

**Minutes of a Meeting of the STEP Board of Trustees
Held on Monday, 8 February 2021 at 5.15pm (Virtual)**

Name	Position	Attendance
Trustees		
Ben Bartlett (BB)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Kate Chhatwal OBE (KC)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present (Chair for items 1-3)
Mark Ducker OBE (MD)	Executive Trustee - CEO	Present
Angela Farrell (AF)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Ross Gardner (RG)	Non-Executive Trustee (Vice Chair of Trustees)	Present (from item 4)
Peter Lilford (PL)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rory Nath (RN)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Navdeep Sanghara (NS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Shelley Stuart (SS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rama Venchard (RV)	Non-Executive Trustee (Chair of Trustees)	Present (from item 4)
Attendees		
Jennese Alozie	Director of Effectiveness and Performance	Present (for items 1-8)
Paul Glover (PG)	Deputy CEO	Present (for items 1-8)
John Halliwell (JH)	Executive Director of Primary	Present (for items 1-8)
James Hooper (JHo)	Director of Operations	Present (for items 1-8)
Philippa Jackson (PJ)	Senior Governance Clerk	Present
Ben March (BM)	Chief Finance and Operations Officer	Present (for items 1-8)
Tim Mills (TM)	Executive Director of Primary	Present (for items 1-8)

1	<p><u>Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping</u></p> <p>RV and RG had connection issues and would join the meeting when possible. KC took the Chair until RV could join the meeting. KC welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly AF who had joined during her maternity leave.</p> <p>No apologies had been received for the meeting.</p>
2	<p><u>Quorum</u></p> <p>The Clerk declared the meeting quorate.</p>
3	<p><u>Review of Pecuniary and Conflicts Interests</u></p> <p>There were no pecuniary or other potential conflicts of interest declared.</p> <p>Trustees confirmed they had updated their personal and pecuniary interests on the Trust Governor system.</p>

4 Covid 19 Update

Trustees noted the following documents which had been circulated prior to the meeting:

- STEP Remote Education and Covid Response update – 1 February 2021
- Vulnerable and critical number academy pupil numbers and Trust overview of safe numbers 2021
- STEP Remote Education Principles and Guidance 2021
- Academies remote learning offer – Spring 2021
- STEP Covid Safeguarding Policy – January 2021
- Addendum to January 2021 update on school opening – 12 January 2021
- Update on schools closing – 7 January 2021

PG provided an update on the Trust’s latest response to Covid. This update followed on from two written briefings previously shared with Trustees in January 2021. The following key points were highlighted:

- The communication channels between the Executive Team and Headteachers and Senior Leaders continued to be very effective during the school closures
- The DfE and Ofsted guidance on remote education had changed this term and the STEP Remote Education Principles and Guidance had been updated to reflect this
- On average there were around eight hundred pupils per day attending school, which was about 15% of the total number of pupils across the Trust
- The safe maximum capacity of the schools and size of bubbles had been reviewed for each Academy to ensure the risk of infection and transmission was reduced
- Covid testing for staff had been rolled out and the guidance would be followed if any members of staff tested positive
- Some bubbles had been closed and Park Academy had closed due to a number of positive cases

JA provided an update on remote learning and raised the following key points:

- The latest Government and Ofsted guidance and our own research had been used to create the STEP Remote Education expectations and guidance, the STEP Remote Education Overview and the STEP Quality Assurance of Remote Education tool
- This provided assurance to the Executive Team and Board of Trustees that the Trust and STEP Academies had met the required expectations and guidance
- The STEP Remote Education Evaluations were reviewed and key themes identified. We are assured that across all academies we still offer a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils
- Leaders had been very clear and creative about the purpose of the remote learning and what they wanted to achieve
- A range of assessment and feedback practices had been put in place across the Trust to assess the children’s understanding and engagement
- Feedback from parents demonstrated that some had found it difficult to support their children in remote learning because of their own subject knowledge
- We had tried to address this issue by ensuring that parents felt confident in the support they could offer their children, but understand that not all parents feel confident to support their child’s learning
- SEND provision continued to be reviewed across the Trust and leaders had looked at the best ways to adapt remote learning arrangements for children with SEND

- The Executive team had been heartened by the amount of time that staff across the Trust had spent on creating high quality and engaging resources for pupils

RV joined the meeting and resumed the Chair.

Trustees raised the following questions:

Q: Thank you for the helpful update. A prioritisation of school places for the critical worker and vulnerable children was needed. It was noted that the maximum number of places for these children had been allocated at Hawkes Farm Academy. How did you ensure that these priority places were only taken when needed?

A: TM explained that the academies had a clear set of criteria for the critical worker, SEND and vulnerable children. We ensured that the criteria had been met through conversations with families. We also clarified whether there was a parent at home and if the other parent was a critical worker. Not all of the priority children had taken a place every day of the week. The letter sent from the CEO to STEP parents had also helped by explaining the importance of putting the safety of the children first. Parents had been very supportive Trust wide.

Q: It was reassuring to see a clear vision on STEP's remote education. Were there any themes across the Trust on home learning engagement? Were you able to track engagement? Could you also provide an update on staff wellbeing across the Trust?

A: JA reported that the engagement in some subjects was varied due to the lack of confidence some parents felt. In terms of Trust wide engagement, this had been tracked in all academies as part of the overview offer. Engagement could be seen in parents' questions and the pupil work that had been uploaded.

TM reported that Breakwater Academy had moved to live lessons which had proved to be very successful and engagement in these had been high. La Fontaine had recorded lessons and these were available on line. There was some concern with the level of engagement moving forwards as some families disengage with the remote learning as time went on. A huge benefit of remote learning was that the parents could now see how we teach the children and the pedagogical approach taken by the academies. Regular whole staff meetings were held within the academies to provide feedback on the remote learning. Headteachers and Senior Leaders across the Trust also met frequently to share feedback on remote learning.

PG added that in terms of wellbeing, staff had found this lockdown significantly more difficult than last year. Some staff who had felt isolated had asked to work from the academies rather than from home. The continued communication between the Executive Team and the Headteachers had helped to provide reassurance and support during this difficult time.

JH explained that it was important to reflect on the remote learning provision each week and to look at the uptake which ranged from week to week. It was also important to maintain contact with the families of the SEND children who had found it particularly difficult to support their children at home. Staff continued to review the remote learning offer for SEND pupils. On-line Speech and Language Therapists had also been introduced. We were aware that some staff had struggled during the pandemic. We had increased the offer through Perkbox for additional support and resources for staff which had been well received. We had also seen some challenges in maintaining staff engagement and some virtual social events had been held to try and overcome this.

RG joined the meeting.

Q: Your report referred to 650 laptops provided to children who were unable to access a device at home. How had those children been identified and what more could be done?

A: JH explained that the Government provided laptops for disadvantaged children via their 'get help with technology' programme. Our STEP ICT team had overseen this and the set up process for families. We had received more than 650 laptops from the DfE but we still required more. Feedback forms had been sent to Headteachers to clarify whether the allocation was in line with the true requirements.

JH added that there was guidance on the academy websites if families were unable to access networks or digital home learning. The continued communication and weekly calls with families helped us identify those who were struggling. Some families had multiple siblings at home and had also been provided with laptops to allow all children to access remote learning.

Q: With the intelligence gathered from self-assessments, were you aware of any particular academies that had struggled or that you were concerned about? What was the biggest risk to the Trust?

A: JA explained that the risks were mainly related to the quality of remote education provision within those academies that had recently joined the Trust. In terms of strengths, the more established academies within the Trust could offer support to the new academies. The regular conversations with families had also helped to identify where additional help was needed. The development of a range of remote learning opportunities had significantly improved across the Trust since last year. It had been useful to talk through and share knowledge on the remote learning with the new academies and staff. Leaders always reviewed the on-line material and lessons before it went out.

Q: Was there any specific support for NQTs during this difficult year?

A: TM reported that the Trust had control over NQT training through the STEP Ahead Teaching School and the NQTs had received plenty of support this year. The majority of NQTs had come through NPQ training programmes which had all been carried out remotely through Buckingham University and the STEP Teaching School.

Q: What were the plans for tackling the disparity between the top and bottom end of capability once the children return to school?

A: JA explained that there were some concerns about this. The children would need to be assessed once they returned to school. We had looked at different options for helping children catch up on lost school time. We had considered inviting the children for additional lessons in the Summer holidays and extending the school day. These options would be discussed further once we had more information on when the children were expected to return to school.

Q: The assessment for KS1 and KS2 tests had been cancelled again this year. Would anything be done across the Trust to assess the children and to help the children transfer to secondary?

A: TM explained that the discussions on assessment and professional judgement were on-going. Once the children returned to school, assessments could be made and we would have a good idea of how disparate the gaps in learning were. We expected some children to be significantly behind where they should be. We would want to do our own assessment against the National Curriculum for Year 2 and Year 6 which would be guided by previous papers but this would all depend on when the children returned to school.

Q: Do you have any particular concerns for BAME staff?
A: No. Personalised Risk Assessments were in place and had been reviewed.

Q: Would you focus on the children’s mental health and wellbeing when they returned to school?
A: Yes absolutely.

Q: Have you received feedback on on-line material?
A: Yes lots of feedback had been received from families and staff. This had been shared by leaders across the Trust to help support the development of teaching materials. In terms of collaboration across the Trust, leaders meet regularly and share ideas on on-line provision and support. Feedback from parents was regularly analysed and leaders worked alongside staff to improve the different elements of the learning in response to the feedback.

Q: To what extent had class teachers been able to engage across the Trust?
A: TM reported that this had happened more and more across the Trust as a result of the shared leadership and Academy Committees. Working relationships had started to form across the academies that naturally worked together and the subject leader meetings still went ahead across the Trust. There was no formal Trust wide networking for teaching staff but significantly more on-line collaboration with the academies that naturally worked together.
JH added that the pandemic had created real opportunities for the academies to tap into the different resources on the academy websites. It had created opportunities for staff to look at ideas and variations in resources and to promote these further.

Q: What could be done to further support the mental health and wellbeing of Senior Leaders and the Executive Team and to encourage them to take a break at half term?
A: PG explained that Headteachers had found this a complex and difficult time to manage and it was becoming increasingly difficult to manage. The constant communication between the Executive Heads and the Senior Leaders had helped and had been a real benefit for staff wellbeing. All staff had been encouraged to take a break during half term. The Directors of Primary visited the academies regularly and could cover for Headteachers if necessary. The Executive Team had also been encouraged to step away and take a break over the half term.

MD added that he had been part of many inspiring conversations across the Trust and wanted to look at ways of celebrating this. A newsletter would be produced for staff and families thanking everyone for their continued support and would include an update from the Board of Trustees on how the situation had been managed.

Trustees thanked the Executive Team for their very helpful update. They passed on their thanks to all staff, to both the educational and operations teams. They recognised that it had been a difficult time and were heartened by the commitment of all the staff. They thanked the staff for continuing to provide a great education to the STEP children.

5 Roadmap to Becoming an Anti-Racist Organisation

At the previous Board meeting, Trustees had received a presentation on the Roadmap towards STEP Becoming an Anti-Racist Organisation. The first draft of the Roadmap had been developed with the view to launch in January. Since the most recent school closures and national lockdown, the Executive Team had taken the difficult decision to postpone the launch of STEP’s Roadmap. Given the importance of this STEP Compass priority, and the need for all stakeholders to focus on the part they would need to play to make it happen, delaying the Roadmap’s launch at this time

felt like the right decision. Work on the Roadmap would continue in preparation for the launch once schools returned.

SS had reviewed the Roadmap with the Executive Team and provided some feedback on the development so far. It had been proposed to use the STEP website to host the Roadmap. A summary of the Roadmap would be created as a graphic to enable the parents and communities to relate to and interact with. The 'C' in PUPAC would be used to show the Trust's 'commitment' to anti-racism and would be an explicit part of STEP First. The Roadmap would also include questions to monitor anti-racism, gender and ethnicity within the Trust's policies to ensure tangible results.

STEP Up – We all succeed together

6 Admissions

Trustees considered the consultation feedback for the admission arrangements for Beddington Park, Benedict, Park and Westbridge Academies to be brought in line with all STEP admissions policies. They also considered feedback regarding the reduction in PAN at Benedict and Tudor Academies. They formally agreed the arrangements with effect from the admission year 2022/23.

7 Code of Conduct

Trustees noted and confirmed their compliance with new Code of Conduct. They also noted the January 2021 Addendum to the Code. Governors would be asked to consider the new Code of Conduct at the next Academy Committee meetings and confirm their compliance.

STEP Ahead – We invest in our future

Confidential discussions on strategic matters were recorded in the confidential minutes.

8 STEP Ahead Teaching School Alliance

It had been confirmed that the STEP Ahead Teaching School, based at Angel Oak Academy, had been designated a Teaching School Hub. 750 existing teaching schools had been replaced by 81 hubs from September 2021. The hubs would be responsible for providing high-quality professional development to teachers and leaders and also support trainee teachers. The STEP Ahead Teaching School had been designated to work in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove and would also continue to supporting all STEP academies. The work of the hubs would help to increase the quality of teaching across East Sussex and raise STEP's profile significantly.

Q: Would the Teaching School receive funding?
A: Yes. An £80k start up grant and £250k a year funding. The remit of the Teaching School would be cut down to offering Initial Teaching Training and CPD.

Trustees congratulated the Executive Team. They particularly thanked Tim Mills and Tom Garry who had lead the team and successful bid and the impact of their work in developing teachers and leaders, and supporting schools across East Sussex. They thanked them for their continued hard work and commitment to STEP in an extremely challenging year. An update on the Teaching School would be provided at the Board of Trustees meeting in April.

Action: Schedule update on the STEP Ahead Teaching School at the April Board meeting. (Clerk)

The Executive Team (except the CEO left the meeting)

Confidential discussions on succession planning were recorded in the confidential minutes.

9	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>RV requested that if Trustees wanted to send any emails for the Executive Team over the weekend to direct these through him. He would then forward them onto the relevant Executive Team member during the week. This would ensure that the Executive Team took a break over the weekend. Trustees were very supportive of this approach.</p>
10	<p><u>Meeting Impact</u></p> <p>Trustees thanked the Executive Team for their comprehensive updates at the meeting and reflected on how effectively the team worked together. There was also good high level interaction between Trustees and the Executive Team. They felt that the Board of Trustees had provided challenging questions and that the Executive Team had been well placed to provide reassurance. Trustees agreed that always received the comprehensive reports in advance of meetings to ensure that Trustee input effectively focused on strategic issues.</p> <p>The Chair encouraged all Trustees to look beyond the typical agenda format and to raise any future agenda items with him. He also encouraged Trustees to question and request further reassurance from the Executive Team when they felt it was necessary.</p> <p>Trustees suggested that it would be useful to hold a team building exercise to help invest in future team relations. This would be particularly helpful for the new trustees and whilst holding Board meetings virtually.</p> <p>Action: Develop and hold team building session for Board of Trustees. (Chair of Trustees)</p>
11	<p><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>The next Board of Trustees meeting would be held on Thursday, 1 April at 5.15pm. This would likely be a virtual meeting. The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting.</p>

Action List

Action	Owner
Schedule update on the STEP Ahead Teaching School at the April Board meeting.	Clerk
Develop and hold team building session for Board of Trustees.	Chair of Trustees

Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting

Chair's signature	
Chair's name	
Date	