

## Meeting Notes - Thursday 27th July from 7pm

Leading & Speaking at the Meeting

[Sarah Greenleaf](#) - Chair of Trustees (stepping down)

[Peter Harrington](#) - new Chair of Trustees

[Reinout Koopmans](#) - Trustee

[John Leary Joyce](#) - Trustee / Facilitator

[Laurence Chester](#) - shortly to join the trustee body (safeguarding specialist in social care)

[SMT members](#) - Julian Paine, Nicky Teensma, Carol Langley, Regina Walsh

[Kevin Avison](#) - Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship

John Leary Joyce

- welcomed those present and those online
- gave context for the meeting and the key to what parents can do to support the process

Julian Paine

- gave a context for the sequence of inspections and the imposition of the Restriction (imposed March 2017 and now in appeal) and deregistration order (imposed July 2017 - which we will appeal against within 28 days)
- stated that appeals do not run for a fixed period. However, solicitors have estimated that this process could be brought to a Tribunal sometime in the second half of the autumn term, or near the beginning of the new year
- stated that the school would be open in September

Sarah Greenleaf

- explained that originally the meeting had been called to introduce the new strategy, and especially the appointment of an interim head, but that the deregistration letter from DfE of 26 July had given a new and even more urgent impetus to the meeting
- introduced the trustees and Peter Harrington as the new chair and Kevin Avison from the Fellowship
- discussed the outstanding concerns, including safeguarding - and the need to be proactive rather than reactive
- discussed strategy - RSSKL starting fresh with interim head, new chair of trustees and new professional trustee intake with a focus on expertise in HR and Safeguarding.
- stated that the main objective was to focus on the successful negotiation of an OFSTED inspection and winning the appeals process
- stated that the school is committed to delivering a full Steiner education
- expressed the importance of the huge amount of work that has been done and is being done to manage the appeal process successfully

Reinout Koopmans

- discussed the way forward especially the new strategy
- stated that the arrival this week of the letter of deregistration doesn't alter the strategy, as the strategy had been proactively put in place to address both the restriction appeal and will also now address the new appeal against deregistration
- **Interim Head role.** It is intended that the new post of principal will give the school much greater credibility and particularly with Ofsted and DfE.
- Trustees have been working on getting the right skills in place to successfully pass Ofsted inspection.
- there has been a thorough process of recruitment for the Interim Head and there was a consensus in the choice of the most suitable candidate from Trustees, SMT and College who were all properly represented.
- this is an ideal candidate as he has an impeccable record in the state school system for many years, with a recent track record in turning around failing schools and he was also a pupil at Michael Waldorf School for 12 years.
- the new candidate will start mid-August
- **Legal Strategy.** The school has commissioned Antony Julius from Mishcon de Reya. Having the best legal team will be very expensive, but worth it. It is hoped that in the long run it will be cheaper and quicker to go with the very best solution, than to pay over a longer period for a compromise solution. AJ as an exception track record in successful resolving a wide variety of cases for clients, as does Mishcon.
- **Change of Trustees.** The new trustees (approved but not yet appointed formally) will provide professional skills in key areas including Safeguarding and HR. Peter Harrington as chair is an ex pupil, and has worked in government policy consultancy for several years as well as a vice chair of Trustees in a London school.
- RK thanked the Trustees who are stepping down (which is those who have been on the board for more than three months - Russell Deane, Sabine Alkema, Ian Martin, Sarah Greenleaf, and Graham Dalrymple). In time to come people will come to recognise the outstanding work they have done for the school through these challenging times.

Peter Harrington

- spoke about being at the school from Kindergarten to Class 13
- spoke about his background in government policy making and his work internationally
- stated he has been a governor of a school in London for 3 years and is currently vice chair of that governor body
- he understands that the level of concern is critically high at this time, but believes that the school can successfully appeal against deregistration

- to save the school the staff, trustees and parents will need to work together to continue changes and improvements at the school - to this he is fully committed

John Leary Joyce

- introduced the group session to help people to formulate their questions for the Q&A, stating that we would also be taking questions from those who dialed-in via a conference call facility.

Q&A Session.

Questions were discussed and collected in small groups then written up on the wall on flip chart paper. Questions were then grouped together and answered under relevant categories.

### **Safeguarding**

- questions, concerns & frustrations were expressed following the Ofsted report about what the parents feel they are not being told by the school.
- parents asked - can we have more transparency about these issues ? What is the school doing to address safeguarding ? How many outstanding safeguarding complaints are there?

JP responded:

1. In order to build credibility with DfE and Ofsted we need to package, present and evidence the huge safeguarding changes that have been made in the school; including, but not limited to - staff training, policy writing, the use of external expertise both legal and local authority (including external audits of safeguarding), the development of internal expertise, culture change in historic freedoms such as parent access to the site
2. We also need to make further substantive changes in the school; including, but not limited to - deepening the expertise in safeguarding in the school, both at management level and in the Trustees; continuing with external audits of safeguarding; bringing the highest level of safeguarding rigour to every activity in the school.

Parents asked for further detail on the particular safeguarding issues that led to the failure at the last Ofsted inspection.

JP gave more detail including

- the school was told that although it was good practice to take legal advice, that the school relied too heavily on that advice. Therefore the school leaders were not showing the necessary level of leadership required to give confidence to Ofsted that we are competent in this area.
- that the school had taken too long to deal with some issues that related to safeguarding
- that the communication between Trustees and SMT was seen not to have been effective. JP further explained that this had to do with an external investigation report that the Trustees had dealt with since SMT were overloaded. That this report contained recommendations that had not been thoroughly reported back to the management of the school. Ofsted regarded this as a serious failing, though they also reported at the inspection that SMT had in fact already implemented the recommendations contained in the report.
- JP explained that the Inspectors had pointed to two phrases that had been published on behalf of the school. One in was in the school newsletter and one in the local press. Their view was that the statements that were made had misrepresented the safeguarding failures of the school to parents. JP pointed out that while it is true that these statements were made, those statements were not viewed in the context of the whole of the school's communications with parents. It was

confirmed that these staff members had had no intention to mislead parents or cover up anything that related to safeguarding.

- JP was challenged to explain how such small things could lead to a safeguarding failure. JP explained that this is to do with the higher level of scrutiny that the school is under, due to past failings. JP then asked Laurence Chester, who is a specialist in safeguarding from local social services, to come to the mic and explain further. LC explained that the DfE would not be confident in the school as long as it was seen to respond reactively to safeguarding problems rather than to take a confident leading role in assessing risks before incidences arise. He also stated that he would be joining the trustee body of the school.
- parent support with safeguarding is a top priority, including their full cooperation with the changes taking place in the school. It may be necessary and helpful for parents to have some workshop training to better understand the new culture around safeguarding and the intense scrutiny that organisations such as ours are under at this time.
- Trustees said they could not comment on legacy complaints at this time.
- Nicky Teensma stated that the current complaints are being managed in line with school policy and within Ofsted protocols

### **Interim Head Role & Leadership in the School**

RK responded:

- the school need to upgrade its expertise. It is felt that the new Interim Head candidate is a very good fit and had exactly the right kind of expertise.
- the new Interim Head will focus mainly on the operational running of the school, But will also be involved in strategic conversations
- we need to look at other roles in the school and the necessary levels of expertise, especially safeguarding
- initially the intention is to have the Interim Head's role for 12 to 18 months, but it may be longer
- the new Interim Head will meet parents early on in the new term, as soon as possible
- Trustees and SMT will work closely with the new Interim Head, and will make sure that the role of College is as full as it should be sustaining in the ethos of the education
- the financing of this role and of the legal fees for the appeals is a considerable challenge for the school, but the school is in a strong position with its current reserves to cover these exceptional costs. However going forward trustees will need to address the question of increased fees with parents in the autumn term to cover the increased work required by teachers due to Ofsted requirements.
- parents who have paid fees in advance the 2017 2018 should contact the office if they would like to be refunded an instead to pay their fees termly
- the question of insurance is also an ongoing concern. The school has had a constructive dialogue with our insurers and has secured an additional period to 2018. The school has a very good risk history but the insurance situation needs to be carefully managed in the coming months.

## **Legal (RK)**

- although the top lawyer AJ is very expensive, he has a team underneath him who can deal with day-to-day matters and their rates are very similar to those of the solicitors that we have been using up to this time
- it may be that the solicitors decide to align both the Restriction and De-regulation appeals, but it may be more advantageous to the school not to do this. The school will be advised.
- a high court action against the Department of education is not on the agenda at this time. The school wishes to work in cooperation with Ofsted and the Department of education. We believe that we can be an outstanding Steiner school and pass all the necessary independent school standards.

## **Teachers and Pupils (JP)**

- parents with pupils entering examination years will be given specific advice
- it was explained that at the current time we understand that at the end of the tribunal process, if the DfE decision to de-register the school is upheld in court that it is possible that the tribunal can:
  - 1. Decide on the timeline for the closure of the school
  - 2. Ask the DfE to decide on this timeline
- as part of this process the school will provide as much information as possible to parents at all times so that they can make the decisions that are in the best interest of their children, particularly, with regard to the completion of the examination curricula and whether or not this can be done at the school (if the school were forced to close).
- there are new administration staff being appointed to support teachers and managers
- the new Interim Head has suggested some new practices relating to monitoring and assessment that will make it easier and quicker for teachers to record the data that they need for the pupils in their classes

## **Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (KA)**

- KA pointed out that there are only three members of staff at the fellowship
- he indicated that he has had meetings with the DfE
- He stated that SWSF would support the school and do not want to see our RSSKL closing

## **What Can Parents Do ?**

- fundraising will be important to support the school at this challenging time
- it would be very advantageous to have a PR strategy to demonstrate the value of all of the Steiner / Waldorf education. It is important that we are very constructive in this strategy, rather than we are positive in promoting the school.
- put additional energy into enhancing the appearance of the school to make a positive impact on inspectors and to raise the morale of our community of pupils, teachers, staff, and parents