

Date ratified at Full
Board meeting
13 December 2021

Review
TLS committee



Directors and LGBs Virtual Meetings Policy & Procedures

THE MAT MISSION STATEMENT

Our family of schools is united in the belief that God's love, peace, truth, and joy is for all.

We are dedicated to the achievement of excellence in all we do. We cherish the uniqueness of each of our school communities and celebrate together as one Trust family.

By following Jesus' example we bear witness to the greatness of God.

'To think, to feel, to do' Pope Francis

St John the Baptist Catholic MAT

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Regulation 14 of The School Governance (England) (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) Regulations 2013 make provision for governing bodies of maintained schools in England to:
"approve alternative arrangements for governors to participate or vote at meetings of the governing body including but not limited to by telephone or video conference".
- 1.2 In relation to this, the Directors of St John the Baptist Catholic MAT have determined the following arrangements will apply to Directors meetings, including committees and all LGB meetings, including committees until such arrangements are withdrawn by Directors.
- 1.3 For the foreseeable future all Directors and LGB meetings may be planned as **virtual meetings**, using Zoom, Teams or similar instead of the default of **face to face** depending on local circumstances. Face to Face meetings may take place and as detailed below virtual attendance at such face to face meetings should be facilitated if possible.
- 1.4 The Directors will ensure all arrangements are adequately secure to protect confidentiality of discussions and supporting documents and expect each LGB to do the same.

2. General

- 2.1 The Directors / LGBs will agree the preferred format of meetings (virtual or face to face) with reference to each school's risk assessment or local circumstances (Directors will be subject to the risk assessment in place at the location chosen for the meeting), government guidance plus local and Directors /Governors' circumstances.
- 2.2 Where a meeting is taking place virtually every effort will be made to enable all Directors or Governors to access the meeting.
- 2.3 The virtual meeting will be chaired by the elected chairperson or vice chair if unavailable.
- 2.4 The 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 their right to waive the usual notice in an emergency situation.
- 2.5 Meetings should be minuted by the clerk or if the clerk is not present by a Director/Governor/staff member (other than the Headteacher/Chair). The draft will be approved and circulated in the normal manner and presented to the next meeting for formal sign off.

3. Virtual attendance at meetings

- 3.1 Where a Director or Governor wishes to virtually attend a face to face meeting of the Board or LGB either by telephone, video link or another agreed medium, the Clerk must be notified at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting to ensure that appropriate arrangements have / can be made. The Director or Governor must provide the reason for wishing to attend remotely, if the meeting has been designated as a face to face

meeting, and the Chair of the meeting will decide on whether to approve the request; approval will not be withheld without good reason.

- 3.2 Requests made due to exceptional circumstances that fall outside the timeframe will be considered on an individual basis.
- 3.3 Virtual attendance at the meeting will be recorded as such in the minutes. Where approval has been withheld the reason for this will be minuted.
- 3.4 Directors / Governors attending the meeting virtually will be entitled to vote on any item discussed providing that they have participated (i.e. heard/engaged) for the whole agenda item which the vote relates to. Where a secret ballot is required, this will be facilitated where possible by the Clerk utilising an agreed method (e.g. by taking the telephone call off speaker phone and the Director / Governor sharing their vote verbally with the Clerk or via an agreed online anonymised voting platform).
- 3.5 Directors / Governors 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 there is no longer a quorum. The Director / Governor with the lost connection will attempt to re-join the meeting immediately.
- 3.6 If the technological link for the Clerk is lost, meeting discussions should either be ceased to allow the Clerk the opportunity to return to the meeting, or a designated Director / Governor may take over. The Director / Governor will capture the discussions, action points and decisions which are shared with the Clerk so they can be incorporated into the minutes.
- 3.7 The Director / Governor (s) attending remotely must ensure that they meet the expectations/etiquette around confidentiality and not participate in the meeting in a public place. The Chair will ensure this with remote attendees at the start of the meeting.
- 3.8 Meetings should not be recorded by any Director / Governor, or persons present, by any means.

4. Review of this policy

- 4.1 The policy will be reviewed at least annually, but may be reviewed more frequently at the request of the Chair of Directors / a Chair of a LGB.

APPENDIX: Making virtual / partially virtual board meetings work

Agreeing your board's preferred protocol will help meetings operate more effectively and assist in getting the most out of your time together. Below are suggestions and these can be used to tailor the meeting etiquette that your board adopts.

Suggestions for the board and their clerk

Setting up the meeting: When setting up virtual meetings a robust approach is for the clerk and chair to be set up as co-presenters / hosts as this allows the chair to control the chat and hands up function during the meeting meaning the clerk can concentrate on capturing information for the minutes. An additional benefit is if the chair or clerk are unable to attend the meeting they will each have the ability to invite replacements to the meeting or if a power cut affects one of these key stakeholders, then the remaining person can continue with the meeting with full functionality.

Where you are: We don't really have much choice about where we call from but making your environment as conducive as possible to video calling can help.

If you can avoid being near sources of noise, so close windows, turn off the radio. Ambient noise can be amplified by microphones. Feedback can be an issue as well as background clattering, so use of a head set can help this (most smartphone headphones have mics too) or remembering to 'mute' your microphone when you are not speaking can reduce distracting interference.

Also consider staying away from bright light sources such as windows and lamps, as your camera may struggle to adjust. Make sure your camera is square on to you and you are well lit from the front. This is particularly important for governors who rely on lipreading. You may want to test the lighting ahead of the call to check you can be seen.

Smooth calling: There is so much demand on internet services now, calls can get broken and the flow of the conversation can get lost. If there are lots of people on the call, it may be worth considering using just voice alone, rather than a video link. Also think about what and who else is using the internet in your home at the same time, can any of them be postponed until after the call? Think about Wi-Fi, would the call be smoother if you were using a wired connection?

If you can, use video calling it brings the human touch, allowing participants to read facial expression alongside the spoken word. Additionally, it has the benefit of assisting the clerk in quickly identifying who is talking.

Testing: The first time you make a video call, it can be unfamiliar, and there tends to be a lot of 'can you hear me?' questions and random pressing of buttons to see what they can do. Arrange ahead of the meeting to have a dummy run, either as a board or individually with the clerk, so when the day and time comes, you can quickly get to the task in hand.

Battery power: Don't forget to have your computer/tablet plugged in if the call is expected to last some time. Video calling can be draining on a device, so rather than having to frantically find the cable half way through the meeting, have it powering up as you go.

Treat it like a meeting: Although everyone will be at home, treat the call like a meeting. If people can't attend then apologies need to be sent, have a clearly prioritised agenda and minute the discussion as normal. Make sure everyone knows to join the meeting on time, as a clerk it is prudent to be in the meeting a minimum of 5 minutes before the official starting time. The chair will need to effectively chair the proceedings, it can be easy for discussion to be missed if people talk over each other, so being invited to speak can be very helpful. As you would in a face to face meeting, turn your phone to silent to avoid distractions.

Be prepared: As you would for any meeting, read the paperwork ahead of time, consider having multiple pages open with documents that you might need to reference throughout the call.

Delegates saying their name: If you have a fairly new board, or new governors joining the team attendees may be unfamiliar with the voices of everyone, it can therefore be helpful to ask people to say their name before they speak

or use the hand up function on Teams or Zoom and wait for the Chair to invite people to speak; refer to the board's agreed etiquette if unsure of the agreed process. It can be useful at the beginning of the meeting for everyone to say hello, so everyone knows who is present and the clerk can track attendance.

Use all the features: Some video calling applications have features that allow you to share screens, present information and use breakout rooms. There is the option to utilise the chat function in Zoom or Teams, both before and after the meeting, if needed, to raise points or ask questions. As mentioned, the raise your hand option allows the chair to invite people to speak which avoids over speaking and gives everyone an opportunity to raise their point. The 'closed captions' facility is ideal for individuals who cannot hear discussions clearly. Get familiar with these functions and consider how they can be used to your boards advantage.

Confidentiality: Remember even though everyone is in their own home, matters discussed by the board are confidential so attendees need to consider if the content discussed can be overheard by others. Use of headsets and headphones can help with this.