

**St James and Emmanuel MAT
Core Group Remote meeting
Monday 11th January 2021 at 9:30am
Minutes**

Present

Simon Ball	Head of School – DCE
Paul Blackburn	Chair - WDCE Governors
Andrew Bradley	Chair of Governors – St. Wilfrids
Bev Burrows	Headteacher– St. Elisabeths
Paul Good	Chair – Trust & DCE (MDBE)
Lee Jamieson	Chair - St. Elisabeth's Governors
Hannah Large	Head of School - WDCE
Helena Miller	Head of School – St. Wilfrids
Matt Whitehead	Executive Headteacher

In attendance

Kathy Crotty	Clerk
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1. Welcome and Introductions

Paul Good thanked all participants for attending the meeting.

2. Minutes of the last meeting 5th January 2021

It was agreed to defer approval to next meeting.

3. Executive Headteacher Update

The Executive Headteacher gave formal thanks to all Heads for the immense amount of work needed given the late advice from the Education Minister to only open schools for key workers. MW highlighted five key issues for schools during this latest lockdown

- i) Three of the schools run nurseries, and these are expected to open fully. There is contradictory advice and this is proving to be divisive as if they were full this could put a huge pressure on staff keeping a safe environment. It was agreed nursery classes should be subject to the same principles as the rest of the school so the Trust has kept a reduction in all three schools. This might affect funding in the future.
- ii) MCC (Manchester City Council) have provided strong guidance on Friday afternoon and this is different guidance to Stockport MBC.

- iii) Critical worker and vulnerable workers children have been offered a place subject to capacity. There is a different number in each school and there is no limit for these pupils. Government advice is schools should not limit attendance. MCC have accepted this as only guidance and acknowledge the definition is open, they have advised schools to stay with own risk assessments. There are currently between 25% and 35% in attendance at our Trust schools. SB reported on Friday the DfE has sent simplified advice, there is more emphasis on critical workers staying at home if possible. The messages for parents are unclear. Pressure for parents to make the decision. The engagement in most schools of children in home learning is good. This remains a crucial issue that no child is left behind.
- iv) Schools are responding to many parents who want a place as they view their role as critical.
- v) There is the potential for the children of some families who are on the cusp of vulnerability become more vulnerable as lockdown continues. The vulnerable numbers may increase and there is an issue of monitoring this. Encompass will help but engagement with children is key to observe vulnerabilities.

The MCC guidance was useful and clear and this was welcomed by Trust leaders. It was suggested a definition of a critical worker might be if you are entitled to get a vaccine in the early allocations. Staffing is an issue especially if the lockdown is not effective and the NW infection rates rise further.

The Trust is only accepting the children of double or single parent key workers and this is keeping the numbers in school low. There are companies providing evidence they are critical workers and requiring parents to work and this is increasing numbers. This presents problems for school leadership. There are allegations of fake evidence and this cannot be policed by schools. The pressure for places can be divisive among the parents. Schools with mixed year groups can be flexible about where a place is offered.

It was clarified there is unlikely to be the opportunity to use supply because if staff are isolating the bubble is likely to isolate.

The virus could further mutate, this might impact differently on younger people and this message is missing. There is a growing shortage of intensive care beds and this message is not being shared effectively to the community.

4. Update from School Heads

DCE

- SB reported the nursery has eight children out of 26. There were 12 places allocated to nursery children. Of 74 places allocated there are only 50 children in the school. Parents have been asked to only take the place on days when really needed.
- In relation to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers there are difficulties in allocating places. Children aged 5 to 15 year olds are not tending to end up in hospital, the issue is children being vectors between home and school so the two-meter distancing is being strictly adhered to, wherever possible. There is approximately 6/7 children per class and this is expected to rise. Yr3 might be an issue.
- Vulnerable children with an EHC plan or a social worker are allocated a place along with looked after children who are adopted. These children have only been offered a

place if the school identifies these children as vulnerable. Some parents are disappointed to be not offered a place.

- Staffing issues: The teachers are not classed based. The TAs and Learning Assistants are in school and the teachers are working from home providing remote learning. The learning is good quality using Google Classroom. There is a check-in with the children in the morning for 20 minutes, this live engagement is well received. The in-school teaching is being provided by TAs. This arrangement provides protection for the teachers. The children in school are receiving the same home learning supervised by TAs. Some teachers come into the classroom on a rota basis to support the TAs and children in the school.
- Home learning: The children enjoy the extended register in the morning. KS2 are expected to be having four hours of home learning but the school is not putting pressure on parents or children. Staff have been asked to provide what is realistic noting every family's situation is different. Parents and teachers are 'at home in a crisis trying to work from home'.

SWCE

- HM reported 15 is the highest number of children in the nursery out of 39. One staff member is more anxious and is working from home on the day with the most children (Wednesdays). Today there were 14 children in the nursery. The nursery allocation of places is the most contentious. There are 92 children in the school today.
- The challenges to the definition of critical workers are now settling down. The community of SWCE is very different. Some vulnerable children are not in school and the school is working with the families to offer a place. The school is worried about two families. The children with an EHC plan are all in school.
- Office staff and the caretaker have tested positive and this is being covered. There is one staff member in isolation due to a family member testing positive. This school does not have a TA in each class so the teacher in some classes has to cater for children doing home learning and class-based learning. The school has been adaptable with childcare issues for staff. One staff member is allowed to work from home some days as her child's nursery is not offering a place.
- Teachers are recording closely the engagement and there is a morning and afternoon meeting with all children. The engagement currently is good, the nursery engagement is different. There are pre-recorded lessons for EYFS children. The home learning is going well, the lessons are not live but twice a day staff check-in to allow for interaction with the class. On a Friday afternoon there can still be a gold award and celebration. Those not engaging are being phoned.

SECE

- Only four children need a nursery place given the requirement for two working parents to be critical workers. Most children who have critical worker parents are in school. The EHC plan children can have their needs met at home.
- Seesaw is working today; the teachers are online in the morning setting the children off with their work. Accessing online learning is an issue. The school has six laptops and 25 were promised. The school has bought 15 Kindle Fires using the catch-up funding, and the has prioritised Yr2 and Yr6. The child & family support worker is providing packs of learning for some families. Parentmail has been used to keep parents up to date on device allocation. The timetable shared specifies at least three hours of work each day.

- Staffing: Each class has a teacher and a TA. Individual risk assessments are being reviewed for over staff aged over 60 and pregnant staff. There are some issues where staff do not want to work in the school building and the school is working hard to ensure all procedures are followed. There is a supply teacher to cover PPA as a Yr2 teacher is not in school.
- The Google Classroom check-in will be explored for this school. There is an issue of FSM allocation for 75 families. There will be weekly food packs which will have to be collected from school.

WDCE

- There is no nursery at WDCE. There are 64 children in school today, offering 15 places per year group which is 82 places. This means the vulnerable children who the school considers vulnerable can be offered a place on some days. HL feels there is capacity to offer places for families with only one parent who is a critical worker. The fifteen places are a limit not a target.
- The school is requiring three submissions of work each day and this is being tracked closely. There is a concern about vulnerable families not engaging and these families are the focus this week.
- The cleaning staff are now back in school after isolating. A Yr4 teacher has tested positive and a TA is now also isolating after not following distancing rules. There is an NQT running the in-house learning and providing this online, if teachers are ill this is an issue but the online learning can be provided by another teacher, although this adds to the pressure. All staff are required to be distanced even if the child has an EHC plan, this is the current situation. It was noted this was a fragile situation which can easily collapse if the risk assessment is not followed.
- Home learning is not live. The staff are positive and the feedback from parents is good. There is still innovative teaching but the school is reluctant to provide live work and parents do not want this as they are juggling the children's lessons with their own working from home. The school does not want to put pressure on families in relation to home learning.

4. Free School Meals

The Executive headteacher reported there are no vouchers this time, schools are expected to organise FSMs. The meals providers will make up packed lunches for children who are not on site. These will have to be collected from school. The Government intention might have been for FSM children to be in school but in some Manchester schools that would be 90%. Totally Local in Stockport will produce a box with five days' worth of food.

Parents of FSM families need to be informed. SECE has only had six families (14 children) out of 70 who want this box of food. The packs essentially provide for a sandwich lunch.

5. Questions

Q: Is catch-up learning still being provided?

In WDCE the interventions are still being addressed. Staff are still providing the extra work for some children, remotely.

In DCE the person offering catch-up is a TA and she is now an extra person in the school delivery of CW/V child provision therefore catch-up is not being currently being provided.

In SWCE catch-up learning is not being provided as this was being provided by staff who are now not available due to supporting CW/V children, but there are additional materials for some children.

In SECE the school bought into a scheme which will be continued. Logins have been sent home and there is an attempt to continue to implement this as £15,000 has been spent on this scheme. Phonics interventions have worked well. This is evolving.

Q: Are the schools going to be open over half term?

MW thinks there will be an expectation schools are open for key workers as the NHS staff will still need childcare. It was noted rates are now dropping in London but in Manchester this has levelled off. The schools have the priority of protecting staff from the virus. Childcare bubbles are still allowed under the current guidelines. The Trust would support opening the schools for NHS staff.

The chair reported the strategy of keeping numbers low by only admitting children of critical workers is the correct strategy to keep the infection rates low in the community and among the Trust staff. The home learning is proving attractive to the children and this was commended by the Chairs of the GBs. The engagement with teachers is still occurring and this is positive. It was noted the inadequate information management by the Government is now leading to other problems such as divisive and contradictory interpretation. There is understandable concern from trade unions and increasing anxiety amongst staff.

The Chair and Executive Head requested Heads of School keep their reports in the next cycle of Governor meetings brief and not spend time in preparing detailed written reports. This is essential so that they can focus on the immediate need to manage the daily challenges they face.

The Chairs of Governors extended their thanks to the Executive Head, Heads of School and leadership teams for their hard work and understanding during this difficult and changing phase of the Pandemic

6. Date of next meeting

It was agreed the Core Group can reconvene sooner than this date if there is a need.

- Monday 25th January 2021 at 9.30am.

The meeting ended at 10:55