



MINUTES

Local Governing Board Meeting 17:00 on Monday 13 March 2023

PRESENT: Babu Bhattacharjee (VC), Aaron Mulhern (Headteacher), Helal Ahmed

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Lisa Tharpe (Deputy Head), Jesse White (T4, Interim CEO), Asad Muzammal (Clerk)

1. Apologies for Absence and welcome of any new Governors:

- a. Apologies for absence were received from Chris Weavers.

Merger proposal

- b. Governors discussed the background reasons to the potential merger being the DfE policy to seek to merge smaller MATs with larger MATs. Governors discussed how merging with a larger Trust could provide staff with better career pathways, better school-to-school support and a greater depth of management.

JW said that the Trust Board's view is to choose a merger partner that they respect, rather than have a merger forced upon the Trust later with a Trust who may not be a good fit for T4. The preferred merger partner is the Beckmead Trust. The schools in the Beckmead Trust are all either SEMH or APs and the CEO and Deputy CEO have over 40 years of experience of working and supporting these types of provisions. The Beckmead Trust's schools are all either Good or Outstanding. If the merger goes ahead, then the Beckmead Trust will have 11 schools by the end of this year.

- c. JW said that IMHS has a full roll and ArtsX is under financial pressure, as there are only 47 students on roll, against a capacity of 150. Merging with a larger trust would provide economies of scale, joint CPD and better shared services. For example, there are currently not enough Maths teachers at ArtsX and merging with a larger Trust could offer shared staff. The T4 Trust staff and school leaders have visited the Beckmead Trust's establishments and all believe that there is a good synergy between the Trusts, with a shared ethos and values. The school leaders of the Beckmead Trust's schools have a high level of autonomy on how their schools operate.

- d. Governors noted that a SLA is in place for the Beckmead Trust CEO, Jonty Clark, to take over as interim CEO of T4 for two days a week when JW leaves at the end of the month.

- e. JW said that the milestones of the merger process are a TUPE consultation, due diligence by both Trusts and gaining approval of the merger from the DfE.
These processes are more straightforward between two Trusts, than it is for a maintained school to join a Trust. The merger could potentially be finalised by September 2023.
- f. The financial position of ArtsX is a potential obstacle for the merger to go ahead. The Beckmead CFO visited ArtsX today to discuss the challenges of finances and student numbers at ArtsX and to view the building. The Beckmead Executive are confident that they could grow the student numbers at ArtsX over time.
- g. In response to questions on the DfE not supporting the T4 trust's previous merger plans with the Lime Trust, JW said that the DfE's objections to the Lime Trust merger do not exist with the potential merger with the Beckmead Trust.
- h. In response to questions, JW said that the Beckmead Trust operates a LGB model in all its schools and this is valued by the Beckmead Trust. The only expected difference for the IMHS LGB would be that they will be providing governance under a different Trust. The school will retain its name. Staff will not notice any change in the day-to-day running of the school.
JW said that decisions have not yet been finalised. The T4 Trust values the work of the LGBs and today's meeting is part of the internal consultation. Governors should raise any concerns they have with the potential merger.
- i. Governors agreed that instinctively, the merger feels like a good opportunity and the right thing for the T4 Trust and IMHS. The greater depth in management from being involved with a larger Trust would also allow the SLT to focus on developing the school and being more involved in education, than having to focus on staffing matters, which take up much of the SLT's time and could instead be managed by a larger central team. JW said that this is also the view of the T4 Executive and the school leaders who visited the Beckmead schools as part of the T4 due diligence process.
Governors discussed the period where the Beckmead Trust CEO will be interim CEO of the T4 Trust, would provide them with a better understanding of how the Beckmead Trust operates and noted that the merger process could be halted if there were any concerns. JW advised that Governors will be invited to the next T4 Board meeting, where they can ask any additional questions they think of which have not been answered in today's meeting and Governors may also contact TA or JW with any questions or thoughts they have around the merger.
- j. In response to questions on the staff feeling, following JC's Q&A presentation to the IMHS staff today, JW said that JC had made a very positive impression and the staff are happy with everything they heard and are broadly positive.
- k. In response to questions, JW said that there are some differences in culture. For example, IMHS operates a kind of therapeutic approach of a no restraint policy with students, rather than a behaviourist approach. AM added that both Trusts are willing to learn and adapt to changes that best meet the needs of the students and schools. JC has given his assurance that there are no intentions for IMHS to change its approach, or to try and impose a different philosophy.
- l. In response to questions, AM said that from his visit to the Beckmead schools, it was recognised that there is a shared ethos and values. JC came across as genuine, with an authentic passion for SEMH. There was a positive atmosphere in the Beckmead schools, where there is autonomy with effective accountability. JC explained the CPD model for the Beckmead Headteachers and SLTs across the trust. It was also acknowledged that a larger Trust would provide staff with more career opportunities. The IMHS SLT came away with the impression that IMHS would be highly valued by the Beckmead Trust as an asset.

AM added that there are over 70 young people in the borough who require a SEN placement. He had spoken to JC about expanding the IMHS post-16 offer and setting up a primary provision. The Beckmead Trust has experience in making these types of applications to LAs and the DfE.

- m. In response to questions, JW said that a larger Trust should be able to offer more school-to-school support through its wider network. For example, one of the benefits that has been identified is having a shared Maths teacher operating over a number of schools in the Trust. Financially, there is also opportunity for more CPD in a larger group of schools, better shared services and greater economies of scale. There is also the opportunity to improve the central services, including the HR function. Governors noted that the Beckmead Trust has a Director of Education.
- n. In response to questions on consultation with parents, JW said that T4 has access to an effective PR advisor and there will be a communication plan for all stakeholder communication.
- o. In response to questions, JW advised that due diligence is currently underway by both Trusts and will include confirmation of the Ofsted grades of the Beckmead provisions.
- p. Governors discussed how although they may not have any legal responsibility in this matter, they do have a responsibility to the community. Governors agreed that they would want some clarification on their role in the merger process and if there are any points that they can insist on or veto. For example, on the philosophy and ethos of the new Trust; whether LGBs will be maintained and if they would have a say on members of the LGB who are retained following the merger; and they would also want some assurances that finances generated by IMHS would be applied more to benefit IMHS students. JW said that the Trustees are responsible for the due diligence and the final decision making is by the T4 Board. The T4 Board has said that they would welcome all input for the LGBs and would consider this before making any final decisions. No final decisions have been made yet and the merger process could be halted. The T4 Board has an open relationship with its LGBs and the due diligence will be shared. JW presented the operational scheme of delegation for the Beckmead Trust's governance arrangements.
- q. JW presented the Beckmead Trust 3-year growth plan, listing the eight current schools within the Trust and planned new schools to join the Trust and plans where they have been asked to create brand new provisions. Governors agreed that the growth strategy is well thought out and measured to allow new schools to settle into the Trust and not overwhelm the central team and to control quality as the Trust scales up. JW said that the T4 Board had some concerns on the Beckmead Trust's plans to take on a 500-place school and it was explained that this will be a brand-new school, where the roll will build up to 500 over time as each year group moves up.
- r. In response to questions, JW advised that the T4 Trust is receiving legal advice from Winckworth Sherwood, who have been the Trust's legal advisers since its inception in 2019.

Agreed: The LGB agreed that in principle they support the merger with the Beckmead Trust.

Action 230313/01: Governors to be invited to the next T4 Board meeting on 27 March. (JW, Clerk)

2. Declarations of pecuniary interest in any of the agenda items:

- a. There were no declarations of pecuniary interest in today's agenda.

3. Membership Matters:

- a. Governors agreed that the size of the LGB should be increased and were encouraged to propose suitable candidates to join the LGB to the Chair and Headteacher before the next meeting.

Governors acknowledged that they should also seek representation from parents and staff on the LGB.

4. Minutes of the previous meetings and matters arising:

- a. Actions carried over

Action 221115/02: The Staff Wellbeing Survey to be an Agenda item for the next meeting. (Clerk, Headteacher)

Action 221115/04: EPM to be contacted for advice on online checks and on providing a Trust-wide Recruitment Policy. (JW)

Agreed: The Minutes of the meetings held on 15 November 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

5. Headteacher's Report:

- a. The Headteacher said that good progress has been made towards the school priorities. Governors acknowledged that the SDP also includes the Ofsted priorities from the inspection last year.
- b. There is a continued focus on curriculum update and sequencing and updating the Curriculum Policy.
- c. An INSET day last week focused on Teaching and Learning and the curriculum updates. The afternoon session discussed inclusive practices, and in particular homophobic bullying.
- d. The Headteacher said that the school has a holistic approach to ensure that phonics, literacy and numeracy is weaved and embedded throughout the curriculum. The school has identified two phonics programmes. For the older students, the school is using the Teenage and Adults Phonics programme. The school has appointed a phonics specialist with experience of delivering literacy and phonics in both primary and secondary settings.
- e. The Headteacher said that to promote the love of reading, the school has bought a large collection of fiction titles, including a collection of Roald Dahl books. Non-fiction books the school has purchased include the Guinness Book of World Records. The books have been well received by students.
- f. The Headteacher advised that the most recent survey for staff, students and parents was around the plan to improve mental health and wellbeing at the school. The school has partnered with the Rewards People, an external agency, to work towards achieving the Mental Health and Wellness award.

Action 230313/02: The survey analysis to be shared with the LGB when available. (Headteacher)

- g. The Headteacher advised that planned capital works include the installation of a climbing frame and installation of a 5G football pitch. A Health & Safety inspection is taking place to assess feasibility of the installation. The school is also considering installing a garden room to be used as a reset space for students who become dysregulated away from the main school building. The Headteacher advised that a staff group are fundraising for the climbing frame

through taking part in the Nuclear Obstacle Race at Braintree. Training for the event has helped to increase staff morale.

- h. The Headteacher advised that the boxer, Amir Khan, has been invited to speak to students at the school next week.
- i. Governors noted that the school has managed to stay open for students during the recent teacher strike days. In response to questions, the Headteacher said that the school does not expect to be significantly impacted by the tube strike.

6. Safeguarding:

- a. Deferred to the next meeting.

7. Finance Update:

- a. Deferred to the next meeting.

8. Policies & Documents:

- a. In response to questions, LT advised that the Business Continuity Plan is based on Government guidance.
- b. The Headteacher said that the Curriculum Policy is under constant review.

Agreed: Governors approved the following policies and documents:

■ Safeguarding Policy ■ Curriculum Policy ■ Health & Safety Policy ■ Business Continuity Plan ■ IMHS Emergency Plan ■ IMHS Probation Procedure

9. Chair's Action:

- a. None.

10. LGB Development Plan:

- a. Governors noted the availability of NGA online training.

11. Any other Business:

- a. Governors wished to record their thanks and appreciation to Jesse White for his role as Interim CEO and their best wishes for his future endeavours.
- b. Forward Agenda
 - Outdoor Space Development

12. Date of the next meeting:

■ 10 July

13. Any Confidential Items:

- a. JW advised that a Governor Panel is required to hear a grievance from a staff member.

The meeting closed at 18:40

.....
Chair date

Decisions

Agreed: The LGB agreed that in principle they support the merger with the Beckmead Trust.

Agreed: The Minutes of the meetings held on 15 November 2022 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Agreed: Governors approved the following policies and documents:

- Safeguarding Policy
- Curriculum Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Business Continuity Plan
- IMHS Emergency Plan
- IMHS Probation Procedure

~o0o~

Actions carried over

Actions

Action 221115/02: The Staff Wellbeing Survey to be an Agenda item for the next meeting. (Clerk, Headteacher)

Action 221115/04: EPM to be contacted for advice on online checks and on providing a Trust-wide Recruitment Policy. (JW)

Actions from this meeting

Action 230313/01: Governors to be invited to the next T4 Board meeting on 27 March. (JW, Clerk)

Action 230313/02: The survey analysis to be shared with the LGB when available. (Headteacher)