

MINUTES

Parents Forum

November 24th, 2021, 2.30pm

In Attendance

Dan Morrow (CEO), Susanne Kiff (CFOO), Adam Hill (Principal), Jo Luxford (Teacher), Lynn Duthaler (Admin), Josh Harmer, Kelly Harmer, Jonathan Gilpin, Jodie Gilpin, Danielle Haydon, Charlie Meacock, Jade Tennant, Jade Oliver-Deacon, Jane Easterbrook,

Apologies – No apologies were received.

Welcome

Adam Hill Welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming. He Introduced Dan Morrow as Chief Executive Officer of the Dartmoor Multi-Academy Trust, and Susanne Kiff as the Chief Finance and Operations Officer.

Sale of the Field Adjacent to the School

Dan thanked everyone for there time and explained that the land adjacent to the school was to be auctioned on the 9th of December with a guide price of £30,000 and that the trust would like to purchase the land to provide further outdoor provision and an outdoor library space which could be used by the community on Saturdays if run by volunteers. He advised that they had approached the vendor with what they felt was a reasonable offer but the vendor had declined and wishes to proceed with the auction. Dan was aware that there have been several conversations at FoLS meetings and some individuals offering to purchase as a group on behalf of the school. He explained that the Trust did not want to spend all of the money it had on the land and then not have anything left to spend on it if it was purchased. Dan said that Trust was not able to bid at an auction for various reason and said that there were several different ways that the money could be raised, for example by FoLS or by individuals buying the land to hold until the money was raised. He then asked what people's opinions were on this.

Kelly said that she didn't see the benefit of the land for the amount of money that would be spent on it and would rather that the money already raised was used to continue to support the school in providing trips and swimming for the children but said she could understand why the trust wanted to buy it and the implications of someone else owning it. However, she did feel that the funds raised should benefit the children at the school now and not in several years time.

Dan advised that safeguarding was paramount at all times and if someone else purchased the land consideration would be given to this.

Jade Tennant asked If the purchase of the land were to go ahead would we look to recruit more children to expand and have another class.

Dan explained that we always want to enroll more children and as surrounding schools are also members of the trust recruiting from outside the area could affect their numbers and the schools in the trust are working closely together anyway.

Charlie asked if the Trust had spoken with the National Park regarding usage of the land.

Dan advised that soft conversations had been had.

Josh raised concerns that if the school was to close in the future the land would be sold as an asset. He asked if a clause could be used so that if this happened the community would be able to use the land for free having if they raised the money to purchase.

Dan advised that the projected figures for the intake of pupils for the next 5-7 years are looking healthy. He said that viability of a school was not just about numbers and the trust currently has a school with just 18 pupils. The viability is also about the social impact that the school has on the community so even if the numbers drop it is not a reason to close the school. The trust is aware of the lack of services in rural areas and how they are being taken away from communities. They really want to look to invest in the communities that they serve and are looking at the possibility of running midwifery and other service out of schools.

Danielle asked if the Trust had a maximum bid and what the figure would be.

Dan said that it hadn't been decided but felt up to about £20,000 would be reasonable. They don't want to pay over the odds for the lands but obviously people are able to buy remotely online and don't know the true value of the land. He explained that the trust had set aside £10-12,000 toward the purchase and were hoping to have this matched. He suggested asking for pledges but was aware of the rapid turnaround time.

Jonathan Gilpin said that a couple of parents, us included (referring to himself and Jodie Gilpin), would front the money then have an agreement with the MAT to buy back the land. He asked if Dan knew if there was an official reserve price.

Dan said that this had not been made public.

Adam asked if there was an agreement to fund if individuals bought the land

Jonathan advised that in the past FoLS had generated around £4000 per annum and spend around £2000 and felt it wouldn't be an issue. There was also a large donation to forest school a few years back.

Kelly pointed out that the forest school donation was decided in a FoLS meeting and felt that this should be too.

Charlie advised that that there had been a discussion at a recent meeting and although there hadn't been an official vote, the consensus was that the existing funds should not be used to fund the land.

Josh explained that FoLS didn't know what money they would have in the future and want to still be able to fund swimming and theatre trips for the children and provide extra classroom resource that enhance the children's education. He said that it was about safeguarding what we have to be able to continue what we currently provide.

Dan said that this was perfectly sensible and that it wasn't for him to comment on the running of FoLS and how they use their funds.

Jonathan said that it was really a time equation if FoLS were up 2K every year.

It was then discussed that there was no guarantee of this amount and that it was a previous committee that had raised the funds held. The new committee hadn't had the opportunity to do anything to date.

Jonathan felt this was a just confidence issue.

Josh pointed out that we had just had two unprecedented years that no one has ever faced before and don't know what the future holds. He would prefer a parent group to buy and then specific fundraising so that the money could be paid back at intervals. There are clearly two different opinions and it would need to go out to a wider parent consensus for a vote.

Jon and Jodie said that they would have no harsh timescales to payback if they purchased the land on behalf of the school.

Jane said whilst she agreed that it was a great opportunity, she felt that it needed specific fundraising and agreed that the current funds should not be used as they were built up over time and were not raised to purchase land.

Jo said that Danielle had an idea about tapping up the community. Danielle then explained that she thought it would be worth trying a 'gift a grand' scheme as they may be people in the village that has some surplus fund that they would be willing to donate.

Jonathan said that there was no reason why the current FoLS group couldn't do what the last group have. If we didn't touch the current funds, we could still raise £8,000 in 2 years.

Adam suggested that FoLS have a meeting and formulate a plan to move forward, the £10,000 - £12,000 being pledged by the Trust having been confirmed.

Parent Forum Times

Questions were raised around the time of the meeting and why it had not been at a time when more people could come. Adam explained that he planned to hold parent forums half termly now that parents can be invited into school again. His plan was to rotate the meetings at different times throughout they year so that all can attend at a time that suits them. He will hold one in the morning after drop off another and another in the evening. If some parents can attend at 7.30pm as they work, there will be others that can't due to childcare. If meetings were always held at a time when the majority could come it would be the same people that attended each session and whilst there would be meetings where less parents could attend, by having the meetings at different times, this would give everyone the chance to attend at least one.

Jade expressed that it would have been helpful to have known this as lots of parents had been unhappy that they couldn't attend.

Charlie suggested sending out a list of times to see when parents could come.

Virtual meetings were suggested but Adam feels that more is gained by meeting face to face. There was a discussion around the best option and the general consensus was that no time would suit everyone and that blended meetings at different times would be best option.

Afterschool Clubs

Adam advised that he had received some comments about the variety and frequency of afterschool clubs and asked what parent's opinions were and what they would like within the compounds of school capabilities. Jade Tennant said that when her daughter started at Lydford, there was an afterschool club four days a week and they always ran until 4.30pm. Now that they finish at 4.15pm, parents are struggling to get here and as there is no afterschool provision, they have to pay over the odds for their children to go Treetops. If this is then coupled with breakfast club some parents have to pay out around £40 a day. Whilst she realised this was a small school and it won't be able to offer the same provisions as larger schools this was in the past balanced out with a community feel. Jade feels that the school is becoming too corporate and losing the community feel to it.

Adam asked if we could separate the two issues and come back to the community feel being lost.

He explained that we currently run a club for both classes on the same night to alleviate pressure for parents with siblings in different classes.

Charlie asked if Clubs could be ran by volunteers.

Adam explained that he was more than happy to have volunteers run clubs, but we would need to restart the volunteer process as it had been such a long time since we had had any volunteers in school. The school has recently had a safeguarding audit in which they were highly praised so want to build on that. The process involves a volunteer filling out an application form. Two character references are then obtained. Upon receipt of satisfactory references, a DBS check will be carried out.

Charlie said that he thought that volunteers would be a good way to run clubs as the teachers have enough to do and parents all have different skills.

Adam advised that this wasn't launched in September due to the covid situation we had to be cautious. We have been very lucky in comparison to other schools that have been affected.

Jo said that she had organised a handbell club but the volunteer had covid and could not attend.

Clubs would run in the hall and a member of staff would need to be on site.

Jane asked if the club would run on a Tuesday after Christmas. Jo advised that she had arranged a dance club on a Monday but there hadn't been any discussions about other clubs yet but would aim to get information out to parents before the end of term.

Adam said that the clubs were to provide enrichment activities after school and 45 minutes was a great amount of time for concentration and physical engagement. Teachers found that the last fifteen minutes of an hour session that the energy levels of the children drop and had counteractive effects which is why the clubs finished at 4.15pm. The clubs are not meant to provide childcare but Adam does not want the extra 15 minutes time to be a barrier to children not being able to attend and so would consider this.

Jade Oliver Deacon suggested that the clubs start at 3.45pm so that the children had a 15 minute break after school so that the clubs could finish at 4.30pm. Adam said that the teachers already have a quick sensory break/activity at the start of the club.

Timely Communication

Comments had been made around the school not communicating with parents in a timely manner. Adam explained that the school do try and give as much notice as possible.

Jane said she missed having a printout of the school newsletter and it would be useful to have one every now and then even if just dates. Adam explained that the school had moved to electronic newsletters for environmental and financial reasons. Lynn offered to look at sending out the dates periodically.

Jade Oliver-Deacon said that although the date of the school production had been communicated, a time had not been given. Adam confirmed that it would be 6pm.

Drop Off/Pick UP from School

Parents raised concerns around the safety, mainly at collection from school. When all the parents are waiting and the children coming out in quick succession, there is a concern for safety with children and parents between parked cars. It is also difficult to practice social distancing as crowded. Parents would like to be allowed back into the playground for collection.

Adam is happy to consider how this would work.

School Menu

Parents are generally unhappy about the changes to the school menu this term and lack of choice.

Jade Tennant said that it had changed a lot since Steve Parr (Trust Executive Chef) had taken over. The vegetarian options did not contain enough protein and there were no vegan options. Tuna was offered every day and she felt that due to mercury levels in Tuna she felt this wasn't healthy for children.

Josh felt that the menu didn't support the health school standard.

Susanne advised that Steve had been brought in to address this and has had to strip back the menu as starting point to build upon and had to take into consideration Natasha's Law which came into effect on 1st October

Josh felt that the menu was 85% carbohydrates and there was little wholemeal. Whilst there had been an allergy list there was no mention of what the options 'may contain'. He felt that the menu was stripped back to low standards. He felt passionate about this and has raised with Phil Whittley in the past. Devon Norse were not good but felt that the menu provided was a step down.

Susanne advised that as the menu is now all freshly prepared, Steve is having to retrain all staff to cook from scratch as items had been pre-prepared in the past.

Dan added that there had been a huge amount of staff training and qualifications taken. He said that 90% of the catering staff had had covid which had really had an impact on the team and training.

Josh pointed out that there had been no communication about this.

Many parents felt that charging £2.30 for a sandwich or fish finger butty was not acceptable.

Charlie advised that there is too much salad and not enough vegetables and the children are not wanting to eat the salad provided.

Jade Oliver Deacon suggested if training was an issue, staff should be sent off for a week for an intense course.

Parents wanted to know when they can expect to see an enhanced menu.

Susanne advised that she couldn't answer that and was aware that there was still a lot of staff off with covid. She will feed the comments back to Steve Parr and ask for a timescale.

School Uniform

The uniform expectations are on the school website. White polos, red Sweatshirts and cardigan – these do not need to have the school logo. Fleeces are optional outdoor wear. Adam advised that if any child has a legitimate reason why they cannot wear a jumper, he should be advised.

Losing the Community Feel

Adam requested that as time was short for the current meeting, could parents please email him with specific examples of how the community feel is being lost and how the school is becoming more corporate. Any suggestions of things that could be done to enhance the community feel would be gratefully received.

Stakeholder Voice

Adam asked if anyone has any ideas about how to go about collecting information and feedback from parents in the future to please let him know

AOB

Kelly asked about having helmets in school when the children rode on the scooters and trikes as she worried about her children. Adam advised that he was looking into it and would speak with staff about how this would work.

Adam thanked everyone for coming and would send out the date for the next meeting.

Meeting closed at 3.40pm

Appendix to the minutes

Some questions/ issues were raised after the meeting and answered by Adam Hill via email (in blue) as follows-

Attendance and Monitoring: In the last newsletter dated 19th Nov, there seemed to be a huge amount about attendance and monitoring and the feel and tone of the content did not sit comfortably. The way the sentences were constructed made me feel as if I was in trouble for having had a child off recently due to ill health. It felt very "corporate" and personally, wasn't received very well.

I am sorry you felt the wording of the information in the newsletter was impersonal. This was not aimed at any individuals. The review of attendance reporting was much needed and the new system, which was detailed in the newsletter, focusses much more on 2 way communication, support and solutions. This is a very welcome change.

I will reflect on how to word such messages more personally in the future.

Website / Blog: I have had a look at the new website and it looks good. I am a little concerned about the blog however, it seems that it's additional work for the teachers, when they already do so much. I would far rather Mrs Luxford and Mrs D spent their time more constructively, such as class preparation time or even better, having some down time. I am just not sure that filling in a blog is a good use of their time, when their time is so precious already.

The website is the front face of the school to parents, visitors and prospective parents. It is a conduit for information sharing and any prospective new parent I speak to has already visited the website. For this reason I have prioritised the creation of the new website and our ambition to keep in relevant, fresh and recent. Within this, the Classes Blog is key to allow current parents to have an insight to the schools daily functions and prospective parents and visitors to gain an understanding of the ethos of our school. This is a key element of our long term plan to ensure the school remains viable in terms of numbers – as discussed yesterday.

Your comments around teacher workload are valid and something I, as Principal, am responsible for monitoring teacher workload and wellbeing. Whilst this task has been added, ongoing strategies to reduce workload have been implemented. I will continue to monitor staff workload and the impact it has. Dialogue between myself and staff is constant and I am certain staff would raise concerns to me if required.

Change of Head: I received a number of messages from parents asking me to enquire why we had the change of head from Mrs Peterson to yourself. There is concern from parents that we have had 3 heads in 3 years and many of the parents felt that Mrs Peterson was doing an excellent job. We weren't really given a reason as to why the change happened and we would welcome being told as to why it happened please.

This question may have been better answered at Mr Morrow, but I will answer as I understand the processes taken.

The change of Principal happened as part of a leadership restructure for the whole Trust. There were lots of factors in deciding upon changes made and needed. Some of the priorities included streamlining workload for Principals with multiple sites (including myself and Mrs Petersen) and matching the qualities Principals hold to the schools that require them.

You will be aware that there were changes in Principal at many of the Trust schools. I agree that consistent change is not healthy and the period of instability in leadership you mention has been far from ideal. There are not plans to redeploy or change Principals again in the short or medium term.

Class 1 - COVID-19: A couple of Class 1 parents have asked whether there was a supply teacher provided for the 10 days that Mrs Luxford was off with Covid, just before half term? There seems to be concern that Mrs Brendan was on her own and although parents are sure she coped excellently, it is more a question as to whether she is able to be in the classroom on her own for that period of time.

There was not a supply teacher employed to covid Mrs Luxford's covid absence. Mrs Brendon covered this absence. Mrs Brendon is a Higher Level Teaching Assistant and is competent and confident at leading the class. She has recently completed her foundation degree in education and, I am certain, is destined to become a fully qualified teacher.

Mrs Brendon was very happy to accept the opportunity to lead the class and was supported by myself and remotely by Mrs Luxford in terms of planning and assessment. This was certainly not something she was forced to do. You/the parents are correct – she did an excellent job.

There are a number of reasons we did not use a supply teacher and are working to avoid using supply teachers at the moment.

1. The quality of supply teachers is hugely variable and, at times, their presence has caused more issues than they have solved.
2. There is a national and local shortage of supply teachers as a result of the Covid pandemic – many supply teachers have found other employment during a period when there was no supply work available.
3. Supply teachers are very expensive.

These factors, balanced with the opportunity for a highly skilled TA who knows the children to lead the class, meant I felt it was better for Mrs Brendon to lead the class

6. Corporate Feeling / Messaging / Jargon: It was interesting to hear that other parents are feeling that LPS is becoming more "corporate". The feel of the village school has changed in recent months and there seems to be a lot more "corporate jargon" being banded about - such as "stakeholder voices". It feels very much like the powers that be (high up in the DMAT) are forcing the little primaries to do as they are told and I am concerned that the wonderful feeling I had when I first saw LPS is starting to vanish.

- An example of this is the last newsletter - dated the 19th Nov. The newsletter felt that it had been written by 1 person, who had never been to LPS and didn't know our children and that the only change that had been made to it was to add the school name and the logo. There was no mention as to which children won the Inspire, Achieve or Nurture award and it was very disappointing.
- It disappoints me that this sort of thing is happening in a tiny village school with less than 40 children in it and I would welcome hearing your thoughts on this and why the change is happening.

Thank you for your comments on this.

These comments are, of course, alarming to me as one of the main strengths of small schools is to have a community and family ethos. There is not a top down directive for schools within our Trust to do as instructed. There are some elements of alignment, such as human resources, finance and premises which are welcome as they reduce workload and allow school based staff to focus on teaching and learning. Indeed, our Trust is very keen for individual schools to keep their unique selling points and individual character.

Thank you for the specific examples you mention which have caused you to feel this way. I will consider ways to communicate in 'plain English' terms. I will endeavour to include more school specific items in the newsletter. There will be, to ensure reduction of workload as mentioned earlier, some elements that will be common to other Trust schools. Are there are other items you'd like to see in the newsletter?

Safeguarding: Will it will be easier to find the safeguarding policy on the website, along with other important documents? the previous website, it wasn't very obvious where to go to find this information

There is a specific safeguarding page on the website here: [Safeguarding - LYDFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL \(lydford-primary.co.uk\)](http://lydford-primary.co.uk)

This can be navigated to from the home page by hovering on 'key info' and then clicking 'safeguarding'. Alternatively, there is a now a search function on the website into which you could type Safeguarding.

The policies for safeguarding are actually a suite of policies including Child Protection, safer recruitment, code of conduct, health and safety etc. These policies are hosted on the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust website which the links on our website will lead you to.

If parents have specific questions around safeguarding, I would be more than happy to discuss them.