



Board of Trustees Virtual Meeting Protocol

Introduction

Jubilee Primary School's Articles of Association state that trustees can attend meetings remotely subject to certain stipulations set out in article 123.

1. Virtual Meetings

1.1 The nine full governing board meetings as outlined in the governance cycle will be face to face meetings. However, additional and extraordinary meetings can take place via telephone or video conference call as long as the usual quorum¹ of trustees is 'present' on the call.

1.2 Where a meeting is taking place virtually every effort will be made to enable all trustees to access the meeting and will be told where to access support if they experience difficulty.

1.3 Where a meeting is taking place virtually the usual statutory notice arrangements will apply and all papers to be considered will be circulated at least seven days in advance of the meeting, except where the chair has exercised his/her right to waive the usual notice in an emergency situation.

1.4 All participants will note and follow any instructions given on how to manage their participation at the meeting. For example, confirming attendance, speaking through the chair of the meeting, voting on matters, etc.

1.5 The governing board will abide by their normal rules, procedures and code of conduct adopted by the governing board and give particular regard to the duty to maintain confidentiality.

1.6 Trustees will contribute towards a safe and secure environment for the meeting by giving due regard to the school's policies relating to data protection and the appropriate use of ICT facilities.

1.7 Virtual meetings will be minuted in the same way as other meetings, either by the clerk being present virtually or by a trustee who is present, other than the headteacher, and these will be presented to the next meeting of the full governing board.

1.8 Virtual meetings should not be recorded by any trustee or the clerk without the approval of the governing board and for a specified purpose.

¹ the quorum for a meeting of the Governors, and any vote on any matter thereat, shall be any three Governors, or, where greater, any one third (rounded up to a whole number) of the total number of Governors holding office at the date of the meeting.

2. Guidelines for setting up a virtual meeting

2.1 Trustees must ensure that they have access to an effective internet connection. Most people's connections at home are good enough, but if you are in an area with poor connectivity you may need to make additional arrangements.

2.2 Everyone is to call in with their webcam/video switched on, if possible. It's much harder for everyone to participate, and for the chair to moderate the meeting, if you/they cannot see everyone.

2.3 The chair or clerk will set up the call on whatever platform they choose, and circulate the link to everyone else.

2.4 We shall test any video conferencing platform or system we are using before the meeting.

3. Guidelines for during the meeting

3.1 We will need to make meetings shorter and smarter – remote meetings are harder to manage, so shorter is better.

3.2 Video time delays can happen, so we will ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute and ask questions.

3.3 As we normally sign an attendance record at the start of a meeting, the clerk will record who's present (and indicating that they're remote).

3.4 When we consider confidential information, trustees are to make sure that they are in an appropriate location to avoid other people overhearing confidential details.

3.5 If you are in a location with background noise, please mute your microphone when you're not speaking – this improves call quality for everyone.

3.6 The chair is to check with the clerk at regular intervals – video time delays and variable sound quality can make it hard to take accurate minutes.

3.7 In the minutes, we will ensure there's a note that the meeting was held via a video conference call.

4. Virtual Attendance at Face to Face Meetings

4.1 Where a trustee wishes to attend a meeting of the governing board by either telephone or video link, the chair and clerk must be notified at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting to ensure that appropriate arrangements can be made where possible. The trustee will be asked their reasons for not attending the meeting in person and their attendance virtually will be subject to the approval of the governing board at the beginning of the meeting, though this approval will not be withheld without good reason. Where approval is withheld the reason for this will be minuted and the trustee informed immediately.

4.2 Trustees attending the meeting either by telephone or video conference will be entitled to vote on any issue providing they have been 'present' for the whole agenda item to which the vote relates. Where a secret ballot is required this will be

facilitated where possible (eg by taking a telephone link off speaker phone and the trustee sharing their vote verbally with the clerk). This is more challenging on a video conference call. One way might be for the trustee to text their vote to the clerk. Where none of these are possible the trustee will be required either to vote publicly or to abstain.

4.3 Trustees attending the meeting virtually will abide by the normal rules, procedures and code of conduct adopted by the governing board and give particular regard to the duty to maintain confidentiality.

4.4 Trustees attending the meeting virtually will contribute to the quorum for the meeting. If the technological link is lost, they will cease to contribute to the quorum, but this will not prevent the meeting continuing in their absence unless it has become inquorate.

4.5 The meeting will be chaired by a trustee who is present in person.

4.6 If, after all reasonable efforts, it does not prove possible for a trustee to participate by telephone or video conference, the meeting may still proceed with its business provided it is otherwise quorate.

This protocol was prepared by the Clerk and checked by the Chair of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees accepted the protocol at its meeting on 15 April 2020.

Appendix 1

Advice from the DfE

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department for Education advises against governing bodies meeting in person, and instead to adopt alternative arrangements, for example by using video or teleconferencing applications. These may include, but are not limited to, Skype, Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Please remember that all parties will need to agree to these arrangements.

Boards can agree to hold meetings via telephone or video conferencing without having to meet first. The chair or clerk/governance professional can contact trustees directly to agree to alternative meeting arrangements during this lockdown period.

Please note: the department will not be making any changes to the statutory governance functions in any upcoming regulations related to COVID-19. The articles of association for academy trusts state that trustees can attend meetings remotely subject to certain stipulations set out in article 126 [123 in the case of Jubilee Primary School].

The department urges governing boards to be pragmatic in what they cover in meetings during this time, and to be proportionate in the decisions that they are planning to take. We expect trustees to focus on urgent, time-bound decisions. We understand that you are likely to want to defer non-urgent decisions/agenda items until future meetings.

Boards should prioritise providing support to their school leaders and staff where needed, to allow them to get on with operational matters. School leaders should stay in touch with the governing board in a proportionate way, including providing information on the welfare of staff and pupils, so that they can retain a strategic overview of the situation and the school.

We also recommend governing boards have in place contingency plans in case the chair and/or vice chair become unavailable, so that there is clarity about who will be the conduit of information for the board.

Appendix 2

Meeting Agendas: Urgent Business

The advice from the National Governance Association (NGA) is that with the enormous task of ensuring continuity of education, it is therefore appropriate for all non-urgent business to be delayed and governing board meetings to be focused on the following:

1. Business critical decisions (eg budget approval, ratifying school leadership appointments, etc).
2. Monitoring how the school is continuing to provide care for children who are vulnerable, children with ECHP plans, the children of key workers, associated risks, etc.
3. Safeguarding: monitoring the wellbeing and welfare of pupils, staff and stakeholders.
4. Support being given to parents and carers to help them educate their children at home.
5. Additional costs being incurred as a result of the virus situation and how these will be met.
6. Any issues arising from how the building is currently being used, and remote working for staff.

It follows that boards will take a pragmatic and considerate approach to the reporting of these matters, relying on oral feedback and scaled down paperwork. It might also require governing boards to review and amend their levels of delegation to enable fewer trustees to make business critical decisions and thereby minimising the risk of being unable to take these decisions.

Appendix 3

How to look good using Zoom

There are certain techniques that ensure that you look presentable for each Zoom call.

The first step is to place your computer on an elevated surface, such as a stack of books, so that the camera is slightly higher than your head. Once the laptop is positioned above you, you should point the camera down towards your eyes.

Lighting is also important. Place a tall desk lamp next to your computer “on the side of your face you feel is best” to provide some flattering light. The lamp should be in line with and slightly behind the computer, so the light falls nicely on your face.

To ensure you get “a bit of fill and bounce,” use a white piece of paper or a white tablecloth and placing it on the table you are sitting at. However, you must make sure the white isn’t visible in the frame.