

**Minutes of the Academy Committee Meeting
held on Tuesday 14th November 2023 at 7:30am at Walton Academy.**

Membership	Initials	Governor category	Absence
Mrs L Crerar (Interim Chair of Governors)	LC	Appointed Governor	
Mrs H Ind	HI	Appointed Governor	
Mr J Horsfield	JH	Parent Governor	A
Mr D Morgan	DM	Appointed Governor	A
Mrs L Purcell	LP	Appointed Governor	
Mr J Robertson	JP	Appointed Governor	
Mrs K Hardy	KH	Appointed Governor	
<i>1 x Chair of governors vacancy</i>			
<i>1 x Vice chair of governors vacancy</i>			
<i>1 x parent governor vacancy</i>			

In Attendance	Initials	Position	Absence
Mrs C Saxelby	CS	Senior Principal	A
Mrs J Leonard	JL	Principal	
Mr M Hoad	MH	Vice Principal	A
Mrs K Dolby	KD	Assistant Principal - Behaviour & Attitudes	A
Mrs L Owen	LO	Assistant Principal - Outcomes	
Mrs			
Mrs N Benson	NB	Governance Professional	

Quorum required	4	Governor's present	5
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Item No	Item	Action/ by who/ when
AC/12/2324	Apologies for absence Apologies were received from Mr Morgan, Mrs Saxelby, Mr Hoad and Mrs Dolby and these were accepted by the committee. Retrospective apologies have been received from Mr Horsfield.	
AC/13/2324	Declarations of interest Mr Morgan has informed the governance professional of a change to his declaration of interests with new employment with NSK.	
AC/14/2324	Trust Training Attendance Training – A webinar produced by Patrick Knight (Strategic Development Leader, Safeguarding) was shown to all attendees. The presentation will be shared with all governors following the meeting [AP-NB] . Mrs Leonard followed this with an academy specific overview with regards attendance at Walton. Current attendance figures were shared in advance of the meeting as part of the Principals' report. The academy sits as one of the top two secondaries within the trust and attendance is in line with the trust average.	NB

	<p>Data from FFT (Fischer Family Trust) and the DfE attendance dashboard has been shared with governors in advance of the meeting. Walton sits in line, slightly above, the national average. The gaps between whole school and PP/SEND at Walton are smaller than across the rest of the trust and persistent absence is lower.</p> <p><i>The governors asked</i> if this positive data is due to the work of the attendance officer and Mrs Leonard confirmed there are now two attendance officers who work well together, their roles have been expanded to allow more dedicated time to focus on the attendance role. Mrs Leonard went on to explain that Walton has experienced a significant change in demographics and now has a much higher percentage of students not working to the 'normal' curriculum. This is for a range of reasons and this year the academy has developed and included much of this additional data into the recording of persistent absences. The team meet each term to discuss the whole spreadsheet containing data of all absence concerns and every student is considered on an individual basis. They will look at all the packages in place for each student. This information is then shared across the extended leaders to raise the profile of those young people. All leaders know that these students are being fully supported which enables them to focus on teaching those in attendance. <i>The governors wondered if</i> there is a correlation between persistent absence and mental health and Mrs Leonard confirmed that the correlation was extremely high, and it extends to parental attitude and a societal shift following the pandemic which impacted on mental health. Many of the students within the spreadsheet are linked to mental health issues. <i>The governors then asked</i> if there was also a link for some students to the mental health of their parents. Mrs Leonard confirmed that some young people have parents struggling with mental health and there are learned behaviours being seen. <i>The governors wanted to understand</i> how parents get involved in discussions and Mrs Leonard confirmed that it is very challenging. There are a huge number of parents who are extremely supportive and thankful for the help and support that the academy offer, however there does appear to be a growing number of parents who do not wish to work with the academy, who will go against the advice and support given, and can't see the value in actions being taken. On occasions, outside agencies will also get involved and offer alternative advice to parents about the value of attending school which contradicts the efforts the academy are making. Home visits are important, and the school now has greater capacity to fulfil more visits but are still unable to do as many home visits as they would like. The academy has initiated fines for some parents but unfortunately the set pathways that must be followed are often not making a difference. Local Authority support is lacking in this area and there is a considerable amount of paperwork and hoops to jump through.</p> <p>Operationally Mrs Leonard is confident that all data is recorded accurately and reviewed and managed effectively and Walton are amongst the best in trust in this area. The sense of belonging is an area that needs to be developed further with both students and parents and this is not an overnight switch.</p>	
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	<p><u>The Governors noted</u> that staff incentives are very successful <u>and asked</u> what other ‘carrots’ can be offered to students rather than the ‘stick’ to encourage greater attendance. Mrs Leonard acknowledged that recognition is given for attendance however it must be done carefully as it can alienate the remainder of the cohort, in particular students that have been absent with genuine illness. Mrs Leonard went on to explain that she recognises that this isn’t absolutely right yet and the team are looking at how recognition is given for attendance and focussing also on those students that manage to improve attendance when they have been persistently absent. Often, rather than gift vouchers etc, it is those little conversations between staff and students about having missed the student in lessons in a more positive way that will encourage students to attend more.</p> <p><u>The governors asked</u> for clarification as to how many school days account for 92% attendance and following discussion estimated that this equates to approximately 16 days a year. Given that a panel meeting is called when a student is excluded for 15 days or more in a term, is there a discussion to be had around how absence is tackled.</p> <p>Mrs Leonard explained that she has also included the current suspension and exclusion data within her report. <u>The governors wanted to better understand</u> the measurement and Mrs Leonard explained that suspensions data is reported in terms of the number of incidents rather than numbers of suspended days but that she will always report on days missed. The data from Walton reflects both the local and national picture, showing a stark rise. Mrs Leonard is certain that suspensions and exclusions are imposed for all the right reasons, and this too is reflected locally and nationally with the 3 most reported reasons being; persistent disruptive behaviour, verbal abuse and threatening behaviour against an adult and physical assault. There is a correlation that as attendance has gone down, suspensions have risen. <u>Governors asked for clarity</u> that suspensions are included in the attendance figures and Mrs Leonard confirmed that they are included but that some outliers are removed from data to review the core picture. <u>The governors asked</u> if the 92% figure reflects the true picture and Mrs Leonard confirmed that it does and <u>the governors then questioned</u> how the core looks at present. Mrs Leonard explained that she didn’t have the information to hand but is happy to provide this information at the next meeting [AP - JL]. Mrs Leonard went on to explain that students on alternative learning pathways also have an impact on the data and gave an example that the 15 students on alternative learning packages might be studying off site or dual coded, the reporting mechanism will automatically put that student at 0%. <u>The governors asked</u> Mrs Leonard to explain what dual coded means and she established that a Walton student studying elsewhere, they will be counted as absent. Any young person out studying elsewhere on a daily basis the attendance needs to be obtained from the alternative provider to be recorded on the Walton system. All students on part time provision will be coded as authorised absent when not at the academy. A bigger spike has been seen at Walton as the academy has been changing demographically alongside this attendance crisis. All the groups that are most impacted by attendance have increased at Walton and the demographic now aligns more closely with the</p>	<p>JL</p>
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	<p>two more deprived academies within the trust. Whilst the demographic has shifted, the attendance remains high despite this shift. Exclusion and suspension data shows an increase too but aligned to similar demographics the numbers are lower. There will be more to look at post this summer when we look at the outcomes data and this will give another indicator of the work currently being done and the impact that it is having.</p> <p><u>The governors wanted to know</u> if absent students can be encouraged to commit to doing any work at home as a step towards coming back into the academy. Mrs Leonard explained that all students need to be considered on a case-by-case basis. In the past, the attitude would have been that if a student is not well enough to attend school, then work would not be sent home as this might enable students to remain at home for longer rather than return to the academy. However, as the landscape has shifted, there are times where some learning outside of the classroom can be considered or at the academy on site on a one-to-one basis or on site but online outside of the classroom environment or online learning at home, or potentially a hybrid of these options. These packages need to be developed on an individual basis dependent upon the student and their needs. It would be dangerous to have a blanket approach to deal with all persistently absent young people.</p> <p><u>The governors asked</u> what the staff attendance was like at Walton and if statistics are available around that. Mrs Leonard explained that she receives a monthly report from HR and this is discussed with the leadership team. Currently the staff absence at Walton is above the average for the trust, the trust average for secondaries is around 4.3 and at Walton it is 6% from September. Much of this is due to long term absences of 4 individuals. It is not unusual to see higher rates at this stage of the year due to illness. Absence is tracked through a Bradford score (rolling). Staff that move into amber or red scores have meetings with line managers and potentially more formal absence processes including occupational health. Mrs Leonard explained that the senior team know their staff exceptionally well and will take each case on an individual basis. Walton follows a mantra of “we put staff first so staff can put students first” and this has been shared with the trust. A lot has been done around workload for staff as part of the Workload Charter to get ahead of the curve on flexible working for staff. <u>The governors were interested to understand</u> how flexible working can be implemented within a school. Mrs Leonard explained that requests will often be where a member of staff might want to reduce their number of days. If the day can be covered internally, the request can be accepted. Another example has been a job share agreed for a staff member to prevent losing them altogether. In some cases, it could be that due to childcare issues, a staff member may need a later start time to their day for example. At Walton there is a golden ticket system where every member of staff is entitled to half a day a year which is covered internally. Staff PPA time (non-teaching time) can be looked at to ensure the time can be used more effectively for everyone. For staff at Walton, period 26 used to be on the cover rota so would be used to cover other lessons. This has now been removed from the cover rota to ensure that staff have an additional lesson slot for planning and preparation time. Internal cover supervisors and</p>	
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	<p>external supply is now used before utilising own staff to enable them to continue to be flexible where possible.</p> <p><u>The governors noted</u> that the policy at Walton of asking staff about their preferences and building that into planning timetables should be applauded as best practice and this demonstrates a caring attitude within the school. <u>The governors also noted</u> that the absence rate is relatively low taking into account long term sickness and this shows that staff are looked after properly and it was acknowledged that the positive approach to supporting staff is reflected in Walton’s successful recruitment given the current environment.</p> <p><u>The governors asked</u> what more can be done to engage parents for those students that are not necessarily persistent absentees. Mrs Leonard explained that there is an attendance newsletter led by attendance officers. On the first day of absence a call is made to parents. The attendance officers have a red flag cohort for parents to be contacted on day 1. Head of years and tutors are involved in that contact and then parental meetings can be held. Much of the time, the students with patterns of time off can be the hard-to-reach parents and families. Home visits, letters through the door etc will be done to try and build relationships but these are difficult barriers to break.</p> <p><u>The governors then asked</u> if the number of unauthorised holidays was an issue and Mrs Leonard confirmed that this has increased as well and the societal change due to the lockdown has changed attitudes towards attendance alongside the cost-of-living crisis and cost of holidays and <u>governors acknowledged</u> that the cost differential is so great that it is still cheaper to take the holiday within school time and pay the fine.</p> <p><u>Governors wondered</u> how we get the message across to families that every school day matters and <u>suggested that</u> the job centre and businesses careers advisors coming into school to express how important attendance is for maintaining employment and explaining the bigger picture might be a way of addressing it from a different perspective. Mrs Leonard agreed that the next steps days can start with their journey into their career and there is no reason why the focus cannot include the importance of their attendance at work and attendance for their company. Mrs Leonard also acknowledged that often schools are bubble wrapping young people and students need to understand that in the “real world” poor attendance would impact on their ability to hold onto a job.</p> <p><u>The governors asked for clarification</u> on the impact of poor attendance on academic achievement and Mrs Owens explained that the Progress 8 score for attendance above 90% was 0.55 last year and for those below 90% it was -0.55 which is potentially the equivalent to 3 GCSEs at grade 4.</p> <p><u>The governors asked</u> if there is any value in using social media to put across a positive message around attendance. Mrs Leonard explained that the underlying message may come across as negative on social media and this method would not reach all parents, but there is benefit in using weduc (the parental app) to get those messages out. Attendance is raised in transition</p>	
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	and there are assemblies and discussions at parents evenings. There may be more that could be done on a termly basis to get those key messages home. Letters have changed to be more supportive rather than punitive and include messages about 'every day matters'. These are sent out automatically and kick in before students drop below 90%. The messages delivered in years 10 and 11 could also be delivered at options evening in year 9 to emphasise the difference in results between good and poor attendance.	
AC/15/2324	Training There were many questions from governors following the attendance training which have been minuted in AC/14/2324 .	
AC/16/2324	Actions / Feedback from link governor visits Mrs Ind has completed a safeguarding link visit and her report will be shared with governors when complete.	
AC/17/2324	Update on progress against Governance Action Plan The governance action plan will be discussed at the next Governors mid term meeting and an updated plan will be communicated at the next committee meeting in January 2024.	
AC/18/2324	Minutes of the AC meeting dated 27th September 2023. The minutes of the meeting that had previously been received were approved and signed by the vice chair.	
AC/19/2324	Matters arising AC/75/2223 Look into potential Rotary Club funding for special projects - carried forward JL. AC/03/2324 To note: a separate meeting has been held to discuss succession planning and consider appointment of a chair. complete AC/03/2324 To note: Full list of governors link roles, contacts and description of link governors requirements has been shared with all governors. complete AC/03/2324 Complete Declaration of Interest form and submit. All governors AC/03/2324 Read, sign and return code of conduct. All governors AC/03/2324 Review governance action plan. All governors AC/04/2324 To note: all governors have been contacted individually with regards mandatory and outstanding training requirements. AC/04/2324 Meet to discuss the SCR outside of school time. complete AC/07/2324 Provide information about which businesses/organisations are currently working with school on careers to clerk to share with governors. complete	
AC/20/2324	Principals Report Given the short time remaining for the meeting to continue, Mrs Leonard wanted to focus on 2 key issues that require governor input and that governors should be aware of:	

	<p>Out of Cohort application - Confidential Minutes</p> <p>Exam space Mrs Leonard made governors aware that the solution around the exam space has moved forwards and that currently discussions are ongoing with Portakabin considering 2 options: The first has initial chaos but will be better in the long term, the second option will cause less chaos initially but is likely to be worse long term. Mrs Leonard explained that the level of disruption will be considered but the solution needs to be the right long-term solution.</p> <p><u>The governors asked</u> what the monthly rental fee to be paid by the school is for. Mrs Leonard explained that the green block was initially implemented as a temporary rented building from Portakabin and the building that will go on the top will be the same. <u>The governors asked</u> for clarity as to who pays this rental. Mrs Leonard explained that the academy pays the monthly rental which will be a line on the budget and the trust will pay for the installation and kit out. <u>The governors suggested</u> that the trust should be paying the rental as they are responsible for the building. Mrs Leonard explained that you could argue that it is really coming from the trust but is just accounted for within the Walton budget and that the trust will pay the significant upfront costs.</p> <p><u>The governors asked</u> how much the rent will be and Mrs Leonard said that she will share the figure [AP-JL] Mrs Leonard went on to explain that all those costs that fluctuate after budget setting for a variety of reasons are supported by the trust.</p> <p><u>The governors noted</u> that they understand the fact that the academy is having to take on extra cost to enable expansion of exam space. <u>The governors would like to understand from the trust</u> if there will be a budget adjustment for this additional cost.</p> <p>It was agreed, given that the meeting had overrun that the governance professional and Mrs Crerar would complete the report to trustees following the meeting [AP – NB/LC].</p> <p>The governance professional explained that any items not covered at this meeting would be discussed at the next agenda setting meeting and where appropriate will be carried forward to the next meeting [AP – NB/LC/JL].</p> <p>All governors were asked to raise any additional questions from the pre meeting documentation shared that have not been covered to the governance professional to be addressed [AP – Govs].</p> <p>Mrs Leonard asked if feedback could be given to the trust in relation to the impact of the training on the time taken out of the agenda [AP-NB].</p> <p>Mrs Crerar suggested that the training video be shared in advance of the meeting in future and that all governors should attend having viewed the video and be prepared with questions.</p>	<p>JL</p> <p>NB/LC</p> <p>NB/LC/JL</p> <p>Governors</p> <p>NB</p>
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AC/21/2324	<p>How has the AC held senior leaders to account? There was significant discussion and challenge from governors in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student Attendance - reporting, reviewing, addressing and improving. - Staff Attendance - reporting, reviewing, addressing and improving. - Budgets in relation to the necessary building requirements to address exam space. 	
AC/22/2324	<p>How have the VMV of the Trust / Equality been upheld?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It was agreed that the VMV of the Trust & Equality has been upheld 	
AC/23/2324	<p>Complete report to Trustees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report to trustees to be completed by Governance professional and chair following the meeting due to running over time. [AP-NB/LC] 	
AC/24/2324	<p>Determination of Confidentiality Equalities Act consideration 7 Nolan Principles AC members considered whether anything discussed during the meeting should be deemed as confidential. It was resolved;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no confidential items discussed • There had been no Equalities Act implications • Attendees were content that all decisions made adhere to the 7 Nolan Principles. 	
	<p>Date and time of next meeting: Academy Committee meeting Wednesday 24th January at 07:30 am at Walton Academy The meeting closed at 09:06am</p>	

Signed by Chair:

Date: