

**St John's C of E Primary School**  
**Governor's Drop-in for Parents**  
**Notes of Meeting**  
**Friday 15 March 2019, 08:50**

**Governors in Attendance**

Imogen Hall, PCC Foundation Governor, Chair of Governors (IH)  
Jaime Goumal, PCC Foundation Governor (JG)  
Christine Richardson, LA Governor (CR)  
Ajanta Kamal, Parent Governor (AR)

Rachel Adams-Constantine, PCC Foundation Governor (note-taker)

**12 parents in attendance**

**Topic: School Finances and SLT Secondment**

The Chair of Governors (IH) welcomed parents to the drop-in and introduced the governors in attendance.

IH then explained that the drop-in would start with an overview of the finances and she would then pass over to Mr Sweetingham to talk through the rationale behind the secondment, offering a Q&A session at the end.

**Finances**

We're sure everyone is now well aware of the national funding crisis within the educational sector. There's something in the media about it on a weekly basis and it was recently debated in Parliament. We want to explain to you the direct impact on our school.

There are three main things to remember:

- 1) The funding our school receives has been static since 2010, which equates to a 8% reduction.
- 2) The funding received per pupil is changing in all schools as a result of the Government introducing the new funding formula (which seeks to redress the balance between London schools and the rest of the country). St John's will be worse off.
- 3) Barnet Council are themselves facing a huge deficit so they are taking back funding that we would otherwise have had. This means that we need to find £8K which they would normally have covered.

The income the school receives has been static but our costs have not. The main cost of running a school is in the staffing budget. The School Teachers Pay and Conditions are set each year by the Government after consultation with unions. Individual teaching and non-teaching salaries rise each year and we have no control over this. On top of salaries, as the employer, we

have to pay NI and pension costs. These also rise each year as the salaries increase. Rightly the Government have agreed to increase pension payments for teachers and award substantial pay rises to non-teaching staff. Although **some** of these increased costs are covered by central government initially, in the three year plan these increases have a large impact on costs.

As we look towards the future, our funding is calculated based on the number of pupils we have on the roll plus additional funding for disadvantaged children and children with special educational needs. We also have reducing numbers of disadvantaged children and reducing numbers of children with special educational needs who qualify for extra funding. Other revenue streams such as sports premium are also being stopped. Furthermore Barnet is predicting a decline in the demand for school places (due to the falling birth date and Brexit encouraging people to leave London) which means that in the long term we do not expect to be over-subscribed and there is no demand for bulge classes (which have been a way schools secure extra funding).

Single-form entry primary schools are some of the worse affected across the country and most of our local neighbouring schools are experiencing similar issues to us (for example, Manorside and Tudor who are already federated are now consulting on amalgamation, even those single-form primaries with money in the bank are experiencing funding issues when they look at the next three years).

Put simply: the funding we receive does not meet the rising costs of running our school. While it is under control this year, next year we will run a deficit and the year after a very large deficit.

Schools are **not allowed** to run a deficit so we have to ask Barnet Council to licence us to do so. If the licence is not agreed there is risk of school closure. We are lucky that we have the support of the LDBS but both Barnet Council and the LDBS have given us a clear message: a school facing an enormous deficit needs to be exploring all possible avenues to generate additional income as well as demonstrating that they have reduce costs where possible. This means being open to opportunities to work with other schools through federating or secondments, letting your building outside of school hours and looking carefully at your staffing structure.

**Q: A parent commented that it had been very compelling listening to IH talk and that the essence doesn't always come across in writing. A 2-3 minute video on the website was suggested as a way of explaining to parents to help them understand better. This was echoed throughout the room.**

**SLT Secondment**

The Chair asked the HT to talk about the secondment.

The HT explained that the secondment has come about through a variety of issues.

Firstly, the successes of the school over the last four years. St John's has developed to be one of the best schools locally and that is why the HT has chosen to move his own children here.

We are a Christian school and have a good relationship with Jayne Pavlou, the school's Primary Advisor from the LDBS. The request for the secondment came from Jayne Pavlou and was supported by Neil Marlow, Barnet's School Improvement Officer. Jayne Pavlou is well aware of our financial situation and that we were open to ideas of how we could collaborate and join in partnerships to hopefully alleviate our financial position.

The other school (SMSJ) will benefit from this secondment and it is also good for the career development of the HT, DHT and leadership team at St Johns. Collaboration between schools is something that is being pushed by both Barnet and the LDBS as the prediction in the education sector is that single-form entry schools will eventually no longer be financially viable.

The decision was made to help another school, provide our leadership with a development opportunity and of course improve our financial situation. The school budget did not balance for 2019/2020 and as a result of the secondment it now does.

The HT clarified that SMSJ will pay the HT salary for four days per week and that he and his team would be working a lot harder.

*Some questions were interjected at this point which the HT and Chair said they would come back to (questions and their answers at bottom of drop-in notes).*

The Chair clarified that pupils were at the forefront of decision making and that the secondment would not have happened if the governing body thought there would be any detriment to any class.

The HT explained further how the secondment would work operationally and that there was an opportunity for the DHT and some of the middle leaders of the school to assist SMSJ and visit the other site from time to time. He would make the decision as to who visits SMSJ during the secondment period.

**Q: A parent commented that the decision was already impacting her child's class because DHT is not teaching there anymore.**

A: The HT replied that the DHT is a subject leader (RE) and that, whilst she may have taught some classes to date, the plan has always been to upskill class teachers to deliver lessons themselves. This was part of the School Improvement Plan and the process has been going for some time. The DHT not delivering RE lessons was not related to the secondment.

**Q: A parent commented that there were 10 man-days in a one week period for two members of staff and ASKED what proportion of man-days would St John's be without their leadership team.**

A: The HT responded that it would be for 40% **maximum** but that it would vary from week to week, with some weeks being very limited.

**Q: A parent wanted to clarify that for four days of the week, the HT will not be at St John's and commented, as a teacher, that she thought it quite rare that both the HT and DHT would be seconded together.**

A: The HT replied that whilst his salary is being paid for four days of the week, he would not necessarily be at SMSJ for four days of the week. It would either be him or the DHT and the time could be variable – up to a maximum of four days per week. The HT commented that he has strong leaders in the school and confident that they would do an amazing job whilst he was offsite. He clarified that there was only one day of the week when it was planned that neither the HT or DHT would be onsite and, on that day, Mrs Stylianou would be in charge of the school as outlined in the parent letter. The Chair added that the LDBS specifically asked St John's to help SMSJ as the HT and DT are such a strong team together and have done such good work at St John's in terms of improving safe-guarding, teaching and learning, and the Christian ethos of the school.

**Q: A parent mentioned that it was a very long letter and that the parents were attending the drop-in to gain greater clarity on the situation. The parent further asked why this meeting was taking place three weeks after the secondment had started. Why weren't the parent body consulted before the agreement reached?**

A: Another parent responded by way of answer (ex-Chair of Governors) that the parent body were extremely fortunate that their governing body was so inclusive and transparent and had informed them at all. As it was a temporary change, the governing body had no statutory duty to inform or consult parents about it and the parents would not necessarily know when the SLT was in school and when they were not on a day to day basis. The governing body had informed parents

because “best practice” and transparency was their mindset and parents should appreciate this.

The Chair added that the letter was long because the Governing Body wanted to provide as much information and reassurance as they possibly could.

**Q: A parent further commented that actually this is a huge change for the school. Could the parents have received a letter to say that this change was being considered? Was it that urgent?**

A: The Chair responded that yes it was urgent. It was a very quick turnaround. Chair reiterated that this was not an easy decision.

**Q: A Parent asked what the other options were.**

A: The Chair responded that we could have said no. In terms of other options there are none on the table at the moment.

**Q: Another parent commented that she trusted the board to have made the right decision for the school. The parent added that it could have been quite disingenuous or more confusing to have sent a letter if in fact we had no other options.**

A: The Chair thanked the parent and invited all parents who wanted to be involved in decisions like this to join the Governing Body. The Governing Body are especially keen to get new volunteers on the Finance sub-committee.

**Q: A parent commented that she felt an air of unhappiness/discontent within the room and asked how many of the parents had written to their MP regarding the finances**

A: It was acknowledged that approximately half of the hands were raised.

**Q: Another parent questioned the purpose of asking this and whether it was to embarrass people in the room. He was there to ask questions as invited to do so by the Governing Body.**

A: The parent who asked the question replied that she was asking the question to gauge how seriously parents were taking the finances of the school which was clearly the main reason behind the secondment.

**Q: A parent indicated he would like to see the minutes of the meeting where the decision was taken to approve the secondment. He asked if the governing body voted on the secondment.**

A: The Chair responded that this was dealt with at a Personnel Committee meeting and then recommended to the FGB. The Chair

clarified that the minutes from previous meetings get approved at the next meeting and then uploaded to the website so it would be a while before minutes are available.

**Q: A parent asked if the full governing body were consulted on this.**

A: The Chair replied that it was agreed in a Personnel Committee and then recommended to the FGB via email given that it was through half term and there was no time to call a physical meeting. The wider governing body were asked to submit any issues or concerns within eight days. Various queries and challenges took place via the FGB, which were addressed. The Chair clarified that appropriate advice had been taken on due process from governance advisors and the LDBS. The Chair further clarified that the arrangement would be continually reviewed and also discussed at their next FGB meeting.

**Q: A parent asked about the impact to children and the impact on NQTs.**

A: The HT replied that that it was his job to develop his staff. Originally it was only DHT mentoring the NQTs but from September, in accordance with the School Improvement Plan, two senior leaders are mentoring the NQTs within their phase. This is not a result of the secondment but good practice for the school and its middle leaders. Should there be any concerns, those concerns would still go to HT as they always would. He still has access to all documentation, emails wherever he is – whether he's at 'home' at St John's, on a conference or at SMSJ.

A Governor mentioned that the TLS committee also visits the school regularly to ensure that what the school say is happening, is actually happening.

A Parent Governor on the Personnel Committee commented that the secondment was heavily debated. She reiterated that it is the job of the governing body to ask questions and challenge. It was debated robustly and people were able to share their thoughts as parents as well as governors.

Another parent in the room also added that you do not need to always agree on things as long as there is a consensus amongst the group.

**Q: A Parent asked if this should have been debated on the FGB.**

A: The HT responded no, the structure of the FGB is that this type of decision is discussed at committee level. Even budgets are discussed at committee level, although committee reports always go back to the FGB for their information and, where appropriate, decision after recommendation by committee.

A parent in the room commented that all governors were volunteers and the parents had to trust the group that had been delegated this task.

The HT commented that there was no secrecy. It was a decision that was difficult to make and ultimately it has balanced the budget for this year. In three weeks' time if this is not working, it will be called off – but then we'd be back in deficit.

The HT noted that he is passionate about his school - and calls this school his home. He feels that everyone (including the Chief Executive of the LDBS) thinks the school can manage this secondment without impacting on the high standards at St John's.

**Q: A parent commented that she was very glad to hear what has been said in this meeting but is asking 'what's next?' What if an offer of secondment comes up again?**

A: The Chair responded that we don't know what's next but that we would not choose to enter into another secondment immediately after this one. If another offer was received, we would have to carefully consider the option at that time, taking on board how the current secondment has worked. The Chair reiterated the school needed to remain open to future partnerships and possibly even a Federation.

**Q: A parent asked what a federation would mean.**

A: Federation involves sharing resources and costs between two schools but remaining as separate entities. You have to find the appropriate school to partner with which is not always easy.

**Q: A parent asked if the children would see the benefit from the money we are saving.**

A: Another parent answered to say that the children would benefit by the school staying open.

The Chair responded that the money feeds directly back into the school and helps us achieve a balanced budget in 2019/2020.

A few parents interjected that even if you are just balancing the books then that is a good thing.

Both the Chair and HT made it clear that St John's was not currently at threat of closure but wanted to be on the front foot by way of planning and doing everything they could to fight the deficit.

One parent commented that she was an HR professional and, just by listening to all that had been said, she could see the biggest impact and

sacrifice will be on the HT and DHT and then the rest of the staff rather than individual parents or children.

The Chair acknowledged this comment and said it had been one of her first concerns when the secondment was raised as an idea. She commented that part of the governing body's job is to ensure the HT and DHT have a good work-life balance.

The HT commented that in a months' time we can review the secondment and will end it if necessary.

**Q: A Parent asked if the school wanted to end the secondment, then what would happen.**

A: The Chair clarified that under our contract with SMSJ we can terminate the secondment if we wish to. HT said we would go into deficit if we did so.

**Q: A parent asked if SMSJ was a big school.**

A: HT responded that it is a big school as it includes a secondary as well as primary.

**Q: A Parent asked if the HT and DHT at SMSJ were leaving?**

A: The HT confirmed that they have left but SMSJ have not yet advertised these positions yet.

**Q: Parents asked how this is effecting the Middle Leaders who are class based.**

A: The HT responded that the he was very confident in the systems in place at school and although you can't account for what pops up day to day, if the HT and DHT happened to be offsite, they would only be a phone call away.

**Q: A parent asked in terms of budget, does this leave us with a surplus?**

A: The Chair replied that this makes us balanced.

**Q: A Parent asked what the average deficit is in Barnet school at the moment.**

A: Another parent (ex Chair of Governors) replied that the LA has not provided this information to schools, despite many schools and governors asking the question. The parent noted that Frith Manor (a three form entry school) had a huge deficit (over £500,000) and as such they are currently in consultation and looking to close one form.

The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking parents for attending and inviting any further questions either in person or via the email:

governors@stjohns20.barnetmail.net

Several of the parents commented how useful the session had been and thanked the Governing Body for their commitment.

**Additional questions received via email:**

**Q Which day each week will Ms Stylianou be in charge?**

At the moment it's planned to be Friday but in reality it's probably going to change each week depending on timetables and what is going on in each school.

**Q As Ms Stylianou is going to be covering some of Mr Sweetingham's time, what teacher will be covering her role in reception in her absence? We are not clear how much time she is already out of the classroom, but we are aware that she is not there at least on Tuesdays and this will mean less time for her in the classroom. We are not sure if she is already covered by TAs or teachers. As a parent of a child in this class, we think this is a very significant year to prepare these very young children for Year 1. So, we are concerned about the impact on them not having a teacher regularly.**

For the duration of the secondment for one day per week Ms Stylianou is responsible for any immediate urgent issues that arise in school. This does not mean that she is out of class, but rather that if there is an emergency she is in control of the school. All teachers have time out of class each week for planning, which is what happens on a Tuesday for Ms Stylianou.

**Q While we recognise the impact of the financial savings as well as the professional development for Mr Sweetingham and Mrs Mitri, we have some reservations surrounding the secondment. I think our main concerns are linked into the work load of the rest of the staff as well as the ability to continue to effectively monitor the provision across the school.**

As a Governing Body one of our primary concerns is the attainment and progress of our children as well as the workload and well being of all the staff. Agreeing to this secondment was done on the basis that we believe we will be able to maintain our high standards (due to our strong team at St John's and the rigorous processes we have in place). However, obviously this is new experience for the school so we will be monitoring how everything works with our Head and Deputy out of the school for part of the week and we have built into the contact with SMSJ that we can end it if we think things aren't working for us. This monitoring includes keeping a close eye on teaching and learning and checking in with the staff.

