

St Joseph's Interim Executive Board Report to Parents 2023-24

This report is a summary of the Interim Executive Board's work during the last year, and to let the school community know plans for the future.

The IEB was appointed at the very beginning of July 2023 following the dissolution of the previous board by the Department for Education. The official direction was to organise an independent investigation of allegations and build a new board. The additional guidance from Wiltshire Council was to focus on the future, restore the reputation of the school and build up numbers.

The workload was dramatically increased by the activity of some of the community on Facebook and elsewhere which directly impacted on dwindling numbers and pupil retention and aggravated reputational damage to the school.

Prior to the school year commencing, it was necessary to recruit an interim head teacher. At very short notice we were joined by Miss Bathe and Mr Bacon as co-interim heads. Miss Bathe was released one day a week from her own school and gave up both her days off. Mr Bacon gave up plans he had also made. We remain indebted to them for their generosity of spirit in dropping everything to support St Joseph's.

An independent investigator, with no connection to the school, looked into the allegations made against the substantive head teacher, Mrs Woods. She determined Mrs Woods had met her professional standards and that there was no case to answer. Mrs Woods, however, felt it was not possible for her to return and chose to resign.

The IEB advertised nationally for a new headteacher and were very fortunate that they were able to appoint Mr Bacon.

A substantial amount of the IEB's work remains confidential but a summary of what can be shared.

Core IEB activity:

- Two meetings per term – one focussed on Resources and the other on Strategy
- Monitoring educational performance
- Admissions panels
- Two meetings with the parent body
- Several meetings with staff
- Meetings with the LA regarding the budget to ensure the financial sustainability of the school
- Appointed a Head, clerk, SENDCO and new teacher.

Key strategic activity:

- Classes – the IEB made the strategic decision to keep four classes running in school. This is to allow room for growth across the school.

- Proposed nursery – having examined the reasons behind falling numbers and noting that the birth-rate will rise once the current dip has passed, the IEB decided to investigate the possibility of a nursery. Both heads have previous experience. Following conversations with the LA, which was very supportive of the school exploring this route, and having spoken with the diocese, a feasibility study was approved. This is now underway and is looking positive. It is hoped that nursery children might progress into the school, thus growing school numbers. There is currently room on-site for a nursery, but the LA requested a back-up plan if the school begins to return to capacity and the school has that in place. Establishing a nursery would be almost cost-neutral to the school and is the best way of growing numbers.
- Budget – the income to the school has been affected by falling roll. The budget for the 2022-23 year showed an uncommitted revenue roll-over of £160,219. The close down for the 2023-24 year showed an increase in roll-over to £164,690. This was achieved by close working with Wiltshire Council, prudent budget management and some grant income secured by the IEB.
- Promotion – two members of the IEB met with interested parents to discuss promoting the school and a full promotions strategy was drawn up and approved. This will include a new Facebook page, more social media, new leaflets, opening up the school more and celebrating everything we do. The school website will be re-designed and a film made to celebrate St Joseph's. Our wonderful children are a great asset and we are very proud that they opened the Christmas late-night shopping event, performed Oh Athelstan to the general public in a packed Malmesbury Abbey and will, hopefully be taking part in the Malmesbury Carnival. We also opened up the grounds and took part in the Big Dig as part of Athelstan 1100.
- Green project – the IEB and interim heads inherited this from the previous governing body. The heads and school business manager took over the operational lead on the project. They have been working somewhat in the dark as it has not been possible to obtain all the documentation from the previous board with regard to due diligence, tendering and other matters.
 - Air source heat pump: The company appointed to provide the air source heat-pump went into liquidation. The pump was retrieved via an approach to the liquidators. At the point of installation, it was found not to work. The pump was returned to Germany for repair and is finally back at school. Installation will be completed imminently.
 - Solar panels: funding for LED lighting needed to be diverted to support a decision by the previous board to install additional panels beyond those covered by the original grant. The project also included an unfunded phase to invest in battery storage for the solar panel-generated electricity. It has not been possible to progress this due to the lack of capital funding and feasibility information. This may be pursued in future. An installation error means all the electricity supplied to the grid has been sold on with no income generated to off-set energy bills. An attempt will be made to recoup this once the installation has been corrected.

- LED lighting: A new bid to the Diocese for LED lighting has been successful. LED lighting throughout the school will be installed during the summer holiday.

Individual governor activity:

- IEB members have conducted link governor visits when capacity allowed.
- The chair has attended school assemblies, a summer performance, the Christmas Fair, Christmas lunch, late-night shopping carols, Oh Athelstan! and the Big Dig.
- Meetings have been held with Father Thomas at St Aldhelm's and there has been communication with Father Maria in Tetbury and Cirencester. Both are reporting information when requested in their magazines and have displays in their churches.
- The chair has been working with several town councillors and a grant was given by the Malmesbury Town Council to support promoting the school
- A meeting was held with the Dyson Foundation and a grant has allowed new batteries to be installed in the children's laptops.
- Meetings have been held with various people regarding the land running down to the river and a project for next year will be how better to use it and securing funding for the future.
- Mr Bacon and Mrs Martin have met with governors at Lea & Garsdon school.
- They attended a meeting at Malmesbury Primary about the classrooms which may be built for STEAM learning.
- They also attended a meeting with the diocese about long-term plans to move St Joseph's into a Multi-Academy Trust.
- The chair has been in regular dialogue throughout the year with the diocese, local authority and Department for Education. The board has been invited to make recommendations about governance based on their experience at St Joseph's. It is hoped this will reduce situations developing where IEBs are needed.

IEB transition to new governing body:

In the autumn the IEB will be replaced by a governing body. Foundation governors have been interviewed and await appointment by Bishop Bosco. Two parent and one staff governor will be elected early in the autumn term. There will be some continuity from the IEB to the new governing body.

July 2024