St Michael's Church of England, VA, Primary and Nursery School

FGB and SLT Emergency meeting 3rd January 2021
Minutes

Attendees: John Neenan, Kerry Joynes, Sian Lewis, Julie Phillips, Fiona Tibbitt, David Hibberd, Chris Marriott, Mary Evans, Tracy Jessop, Georgina Chapple and Olivia Corfield.
Apologies: Eleanor Milligan

Key: Challenge, Support, SIAMS

JN thanked everyone for attending the meeting on a Sunday and at such short notice. He explained that he had spent the weekend at various meetings including Educate Norfolk, NEU, Aylsham Cluster, NCC, MHH and with the SLT.

He highlighted how the pandemic situation has been developing over the weekend with many considering that Gavin Williamson and Boris Johnson would close all schools in Tier 4. Education unions were contacting members to advise it is not safe to go back to school quoting section 44 of the Health and Safety Act, of the right not to work if you feel unsafe to do so.

JN explained that there are already 3 staff members unable to come into school; 1 as she is in the 3rd trimester of pregnancy and 2 who are classed as critically vulnerable. JN has now received Union correspondence from 4 support staff stating they cannot come to work when all children are in, as it is not safe, and 1 teacher feels the same way. In light of this JN stated that he is unable to safely open the school to all pupils for the current time. He has taken advice from MHH and discussed the situation with the Cluster heads and SLT and proposed that the school is closed to everyone on Monday 4th January as an emergency INSET day. This will enable the staff to prepare for online working and survey which children will come in as critical worker children and assess who are vulnerable children.

The school will then be open to critical worker and vulnerable children from Tuesday onwards. They will continue in the 3 current key stage bubbles. To enable parents to plan childcare etc. they will be advised that this will be for at least 2 weeks and will be reviewed for Monday 18th January.

Governors discussed the fact that cases are rising in the Broadland area and it seemed likely all school would soon be closing. The NNUH is overwhelmed and Cromer hospital has closed so staff can be relocated to Norwich. North Walsham's Cottage hospital is now a dedicated COVID hospital. Several other schools have already taken the decision to close.

JN advised that Seb Gass from NCC has assured school's that he will back them if they decide to close and this has been reiterated by Chris Snudden and Sarah Tough. In case of complaints, they have set up a crisis line for parents which the school should refer complainants too. Other schools in the Cluster are currently staying open as they have had no clear communication from staff members to say that are not happy to come into school. A lot of St Michael's parents have been communicating with school to say they are unhappy about sending their children back to school with the current COVID infection rates.

JN explained that if governors agree he will send a communication out to parents to advise of the situation and survey the provision that is needed.

Governors asked:
What is the teaching/TA staffing capacity at? JN advised it is at approximately 50% and the SLT would look at minimising the number of staff in school each day.

How would teachers manage teaching in person and providing remote online work? As 2 classes were in each bubble the workload could be shared. A lot of the in-person teaching would be the same as the online work.
There are only 2 members of staff able to work in Early Years, however another TA would be able to come in if there were far fewer children in school. Those working from home would support planning and prepare videos for online work.

Had enough been done to put procedures in place to keep the school as safe as possible and assure staff members that they would be safe from infection?
The majority of school staff had attended a zoom meeting on New Year's Eve. The amendments to the risk assessment had been discussed, such as having 3 staff rooms, no visitors in school, including parents and governors, use of visors and face masks, parents wearing face masks on school grounds, hand-sanitisers on lanyards etc. The SLT felt the school had done as much as it plausibly could however safety could not be guaranteed, and staff members still felt unsafe.
The risk assessment will be used when critical worker and vulnerable children are in school.

At what point would school re-open, would you be looking at the R number?
JN explained he did not know; it would be reviewed in 2 weeks, but he did not feel infection rates would drop in that time especially with the new variant.

Governors agreed the facts and figures around COVID were concerning and they could understand staff members feeling uncomfortable with coming into school. It was agreed that the decision had to be based of staffing levels being sufficient to run the school and currently they were not.
It was commented that the school had to handle the situation as an emergency response, in a command-and-control situation ensuring parents received clear and timely communication.
Governors agreed that the school should close on Monday 4th January for an emergency INSET and remote learning should start from Tuesday alongside in-school provision for critical worker and vulnerable children only.

Next steps were agreed as JN speaking to the rest of teachers and support staff and emailing parents as soon as possible so they could arrange childcare if needed. FT is to set up an online survey for parents and a detailed letter would go out to parents later in the afternoon to give as much clarity as is possible in the current time.

JN thanked everyone for their time and the meeting ended.