





The Fields Nursery School, Galfrid Road, Cambridge, CB5 8ND

- Before the start of term, a Section 44 letter had been submitted, signed by half the staff including both NEU members and non-members, stating their view that it was not safe for staff or children to return to The Fields.
- On the evening of Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021, the Prime Minister had announced a new national lockdown, with primary and secondary schools closing immediately. However, unlike the first national lockdown, in this lockdown early years settings including maintained nursery schools remained open.
- The local authority had advised that following the submission of the Section 44 letter, staff could not be required to attend work. However, staff had indicated that they were willing to come in to work with key worker children and vulnerable children only. The local authority had measured the internal space at The Fields and had advised that 20 places could be offered. The nursery school was now operating on this basis, with staff working on a rota, attending one week and working from home the next.
- Staff working from home were helping to deliver Zoom sessions and resources for the website and Facebook. Staff were making welfare calls, prioritising children who were neither attending nor participating in Zoom sessions. Activity packs had also been prepared and were being given out for families to use at home.
- It was expected that The Fields would continue to operate in this way at least until the February half-term.
- An e-mail from Paula Champion, NEU representative at The Fields, had been circulated to Governors just before the meeting. In the e-mail, Paula explained the rationale for submitting the Section 44 letter. She also drew attention to an NEU/UNISON petition on safety and funding in early years and invited Governors to sign.

RH also updated Governors on two e-mails she had just received, which she would be sharing with staff the following day:

- By the end of January, The Fields would receive home lateral flow tests for all staff for use twice a week. If a test proved positive, the individual would be asked to go to a testing centre for a confirmatory test.
- Jon Lewis, the Director of Education, had advised that he had ordered vaccines for all Education staff in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, 30,000 in total. It was not yet known when these would be rolled out.

It was hoped that the combination of these measures would in due course enable staff to feel more confident and The Fields to reopen more fully.

Responding to the update, Governors discussed the following points:

- Asked whether there would be any financial consequences for The Fields of not being fully open. RH reported that the Government had initially said that the national school census due to take



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place on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021 would count only children who were in attendance. However, this had been universally challenged and the Minister for Children had subsequently announced that the census and associated funding would be based on the number of children on the school roll that day. At The Fields, the paperwork for children due to start in January 2021 had already been completed, meaning that these children could be included on the funding statement. However, Governors noted that the number of funded 2 year olds at The Fields had fallen: 10 in January 2021 as compared with 27 in January 2020. More were expected in April and September.

- Expressed concern that the partial closure of The Fields meant that some families who did not meet the formal criteria for a place could still be struggling. RH noted that the criteria for a place included the option of 'the Head's discretion'. Using this, she had offered places to some families who she knew would otherwise be facing severe difficulties.
- Suggested that the assessment of risk should be based on the total number of children attending, not whether they met particular criteria. Governors noted that not all places were filled on all days – for example, 11 children had attended that day – and asked whether places could be offered to more children. RH explained that The Fields was required to keep places open for particularly vulnerable children, even if their families were not currently bringing them in. In addition, some key worker children were attending only on the days their parents were at work, not for the full week. However, the total number of children currently being offered places was 20, with the aim of keeping the group as consistent as possible.
- Noted that Paula Champion was happy to speak to Governors individually. Governors wishing to do would ask RH to arrange this. Governors agreed that it would be very useful for the NEU to write to parents explaining the reasoning for their action and how long it might apply, particularly since the Government was saying that early years settings were open and this was the case for other early years settings locally. Governors also suggested that The Fields could help parents who were not able to access a place and who were struggling, potentially at risk of losing their jobs, by signposting to alternative providers such as childminders and other legal options such as childcare support bubbles. RH confirmed that she was already in touch with local childminders. She also noted that she and other staff were using welfare calls to link families with other forms of support, such as Abbey People and IT connectivity.

Governors agreed that the risk assessment responding to the latest situation was well-written and adequate. Governors thanked Ruth for her continuing efforts.

## 6. Update on Federation

GR reported on a number of issues relating to the planned federation of The Fields with the Cambridge Nursery Federation (Brunswick and Colleges):

- All Governors had been e-mailed to ask if they were interested in joining the new Federation Governing Body.



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- The formal staff consultation letter would be issued imminently and would include 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 as the proposed date for federation, with a proviso that if any practical obstacles were encountered, this would need to be reviewed.
- The working group comprising GR, RH, Amanda Bannister, Chris Willis Pickup and Emma Dean would continue to meet.
- It was intended that legal federation of the two Governing Bodies would take place on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, although Amanda Bannister might not take over officially as Executive Head from this date.

GR also reported that the local authority had advised shortly before Christmas that they had been unable to find an alternative use for the vacated Cherry wing and would therefore not be contributing to The Fields' budget for these rooms. Despite disappointment at this news, Chris Willis Pickup had confirmed that the Cambridge Nursery Federation remained committed to federation. Ray Byford from the local authority's Education Finance team was supporting staff at The Fields to remodel the budget.

#### **7. Any Other Business**

Governors considered a request from a member of staff to take a six-week sabbatical during June and July 2021. Governors noted that RH had discussed the reason for the request fully with the member of staff. It was agreed unanimously to support the request.

#### **8. Dates of Future Governing Body Meetings**

It was agreed that future Governing Body meetings would take place on:

- Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 6.30pm
- Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021 at 6.30pm.

The meeting closed at 7.30pm.