

Priestley College

Minutes of the Curriculum & Standards Committee meeting
held at 4.30pm on Thursday, 18 June 2015
in the Lewis Carroll Building (LC1-5)

PRESENT:	Mrs D Stead	Chair
	Mr D Cathie	Student Member
	Dr M Hartill	
	Mrs K Hope	Staff Governor
	Mr L Horrigan	
	Mrs C Owen	
	Mr Y Shaikh	
	Mr P McMellon	Clerk to the Governing Body
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mr G Contos	Vice Principal (C&S)
	Mr I Edge	Student Services
	Ms H Roach	President-Elect (College Council)
	Mr B Jackson-Spruce	Vice-President-Elect (College Council)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr B Craven and Ms K Simcock.

The Chair welcomed Ms Holly Roach and Mr Ben Jackson-Spruce (Student Members for 2015/16) to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No member declared a personal interest in any item on the agenda.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2015 were accepted as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

5. TEACHING, LEARNING & ASSESSMENT : OFSTED'S FURTHER EDUCATION DATA DASHBOARD

Mr G Contos (Vice Principal – Curriculum & Standards) reminded the Committee that, at the equivalent meeting last year, the first version of the (then) new Ofsted Data Dashboard had been presented and discussed. The Dashboard had subsequently featured at other meetings of the Committee and the Governing Body since then. Mr Contos then presented the updated version (with 2013/14 academic year data) of the Dashboard directly from the Ofsted website. He advised on actual student numbers (cohort sizes are not included in the Dashboard) so as to allow better judgement of the import of the separate groups of data.

The Committee considered Mr Contos's update on measures taken at the College to address Level 2 Maths issues (although the latest data did show the College to be above the national benchmark).

The impressive ratings for Level 3 A level and AS level were noted and the very positive Vocational performance was very gratifying.

However, the Committee's serious concern (as also expressed last year) regarding the Dashboard's failure to provide a fair reflection of the College's particular strength in 'mixed' (A levels and vocational) courses remained. The general public (including prospective students and their parents) could be discouraged from enrolling by this unfair portrayal of the College.

The Committee was also surprised that there seemed to have been no progress in the provision of data for successive years (thus, patterns of progress/deterioration were not really discernable) in the Dashboard.

The data on student destinations was then examined. Mr I Edge (Student Services) was able to provide more detail on the actual numbers in each category, and the Committee did consider how the College identifies, classifies (including for 'gap' years) and follows up those students who were in the 'Destination not sustained/NEET' or 'Unknown' categories. Both these were lower (at Priestley College) than the national benchmark, but the Committee noted and endorsed how College Management looked for patterns and features (eg medical issues) which needed to be tackled. Mrs C Owen advised on the pupil tracking arrangements in the schools sector and Mr Contos confirmed that extension of that system to cover post-16 was anticipated. However, the general message from the 2013/14 student destination data was largely very positive for the College.

The Committee then considered again the concern that, without clearer guidance, casual readers of some of the College's entries on the Dashboard could easily be misled and discouraged. There was discussion on the consequent importance of better data/information at College open events and in College marketing material. The Student members also advised on the extent to which future students were likely to access the Dashboard in deciding whether or not to come to the College.

In conclusion, the Committee asked Mr Contos to consider developing a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document to enable staff to present a fairer and more balanced interpretation of the Dashboard data, and particularly the Level 3 Value Added classification.

The Committee thanked Mr Contos for his report.

6. "MATRIX" QUALITY MARK

Mr I Edge (Student Services) reported that the College had now received the prestigious national award, recognising the College's commitment to the provision of sound 'information, advice and guidance' for students. He drew attention to a series of very positive observations in the full Assessment report.

The Committee agreed that achievement of the quality mark was impressive and that the extremely positive comments in the report were very reassuring. The Committee asked Mr Edge for detail on the grounds for seeking the award, noting the costs and the link to income/funding.

It was agreed that, by ensuring that the College's overarching plans for self-assessment/continuous improvement covered those practices which had allowed the College to secure 'Matrix' status, it should be possible to retain the award with minimal additional work.

The Committee thanked Mr Edge for his report and congratulated him and his colleagues on this success.

7. COLLEGE IMPROVEMENT PLAN – UPDATE

Mr G Contos presented the updated version of the College Improvement Plan which had been distributed with the agenda papers. He went through each section of the Plan and drew particular attention to

(i) Outcomes for Learners

1(a) The A2 Law and Health & Social Care retention/success rates had declined by a small percentage, but were still above the national benchmark.

4(b) Evidence of improvement (eg 100% attendance at the GCSE Maths examination) following the engagement of Lilac Sky (external consultants) and the subsequent impact of strategies including the development of leadership and management.

The Committee discussed the challenges which the College faced through obligatory enrolment onto GCSE Maths, noting where the College seemed to be having considerably more success than elsewhere in the sector/area.

5(a) Identification of inconsistencies/good practice via mid-year reviews (use of value added measures) would continue since this had been effectively applied and offered promise of further beneficial development

5(c) The positive take-up of revision classes (over 20 classes/over 200 students presented during the Easter Break) and the involvement of SMT with targeted RAG students.

Mr D Cathie provided examples of and detail on the revision services, including his own recent experiences. Mr Contos confirmed that the planning of the revision support had depended to a significant extent upon the messages and feedback from the students.

(ii) Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

2(c) Walk-throughs in PE and Humanities

The beneficial outcomes (particularly Geography/Geology) were discussed, with the Student Members adding their individual perspectives on the practice and on evidence of improvement.

4(b) Accompanied peer observations

Mr Contos outlined how management staff followed up the outcomes from observations and how, if necessary, application of the Capability Procedures would follow.

(iii) Leadership and Management

7 Good practice and external peer observation

Mr Contos reported on his own involvement in the ‘Ofsted through the Lens’ activity with Ashton S.F.C.

In summary, the Committee was pleased to note that good progress was being reported on several key fronts. The format of the Plan document was valuable in allowing the Committee to chart the progress, but also to see where attention still needed to be concentrated.

Finally, the Committee noted that Mr Contos would provide further information on the Quality Improvement Calendar (copies distributed with the agenda papers) at the next meeting.

The Committee thanked Mr Contos for his comprehensive report.

8. STUDENT RETENTION AND ATTENDANCE

The Committee examined the latest data on student attendance and retention as distributed with the agenda papers. Mr G Contos confirmed that much management attention continued to be devoted to slight drop in student attendance (which the Committee had noted). In discussing the traits which tended to characterise poor attenders, the prevalence of health issues and the link to deprivation classifications were noted.

The inclusion of student performance in the Quality Improvement Calendar (see Item 7 above) was noted/endorsed.

9. SAFEGUARDING POLICY (AND CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES) - REVIEW

Mr G Contos drew attention to the changes which College Management recommended for the Policy. He confirmed that many of the proposed changes related to the College's obligations arising from the Government's "Prevent" (anti-radicalisation) agenda. There were, however, other changes proposed, including a widening of the statement on the areas of child protection covered by the Policy.

The Committee felt that the document would be improved if more/clearer pointers to the action expected of staff (in the event of actual issues arising or being suspected) were included. The cross-referencing with other College policies (eg Drugs Policy) was noted.

Consideration should also be given to the general format of the document in order that the tendency to elide 'policy' with 'procedure' did not detract from the document's usefulness. The Committee had expressed similar preferences at previous reviews of such policy documents and it was agreed that the Clerk should refer this general point to Senior Management for consideration.

As regarded the specific amendments – many directed towards the College's 'Prevent' (anti-radicalisation) agenda – these were noted and approved.

RESOLVED : That the Governing Body is recommended to approve the proposed changes to the Safeguarding Policy (including Child Protection Procedures), but also to note that a further review of the document is being undertaken with the expectation that other changes will be presented for consideration early in the Autumn Term.

10. SAFEGUARDING (INCLUDING CHILD PROTECTION) - REPORT

Mr G Contos presented the annual report on 2014/15, which had been distributed with the agenda. He provided further background details, including anonymised examples, on each of the reported categories.

The Chair thanked Mr Contos and Mrs F Evans (Director of Student Services) and her team for their diligence and commitment. It was agreed that future reports would be improved by the inclusion of a simple table which allowed year-on-year assessment of developments/occurrences.

Finally, the Committee noted that the report would now be discussed with the nominated Governors with Child Protection responsibilities (Mr G Hill and Mr J Monaghan).

RESOLVED : That the Safeguarding (including Child Protection) Annual Report is received.

11. LEARNING SUPPORT (BURSARY) FUNDS AND FREE SCHOOL MEALS POLICY - REVIEW

The Committee examined the recommended changes – all of which were of a minor nature – and it was

RESOLVED : That the changes to the Learning Support (Bursary) Funds and Free School Meals Policy are approved.

12. STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND CURRICULUM UPDATE

(i) Student Recruitment

Mr G Contos presented the most recent figures for student recruitment for September 2015. The number of applications was slightly lower than the previous year, but the rate of acceptance was at a higher level. Various strategies continued to be deployed, with key recruitment events in the pipeline.

The Committee discussed demographic factors which currently contributed to the struggle to maintain recruitment levels, but also the local competition for students. Mr Contos reported on the key developments affecting other institutions and which worked for or against the College’s student recruitment endeavours.

(ii) Curriculum Update

Mr Contos reported on national curriculum considerations (particularly in the aftermath of the General Election) and on measures to align the College’s curriculum offer to local/regional need.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The provisional date for the next meeting is Thursday, 1 October 2015 (4.30pm).

PMcMellon
19 June 2015

Accepted as a true record and signed by the Chair

Signature

Date