chair), Jane Adams, Helen Carn, Rob Norton (head), Sarah Fast, Briony Parsons (associate), Amy Suchacki, Heather Dunn, Sue Wells, Adrian Wells, Verity Lunn (clerk). Mike Clark arrived 21.33.



MINUTES

1. **Opening Prayer & Welcome.**
SA welcomed all to the meeting. AW led the opening prayer
2. **To receive, and if appropriate, approve apologies for absence.**
No apologies received in advance of the meeting.
3. **To declare any business interests arising from the agenda and remind governors of meeting confidentiality.**
SA declared an interest as an associate director of Chulmleigh Academy Trust.
4. **To approve minutes of previous meeting (21st March 2016 – previously circulated)**
Minutes of FGB meeting 21st March agreed and signed. Minutes of meeting with Julie Sutchbury-Ullah 1st March agreed and signed. Part two minutes from FGB 21st March distributed, agreed and signed.
5. **Matters arising from the minutes**
Report from Mock Ofsted at Witheridge had not been e-mailed to governors as per action point from last meeting – to be forwarded after meeting.
6. **Approve Budget**
Copies of the budget had been distributed to governors prior to the meeting. BP invited any questions from governors.

SA asked for confirmation that the changes talked about in the last meeting were included. BP agreed they were, and that it had also been updated to reflect a change in pupil numbers.

AW proposed the budget be approved, SW seconded, governors all agreed.
7. **The federation's future within a MAT – Discussion/Visitors (TEAM MAT and Chulmleigh Academy Trust)**
Governors had a period of discussion before receiving visitors.

SA reported that at the first meeting with David Blower/Andrew Riley after the red report inspection at Witheridge DB/AR had given the opinion that TVF needed to join a MAT quickly. They had concerns about middle management/multiple roles that RN took on. They were also concerned by data, the likelihood of getting 'coasting' and the implications of that. When they had been told about this meeting/visitors they gave the opinion that it would be good to make a decision at this meeting. They would be looking for the federation to have moved forward on this before the July inspection – if this had not happened then it would not reflect well in the inspection, as not working forward for the children.

AW had talked to Richard Maudsley (diocese) who had agreed it was fine for governors to have the presentations from the two MATs this evening, but before the diocese accepted a decision governors would also need to have had a presentation/visit from St Christopher's MAT, at which point they would be in a better position to have their decision received by the diocese.

SA felt there was some conflicting information from different people at the diocese over their involvement – AW had been told 6-9 months for legal process of transferring land, in which case St Christopher's MAT might be an option after all – governors previously thought the delay until they were taking new schools would be too long.

Conclusion – governors were not able to take a vote at this meeting. BP reported that she had talked to Graham Andrews at St Christopher's and that they were very keen to send somebody to the meeting, but physically were not able to get there that evening as all were already busy. It would not be possible to become part of the St Christopher's MAT until January 2017. SA – David Blower had expressed concern that as TVF would be the first schools in the North Devon area within that MAT, it might be quite isolated in terms of support.

AW – Is it possible to unpick the federation to avoid High Bickington school being forced into a MAT, having accepted that Witheridge will be?

SA – Was something that was brought up in meeting last week with David Blower/David Chapman. It is something that governors could look at, but the two schools felt very much as one now. High Bickington was likely to be forced into a MAT sooner or later anyway. Only advantage would be being able to choose MAT rather than forced in like the possibility for Witheridge.

19.27: TEAM MAT (Pilton Bluecoat, Umberleigh Primary, Brayford Primary) – Paul Mulligan (Executive headteacher), Penny Wignall (chair of trustees), Caroline Tucker (business manager)

PM – had not brought a presentation, as he had felt a conversation was the best way of proceeding,

JA – asked for an overview of the academy trust.

PM – did she mean an overview of who the academy is, and how they got there?

JA confirmed

PM – In July 2012 Pilton Bluecoat explored the issue of becoming an academy; they were a VA school anyway so were quite independent. The MAT buys services from the local authority so still on good terms – overall felt they have saved money. Felt like more they were in ownership of the school and what they could do for the children, although still accountable to parents/Ofsted. Umberleigh and Brayford formed a federation as only had one headteacher at the time – formed a good partnership which worked well, were in a partnership/federation for two years. Then lost their headteacher – were advised would not get another one, and to find another school for federation (this fell through) which is when they looked for other options.

PM – felt federation of Pilton/Umberleigh/Brayford was not the best way of going forward necessarily – they formed a management partnership which worked well – smaller schools were able to participate in (eg) the residential programs they would not necessarily have been able to do on their own. Also more able to look at individual children and make suggestions for best interest. Knew would eventually form MAT, moved into MAT at time of financial incentive from government.

Structure – Executive head over all schools. Non-teaching deputy at Pilton, and the smaller schools have a designated senior teacher. PW – from point of smaller schools it had really transformed them – now had access to specialist teachers. Also opened pre-schools in the smaller schools – despite not being immediately financially viable due to ages of children in the village.

SA – PW was from smaller schools originally – how had joining the MAT affected the individual ethos for each school?

PW – the ethos hadn't really changed, more of a case of better opportunities, and better teaching. Actual feel within each school wasn't very different.

PM – felt that had changed in some aspects – eg had improved the environment of the schools, and also the standards.

HD – what measures had they got in place to ensure that the ethos does stay the same?

PM – it is something David Carter puts at the front – have to look at joy of a school's individual distinctiveness, but there are also a number of non-negotiables that you know work to make a school a good school. Often start with base policies like safeguarding – and ensure that in any partnership you form you are clear about where you want to go with it. But at same time need to enjoy their individualities as part of the range of experiences that the MAT can offer as a whole.

PW – there are local schools committees – Brayford/Umberleigh have one between them as were previously a federation with one governing body, Pilton Bluecoat also has one.

PM – can even be as simple as ringing the morning bell at Umberleigh. It feels good to have children from different backgrounds at different schools, as when they meet they learn from each other.

JA – do all the schools have a common curriculum?

PM – they have 'big event' curriculum – every term all children are taken out on a big visit, based on current/relevant event. Teachers then interpret this as best suited for their class, bringing own creativity for it. Also have some aspects that they know work – eg literacy.

Felt that at the moment with one head over the three schools it is very similar in all.

SA – what would this proceed like if TVF joined?

PM – it is hard to say at this point.

PM explained how the structure of the MAT worked – top level (representatives from Mole Valley Farmers, The Bishop of Crediton and the Diocese) who meet once a year. Then trustees – people who have the expertise able to challenge what is going on – portfolio system – have PW, CT, an accountant, an insurance specialist, a personnel officer for a vet group. Strategic direction of the trust – not there to speak on behalf of any particular school – there to ensure performance is secure.

Local governing bodies/Local school committees – people who are concerned with one particular school/local issues. They will look at how the local school is performing/buildings. PM felt hadn't really tied down their role yet – had been only going a year. Told governors that they need to be considering this whichever MAT they joined – how this would be set up/input to trustees.

SW – do they have a foundation element to the trustees?

PM – the trustee group is quite large. As a church school the diocese determined there always need to be two more foundation trustees than non-foundation trustees – have 13 trustees. Two of the foundation trustees are actually from Brayford/Umberleigh (previously community schools). Foundation trustees now have to prove they have an expertise that they can bring to the trustees, and also meet with the relevant vicar – they don't need to necessarily be a regular church goer, but need to show they have an empathy with the Christian faith.

PW asked governors to hear about where TVF currently was.

SA – gave history of TVF management partnership/federation and involvement with the Two Moor Learning Partnership. Witheridge lost head/joint head model – formed management partnership with High Bickington for two terms, and federated slightly over a year ago. Reported were in difficult position at moment with Witheridge. The focus was on Witheridge a lot at moment due to this. Governors were looking for possible MAT support that would help support the improvements they were currently working for at Witheridge. SA had felt several times recently that if the school was part of something bigger then things would be moving forward quicker.

CT – what had happened to other schools in co-op?

SA – are still there, and working with them to some extent.

CT – how is this being done?

SA – gave examples – meetings with heads/joint visits.

SA – having said that were interested, they wanted to hear from TEAM to know what their experience was that could help with their individual needs.

PM – gave context that if did say that they wanted to go with TEAM then would be very happy to have them. They were a happy MAT, with good reputation, and could stay in their current position contentedly, but were government pressures to expand, which would of course give more opportunities for the children involved.

TEAM had been put forward by the diocese for sponsoring a new free school at Roundswell – wanted to create a school that was right for the Roundswell community. They did not know whether this would happen at this point.

PM – felt that what governors were looking for was someone to work with them as part of a MAT, and as the support to get Witheridge to where it needed to be. If TVF joined – RN would remain head teacher of the two schools, responsible for the day to day running, but would have PM as executive head teacher over him. Would need to give up some of the strategic decisions to higher up the structure – was a vacancy on the trustees which would be expected to be from TVF governors – also as vacancies arose would be used to balance representation.

HC – would they keep the current four class structure in place in the two schools?

PM – did not feel his place to change this if it was working for the schools concerned.

PM – felt it was possible to create job progressions within the MAT that wouldn't work within smaller structures. They can be entrepreneurial in terms of staffing that wouldn't happen in LA controlled schools.

SA – did not see evidence that were working together with other schools in the Barnstaple area – especially Pilton infants. Why, when this would be an obvious thing to do?

PM – did actually work with other schools within the Pilton/Barnstaple area. Had made attempts to include the other Pilton schools within their MAT. Felt at first academisation Pilton infants did not happen as it was a case of not having any other infant pupils for staff support at the time. Five other schools in Barnstaple had formed co-op. Would still like to think that they may give consideration in joining the TEAM MAT.

Discussion over difficulties of keeping individual personalities out of decision making regarding children.

SA – did they see primary MAT with a secondary as viable?

PM – although they were a primary focused MAT at the moment, he felt gaining a secondary school would have interesting opportunities.

SA – What were the time issues with joining a MAT?

PM – thought it would be December.

AW – would they be interested in forming management partnership within that time?

PM – was what they did with Umberleigh/Brayford – useful in case of knowing that they will be forming a MAT, but standards in a joining school needed improving.

SA – question of church issue.

PM – would not be a limiter as they already had a structure the diocese approved, and it would be a case of bolting on.

PM, PW, CT left 20.25.

20.25: Chulmleigh Academy Trust (Chulmleigh Community College, Chulmleigh Primary, East Worlington Primary, Lapford Primary, Burrington Primary) – Mike Johnson (executive headteacher/CEO), Tracey Dodd (Deputy Executive Headteacher/in charge of primaries), Steve Baber (chair of directors)

Presentation – MJ stated that a presentation can only give flavours of things, and would also answer any questions.

CAT had over 900 children aged 2 to 16, making their journey through education.

Felt choosing which MAT to join was an important decision. They had looked at TVF's values etc, and felt they were compatible. He felt it was important to look at it as a merger rather than one of them taking over. Positives of joining CAT – consistency throughout child's journey in school life, and can also see positive results in the track record of CAT. Have successfully improved schools within MAT. Gave details of experience of the representatives there – TD had 30 years working with primaries, MJ since 2007 in federation. Felt as bigger can work to strengths that people have within it. Felt natural alliance as already working together as catchment area secondary school. There were more opportunities for staff as part of a bigger team, which had enabled them to keep on staff that may otherwise have moved elsewhere. Had a Church school in Burrington – has had positive influence on the non-church schools in that regard. Also passed SIAMS inspection well even though in a MAT with non church schools. Kept local in terms of those in the MAT.

Assurance in terms of headteacher – felt that they would be more support with having a bigger set up. Values – agile approach in terms of change, social justice, focus on pupil achievement/high standards felt very much fitted in with what TVF had, and fitting in with the Christian distinctiveness. Summing up – opportunities all schools in local community have to maintain individualities within supportiveness of each other in same localities. Said would be interested in what any governor within the TVF governing body would be able to bring to the merger.

SW – one of the things they were working towards was behavior – which they had linked to the Christian values and ethos, which she thought would be a strength bringing in.

JA – focus on developing whole child – not just academic attainment – also music, PE, etc.

SB – clarified 'standards' could also refer to behavior, more than just academic.

RN – Felt the TVF governing body was strong, in a different government may have continued well along their current route. Have many governors with good skills, would be a shame to lose any input to this.

SB – TVF could bring advantage to whole MAT. Individual schools have individual advisory groups.

JA – understood the decision making was not at that level.

SB – that would be the same in any model, but can feed into board through academy parent advisor group.

SW – are each of the schools within the MAT represented on the board of trustees? Do they have foundation trustees?

SB – all on board responsible for all schools – two foundation directors (trustees). Also parents, staff, etc

JA – how do they maintain individualities of schools within the MAT?

TD – team across primaries so strong with specialisms that can focus on strengths, working within community. Model of children's wellbeing comes first, then the academic side. The schools are in such different areas that there would be no way that they would be the same as each other. The CAT partnership was highly successful in terms of improving schools behavior/happiness/which resulted in better progress. Specialisms for teachers across all schools – supportive of each other, planned support with each other. Teaching not necessarily tied down to whole plan.

HC – would keep the same structure in terms of class structure/staffing?

MJ – yes they would. Each school has a budget for which they then operate as appropriate.

HC – how would current head fit into this model?

MJ – were confident about RN, so would look at structure and work something that was effective. Knew HB was very successful – would have to look at that. Know about results from HB/W, but don't know the schools themselves like RN does.

TD – being a headteacher is an isolated place when having to make drastic improvements on own – have team behind you when in MAT situation supporting you in this.

SB - Feels like RN has lots of good things to offer to the CAT. Do know that it is a journey, board of directors supportive.

HC – why did they set up Y6 academy?

MJ – when it started, class structure of schools in Lapford and East Worlington were not working in terms of consistency – initially tried to support that structure but were not making headway, so combined the Y6 across three schools (Lapford, East Worlington, Chulmleigh) so had opportunities for single year teaching across two classes, adjacent to the secondary school so had the better resources. Lots of opposition/negative publicity, but now had the evidence to show this was in the best interest of the pupils. Now felt there would be similar opposition to removing it. Sometimes have to do what they believe is the right thing for the children – 99% of time parents with you. TD – proof in children – preparing well for transition, children happier in it. Desire by the children to achieve.

HD – given all those advantages stated, why Y6 at Burrington not included?

MJ – Y6 were achieving at Burrington and still are, so did not feel appropriate for Burrington

SA – Can't give a definite answer here as to what would that be with the two TVF schools. Witheridge seemed to be similar situation to that reported of Lapford and East Worlington.

MJ – same principles as outset need to keep being applied, and needs of children – HB appears very successful, Witheridge not and results not consistent. Would look at if setting up Y6 in a different way with Witheridge would be appropriate. If it is not sensible in terms of education of children then would not do it.

TD – was what was needed for drastic improvements at the time. Not something that can make decision about at this time, would be based on needs of children – Burrington wasn't needed for standards point of view, but they are now looking at social days for children so transferring to a big school not so much of a shock.

HD – how long would be given to improve Witheridge before something like that would happen?

TD – difficult to say, about putting in what can now, will be turnaround but can only do what can with history of school teaching and the children – which is where bigger support can come in.

SB – looking at school improvement agenda. Looking at what needing help, support is there in a bigger structure. Emphasising support needed would be agreed with RN, rather than imposed on him.

AW – had asked about what TVF could offer. He felt this could include a balanced budget, very good staff, and lovely children – although like all children they have needs. Lack of aspiration from community around school for the children in some cases.

TD – had aim of changing the ethos – get the children to want to learn, which then changes the parents view.

AW – if decided to go down road of making formal agreement – what help would be able to give in meantime, given timescales before a MAT possible?

MJ – similar with Lapford, immediately started working as if together already – joint school improvement work as if in MAT.

JA – how would joining affect staff terms and conditions?

MJ – move from LA terms and conditions to same terms and conditions with different employer – legally protected; cannot have same job just with different employer and change terms of conditions. No question of ever reducing terms and conditions – they had been really keen not to mess around with that.

HC – does that include new staff?

MJ – yes, changing terms and conditions for new staff (for better or worse) would result in two tier structure.

HD – staff having different areas of expertise (subjects) – how does this work with cross curricular?

TD – work same way as the other schools, in terms of linking things together. Lots of in house training.

JA – another strength of TVF governing body – strong leadership from chair of governors.

SB – making more clear about leadership structure – each primary school has a senior teacher.

TD – which is very good for sharing strengths and improving each other. Very open and shared.

SB – is currently vacancy on board, which they would look to fill from TVF.

TD – to sum up – felt MJ very supportive of the primary schools. Really good to have that strong support and vision around the primary schools.

21.33 – MJ, TD and SB left. MC arrived.

Brief discussion amongst governors

SA – while fresh in head, what are collective thoughts? Before talking to church/moving forward.

AS – would feel very worried about Witheridge in Chulmleigh MAT in terms of year six.

HD – felt that Witheridge would be restructured quite quickly.

RN – giving time scales might get to position that they might not need to consider that.

HD – felt weren't giving impression that they had considered that.

SA – if looking at comparison with first MAT, Chulmleigh have seen results from

Witheridge going into Chulmleigh for several years, so know what is happening there.

SF – would that be a bad thing for the children though?

SW – would it then affect the budget?

AW – it's a MAT, so budget is going to be affected anyway.

BP – had spoken to CAT, they costed out on basis of number children – would get the money for their year sixes, but would then have to pay cost of transporting them. Worried if they would have capacity to do that.

RN – the only school they don't take year six from is the church school – they've not had to face issue of church school in the year six academy before, and how that would work.

JA – would there be an increase in length of school days for those children?

BP – thought adjusted so part of their school day is travelling – might adjust at lunch time?

HD – balance would be changed with TVF joining, secondary heavy at moment, but might become more primary influenced with TVF joining.

SA – TD is incredibly primary focused, but don't know if this is accurate in the whole picture. Worried that if TVF went with another MAT, especially if had a secondary school as part of that MAT within travelling distance, that it might affect how many of their children progressed to Chulmleigh secondary, and issues this might cause them.

SW – did need to think about children now, and parents choices of secondary school.

SA – issue that if Chulmleigh did close, then one less choice for children – did they want it to be removed for children?

HC – not something that can be the only reason for going with them.

JA – felt wanted to go in to schools to see if what they were saying was actually reflected in the schools.

SA/AW/RN to communicate with church – need clarification.

BP – worth getting same governor to go into both Brayford/Umberleigh and some of the CAT schools to compare.

JA to arrange to do this.

8. Matters brought forward by the chair.

None.

Meeting ended 22.14.

Dates of future meetings (and associated portfolio)

16th May 2016 (W) - Learning and Curriculum, Wellbeing and Christian Care

20th June 2016 (HB) - Finance Leadership/management part of SIP. {Use of outside space/environment within school.}

11th July 2016 (W) - Achievement and Standards, SEND, Pupil Premium and overall.