

Minutes – Digitech Studio School Academy Council

Meeting Date: Tuesday 21 February 2023

Location: Virtual via Teams

Time: 5.00pm

AC Members		Attended	Apologies
Rob Gillman	Sponsor 1 (Chair)	✓	
Russ Gallon	Sponsor 2	✓	
Antony Merritt	Sponsor 3		✓
Rebecca Kemp	Sponsor 4	✓	
Vacancy	Sponsor 5		
Leila Henry-Thorne	Teaching staff Councillor	✓	
V Balasco	Support Staff Councillor	✓	
Chris Ballard	Principal	✓	
Vacancy	Parent Councillor		
Vacancy	Parent Councillor		
Sally Apps	Executive Principal	✓	
Invited attendees			
Wendy Hellin	Clerk	✓	
Simon Jones	Deputy Principal	✓	

Minutes

Item	Description	Action
1	Introductions, Administration, Apologies	
1.1	RGi opened the meeting and welcomed those present. Apologies are recorded above. RGi congratulated CB on his appointment as Principal to DSSB.	
2	Declaration of Interest	
2.1	No verbal declarations were made.	
3	Academy Council Membership	
3.1	RGi welcomed Leila Henry Thorne back to the Academy Council as Teacher Councillor and welcomed V as the new Support Staff Councillor. Rebecca Kemp has moved from Parent Councillor to Sponsor Councillor and this has been approved by COAC.	
4	Minutes of Previous Meeting	
4.1	The minutes of the last meeting were confirmed as a true record.	
5	Academy Council Report	
5.1	Achievement and standards (including raising attainment and preparation for exams)	

5.1.1	<p>CB provided the following updates:</p> <p>Outcomes and progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is little to update for Year 11; they are just starting their mock exams. Data will be available for the next AC meeting. • Year 10 have had a round of mid-terms (mocks) and staff submitted that data yesterday, so it is still to be analysed. The data and updated black box should be available at the next AC meeting. It is important to remember that the mid-terms were only partial papers so the focus will be on marks gained rather than overall grades. <p>Raising Attainment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of the RA plan and the 100-day plan, SLT are in the process of changing the Year 11 timetable as they approach the GCSEs to ensure students are with their subject teachers on the day of the exam or the day before. There will be a 'toast it' session on the morning of exams to help prepare students on the day. This year there are slightly larger numbers in the cohort which might cause some constraints. • There will be some additional capacity in option subjects, particularly arts and graphics, so the timetable will be adjusted to ensure time is utilised to the best effect. • There is a list of key students that staff are concerned about, in terms of sitting exams. There are about 11 on that list currently and the concerns are due to a range of issues, including students not being on site regularly enough. Bespoke things are being put in place for each. • Each subject will lead a big revision session and a series of assemblies will be held. A parents' evening will be held where staff will detail how parents can best support their children in exams and what they can do at home. • The tutor programme in Year 11 is being linked to help children with how to revise and a mental health and wellbeing strand is in place. A small number of students are feeling the pressure. There are a broad suite of strategies taking place now, and once the mock data has been analysed the interventions will be targeted to any gaps that emerge. 	
5.1.2	Questions from the Academy Council	
5.1.3	The crossover group has been a difficult challenge in past years. Are you doing anything more to identify those students and take action?	
5.1.4	This list is regularly updated, and it will be reviewed again after this round of mocks, and we will analyse the data to see where the intervention needs to be focused. Alongside this, we are making sure those students are attending regularly. Last year there were 4 or 5 students who did not get both and this impacted our basics data. It has been a regular standing item in our discussions. All indications seem positive that this year we will see an improvement in the basics score.	
5.1.5	We have made some different strategic decisions this year and have taken some children from some of their option lessons and focused on maths. It is really important for those individual students to be secure in English and maths; their college application could depend on it. The extra capacity we have in maths has allowed us to do that.	
5.1.6	We need to culturally change our approach and ensure the messaging is clear; the reason this is a focus for us as a school is because this is the key to opening future success for our students. It aligns with also improving the outcomes for the school.	

5.1.7	You mentioned some students are taken out of option subjects to get more maths and English. How has the addition of Jas Khera created the capacity you need in maths?	
5.1.8	The appointment was for 0.6 FTE, and this gives extra capacity in that there are 3 or 4 lessons where he (and another colleague) is timetabled to intervene and work with individuals. Sometimes the intervention will be during a timetabled maths lesson, and at times students may be withdrawn from another lesson. It appears to be having impact. At the same time, SLT are working with individual students on careers advice and destinations.	
5.1.9	It is really good to hear there is a lot of positive activity going on. The results of the functional skills are poor. Is it right that no students passed functional skills?	
5.1.10	In terms of English, the after-school interventions have been reduced due to capacity. We employed a tutor using the tutor funding. However, the tutor has been unwell and as such has not been in school as much as we would like, so the offer for English has been reduced. The additional period 7 for additional English and maths are still running but there is variable uptake on that, and it needs a bigger push. There also needs to be more work in terms of resits for Year 12 and 13 for GCSE resits and functional skills. There is not a large percentage of students taking resits or functional skills. No students passed the functional skills on the most recent attempt, and this is largely due to attendance issues, as well as some potential issues around safeguarding and mental health.	
5.1.11	How is raising attainment going for disadvantaged groups. What is progress like?	
5.1.12	CB reported that attainment and progress was looking strong for disadvantaged students. The school is in the second or third year of the strategy and impact is starting to be seen.	
5.1.13	Rebecca Kemp joined the meeting.	
5	Quality of Education/Achievements and Standards	
5.1	Student Outcomes	
5.2	CB reported that there had been a good start to the round of mocks in terms of preparation and attendance; largely due to the hard work of the pastoral team. It will continue to be monitored over the next 2 weeks.	
5.3	Questions from the Academy Council	
5.4	There was mention in the report that there has been some limited resource in terms of SLT going into lessons; has that been resolved?	
5.4.1	There has there been a challenge over the last term or two, mainly due to staff absence and cover; SLT have had to do a lot of cover and duty, and this pulls us away from being able to do quality assurance. However, SLT have been into lots of lessons and have used the feedback from SA and the ARV to support with the quality assurance. We have done a lot of work with staff on setting expectations and what it looks like to lead their lessons and are checking expectations around behaviour, those and culture. We do need to be in a position where SLT has the capacity to do quality assurance on a more regular basis.	
5.5	Is staff absence higher than usual? Are there particular issues?	
5.5.1	It is not higher than usual. The issue is that it is very difficult to secure cover staff so when there are absences, we have to cover that in-house. SLT are then called upon and become operational which detracts from the strategic work around quality assurance and maintaining standards. There isn't a specific trend or concern with absence.	
5.6	Can you provide some feedback from the ARVs?	
5.6.1	(SJ) During the ARV, SA noticed that there were some Year 10 girls with low self-esteem and a piece of work has started today by way of a girls group. We have also recently tightened the rules around mobile phones.	
5.6.2	(SA) The focus was on two areas: the consistency and application of the behaviour system and whether it was having impact; the level of challenge given to students (the previous ARV	

	included some feedback from students at the top end of ability who did not feel particularly challenged). During the visit it was evident there is greater consistency in applying the behaviour expectations. However, there were some students trying to discreetly use earphones and phones in class. When it was noticed, it was dealt with, and it is good to know the school has since done further work around the mobile phone policy. There was also more challenge across the board; the students spoken to felt they were now being challenged. Also, during the visit, the opportunity was taken to speak with any students that had come out of lessons. It was mostly girls out of lessons, and it was for valid personal reasons but for longer-term issues that were not going to be solved quickly; they were around the perceptions of self. This started a series of conversations around mental health and resilience. It is great to hear that a girls group has started.	
5.7	Was your observation about the girls validated by the leadership team? Had they also observed that?	
5.7.1	(SA) It was useful to have an external view. All the things raised were things that the leadership team were not blind to, but the additional information added clarity about what the root cause might be. On the day in question, it is worth noting that there were mock exams in the afternoon so there was some added pressure.	
5.7.2	We have seen a similar thing before with a group of girls now in Year 11; it was not the exact same reasons, but we have been on a journey with them and now rarely see them out of lessons. It is not unusual for DSSB, we often have students that are extremely vulnerable. On average our students have 1.4 ACEs, whereas at the next nearest school the average is 0.4.	
5.8	The point about exams is important. The cohort identified are the students that spent parts of their school life in isolation during the pandemic and they now find themselves struggling at a crucial time in their development. Their anxieties may be amplified during summer exams, and it would be good to keep that in mind.	
5.8.1	It is also worth saying that every one of the girls in question had a period of home schooling prior to joining DSSB so there may be gaps in their learning and some undiagnosed need. At DSSB we are very good at getting to know what those needs are quickly and putting effective interventions and strategies in place.	
5.9	How is the coaching working?	
5.9.1	A triad coaching model is in place, where staff are put in groups of 3 and over 2 terms, they each are observed, and each go into class to see someone else teach. It is driven by staff in a safe and non-judgemental environment. The first coaching window is just coming to an end and feedback will be gathered tomorrow. We wanted to offer a form of professional coaching and there was limited capacity in the leadership team, so we did some CPD and worked with Chris Baker to upskill staff on how to hold a coaching conversation.	
5.10	Has the Voice 21 work been broadly positive?	
5.10.1	Yes, we are coming to the end of the 2-year cycle and will continue to use some of the learning from it to continue to drive literacy across the school. Staff are more confident in the use of oracy to support students in the classroom.	
5.11	Do students applying to join DSSB next year know the curriculum offer?	
5.11.1	At Post 16 we are marketing the curriculum offer already and have had an increase in applications – there are already 31 for September 2023. At KS4 the students do not yet know what their choices are. We have had 134 applications for 90 places. Once the LA confirm which 90 students will be offered a place, we can then contact them to send the information out including the options offer.	
5.12	To what extent are you able to quality assure the provision at the partnership organisations such as BoomSatsuma?	

5.12.1	It is a piece of work we are constantly thinking about, and we talk about it with SA and Sarah Lovell. In an ideal world we would have greater capacity to allow us to go into those provisions more often to quality assure both the education and the compliance areas. Over the coming terms we will have a clearer answer about what that quality assurance process looks like.	
5.13	How are you ensuring that within each subject, staff are preparing students to be ready for employment in industry? Are you continuing to work on the Gatsby benchmark score?	
5.13.1	We need to continue to build the career and employability strand to ensure we are meeting the Gatsby benchmarks, and part of this involves arranging for visits from industry experts. All upper pay scale staff have been reviewed over the last couple of terms to support staff and lead on careers in the curriculum across the school. We continue to work with our employability coach in the creative, digital and tech industries to ensure students are supported to follow those pathways.	
5.14	What did you learn yesterday, with regards to behaviour, following your visit from Tony Searle?	
5.14.1	Tony Searle (TS) leads the Behaviour Hub work for the trust. Unfortunately, the visit was postponed as we ascertained we first need to relaunch some of the behaviour initiatives to reinforce the importance of consistency ahead of TS's visit.	
5.15	When Tony Searle visits, will he view the school over a couple of days to see what behaviour is like, and how staff apply the policy?	
5.15.1	No, his role is to support us and to offer questions and challenge to us as a school to ensure the way we run our behaviour system aligns with our values, and to support us to ensure there is consistency in it.	
5.16	The report details 9 suspensions – is this 9 students suspended 9 times, or 9 suspensions in total?	
5.16.1	It is 9 students that were suspended for a total number of 41 sessions (each session is half a day), so a total of around 20 days. There were a couple of longer suspensions in there, but on the whole, they are short suspensions given to students for not responding to the behaviour system, such as using a mobile phone when they should not.	
5.17	Some schools PEX more regularly. DSSB do not. How close have you been to needing to permanently exclude a student? What is your philosophy on that?	
5.17.1	We will only PEX at DSSB as a very last resort. We have a cohort with very high vulnerability, and it is complex. We support each student very well and our philosophy is that DSSB is the best place for those students to be and we need to get it right for them. If we can't, it is unlikely another mainstream school can. We have had 4 or 5 students where we could have made the decision to permanently exclude them, but instead gave them the chance to improve their behaviour (with support) and so far, that has been successful. That said, it might be necessary one day; we will not allow the behaviour of some students to impact the culture of the school and to harm or impact the learning of others.	
5.18	Going through the permanent exclusions process can see student's attitudes change. Is simply suspending students having the same level of gravitas? Or are you suspending the same students over and over again?	
5.18.1	It is an internal debate we have often about the purpose of suspension. Suspension does not change behaviours. There have been times we could have permanently excluded a student but chose instead to suspend so that we can spend some time trying to unpick the root cause of the behaviour. Where their behaviour affects other students we do warn students that they are putting themselves at risk of permanent exclusion and do have those conversations. We regularly check in with SA as our EP to sense check our decision making.	
5.18.2	(SA) To provide some reassurance, we do have a lot of professional challenge around the decisions made. DSSB is extraordinary about how it is creative with initiatives to be able to avoid permanent exclusion for a student. If we consider the suspension data as an indicator	

	or outcome, rather than thinking of it changing behaviours, it indicates that DSSB is being successful in other strategies to avoid permanent exclusion. Suspension needs to be rare enough to remain powerful. It is an area of constant discussion and review.	
5.18.3	RK praised the approach at DSSB and noted that the child-centred approach was the reason she chose DSSB for her son.	
5.18.4	RK left the meeting.	
5.19	Behaviour and Exclusions	
5.20	What does RRS stand for?	
5.20.1	Ready, Respectful and Safe – they are our 3 values, and they underpin the behaviour system.	
5.21	Attendance	
5.22	Attendance is still not where we would want it to be. We have spent a considerable amount of time in previous meetings discussing this and hearing what you are doing to improve it. Is there anything that has changed since the last meeting?	
5.22.1	One of the biggest things we have done is to appoint an attendance and pastoral support worker. We do really good work with families, particularly from a safeguarding point of view, and this will add capacity to do the absence phone calls and initial attendance meetings. There is further work to do on the strategy, but it is hoped this will have a significant impact on the attendance, particularly for PP students, and will strengthen those family links.	
5.23	Will their role also include some preventative work, rather than just being reactive to absence?	
5.23.1	Yes, it will. We look at the attendance data of students before they arrive in Year 10 so that we know if there will be challenges and we can start to build relationships with families early on.	
6.	Safeguarding	
6.1	RGi reported that he is currently carrying out the role of Link Academy Councillor for Safeguarding and that he has met regularly with Tom Pratt (TP) DSL. The report is included in the meeting papers.	
6.2	Partnerships – TP has safeguarding responsibility for the partnerships. The assessment was that they could all do a better job in recording some of their material, but overall safeguarding was good at Robins, strong at BoomSatusuma and a work in progress at Bristol School of Acting. RGi asked if CB was surprised by that assessment or if it reflected CB's view. CB said it was aligned with his view; he discusses this regularly with TP and the wider leadership team on how they can support the partnerships to improve safeguarding as well as other areas.	
6.3	RGi noted that a person has been secured to provide some free mental health support for students and asked CB for further detail. CB confirmed that they are part of the mental health support team from the LA and will work with some students that have been identified, that would benefit from cognitive behaviour therapy.	
6.4	RGi noted the use of a postbox in the corridor for students to drop a note of any concerns they have about themselves or someone else. CB advised the postbox could be used to highlight any concern and is checked daily. It is a more subtle way for a student to be able to ask for help, if needed.	
6.5	RGa noted the numbers included in the data for this report are different to those in Term 2 and asked if there is normally such a swing. CB advised it was normal to see peaks and troughs and the data is not concerning. There is an expected increase when a new cohort comes in, and it can take some time to unpick those existing challenges. SB reported it can often peak around the school holidays too. DSSB is good at responding to small trends such as bullying or domestic violence, and where this is recognised, it will be dealt with in the	

	next PHSE or other suitable lesson, or via assemblies. It would be expected that there would be around 60 open Safeguarding cases at any one time across DSSB, including partnerships.	
6.6	RGa asked why the no of LAC and PLAC pupils changed last term. CB advised that these numbers do change periodically where students join or leave in-year.	
7	Finance, Health and Safety and Estates	
7.1	Nothing further to report.	
8	Policies	
8.1	There are no policies to review for this meeting.	
9	Student Voice	
9.1	Nothing further to report.	
10	Governance	
10.1	Nothing further to report.	
11	EDI	
11.1	LHT reported that there are discussions taking place around how to deal delicately with students wishing to choose pronouns. LHT stressed the importance of progressing this work carefully and taking the time to get it right. The other strand in focus at present is around ensuring BaME students feel listened to and feel safe at DSSB. SJ advised that a 5-year EDI plan is being discussed.	
12	Matters for the attention of the Board	
12.1	Nothing further to report.	
13	AOB	
13.1	RG noted the high number of applications received for Year 10 in September 2023 and asked how the 90 places will be allocated to the applicants. CB advised that the Local Authority processes the admissions and will allocate places. In addition, some wider work is being carried out with the EP around the admissions policy and what the oversubscription criteria should look like, and in addition, if there needs to be a post-16 entry criterion.	
13.2	RG asked for information about the new sports centre. CB advised that the plan is that the LA will refurbish the existing sports centre on the site of The Grange. The school would then negotiate with them to access it for the schools PE offer and it would be dependent on pricing.	
13.3	RG thanked V for joining her first meeting and asked if she wished to raise anything as Support Staff Academy Councillor. V did not wish to raise anything at this meeting.	

The meeting ended at 18.50hrs.