**Minutes of the meeting of the Members of the Academy Trust**

**Wednesday 8th July 2015 at 9.30 a.m.**

**Debenham High School**

Present: Rt Rev Martin Seeley Chairman

Mr R Boulter

Mr D Carruthers Chairman of Governors

Mr R Grimsey

Mr N Serjeant

In attendance: Miss J Upton Headteacher

Mr S Wright Clerk to the Governors

1. **Apologies for absence.**

These were received from Mrs J Brown. Mr Serjeant left the meeting at 10.24 a.m.

1. **Minutes of the meetings held on Tuesday 8th July 2014 and Tuesday 3rd February 2015.**

The minutes of the meeting of Tuesday 8th July 2014 were received and approved as were those of Tuesday 3rd February 2015.

1. **Matters arising from the Minutes.**

Tuesday 8th July 2014

Item 3 – Mr Grimsey asked if ownership of the land on which DHS stood had been transferred from the LA to the Diocese. Mr Boulter said that it had not and the matter was in the hands of the Diocesan legal team. Miss Upton will chase.

**Action Miss Upton**

Item 9 – Mr Boulter noted that, as Mr Serjeant’s term of office was due to end in December 2016, it was important to ask if he wished to continue as a Trust Member because, if not, the process of appointing a replacement would need to be put in train. Mr Serjeant confirmed that he was prepared to continue.

1. **Report from Chairman of Governors to Members of the Trust.**

Results

These had been very good with 70% of GCSE candidates at DHS gaining 5 A\* - C grades (Including English and Maths) with 83% gaining 5 A\* - C grades (excluding English and Maths). 37% of candidates gained the English Baccalaureate (note the DHS policy of entry which does not insist on students taking E-Bacc qualifying subjects) and 32% of results were at A or A\* level. A comparison with previous years’ performance was difficult because of changes to the curriculum and to grade boundaries. RAISEonline data that had been presented to the Curriculum Working Group (CWG) showed positive outcomes with the Value Added (VA) performance for the average of the eight best subjects taken by candidates showing a strong figure of 1019 (against a base national average of 1000). This was perhaps the most important measure for Governors and placed DHS amongst the top 25% schools nationally, with outcomes in English, Maths and Science being particularly strong. The gap in performance between those students receiving Free School Meals (FSM) and other students was closing with FSM attainment being above the national average. The Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) had recognised DHS as being in the top 10% of academies in the country in terms of GCSE results. The Sunday Times Parent Power survey placed DHS as 23 in the top 50 of those schools without Sixth Forms.

Attendance

At 96% this is very good and reflects the fact that students want to be at DHS. Miss Upton indicated that when individual attendance falls below 95% then contact is then made with parents.

Behaviour

DHS has a calm and productive atmosphere and there was a positive trend in terms of disciplinary issues; external inclusions, internal exclusions and referrals for poor behaviour are all significantly reduced – Miss Upton pointed out the tight parameters for standards of behaviour expected in the school. Mr Carruthers noted that there had been a 62% reduction in low level disruption since Miss Upton’s appointment.

Teaching Staff

Though there was a steady turnover of staff, it was the case that staff enjoy teaching at DHS and, whilst experienced teachers tended to be a little more expensive, the benefits outweigh the increased costs that this brings. Mr Carruthers gave examples of the calibre of new staff who had been appointed and details of some significant departures. He also made positive reference to support staff, to Graduate Interns and Trainee Teachers. Miss Upton added that there were changes taking place in the examination administration and pastoral support teams.

Infrastructure

The new heating system should be ready for the winter months (most of the pipe work has been completed) and much progress is expected in the summer holidays. The appeal on the failed bid for roof replacement had been successful (£320k) though the bid for new classrooms was not. Issues with respect to the re-positioning of the PV panels had been resolved with 40% of the feed-in tariff going to the school.

Miscellaneous issues

* The leadership of David Yaroslaw in the RE Department had led to the award of an RE Quality Mark recognising the sharing of expertise in contact with other schools.
* HMI had visited to undertake a case study of DHS’ record of success in the attainment levels of disadvantaged students (one of 11 schools nationally chosen for this exercise). The feedback had been very positive.
* Miss Upton noted that Ofsted had not visited since 2008 – a mark of the school’s continued success.
* The School Improvement Partner (Kevin Haddock) had sadly passed away. He has been replaced by Sean O’Neill (ex Head of Bungay High School).

1. **Changes in Governors/Directors.**

Mr Carruthers reviewed the structure of the Governing Body and noted that all governance positions were filled. There had been several changes over the year:

Mr Hilary Marlow had moved to be a Foundation Governor.

Mr Ronnie Barker and Mrs Caroline Driver had joined the board as Parent Governors.

Ms Jo Newman had joined the board as a Teaching Staff Governor.

Mrs Emma Wnukoski had joined the board as a Support Staff Governor.

Mr Tim Green had joined the board as a Co-opted Governor.

Mr David Ralph and Dr David Egan had been re-elected as Parent and Co-opted Governor respectively..

Mr Boulter had joined the Academy Trust.

A skills matrix for Governors had been developed to assess the board’s strengths and weaknesses, to assign gubernatorial responsibilities and to determine training needs.

1. **Finance.**

The financial situation remains tight with a continued reduction in funding – while per pupil funding remains constant, increased costs mean a real-term reduction. DHS was fortunate in that it had prepared for this situation over a number of years and had significant reserves but costs – particular those relating to National Insurance and Pensions – continued to increase. As a consequence DHS had set a deficit budget for the next financial year of £48k (reduced from an initial projected deficit of £117k after a comprehensive cost-cutting exercise). Such a situation would not be sustainable, particularly as the Education Services Grant (ESG) might be discontinued and given that the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) had been cut from £140k to £57k. It was likely that there would need to be adjustments to both staffing and to the curriculum in the light of this - an uncomfortable situation for both teaching and support staff. The situation for DHS has been exacerbated by it employing a number of long-serving staff. Lobbying was being undertaken but the message from Regional Schools Commissioner was that schools would have ‘to do things differently’. It was noted that Suffolk as a local authority was disadvantaged significantly in its funding in comparison to those based in a more urban setting; the promised levelling had yet to occur.

Bishop Martin asked if other schools were in a similar situation – this was confirmed. He also ascertained that the Academy Trust held no financial liability for the school – this was held by the school governors.

1. **Admissions.**

The school was heavily over-subscribed. Though the Planned Admissions Number (PAN) stands at 125, DHS has admitted 130 in Year 7 (historically following unsuccessful appeals). Following an EGM in May Governors had agreed that DHS should admit more than 130 students for entry into Year 7 in September 2015, partially to alleviate financial pressures; current applications suggested that there were likely to be 140 students in this year group. The EGM had also agreed that other year groups could recruit up to 135. At the time of the meeting numbers for the next academic year stood at:

Year 7 140 (4 on waiting list)

Year 8 135

Year 9 134

Year 10 135

Year 11 128 (including 1 Looked After Child to be admitted over PAN)

Bishop Martin asked if the funding arrangements outlined in Item 6 took the increased numbers into account. This was the case with modelling for future years also being based on these figures. Miss Upton pointed out that the increased size of the school could work against the ethos of DHS and that it would not, in itself, solve the financial problems. Staff had been briefed on this.

In a more positive vein DHS remains a very popular choice for Year 6 transfer – for example, 135 Year 5 pupils recently attended a science enrichment day.

Mr Grimsey asked if numbers in the feeder primary schools were still strong; Miss Upton felt that they tended to fluctuate due to population demographics so it was difficult to say. Mr Carruthers pointed out the school reorganisation in Suffolk was coming into effect in the coming year and that this might impact on recruitment.

1. **Head's Report to Governors.**

Miss Upton said that much of that which she wished to report had already been covered but highlighted two points**:**

* Raw attainment outcomes for the current GCSE cohort were not expected to be as good as last year (due to a lower prior ability profile) and that 65% of students gaining 5 A\*-C grades (including English and Maths) would be a pleasing outcome. Progress measures, however, look very positive.
* Whilst recruitment of staff remained strong given general difficulties on this front in East Anglia, field were thinner than previously – witness a recent English post where no appointment was made. Mr Grimsey wondered whether this was due to property prices but Miss Upton felt it was more likely to be due to the rural nature of DHS, the absence of a Sixth Form and a pending recruitment crisis in East Anglia. It was noted that *Teach First* was now working in Suffolk, including in deprived coastal communities.

Miss Upton then looked at the challenges facing DHS in the future. These included:

* Finance – see above
* Changes to GCSE – these are being staged over the next two years
* E-Bacc – this was to be reintroduced in a modified form. It was again noted that this was only encouraged for those DHS students for whom the E-Bacc was felt to be appropriate.
* Collaboration – it was increasingly the case that an outstanding school such as DHS was expected to work with other schools – possibly through federation or sponsorship, the creation of a common governing body or through substantial outreach work. This could be vertical or horizontal and with a school that is similar to DHS or with one that is different in nature. Mr Grimsey asked if a previous link with Mildenhall College Academy was still being maintained but this had lapsed some time ago. Bishop Martin was keen to support a relationship with another church school. The Seckford Foundation and Stradbroke High School were suggested as other possible partners.

1. **Any other business.**

There was no other business.

1. **Dates of next meetings.**

These were provisionally set as Tuesday 2nd February 2016 at 4.30 p.m. (AGM) and Wednesday 6th July 2016 at 9.30 a.m.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 11.05 a.m.

Signed: …………………………………………………………………………….. Date: 6th July 2016