

ST MARTIN'S CE PRIMARY & NURSERY SCHOOL

GOVERNING BOARD MINUTES

FULL GOVERNING BOARD		DATE:	4th March 2024
CHAired BY: Brian Gravenor (BG)		CLERKED BY: Jacqueline Brooks (JB)	
GOVERNORS PRESENT:		Also Present:	
Brian Gravenor (BG) Gemma Tozer-Howe (GTH) Jennifer Elliott (JE) Rev. Jon Holder (JH) Amy Hardinge (AH) Vicky Harris (VH)		Christina Mabin, Senior Diocesan Education Advisor, Diocese of Exeter (CM) Brigid Thompson (BT) – School Business Manager Nat Padley (NP) – Acting Assistant Headteacher Mel Turl (MT) – Acting Deputy Headteacher	
APOLOGIES: Phil Wales (PW), Lynette Bickers (LB) Ruth Marsh (RM) – apologies received following the meeting			
Absent without apology: None			

Governor questions are highlighted in grey

Agenda Items	
1.	<u>Opening Prayer & Welcome</u> 1. Opening Prayer taken by JH
2.	<u>Apologies and sanctions of absence.</u> 1. PW and LB had sent apologies, which were sanctioned by the GB. RM apologies were received following the meeting.
3.	<u>Declarations of Interest</u> 1. It was noted that CM also works with The Exeter Diocesan Education Network (EDEN) although not in any decision-making capacity. EDEN was formed to act as a member to protect the Christian Foundation of church schools in Academy Trusts, and to hold Trust directors to account.
4 – 5.	<u>The process for Church Schools to convert to Academies and Governor questions/discussion.</u> 1. Governors were reminded that the decision being sought today is to explore the possibility of converting and joining Ventrus in more depth, it is not the final decision to do so. This builds from the exploratory work into academisation undertaken by the GB last year, and the school entering a Management Partnership with Ventrus in September 2023. CM advised that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church Schools have protections with the academisation process. Land and assets are not transferred to the Trust, and Trusts must hold majority articles. The Academy articles

cannot change the structure of Church schools. Laws exist to allow Trusts to be given notice if their education does not meet Church school structures.

- Governance structures in academies change, with schools having Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) which focus on teaching and learning, Church school links and Christian distinctives. The three main responsibilities of governors remain the same but there is no requirement for governors to be responsible for other matters e.g., premises, health and safety. The LGB will be smaller and different in composition.
- The educational landscape has changed in the last few years – the academy structure is now more mature. CM advised that there are only 21 standalone schools remaining in Devon and nine of those are working to explore joining a Trust.
- The situation for St. Martin's is more complex as Ventrus is in the process of merging with the Tarka Learning Trust and there is to be a general election this year, which will mean that there will be a period of purdah resulting in the DfE not being able to make decisions. When two Trusts merge, there is usually a period of consolidation where new schools would not be allowed to join. The advice from the Regions Group is for schools to join the existing Trust and not wait for the merger to be completed, as those timescales will not be known. The new MAT may also look different, and it would be better for the school to have already joined.

BG raised that the key concerns of the GB would be to ensure that joining a Trust would be right for the children, and that the school's Christian ethos will be maintained. BG has not seen any evidence that joining Ventrus would be contradictory to what St. Martin's wants for its pupils. CM advised that retaining the Christian ethos will not be an issue, and that Academy trust members have the responsibility to hold Trust directors to account.

The GB discussed that it has undertaken a high amount of due diligence in exploring its options and considering joining Ventrus. There is currently no need for St. Martin's to academise and it remains the choice of the school. Governors reflected that there are more notable benefits to joining a MAT now than there were when governors previously explored academisation and decided not to pursue this.

AH raised that the following are questions that still need to be explored/answered:

- What would being in Ventrus look like for the school in terms of finance and the budget it would have?
- Will there be the option to retain a non-teaching Deputy Headteachers? Would this be affordable?

CM advised that it is not guaranteed that staffing budgets/allocation could be retained in the same way but highlighted that it is not guaranteed in a maintained school either. Each school in a Trust determines what its needs are for its budget. The GB noted that there will be a lot of responsibilities lifted from AH and BT if it joins a Trust.

MT queried:

- How much involvement St. Martin's would have in making budgetary decisions in a Trust?
- Who would be ultimately responsible for financial decisions?

CM advised that it would be up to the school to spend the budget it has been allocated.

BT raised that to date, the school does not have any information on what the equivalent costs will be to be part of a Trust and observed that given the school would lose its carryforward if it joined, that would leave the school in a very different position. When BT discussed the carryforward previously with Gary Chown (GC), he had advised that the school would not retain it unless it had been ring-fenced for something very specific. AH felt that it is key that the school has that information to be able to make an informed decision – currently the school has a healthy budget. She would not want the school to be disadvantaged by losing its carryforward. The GB noted that AH has not heard any concerns raised by Ventrus schools around finances. NP noted that there is currently no other school which is the same size as St. Martin's within Ventrus and therefore no available comparison to look at.

	<p>CM advised that to be able to explore all these aspects more deeply, the school needs to proceed to the next stage of the process which involves seeking consent from appointing bodies, site trustees and the Regions Group to convert.</p> <p>BG asked BT, MT and NP if they would be happy as SLT members for the GB to seek permission and explore academisation further. They all agreed that they would. MT emphasised the importance for St. Martin's to retain its voice when strategic decisions are made if the school does join.</p> <p>JE raised concern that there could be less autonomy for the school to make financial decisions. AH advised that the way in which Ventrus works, the school would still have a voice and a say in decisions.</p> <p>JE referred to the potential staffing changes within admin, IT and leadership and asked if having less staff in school could affect the children. CM advised that resources for children should be equal and that all children in a MAT should benefit.</p> <p><i>(NP left the meeting)</i></p>
6.	<p><u>Consideration from GB whether to decide to explore to convert and join Ventrus and to formally seek consent from appointing bodies.</u></p> <p>1. Decision: All governors agreed to formally seek consent from appointing bodies to explore converting and joining Ventrus.</p>
7.	<p><u>Next steps and planning of communications with the school community.</u></p> <p>1. CM advised that there is now a very clear process to follow which she will support the school with. The grant of £25000 which finances the process can also be released. Once BG submits the written request for consent, CM will set up an initial meeting with all relevant parties. CM will also contact the other appointing bodies and site trustees who need to give permission. A formal consultation with parents will need to be held - this will be run by St. Martin's and GC.</p> <p>2. Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BG to liaise with CM to submit written formal request for consent to convert. • BG and AH to communicate to parents and staff that the school will be exploring academization in more depth but that no decision has been taken yet on joining Ventrus. <p>BG thanked all for attending.</p>
8.	<p><u>Discussion: 'How has this meeting benefited our children and contributed to the Christian ethos and distinctiveness of the school?'</u></p> <p>1. The GB has continued to focus throughout this process of exploring whether to convert on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that governors consider what will most benefit the children. • Ensuring that the school will retain its Christian ethos and values

ACTIONS FROM THIS MEETING

<u>Action</u>	<u>Person responsible</u>	<u>Date to be completed by</u>
1. Liaise with CM to submit written formal request for consent to convert.	BG	18.3.24

2. Communicate to parents and staff that the school will be exploring academization in more depth but that no decision has been taken yet on joining Ventrus.	BG and AH	18.3.24

SUMMARY OF DECISIONS

- The GB agreed to formally seek consent from appointing bodies to explore converting and joining Ventrus.

Next meeting: Monday, 18th March 2024 at 6.15-8.15pm

Signed as accurate by the Chair:

Name of Chair:

Date: