

THINKING SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST

COMPANY NUMBER: 7359755

Subject	Meeting of Directors	Date	1.5.2024
Room	London	Time	10.00am
Present	Gerard Newman (GN) (Chair), Peter Martin (PM) (Vice Chair), Kaye Bettey (KB), Stuart Gardner (SG), Derek Morrison (DM), Andrew Medhurst (AM), Clive Star (CS), Dave Glassey (DG), Natasha Hurtado (NH), Ian Mason (IM) – Joined at 12.00	Clerk	Kelly Denton
Apologies accepted		In attendance	Kelly Denton (KD), Lee Miller (LM), Jody Murphy (JM), Mandy Gage (MG), Janina Villalta (JV), Jay Davenport (JD)

Key Points Discussed and Action Items				
No.	Agenda Item	Action/Discussion	By whom	When
1.	Declaration of business interests	There were no declarations of interest relating to items on the agenda		
2.	Welcome and apologies for absence	GN welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies were received and accepted from Steve Geary with Ian Mason attending from 12 GN gave context to the timing of this meeting and position of the Trust with particular focus being drawn to challenges with outcomes in some areas, and the financial position		
3	SWOT	SG led a session on the current SWOT of the Trust. The session started with a discussion on the strengths with the agreed strengths being noted as; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established vision and values (but identification that how we do this has some inconsistencies in some schools) • Some strong leaders at Executive and Headteacher level. • Demonstrable ability to have impact were school and Trust work well together. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible and open-minded approach to problem solving. • TSfE – quality of Core services provision. • Strong culture of supporting schools at times of crisis. • Openness and transparency with Executive and Trustees • Have been able to attract schools to join us and by into our vision. • Commercial services offered by the trust to generate income and with positive reputation <p>The discussion established the following weaknesses;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency in the strength of some school leaders. • 5 schools are currently Ofsted RI. One more school more challenging. Therefore, 6/25 schools are not currently Good. (Discussion around length of time in Trust and Trust impact, where it was concluded that there was not a systemic flaw but individual situations) • Outcomes for students in some schools and at some key stages is not good enough. • Inconsistency in the strength of some governing bodies. • Lack of effective leadership and development programme for current and future school leaders. • Quality Assurance is not providing an accurate assessment of Ofsted readiness. • Isolation of CRGS, particularly the ability to leverage their best practice and strengths across the Trust, as well as the risk of our people strategy not being applied to CRGS staff • Regional Education Drive Teams have not had a consistent impact. • IT was discussed and the recent changes to the model to improve, but not defined as a weakness. <p>The discussion established the following opportunities;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a new operating model. • [REDACTED] • ICT – single central network. • Review central function operating model and structures. • IIP provides a framework for our people strategy. • Participation in Arts Mark Programme. • Little Thinkers Strategy. • Co-Ed proposal at HGS. • Role of Director of Culture and Development to improve the culture in the trust of schools to buy into the vision <p>The discussion established and following Threats;</p>		
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		<p>[REDACTED]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding position over the next 3 years [REDACTED] • Impact of necessary cost savings on Trust culture and impact on school improvement. • New leaders requiring support / development to be successful. • New governance structure not providing effective oversight. • Ongoing sector wide recruitment and retention crisis. Within TSAT specifically the number of experienced staff we have that are retiring over the coming 5 years in high and the opportunity to target groups to drive improved retention. • Low student number forecasts make the financial position even more challenging – [REDACTED]. • Knee jerk reaction to challenges the Trust is facing. • Some schools don't buy into the ethos and values of the Trust • Risk of a cyber attack • Impact of external factors such as social services, mental health, AP and SEND position in LAs. • Impact of potential curriculum changes and the challenge of working over a number of regions • Small number of really strong people and the risk of single point of failure including the sector wide challenge of the number of high quality Headteachers 		
4.	Financial position	<p>LM highlighted current position of 23/24 forecasted [REDACTED]. Trust forecast for reserves for 31/8/24 is [REDACTED]. In addition to the discussion in December with the Board there are two further challenges to GAG funding which is [REDACTED] worse than estimated and pension grant has a shortfall of [REDACTED]. Position in March was that, without intervention, the Trust would be [REDACTED] requiring use of reserves to remain solvent. Current position is forecast of [REDACTED] from schools and [REDACTED] from central. LM there will positive improvement to this but not to a balanced budget position.</p> <p>LM highted the main drivers;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfunded pay progression • Grammar school funding model • Pot 4 investment • SRPs/SEND funding 		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent leadership model across hubs • Intervention costs being shared by all • Central services going beyond minimum requirements <p>The Board discussed the approach of Schools being asked to work to a balanced budget, if this is not feasible for 2024/25, they will be asked to produce a 3-year plan. The Board discussed this approach and how prescriptive it is at the moment and how this may shift, dependent on the final position, as well as how it will address the inequalities and the principles of our Trust financial model. Final forecast will go to July BoD meeting including a 3-year plan.</p>		
5.	Trust operating model	<p>SG presented the history and evolution of the operating model in the Trust, and the move over recent years to an expectation from schools and governors on ‘what the trust will do to improve/support’ as well as the services that the Trust delivers that support the school and have moved from school delivery.</p> <p>SG highlighted the concern with the current model of having blurred responsibility and accountability for school performance and that this model is not financially viable.</p> <p>The Board discussed the spectrum in MATs between a federated model and blueprint model and where our Trust should fit, with the Trust currently being a federated model.</p> <p>The model of becoming a federated model with explicit expectations and policies was discussed with agreement that the Trust moves to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - HTs empowered decision makers and school leaders - HTs and RDs responsible and accountable for implementing school improvement <p>Key aspects of the discussion and decision from the Board on this were; how new schools coming into the Trust will adapt to this, learning from schools where accountability for poor performance has had blurred lines, ensuring that clear messages are delivered to heads if they are failing to achieve an agreed minimum standard, and clear expectations of support for the Head on how <u>they</u> deliver it.</p> <p>The Board agreed that responsibility and accountability for school improvement and performance is held at school level rather than Trust level.</p> <p>The way this will be delivered is through key three areas;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong leaders: developed, supported and challenged to lead effectively through effective line management and oversight 		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong Policies: clear Trust expectations of school performance through policies and framework - Strong Services: delivering value for money on core functions to enable HTs to focus on school improvement 		
6.	Principles of Growth	<p>SG led a session on establishing principles of growth for the future. SG proposed removing the strategy of being a “safe place” for grammar schools due to the financial challenges linked to grammars and the adverse impact on the Trust finances increasing the number of grammars would have on this.</p> <p>The Board discussed and agreed the principles of proposed growth of securing additional schools in our current hubs particularly in Deal & partner secondary school for TPA. And focus growth on securing our through school model with existing schools in our Trust.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p>	LM SG	24/25 July 24

7.	Strategy for the 3 years ahead – Education	<p>JM presented the progress of the Trust’s development plan priorities linked to the Education Drive Team and the EDTs achievements and impact over 2023/24.</p> <p>JM covered the structure of the EDT team and where this fits with the earlier conversation about moving to a model where schools are accountable for school improvement, and whether all aspects of this model would be essential going forward.</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>JM presented a proposal of introducing policies and frameworks which give clear Trust expectations which will clarify the measure of success for our schools and the standards of minimum requirements required to deliver consistency across the trust. These would be written by the EDT and then a plan to review the implementation of these across the schools, which will be reviewed through heatmaps which will in turn be reported to the Executive and AGBs.</p> <p>JM presented the focus on 24/25 for the EDT with highlights in terms of value of EDT team, implementing policies, empowering leads to review self against agreed frameworks, increasing Trust-wide networks, and support in moving towards a tighter federated model.</p>	JM/LM	Financial review timeline
	Strategy for 3 years ahead – People	<p>MG presented ‘where we are’ with the key focus needing to be on focusing on strong leads to support school improvement and accountability for schools, as well as building strong leaders in governance. MG presented data regarding Heads staying within the Trust, and the lack of new heads coming through within the education sector. She also highlighted some inconsistency with performance, behaviour and willingness to embed Trust-wide strategies such as Professional Growth.</p> <p>MG presented the plan to define what Strong leaders in our Trust means, which includes working collaboratively, use professional growth, operating with high challenge and high support as well as a culture of transforming life chances.</p> <p>MG presented the focus over 24/25 which included; audit of PG objectives to ensure consistency, review of school leadership by region, further development of the Trust coaching model, the new governance structure, heads being conduits of Trust strategy, review of headteacher engagement, and implementation of the Trust People Strategy.</p>		

		<p>JV updated the board on the People Strategy 2024-2029 and how it supports every school delivering outcomes that transforms life chances. The key areas will be well-being, EDI Strategy, and professional growth strategy.</p> <p>The People Strategy has the aims of transforming leaders, supporting our staff, advocacy for our people, and talent management.</p> <p>JV talked through the People Strategy roll-out over the coming years with the 5year plan regarding IIP accreditation.</p>		
8.	Strategy for the 3 years ahead – Finance	<p>LM presented his reflection on 23/24; embedding the vision of central ‘right things, right way, right costs’, setting up strategic and tactical groups within the central function and setting up the funding model and regional model of structure and support for schools.</p> <p>LM presented what he defines strong services as - ‘delivering value to enable HTs to focus on school improvement’ and confirmed his focus on 24/25 of looking at; leadership structure across the central function, ensuring value for money, reserves policy, a new TSAT funding formula, the “Pot 4” strategy, the new business directorate, and growing the external customer base of TSFE to add further value back to TSAT.</p> <p>The Board discussed how they could explicitly be shown that our model of central services does provide efficiencies and economies of scale and agreed to set a target for the cost per pupil for services to ensure there is these efficiencies and economies of scale.</p> <p>The Board discussed and gave their support to the plan of growing the customer base for TSFE and commercial income. Additionally, they also discussed and agreed with the review of the most efficient way of delivering central services with the appropriate trade-offs between costs vs level of service.</p> <p>The Board asked LM what his 3 year aim will be, which he explained he has some early modelling on and will present part of this to the July Finance committee</p> <p>Action LM to present the 3 phase approach to developing TSFE value back.</p>	LM	
	Leadership Conference	<p>The Board discussed how all that has been spoken about today will be taken forward, with agreement that the Executive will take this away and present back to the Board and communication to the wider Trust and the Trust Leadership Conference in July</p> <p>SG will also look at how to communicate to the wider governor community on the changes to the operating model to ensure we have their support of the new model.</p>		

		Action: Exec present back the final strategic plan for presentation at the leadership conference	SG	Before conf
11.	Items for future meetings	Plan for Goodwin to be brought to the Board in July		