



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Malmesbury
Minutes of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) Parent Meeting
Held on Thursday July 13th 2023 @ 6.30pm

IEB Members Present: Kirsty Martin (Chair) Gabiella Tiley (Vice Chair) Kevin Burchall Jessica Higgins Apologies: Simon Watkins	Other Panellists: Sue Woods (Headteacher) Andrew Best (Head of School Effectiveness, Wiltshire Council) Additional officials in attendance: Mary Cox (Director of Schools & Colleges, Clifton Diocese) Richard Hanks (Co-Director for Education & Skills, Wiltshire Council) Note Taker: Claire Brown
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Introductions and Welcome

Mrs Woods welcomed attendees to the meeting and thanked everyone for giving up their time to attend after what has been a very busy year.

She invited Andrew Best (AB) from Wiltshire Council to run through some key facts surrounding the Interim Executive Board (IEB).

AB explained the local authority (LA) can propose an IEB is established to the regional director Hannah Woodhouse (HW) at any time where there are concerns within an individual school. AB explained the process would include a consultation with governors resulting in an evidenced proposal to the Regional Director who would then decide on the way forward and appoint an IEB if she felt it was appropriate to do so.

A question was raised asking for an explanation of 'What is an IEB'. AB explained that it was an interim form of governance, in the context of a single school, and IEB members are chosen based on their experience and skill set.

AB went on to add that it had been a very tough time for the school and the community and that it was very important for the IEB to work closely with the parents, school, and the diocese. AB confirmed that KM, chair of the IEB, had met with the outgoing chair.

A question was raised asking how the school had got to the point of needing IEB intervention? AB responded by saying there had been a breakdown of relationships at a corporate level.

AB introduced KM.



KM asked that there be no recording of the meeting as minutes would be shared publicly. KM also asked that the meeting was respectful to all parties and that names of those asking questions would not be included in the minutes.

KM said that she was impressed with the school so far:

- It's a lovely site, even if parking is a challenge.
- Has met several of the staff all of whom are very supportive and have made her feel at home.

KM emphasised the school was very important to the community and welcomed Father Thomas and other members of the parish to the meeting. KM said the most important thing of all is the children, and it had been lovely to see them enjoying their school play earlier in the week. She reminded everyone the focus needs to be the children and what is best for them.

KM explained the IEB had held its first meeting last week over Teams. The board is fully aware of the difficulties to date and wants to focus on looking forwards not backwards. Although members need to understand the context of the past, tonight's meeting was about the future work of the board.

IEB members briefly introduced themselves:

Kirsty Martin (KM) - from Chippenham and is currently a National Leader of Governance, chair of governors at Hardenhuish Secondary School, and a governor at St Paul's Primary School both in Chippenham.

Gabriella Tiley (GT) comes from Gloucestershire and is a foundation governor at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Nympsfield and will focus on Health & Safety, and attendance.

Jessica Higgins (JH) – is chair of governors at St Joseph's Catholic College in Swindon. Her focus will be on Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Whistleblowing.

Kevin Burchall (KB) - is vice-chair of governors at St Joseph's Catholic College in Swindon. His focus will be Finance.

Simon Watkins (SW) - who couldn't be present at the meeting is an experienced school governor who has previously been part of an IEB. He is Regional School Improvement and Excellence for Wiltshire Council in the west of the county. He will focus on education.

KM highlighted the 'Good' Ofsted report in March 2023. She explained it was conducted by independent inspectors who did not know the school or headteacher and was an achievement to be celebrated. She thanked everyone who had worked hard to get such a positive outcome.



KM said it is not yet clear how long the IEB will be in place. She explained the key difference between the IEB, and the previous board is that IEB members are all starting with fresh eyes with no previous connection to either the school or the town and this should bring a clarity of leadership which has been eroded by the very public tensions.

KM said the key question for those in the room was 'Do you want the school to exist?' Those present acknowledged they did. KM stated it was therefore essential to resolve the tensions in private and stop the public damage. KM said it was also important to protect the staff living locally who were suffering due to the very public noise and negativity.

KM confirmed the school has a healthy budget with an unusually high roll-over which should help weather the storm. The school is not in financial difficulties but recruitment is key as it is important to keep numbers up. She understands that some children who are happy and doing well and had good friends were leaving and this was unfortunate. She said it was unusual for there to be a high turnover of children following a 'Good' Ofsted and re-iterated the importance of stopping damage by social media. The board needs to support the staff and get the numbers back up with the support of the community. KM said the community must trust the IEB to do its job. Communication is key and the IEB has significant experience in communications.

KM said the board had approved a code of conduct. This is on the school website and spells out how the board will carry out its duties highlighting priorities and governance functions and how they interact with the strong Catholic values of the school. The board would abide by the Nolan Principles and use the Ethical Framework for Education. She also confirmed the terms of reference for the IEB could also be found on the website and that engagement with the parents will be key.

KM said she wanted to address one of the claims via social media about the high staff turnover. She said she had reviewed the staff exit surveys and whilst there have been 21 leavers since the headteacher was appointed in 2019, which looks high, half of these were post pandemic leaving in 2020/21 when many people re-evaluated their work priorities. She gave examples of some of the leavers, a TA who joined during COVID felt so supported she left to train as a teacher, another left after maternity, two retired, one emigrated, one joined the LA, another left to run a business. Three cited the school as the reason. KM went on to say she fully conceded that exit surveys do not always tell the whole story but it was apparent 21 had not left because they were unhappy. This was challenged by a former governor, who cited that there was a governor summary, which KM confirmed she had seen. She had compared the former governor and school versions and noted there were some anomalies which is why she had agreed the figure was higher than the school version.

The following questions were raised:



Question: You are all very busy with other roles, how will you balance priorities to ensure St Joseph's receives the attention it needs?

Answer: KM explained she was semi-retired and was able to flex her hours as needed.

Hardenhuish had a large well-established board where good delegation was in place and multiple committees were managed by experienced governors. KM also said her role at St Paul's was less demanding as she was not the chair.

GT explained she was co-chair of governors within a small school where the governing board is well-established. GT also explained she had a family with four children who were all independent. GT also said that she was in between jobs, and it was a privilege to be able to help support another Catholic school.

JH confirmed she was very keen to help Catholic education and would not have volunteered for the IEB if she didn't have the capacity to make a difference.

KB echoed JH's comments and said he was passionate about Catholic education and that, along with other governors, he was determined to help the school.

Question: You talk about the viability being based on recruiting children, a question was posed to the headteacher about what was the turnover percentage and how does this compare to other schools in the area?

Answer: KM responded as the meeting was about the work of the board. She said the school was losing a large Y6 and the birth rate has fallen in many areas locally affecting numbers. KM explained, based on her experience in Chippenham, that a lot of schools have capacity but agreed four was too low. Some of the parents strongly disagreed that it was due to the birth rate and said other schools locally were all full. They said the school was also losing pupils in the middle year groups decimating friendships. KM pointed out that there had been a noticeable number of pupils being removed since the governors resigned and the ensuing media attention. It was also pointed out by one of the attendees there had been a net outflow year on year over the last four years. GT suggested that further analysis was needed.

One parent said they were non-Catholic and had moved their child from a large primary school to St Joseph's and their child had thrived in this environment. They explained that staff turnover in the larger school was much higher with less direct support for their child. They said they were not aware that non-Catholic children were accepted into the school and more should be done to highlight this as part of any recruitment campaign.

Father Thomas said he and the church provide strong pastoral support to the school and he is extremely supportive of the school. He said he was concerned about the health and wellbeing of everyone, and it was therefore important we all work together. Father Thomas said we need to trust the IEB to do its job and he expects members to be honest. KM agreed whole heartedly with



Father Thomas, and also agreed it needed to be made clear that everyone is welcome at the school.

Question: A letter has been sent to the school this week for which no response has been received.

Answer: KM said she would look into this and respond privately.

Question: The governors have all resigned so what are you doing to address the challenges that existed?

Answer: KM explained that a draft scheme of delegation had been created which will demonstrate clear roles and responsibilities and will be used by the IEB to set strategic priorities, monitor, and challenge. It will also be used to hold the headteacher accountable.

Question: The parent thanked the IEB for their intervention and asked what the parents can do to support and help the school to grow?

Answer: KM asked for any ideas to be emailed to her (kirstymartin@st-josephs-malmsbury.wilts.sch.uk). KM re-iterated that there will be plenty of parental engagement going forward and she is happy to chat with anyone.

Question: A question was asked about a safeguarding matter.

Answer: KM said this question was not appropriate for this evening and a discussion should take place outside the meeting.

JH pointed out that tensions in the room were high and there is a strong concern over the wellbeing of everyone. Everyone needs to be open to form new relationships, old issues need to be considered, but should not be the centre of the discussions. Attendees in the room said governors had wanted the school to thrive but were constantly blocked. KM reiterated that relationships need to be re-built.

Question: When will we see a plan on how to transition to the new team?

Answer: GT explained the new team had only been formed a week ago so the room needed to bear with them and confirmed work will continue over the summer.

Question: Staff wellbeing is key and needs to be on everyone's radar and dealt with appropriately.

Answer: KM responded by saying any concerns would be investigated and dealt with properly. She said she was worried about the stress that staff are under due to the criticism of the school online. The board will ensure that staff are looked after.

Question: When a new board is created, does it have to have parent governors?

Answer: GT confirmed the schools instrument of government, which includes parent governors will be reintroduced at the appropriate time. KM said parent governors were important as they



represented the voice of a typical parent, and they gave an insight other governors might not have. However, they perform the same function as any other governor. She always encouraged parents wanting to stand for election to contact her first so she could make sure they understood that they were not there to represent the body of parents or the interests of their own children.

Question: Following the IEB, the guidelines state that schools will need to join a MAT, is this the case?

Answer: KM said this was not always the case unless the school was underperforming. This response was challenged. AB explained that a conversation about suitability for a MAT would normally take place with the Regional Director, but it is acceptable for the recommendation to be that a MAT would not be appropriate. GT explained the Bishop's vision to secure Catholic Education in the Diocese is for schools to join together to form MATs but that, unlike other bishops, he is giving governing boards the freedom to choose. There are discussions already going on at Partnership level across the Diocese. JH confirmed that this was happening in the Samuel Partnership as this may be a good option to secure Catholic education for children.

Question: A comment was made about the teaching of a subject.

Answer: KM confirmed that Simon Watkins would be monitoring this through his role on the IEB.

Question: When is the next public meeting going to happen?

Answer: KM confirmed this will take place in the autumn and that work will continue over the summer.

KM closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their time and questions. KM confirmed this is a good school, it has problems, every school does, but she asked parents to talk to the board and work with the board.

The meeting closed at 7.35pm with a round of applause.

Afterwards, parents were invited to chat individually with board members. It was noted that many were positive about the school and some offered to work with the board.