

**MINUTES OF THE 149th MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
WEDNESDAY 14 DECEMBER 2022 AT 17.30
VIA TEAMS**

Present: Dick Whitcutt (DW) - Chair, Richard Perry (RJP), Douglas Mitchell (DMI), Angela Entwistle (AEE), Stewart Harris (SH), Kevin Chamberlain (KC) Madeleine Hughes (MH) Tom Chmielewski (TC), Pat Edmondson (PED), Matt Gallagher (MGA), Michael Collins (MCO)

In Attendance: Jane Kiddell (JKD) (Minutes)

Start Time: 17:30

DW welcomed Peter Gaze, who is a close associate of Lord Ashcroft and a Trustee of the Academy Trust, to the Executive Board meeting.

3. Apologies

Apologies for absence came from Tony Bothwell (TB) and Maria Chiara Sechi (MCS).

4. Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

5. Minutes of Last meeting held on Tuesday 11 October 2023

DW referred to Page 2 of the previous minutes which referred to the examination results that may improve due to some students' papers being remarked and asked for an update. DMI said that ATA won't know until January when the final national data set is released. ATA has had notification from the DfE that all of the remarks have been accepted.

DW referred to the three autistic resource base provisions in the local authority area for secondary level students, which are no longer sufficient to meet the growing demand of applications. DMI has a meeting scheduled with the local authority towards the end of January to discuss this area.

DMI explained to the Board that ATA had received its highest number of "consultations" for children with additional needs. This includes consultations in respect of students who live outside, and who are educated out of the borough. Colleagues in other local schools have reported the same thing. It is clear that the Local Authority are under pressure and are finding it difficult to cater for the number of students in receipt of an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) in a cost-efficient way.

DW asked whether, if there were an increase in the number of applications for students with special needs, the Local Authority would then have to find places for these students in their own schools. DMI confirmed that this would be the case. He also told the Board that the Academy has agreed a maximum number of students with an EHCP that it accepts, which is ten EHCP students in each year group and a further sixteen students within its Autistic Resource Centre (ARC), for which a student must also have an EHCP in place. This places ATA over the national average. The Board agreed that additional EHCP places should not be offered at this point in time.

DW referred to the three main lifts in the Academy and it was confirmed that there are no further delays to the work being carried out.

DW commented about the revised arrangements at Open View sportsground which are proceeding well. The minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 11 October were agreed as a true and accurate record.

6. Principal's Report

DMI shared his report with the Board.

DMI informed the Board that his report is relatively short this time.

The Year 11, Year 12 and Year 13 mocks were conducted well and ATA is pleased with the outcome. Year 11 students are not yet aware of how they have performed as the papers are being marked at present. The students will be invited into the Academy with their parents on 10 January 2023 for a simulated results evening. Students will receive their grades in a brown envelope and senior staff will go through what has been learnt from the mocks, discuss any common trends across subject areas and any specific things to look out for when preparing for the final exams.

It has proved popular and successful in the past and where ATA has been able to have an in-depth conversation in a formal setting with parents and students together.

Attendance

ATA has experienced a higher rate than normal of student absences. This is a trend observed by all schools and caused by a current surge in COVID-like symptoms and concerns about STREP A. Four students have had a confirmed diagnosis of Strep A and are currently taking a course of antibiotics.

Staffing

DM spoke about recruitment and a worsening national picture for school staffing. ATA is losing its Food Technology teacher after Christmas. It is proving difficult to appoint a replacement for this role. An interview is scheduled for tomorrow morning and, if successful, an appointment will be made.

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Further to his comments under 5 above, DMI explained that Local Authorities are finding it difficult to cope with an increase in the number of children who receive an EHCP, the increase in needs within those ECHPs and the reduction in funding each Local Authority receives for children who have high needs. Ofsted produced its annual report yesterday and referred to the rise in the number of students who are either being assessed for, or who have received, an EHCP.

Strategic Plan

DMI spoke about the strategic plan briefly. The majority of the progress made has been in Teaching and Learning and DMI told the Board that Phil Hall will attend the next Executive Board meeting so he can present the progress in more depth.

Attendance

DMI followed on from his earlier comments about attendance. ATA is still within the excellent student attendance range it has historically achieved, which is the 96% to 97.6%. The national attendance figure has dropped below 90%, which is a cause for concern.

DW asked about the groups within the attendance tables noting that some groups appear to have a lower attendance rate than some others. DMI said that there are a number of students that did not return immediately after the summer holidays because they had taken extended leave over the summer in their home countries. In two comparatively small groups, there are two students who are seeking a place in another school and are not attending while transfer takes place, which has impacted negatively on the overall attendance.

Accident Report

DMI shared the Accident report and no concerns were raised.

Exclusions

DMI told the Board about five of the exclusions reported in his table. These related to five Year 7 students who were caught vaping, and have since been excluded for a fixed term and senior staff have met with the parents. Board members commended ATA for the strong stance that has been taken with the issue of vaping.

6. Current Topic for discussion

i. Student exclusions – new guidance (DMI)

DMI shared his presentation with the Board.

DW explained briefly to the Board about the role of the Discipline Review Committee, comprised of members of the Executive Board, who must meet formally (with representations) to either support the Principal's decision to permanently exclude a student or overturn it. DMI spoke more in depth about exclusions and explained the difference between a fixed term exclusion and a permanent exclusion.

DMI told the Board his presentation is designed provide more context about exclusions and to explain the new guidance from the Department for Education that was published in September 2022, and the Academy's response.

There is a pressure from some who believe that any and all exclusions are wrong and that when children are permanently excluded from school their outcomes will be significantly worse than they would have been had they remained at school. There are also voluntary groups and charitable organisations that will match very experienced competent lawyers with families of children who have been permanently excluded with a view to overturning that decision to permanently exclude.

However, there are those who believe exclusion is an important part of a school's sanction system because one individual should never disrupt the learning experience or make the school environment unsafe for all other children.

A permanent exclusion, as a last resort, is a way of making sure that the school environment is safe for every single child. Used effectively, this is an effective deterrent.

Southwark Council and Bristol City Council have tried to create a zero-exclusion zone in their council areas but schools in each Local Authority were not in agreement with this decision.

AEE asked the parents on the Board what their views were and a discussion took place. All Board members were in agreement that exclusions should be there as a last resort, when all other avenues have failed to resolve a student's behaviour.

DMI shared an example with the Board of a school in Aberdeen that had a zero-exclusion policy. Industrial action was taken by members of staff because they felt the school was unsafe for them to teach in – they were regularly subjected to abusive language, physical threats etc since some students felt their school places were secure no matter what their behaviour.

The new guidance produced by the government is explicit in its support of head teachers using fixed term exclusion and, occasionally, permanent exclusion as a sanction. This is part of creating a calm, safe and supportive environment for students and staff members. DMI shared an excerpt from an 'inadequate' Ofsted report, which described an unsafe environment for staff and students.

DW commented that exclusion is not something that ATA does very often, but acts as a deterrent.

DMI shared some national figures which showed there were a total 352,454 fixed-term exclusions nationally last year, with a sharp increase in the number of fixed-term exclusions in the North East.

The lowest number of exclusions were in the southwest and the most common reason for an exclusion was persistent disruptive behaviour.

A permanent exclusion, it is considered to be similar to a legal process and schools are therefore obliged to produce a significant body of evidence when preparing for a permanent exclusion hearing. After a head teacher has taken the decision to permanently exclude, the Discipline Review Committee, made up of members of a school's governing body must convene to hear the case and decide to uphold the head teacher's decision or overturn the head teacher's decision. If upheld, the parent can appeal the decision via an Independent Review Panel. DMI sits on these for (other schools in) Wandsworth and PED has now been trained to sit on independent Review Panels too.

ii. **Extra-curricular activities – participation rates (MCO)**

MCO shared his presentation with the Board on the subject of extra-curricular clubs and activities.

A big emphasis has been placed on the importance of attending extra-curricular activities in schools following COVID and the lost learning that students experienced during that period, but also the loss of access they had to the enrichment experiences that schools offer students.

The Ofsted inspection framework has really put personal development of students in the foreground of their scrutiny of schools. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities are front and centre in this particular area of student development.

MCO gave the Board an update of what ATA offers its students. This academic year ATA has over 100 different clubs and activities that students are able to participate in.

The teachers are very much on board and keen to share their ideas. ATA has a rich and diverse range of activities for the students to choose from, whether it is an art club, performing arts club or chess club etc., and also subject-specific activities. Post COVID, ATA extended the lunch break and this enabled its students to have more time to access clubs as well as have their lunch and play and socialise with each other.

ATA has a really thriving STEAM club which consists of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Maths. It includes a range of different staff running a carousel of different activities across all year groups, which has proved to be very popular. ATA has morning and lunchtime PE clubs for students – team sports and access to the fitness suites – and a wide range of performing arts clubs. ATA had its performing arts Christmas showcase last night, which was an excellent showcase of all the different things that students are doing within the performing arts department.

ATA has mentoring opportunities for students, which is a different type of personal development, but good for some students to help develop their soft skills, which will make them attractive. ATA has good links to external agencies and organisations, particularly the sixth form, many of which integrate into ATA's careers advice service and other opportunities.

ATA has integrated its extra-curricular range of activities into a central data system which allows ATA to track, manage and analyse student attendance to clubs. MCO shared the data with the Board.

With ATA using the centralised record of students who are participating in clubs, ATA is able to target students who maybe aren't making use of what is on offer to them and encourage the student to get involved - particularly the disadvantaged students.

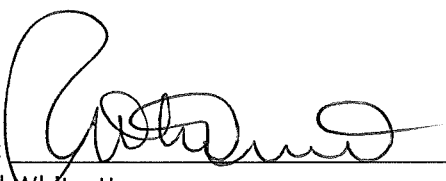
Over the course of the rest of the year, ATA would like to raise the profile of extra-curricular activities with students through a reward system and the House system

The Board wished to convey their thanks and appreciation to the staff that are so willing to get involved and promote the activities.

7. Any other business

DW thanked everyone for their participation and continued support.

The next Executive Board meeting will be Tuesday 28 February in the Academy.

Signed: 
Richard Whitcutt
Chair of the Executive Board

Date 28/07/2023