



An Daras Trust
Igniting Curiosity Growing Capabilities

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CEO: W. T. Hermon

24/03/2022

Minutes

An Daras Multi-Academy Trust Members

General Meeting

Tuesday 22nd March 2022 at 1.30pm at ADMAT Hybrid at Central Office and via Zoom

1. Welcome and Apologies

Present: Askel Veur (Mark Lees), Eden (Sue Lockwood), Steve Tavener, Chris Marshall, Margaret Young

Apologies: Andrew Terry, Paul O'Brien

In attendance: Will Hermon (CEO), Toni Martin (Governance Officer)

TM noted that MY will be attending but would be a few minutes late. She also noted that AT and PO'B have both sent apologies and notified TM that they will be stepping down from the member position. TM will amend the register when resignations are received.

ST agreed to chair the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest/Pecuniary Interests Relevant to this Agenda

No changes noted to annual declarations and none declared relevant to this agenda.

3. Approve Previous Minutes (5th October 2021)

No actions required. Members agreed the minutes were an accurate reflection of the meeting the ST signed a copy.

4. Confidential Agenda Items

None.

5. Presentation of Accounts

The year-end audited accounts as at 31 Aug 2021 and governance statement were presented to members prior to the meeting and WH gave a brief update on the current budget. [MY joined the meeting]. ML passed on thanks and well done for a successful audit and a good report, the other members agreed.

What does the Board see as the financial risks for the Trust going forward and do you have a plan to address that? The trust ran to budget last year and this year should roughly be the same this year but there are obviously external factors that could affect the budget such as rising energy prices. Bundles of energy were bought previously so the energy costs are fixed in the short term but next year the trust could see a four-fold rise in energy costs.

If the trust is expecting a 4-fold increase in the cost of energy, what % is that and what else will have to give in order to cover that cost? The exact % would need to be calculated but this rise is clearly going to have an impact on how the schools use their funding, unless this increase is met with

additional government funding. Decisions will have to be made nearer the time on what these costs will need to be offset against. It was noted that the trust has a comprehensive risk register and funds from the reserves have previously been ring fenced to mitigate some of the risks; this will continue in future. The Trust Board will look at the risk mitigation for rising energy costs, identifying what these costs will need to be offset against or whether funding from reserves can allocated to this [**Action for summer term FSD/Audit committees**].

The audit report, page 29, shows benchmarking data where the trust figures for reserves and cash balances are much lower than the benchmarked data, why is this? It should be noted that the Trust 2021 data is being benchmarked against other 2020 and 2019 data so its usefulness is questioned. It is also being compared against secondary as well as primary, noting that reserves in secondaries will always be larger as they are larger establishments. This will be taken up with the auditors for future reporting. It was confirmed that the cash forecast is healthy, that sometimes schools have come in without the funding needed to get them to an appropriate place that the trust has had to assist with financially, and the trust only holds an acceptable not excessive level of reserves because it should be spent on the children. **The final report posted on the trust website does not include the auditor's signatures.** This will be rectified. *[Afternote, this has been rectified]*

It was challenged that the copy of the audited accounts on the trust website were not signed on pages 30 and 32 by the external auditor. TM will ensure this is rectified. *[Afternote; the trust website now displays a copy of the accounts signed by the auditors]*. **It is noted that on the annual report the data is RAG rated by school but including the overall MAT picture would also be helpful.** WH agreed to do this for the next report.

6. **An Daras MAT Strategic Update**

WH gave a brief strategic update. He noted that Covid numbers are significantly higher this term than in the Autumn term. While the level of illness is not too severe, it has caused significant disruption for the children's learning, implementation of the curriculum and consistency of staffing. The schools have been kept open but it has at times been a struggle and there is concern for the long term well-being of the staff who are exhausted trying to manage this disruption. The disruption is bound to have an effect on the pupil outcomes but this is hard to compare nationally as there is no national comparison. It was noted that reception level children are generally behind where they should be because they didn't have the same development opportunities due to the knock on effects of covid lockdowns and the like. Performance at SSCA is a risk, not because it isn't a good school with good staff, but due to deprivation and consistency of learning from the impact of covid. **What is the trust and board doing to support SSCA?** Additional school improvement support, child protection support and families support among other things have been allocated to SSCA. Some of the issues that need resolving can only be done if the children have time back in school to ensure consistency of learning.

It was noted Coads Green is looking more positive in terms of their performance and therefore preparation for Ofsted. Discussion about forthcoming Ofsted and SIAMS inspections took place. **Considering the well-being of Heads and staff, and all the issues related to covid and absence, and the work required on school improvement, what is the board doing to support the heads and staff?** The staff well-being charter considers mental health and well-being alongside email protocols, reduced assessment points, reduced reporting, flexible working, school dogs (for child and staff well-being) and a number of other mechanisms to reduce work for staff are in place and constantly reviewed. However, there are pressures from the government, Ofsted, auditors and other organisations that make implementing these well-being measures more difficult than we would like in reality. The Trust is not using the new DfE reduction in workload toolkit as it is lengthy and unwieldy but much has been taken from it.

The members enquired as to the forthcoming numbers on roll. WH noted that SC, SSCA and Wer are full but WHA, NP and PT have spaces. CG and LT also have pupil spaces but both schools have enough pupils on roll that their existing staffing/class structure can be maintained into the next academic year.

How are you enabling the schools, in particular the church schools, to flourish in their Christian ethos? WH and MY discussed this in detail, including preparation for SIAMS. SL noted the positive relationship between the school leaders and the diocese.

Noting that the forthcoming white paper will likely require more schools to join multi-academy trusts, what is the Trust Boards position on growth of the trust? It was noted that the Trust has always been about 'primary education' to meet 'local needs' and not about expanding (including geographically) for expansions sake. The Boards most recent review of the trust growth plan agreed that the focus should be on quality not quantity. If the trust is to take on more schools, it needs to work geographically and the trust needs to ensure it has the capacity to help new schools while keeping acceptable performance at the current schools and not diluting everything too much. It also needs to consider the well-being and workload of the current staff to cope with assisting new schools. There are currently no plans to expand the trust with new schools. **Have you also thought about the merging of trusts?** The trust's position is that if the trust can manage and make what we have work both for the children and financially, then there is no need to merge.

7. New Members

Andrew Terry and Paul O'Brien have notified that they will be stepping down as Members. TM asked the current members to keep a look out for potential new members and some potential options were discussed.

TM noted that although 5 members are sufficient to cope with the demands of the member role, the trust articles state that no more than 25% of the members can be foundation/church members (the Diocese) and so in reality the trust needs to have 8 members. With 2 stepping down, 3 new members will need to be found.

It was also noted that Eden's foundation director is not staying on past his end of term in July and a new foundation director is required. It was also noted that there is still a vacancy for foundation director appointed by Askel Veur.

8. Any other Business

It was planned to do members visits to schools but as the covid situation has been worse this term than last term, it hasn't felt appropriate to add to the Head's workload with visits just yet. This will be arranged in future, perhaps when there are new members to host.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The Annual General Meeting is planned for October as usual. The date will be confirmed next term when the Trust annual meeting cycle is put together.

SL expressed thanks to the Heads, staff, directors and governors for their hard work ensuring the trust is functioning well and the children are being well provided for. The remaining members agreed.

The meeting closed at 2.35pm.

ADMAT Governance Officer

Distribution List:

P. O'Brien – Member

M. Young – Member

A. Terry – Member

C. Marshall - Member

Eden Member (represented by Sue Lockwood)

Askel Veur Member (represented by Mark Lees)

S. Tavener – Chair Board of Directors & Member

W. Hermon – CEO Director