



# Ripon Grammar School Governors

Full Governing Board Meeting

11 December 2024

By MS Teams

17.30h

## MINUTES

**Present:** Governors : Matthew Bean (MB), Vikki Baton-Brown (VBB), Tom Cavell-Taylor (TCT), Ian Charlton (IC), Elizabeth Jarvis (EJ) – Chair of Governors, Siny Jayan (SJ), Adele Laurie-Wilson (ALW), Eric Medway (ERM) – Vice-Chair of Governors, Robert O’Hare (ROH), Victoria Pang (VP), Josh Stott (JS), Amy Tweddle-Bray (ATB), Jonathan Webb (JMW) - Headmaster, Dave Winspear (DW) Clerk and Director of Strategic Operations : Graham Livesey (GL)

### Introductory Business

**1 Apologies :** The apology of Jayne Dale due to a prior work commitment was accepted.

### **2 Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

### **3 Chair’s Opening Remarks**

The Vice-Chair, Eric Medway, explained that because of an unexpected and unavoidable work commitment, the Chair would be able to join the meeting only towards the end. In accordance with Standing Order 2 he would chair this meeting.

### **4 Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2024**

These had been circulated in advance. ALW proposed and IC seconded that they be accepted as a true record. This was agreed unanimously and the minutes signed.

### **5 Matters Arising**

A date for a panel of governors to meet parents of Year 9 students had not yet been fixed, but will be soon **after** GCSE choices have been made. EJ

Also, a suitable date towards the end of the Spring Term would be found for a panel of governors to meet Year 13 students. EJ

### **6 Governor Vacancies**

The recent election of Jayne Dale by parents was announced and she had agreed to fill the vacancy on the EDC Committee.

The three vacancies for co-opted governors remain unfilled. Candidates with suitable skills, experience and commitment would be sought.

### **7 Governor Committee Membership**

Governors’ attention was drawn to a number of vacancies and governors were urged to consider whether they might take on an additional role:

- Boarding Committee
- Governor for Child Protection and Safeguarding – DW agreed to do this in addition to being the Governor for Health & Safety.
- Governor for Inclusion (who should also join the Curriculum Committee)
- Governor for Staff Welfare

## Principal Business

### **8 Headmaster's Report**

The slide presentation had been circulated in advance and the Headmaster elaborated significant matters.

#### **a) Current Roll and Admissions**

Compared with this point last year, the school roll has increased by 21. We are tracking applications for 2025 entry each week. Sixth Form applications at this stage are roughly the same – and there is always a rush in January. We had record numbers at the sixth form information evening. We shall gain 2 boarders from the recent in-year testing. NY has been contacted about any cost implications associated with a change to the format of the Y7 admission test. JMW will be visiting all feeder school heads in the coming weeks. We have increased the PAN for Y7 from 117 to 120.

- *The purpose of 117 was to allow for up to three entries on appeal without exceeding 30 students per class. Are we now comfortable with 31 in a class?*

The rooms are set out for 32 but in recent years we have not had as many as 120 in Y7.

We need to consider whether we should add at least a GCSE grade 4 in English and Maths to our sixth-form entry requirement in order to avoid providing GCSE improvement courses in the sixth form.

The Admissions Committee was asked to consider this.

**ERM**

Discussions are taking place with the cathedral to provide choral scholarships for Y7 boy boarders from 2026. These would provide a fee reduction, choral training and the requirement to sing in the cathedral choir. They would be for two years. Consideration is being given to finding sponsors for other scholarships such as academic, sport.

Negotiations have taken place with three boarding recruitment consultants and the legal agreement is now being checked by NY. Each consultant has a different area of experience and expertise. Governors welcomed this initiative to increase boarding.

- *Could we challenge these consultants about how else they can contribute to the school to justify their being paid?*

They only get paid for successful recruitments. However, they will be giving a good account of the school to appropriate groups of parents and that story will get passed on. Governors agreed that there was such an intangible benefit of recruiters.

- *In the past we have found it very difficult to recover boarding debts owed by overseas parents. Will these consultants carry out income checks?*

That would be difficult and probably ineffective. When we have had problems it wasn't a lack of funds but the willingness to pay.

- *If the recruitment consultant will get a much larger payment from an independent school (because they have higher fees) then surely they will direct students towards those schools?*

I have posed that question to them. They say they are keen to get the best fit in terms of both the kind of school best suited to the student and parents and the cost.

- *From a staff perspective, it is important to ensure that the students have appropriate qualifications (if not iGCSE) and good EAL skills otherwise the benefit will be offset by EAL costs.*

This is recognised. The recruitment process provides an application and these are then scrutinised by the school. The Assistant Head (Boarding), who has lots of experience in this, will oversee the process, including verifying the equivalence of examinations.

#### **b) Staffing and Staff Wellbeing**

Two of the Monday afternoon sessions this term have been devoted to staff wellbeing. They have brought favourable reactions. The Staff Council is now self-chairing and some good ideas are coming forward.

#### **c) Academic**

- *You have referred to 2024 results being poorer than normal. Are there any underlying issues?*

There was a group of girls in Y13 with SEMH concerns and a group of boys who were rather blasé. In Y11 there was a group of boys who consistently underperformed despite interventions. We don't see these issues to the same extent in following Year groups.

#### d) Pastoral

The Head summarised the recent safeguarding visit from NY which generated a very good report. There was the recurrent concern about site security but a recognition that the cost of a closed site would be exorbitant and not in keeping with the school's ethos. Our managed risk strategy was recognised.

We are taking steps to prevent access to the rest of the school from the pool.

There is a residual problem with vaping in toilets but it is much reduced. In fact vaping appears less of an issue altogether. The toilets are clearly an area where urgent investment is needed to improve the general standard.

The GUNY feedback contained nothing unexpected or concerning. It will be studied by the Pastoral Committee.

TCT

About 25 parents attended the most recent pastoral information meeting.

With Emysted's we arranged online interviews for the Oxbridge candidates at each school with staff from the other. This was very well received by students.

#### e) Estates

The poor maintenance by NY continues. One of the two non-functioning boilers is now being repaired, rather than replaced. There is a leak in School House roof which has caused damage internally.

- *If this leak continues, does it pose any risk to boarding provision?*

There is spare capacity so we wouldn't have an accommodation problem. However, the Common Room has had to be closed and the greatest risk is to the reputation of our boarding provision. We have had to put one of our estates staff through a cherry-picker course so that we can get the gutters cleaned ourselves.

### 9 Financial Matters

ROH reported that the F&P Committee had seen three monthly Budget Monitoring Statements since the last FGB. All of these were in the papers for today's meeting together with the Bursar's excellent notes. An improvement in the position in October by about £20k slipped back by about £10k in November. As we are now two-thirds through the financial year, the figures are stabilising close to the start budget. While we will have an in-year deficit this year, it is less than 1% of our annual turnover. The focus now is on the recovery plan. This was submitted on time but there has been no response from NY so far.

GL gave governors an indication of how the start budget for 2025-6 was progressing. At this stage it will still be a deficit budget but the following year the position will improve. In three years' time the planned increase in the school roll and the start of the completion of long term loans will bring the school back into surplus.

- *We are for the next three years depending on an increased school roll to deal with the deficit. What are the risks of this?*

The main risks are the additional demands upon staff, more rapid deterioration of the fabric, more crowding in common areas and corridors, and the delays to implementation of the digital strategy. GL said there were no capital expenditure items for approval.

### 10 Safeguarding

**The Safeguarding Annual Report for 2023-24 was approved** and the Chair of Governors will sign it. EJ

### 11 Curriculum Statement

This had minor changes and had been scrutinised by the Curriculum Committee who recommended approval. **The Governing Board approved the Statement.** It was noted that ATB had offered some suggested enhancements. These will be considered by the Deputy Head (Academic) and if amendments are needed the revised Statement will go to the Curriculum Committee for consideration and FGB for approval.

ERM

### 12 Governors' Annual Report to Parents

This is now complete but was unavailable for this meeting. Based on the many prior experiences, Governors agreed to approve the report unseen, *once it had been proof-read by a governor.*

EJ/ERM

## Regular Business

### **13 Governors' Committee Meetings** (minutes and notes available in advance)

#### **a) Finance & Personnel Committee**

ROH had nothing further to add. There were no questions.

#### **b) Curriculum Committee**

ERM had nothing further to add. There were no questions.

#### **c) Pastoral Committee**

TCT gave a more detailed account of the report to the committee by the Head Boy and Girl. He particularly emphasised how they had sought and were supporting initiatives by other officers. He also highlighted the very welcome and significant improvement in all the behavioural and wellbeing metrics for the students. We seemed to be getting back to what we consider "normal".

There was no other urgent business from any committee nor any health and safety issue.

### **14 Governors with Specific Areas of Responsibility**

#### **a) Child Protection and Safeguarding**

EJ was acting in the role temporarily and had not yet joined the meeting. Governors were referred to references in the Headmaster's Report and in the Pastoral Committee minutes.

#### **b) Inclusion**

In the absence of a specific governor, ERM reported that the Curriculum Committee had received a very detailed report from the Inclusion Manager which indicated that all aspects of inclusion were being very well provided for. Governors were also referred to references in the Headmaster's Report.

#### **c) CEIAG**

TCT provided a paper which described the wide range of excellent careers advice being provided. He drew governors' attention to risks and concerns about the staffing of this very successful department:

- There is now only one person, Mr Bob Walker, and he is going well beyond his job description and hours and is clearly determined to keep the carers service the best it can possibly be. Is this reasonable? What if he is incapacitated?
- Because the independent adviser has now left, Mr Walker has added her work to his own. Schools no longer must have an independent adviser. However, advisers should have a relevant Level 6 qualification, which Mr Walker doesn't. This might put us at risk with, say, Ofsted – even though our service is better than most schools'.
- *Some governors suggested we might ask suitable parents to assist with, for example, interviews.*

The Head responded that when agreeing how Mr Walker might find some time relief, Mr Walker had asked that he no longer had to recruit and marshal parent assistance.

GL said he would ask the Bursar to take over the job of chasing bad debts linked to careers education and work experience, to remove a task from Mr Walker.

GL

Governors asked that the Chair write to Mr Walker to thank him for his truly outstanding commitment – and that some additional recognition should be considered.

EJ

#### **d) Staff Welfare**

Governors were referred to the Headmaster's Report.

### **15 Health & Safety**

DW reported no concerns. The management of H&S in school was well organised and documented and there were clear routes for reporting incidents and near misses to appropriate governor committees. He would be making another visit next term.

## 16 Policies for Approval

The Respectful Relationships and Behaviour Policy was considered. The Head said it had been checked with NY and was following their guidance. Some parents and prospective parents were asking about our mobile phone rule. This is clearly set out but we are consulting with Outwood Ripon and primary schools.

- *Because this policy, which is mainly procedure, is trying to cover everything and for all audiences, it is very long and an indigestible read. So can we also publish a short clear guide for each audience – student, parent, teacher, other staff, school leaders, governors?*
- *As a start, an index page at the front, hyperlinked to the rest of the document, would help.*

These comments were noted.

JMW

**The policy was approved.**

## 17 Off-Site Visits and Activities

GL provided the full list in advance. Governor approval was sought for a Year 8 curriculum-related residential visit to Paris in May 2026. The leader had done the trip before with a different school but the same provider and another experienced teacher was assisting. It would be one school day plus a weekend. **This was approved.**

GL

## 18 Governor Training

- a) NY had been contacted about providing **Safeguarding** training for governors as a group but could not provide this. Instead they referred to the safeguarding modules in their training programme. NGA also provide safeguarding training. DW offered to register for both courses and then report back to governors his recommendation.

DW

- b) The date for a governors' strategy evening with SLT will be fixed for next term.

Governors were urged to consider relevant training courses from the NY programme (Paper 18). They can book these via the Clerk (GL). Once they have completed a course, they should let ERM know for the record.

**ALL Governors**

## 19 Calendar

Reminder of Carol Service on 17 Dec.

## 20 AOB -There was none.

## 21 Date of Next Meeting 26 March 2025 at 1750h.

*JMW, GL and VP left the meeting at this point.*

## 22 Report on Headmaster's Performance Review

ERM who, as Vice-Chair, chaired the review panel explained it consisted of one other governor (different each year) and an independent member. This year the governor was ROH and the independent member was Pat Langham, retired Head of Wakefield Girls' High School. Without breaching confidences, ROH summarised the meeting and a letter of assurance from Pat Langham was provided. While some areas for progress were discussed, the panel was very satisfied with the Headmaster's performance. Most targets had been achieved, one showed good progress and much more had been achieved besides. Important and challenging targets had been set for 2024-5.

**Meeting closed 1945h.**