

**MINUTES OF THE 139<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD  
OF ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON  
TUESDAY 13 OCT 2020 AT 17.30**  
*Meeting held remotely on the ZOOM platform  
due to the on-going Coronavirus pandemic*

**Present:** Dick Whitcutt (DW) - Chair, Richard Perry (RJP), Douglas Mitchell (DMI), Angela Entwistle (AEE), Cristina Carli Nonnato (CCN), Stewart Harris (SH), Patricia Edmondson (PED), Rachel Branagan (RB), Kevin Chamberlain (KC), Tony Bothwell (TB), Phil Hall (PHA) Mike Smith (MSM)

**In Attendance:** Jane Kiddell (JKD) (Minutes)

**Start Time:** 17:30

**1. Apologies**

DW welcomed on-line presence of members of the Executive Board, who had all joined the virtual meeting via the Zoom online meeting platform.

**2. Declarations**

No interests were declared.

**3. Minutes of Last meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

**4. Matters Arising**

No further matters were raised.

DMI welcomed the Board and introduced Phil Hall (PHA) Deputy Principal and the Academy's Designated Safeguarding Lead and Mike Smith (MSM) Deputy Principal.

DMI asked the Board if they were happy for PHA to deliver his presentation on safeguarding matters first. It included the effect the lockdown period has had on some of our students and the approach the Academy adopted to help support its students during the lockdown period and since 1 September.

**Safeguarding – Presented by Phil Hall (PHA)**

PHA addressed the Board and provided a timely safeguarding update.

The Department for Education describe safeguarding in two ways: child protection and safeguarding - the preventative measures that are put in place so that all students are safe. It is a collective effort and the responsibility of every member of staff to be aware and to notice when something is wrong with a student and to make sure that students are safe from any harm, whether that be at school or in the home.

Over the lockdown period, measures were put into place to ensure that the most vulnerable students were

identified. ATA had 120 students which spanned across all year groups. A traffic light system was introduced and staff contacted these students on a regular basis.

Red – ATA staff contacted the students every 2-3 days.

Amber – ATA staff contacted students on a weekly basis.

Green – STS staff contacted students every two weeks.

Over the lockdown period, PHA, Heads of Year, Leadership Group, ICAS and SEN mentors and the Welfare Officers maintained good contact with vulnerable students and if action was needed then a referral would be made by PHA.

Nobody realised that the lockdown period would extend to five months but a system was put in place for Form Tutors to contact every student in the Academy on fortnightly basis so all students received direct contact from a member of staff.

Many of the conversations focused on workload, exercise, rules and regulations and the Form Tutors updated PHA after each telephone call. PHA discussed the feedback with DMI on a regular basis.

Now having the students back in the Academy is great and it has clearly showed that the students missed being at school. They missed their friends and realised that it was much better to be back in a structured day.

One of the major fears was the potential increase in mental health issues among students, but thankfully there have only been two significant concerns: one Year 11 student and one Year 8 student. One was an existing concern and the other a new concern for whom home is an unsafe environment. PHA has been working with them both.

The number of general safeguarding concerns are in-line with those received in previous years but ATA staff are observant and will report any issues of safeguarding they may have.

PHA advised the Board that the Academy is piloting a new initiative with CAMHs (Child Adolescent Mental Health Support). This is a new programme with support for 15 to 18 year old students. Students who are suffering from anxiety can self-refer or they can be referred by teachers. CAMHs have already presented to Year 12 and Year 13 in an assembly and already students have referred themselves. ATA are hoping that an early intervention of this type will stop small issues from developing into much more significant and concerning issues.

Vicky Ward will be overseeing the delivery of this support and the first sessions were held last week. The service will work with ATA students over the course of this calendar year with the hope that more funding will be released to extend the support the support into the new year.

Recently, however, ATA has found it challenging when engaging with external services in Wandsworth because many of the services are under resourced and therefore very stretched. Wandsworth have reported a surge in cases and a restriction on face to face meetings.

In many of our cases, we are simply told that the threshold has not been met for intervention by Social Care which has resulted in ATA having had to deal with these issues in-house. This is far from ideal because ATA staff are not professionally qualified in these areas but do spend the time to counsel and coach students so that students know they have someone they can turn to.

DW asked PHA what CAMHs think of the service that they are providing? Mental health among students is on the rise and Social Services are dependent on Social Workers. While some are excellent, there are some who are not as effective and the support is not there.

## **5. Principal's Report**

DMI explained to the Board that his report had been produced in the same format he presented at the last meeting. However, now that the Academy has re-opened fully, the report includes attendance figures, exclusion figures and an accident report.



DMI advised the Board that the Academy reopened fully on Tuesday, 1 September. ATA's strength is its routines and systems. The plan to reopen capitalised on these so that Academy life could be as normal as possible for staff and students returning from a lengthy period of absence from site - albeit most had remained well involved with the school by virtual means. Staff and students have responded well to the re-opening plan and updates made to the plan have been measured and adopted very quickly. ATA have a number of new staff members who were appointed remotely via Zoom and started without even seeing the Academy. This group has settled in incredibly well, something the Leadership Group has observed whilst on their daily walkabouts. This is important because, ordinarily, ATA staff would observe candidates teaching a lesson when they are interviewed for a teaching role. Candidates would also receive a tour of the Academy and then experience a full panel interview. This process couldn't be followed in the same way when conducted on Zoom. So, Curriculum Managers and the Leadership Group were understandably mindful of this when the new staff began teaching. However, lessons have been very well planned and delivered by all new staff.

ATA also welcomed a new cohort of Year 7 students and Year 12 students. The existing Year 12 students have demonstrated real leadership in the way they have supported the new external students in their own year group and in the way they have managed the one-way system for younger students - stopping, waiting and allowing others to pass before they move.

DMI said to the Board that, overall, he is pleased with the start of this academic year.

DMI also reported that the control measures in place have had a positive effective on student conduct and learning.

The control measures in place allow the full curriculum to be delivered to ATA's students. Some schools locally are finishing the day very early and this has some issues for these schools because their students are out of school for much of the afternoon whilst their parents are at work and with no extra work to complete. ATA's students are focussed and receive their full curriculum entitlement and students are safe in school for the entire day.

ATA has a structured rota in place for lunchtimes and the advice from the DfE is to keep students outside as much as possible - weather permitting – which is why we have a one-way system in place which runs around the perimeter of the building. The majority of student movement therefore takes place outside. The lessons have started very well and students have enjoyed returning to school. The sharp start to lessons has helped to maximise time the students have with the teachers and allows them to catch up on the work they have missed or misunderstood.

There are two subject areas where social distancing is not achievable. These are DT and Drama. Students are therefore required to wear a mask when in these lessons. The Science department will also be starting some demonstrations so students will be expected to wear a mask when observing practical demonstrations.

ATA has operated sport clubs for year group bubbles on the day they are timetabled to have PE lessons. ATA has reinstated music lessons and the Curriculum Manager for Performing Arts has installed Perspex screens which allow all interactions between the peripatetic teacher and student to be safe.

The line-ups in the morning, lunch and at the end of day have been superb and these are likely to remain in place because they are good practice.

There were some initial concerns with the restaurant being closed for morning break. Students are now permitted to bring a snack to eat outside if seated at one of the benches or picnic tables. This arrangement has worked well. We can monitor the snacks students bring to the Academy and we have had few issues with litter.

Attendance was also a concern but DMI was pleased to report to the Board that ATA's attendance figures remain very good. Any student or sibling that presents with COVID related symptoms is required to isolate immediately and request a test. Once the test is confirmed as negative then they can return to the Academy. For students required to isolate, subject staff upload the lessons they miss to Showmyhomework so that students do not fall behind.

DMI confirmed to the Board that ATA has 65 students currently isolating and once they receive a negative test result they will be able to return to the Academy. ATA has had 204 students self-isolating and tested at various points since the start of September.

ATA Staff are fully aware of the procedure if students present with symptoms. In the beginning trying to obtain a test was proving to be difficult but the process is getting much more efficient. Although postal tests are delayed, there are many more walk-in centres now available.

ATA Attendance figures are 97% compared with a national figure of 82%. ATA had no positive COVID-19 cases.

DMI advised the Board that the picture is not as good elsewhere with continuing reports of schools who have had to send home entire year groups for a fortnight.

DMI told the Board that should ATA be required to go into Lockdown again ATA have a policy in place that would be able to move to virtual teaching immediately and this is also in place should there be a whole year group that have to isolate.

DMI also briefed the Board on finance and resources for the Academy. There is a reported deficit estimated again for the current year, largely due to the increase in staff costs.

The refurbishment work to provide additional teaching space to accommodate the increase in student numbers is complete and ATA are happy with the outcome. 100% of ATA's site is in use each week and, importantly, there is the capacity for extra classes as the additional students arrive each year. The repositioning of four departments has also had a positive impact on student movements across the site.

DMI discussed Appendix ii. ATA is a well ordered Academy with clear requirements and sanctions for non-compliance. With students at home for such a long period of time, there was a concern that behaviour might be more challenging. DMI was pleased to advise the Board that behaviour has in reality been very good.

DMI presented a condensed accident report which outlines only the major issues that ATA has experienced this term. DW noted there were no consistent patterns so was happy that ATA are not being neglectful of any repeating hazards or areas which needed review. Such oversight was the purpose of the Executive Board receiving the report.

KC asked if ATA envisaged any issue with the weather due to the students being outside more now. DMI assured him that students have been advised to bring an umbrella and coat into the Academy. DMI advised KC that the students seem to prefer to be outside but that there is a full contingency plan in place should the weather turn particularly bad.

DMI advised the Board that the Ofsted inspection exemption for schools graded "Outstanding" on previous inspection no longer exists. All outstanding schools will now be subject to full inspection in the future.

The Board congratulated the school on the new arrangements that are in place and felt everything has been handled superbly.

## **6. Current Topics for discussion**

### **Preparation for next year's exam season – Presented by Mike Smith (MSM)**

MSM shared his screen with the Board and presented the way in which the Academy is preparing its students for exams next year. MSM advised how the process had worked over the summer and reported that the process had been fairly smooth when sending the results to the exam Board. MSM explained that, on reflection, the students' "Centre Assessed Grades" were slightly higher than their results would have been had they taken the exams as not all students would perform to the best of their ability on the day.

Students were pleased that they could progress to the next stage of their education. There are only resits booked



for two A Level students and one GCSE student.

An announcement has been made to move the 2021 exam series back to 7 June which would, in theory, give the students an extra three weeks preparation, but in reality, it will only be an extra 6 days, particularly for GCSE.

With the results' days moved to later in August and closer together on the same week, there will be logistical issues with providing the necessary guidance to students. However, plans are already afoot at ATA to make sure that Year 11 and 13 students will have access to a member of staff for enrolment, UCAS and college issues. ATA may have some issues: it will be a hectic and difficult time so ATA needs to be prepared. JKD will send the presentation to Board members.

There are 5% of schools with students absent with COVID-related symptoms and around the country a quarter of schools have already sent home Year 11 students, so there may be some difficulty between now and the exams for schools to keep hold of their exam groups and that the pattern across the country will be very varied. ATA are therefore also preparing for the Government to re-introduce Centre Assessed Grades.

Private schools, as a result of their size and facilities, are better able to weather the storm. Different areas and catchments will fair differently, which would make the government's commitment to 'level up' more difficult to achieve were everyone to sit the same exam in 2021 if some areas experience regular disruption to learning. If exams are diluted or scrapped, predicted grades will come into play and teachers may have the same scenario as last year. For now, we have to keep to the arrangements that work well in the Academy: study hall, Year 11 study support for exams, walking talking mocks, professional development days and delivery of study skills.

There is also the very real possibility of a further lockdown and staff and students are prepared for this.

## 7. Any other business

RJP advised that for the future, to save repetition, DMI will now incorporate a summary of RJP's report to the Finance and Resources Committee (FRC) in the Principal's report and that items would be presented in greater detail in the FRC minutes.

RW expressed the Board's thanks to DMI for all the effort of the staff at ATA and asked DMI to pass on their thanks.

Signed:   
Richard Whitcutt  
Chair of Executive Board

Date: 16/12/2020