



GEP ACADEMIES WEEKLY BULLETIN

WEEK COMMENCING 30th NOVEMBER 2020

Reminders for this coming week:

Forthcoming meetings:

AUDIT COMMITTEE

07.12.20
16.00 – 18.30

BOARD MEETING

14.12.20
13.00 – 15.30

GEP/AST ALL HEADS MEETING PLUS TRAINING

14.01.21
TIME TBC

AGM

18.01.21
13.00 - 15.30

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

28.01.21
13.00 - 15.30

RESOURCES COMMITTEE

04.02.21
13.00 - 15.30

ALL HEADS MEETING

09.02.21
08.00 - 12.00 TBC

TRUSTEES & GLAC CHAIRS

01.03.21
16.30 – 18.30

Be more penguin...

As I kicked my feet and pulled my coat around myself more closely on the school gate this morning, I was reminded of the emperor penguins at the South Pole, working together for warmth, collective betterment and the ability to get through the long dark winter. I would like to stress that this reflection is an analogy, and I am not suggesting staff members need to huddle tougher for warmth. Definitely not in these Covid times!

However, being part of a trust is in some ways similar in terms of mentality. We understand that the education year sometimes presents us with challenges which feel more like the depths of an Antarctic winter than feeding in the endless summer-time sun on Atlantic krill. As schools we come together as a trust to work through the good times and the bad. To share successful approaches to brilliant classroom practice and provide the best for our pupils. Like the penguins, we rotate. The pack moves and those on the outside, take their turn on the inside...sheltered from the excessive freezing temperatures and winds. This allows us to recover and preserve energy.

Last week our CPD afternoons and network meetings helped us 'rotate' and restore our energies and resolve. I'd like to highlight two networks in particular. Our SEND and PP networks. Often the trickiest of educational nuts to crack, the progress of our SEN children and disadvantaged youngsters is not always comparable to others in our school populations. But it should be. We need to review our provision. Review our curriculum. Reflect upon how, in many cases, we need to develop in this area. It was pleasing therefore to hear from the SEND network, whose reach includes those outside our trust, and learn of their consultation with SEND specialists and the local authority on how we can work better together to meet the needs of children in these cohorts.

Our disadvantaged network too is considering how we can share best practice and secure improved outcomes for our PP learners. It is interesting that time and again they are returning to improving quality first teaching, getting the curriculum right and holding our expectations universally high for these children. My thanks go to those that lead and attend both these networks. They help us identify how we can, metaphorically, huddle for support and warmth in hostile environments.

However, to end, our penguins also offer us a cautionary tale. It seems these penguin huddles can actually be too good at keeping the emperor penguins warm. The rotation from inside to outside the circle is just as vital. Penguins can get too warm and must seek the outside to better balance their needs. Trust life is the same. We cannot exclude those 'outside' our trust. We work alongside many great schools and colleagues from whom we can learn, be inspired and supported as we look to provide the best for our children. We must not become insular in our thinking – believing that

everything from within is good, and anything outside is not to be trusted, learned from or 'stolen with pride'.

Potentially as our deep in the autumn term winds blow, seeking this balance of internal and external support is important. More than anything, supporting each other and realising we achieve more together, than apart is essential. This week – be a little more penguin... but penguins have nothing to do with Christmas.



Actions for Heads:

Governor and stakeholder newsletter

Please remember to send your good news stories to glleliott@gepacademies.com for inclusion in the termly governor and stakeholder newsletter by Friday 4 December 2020.

Actions for Governors and Trustees:

You can view GEP/AST upcoming training sessions for governors by [clicking here](#).

School Improvement Update:

A message from Kathryn Krynicki, GEP Director of Primary Education

I write this with the knowledge that national lockdown is ending and Christmas is in sight. It has been a continually challenging half term and I have the utmost admiration to colleagues for spinning the plates whilst still awaiting national decisions on Ofsted and Assessment which you are still waiting for so that you can plan next steps for your schools. I do believe that these decisions are imminent, which will then help our staff and young people.

There has been extensive media coverage this week regarding end of term plans and expectations of school leaders who are still responsible for track and trace during school holidays. I saw a brilliant example from one of our schools this week who had written to parents stressing the need for 'following the guidance' and indeed increasing Covid measures in the weeks between now and Christmas to lower the risk of Covid cases and subsequent self-isolation over the Christmas holiday period for staff and pupils.

I wanted to thank the School Improvement team here as well as schools who have enabled us to run our 'Covid safe business as usual' model. We have adapted our practices and schools have been so accommodating. Despite the challenges, we have seen some inspiring learning opportunities for the children we serve. Lots of ground has been covered which is a credit to school leaders and all their staff.

In the nicest possible way, I'd like to wish you all an uneventful end to the term!

School Operations:

The academy sector is placed under considerable scrutiny, which is felt more readily at school-level than for our maintained sector counterparts. Accountancy firms undertake an external audit of our financial accounts and processes for the academic year, submitting within our annual report a formal statement of assurance to the Education Skills & Funding Agency on our accounts and regularity. Furthermore, we are required to have an internal audit function, which monitors the risk of internal processes, including fraud, financial and non-financial matters.

All audits this year have been undertaken remotely, which has put huge pressure on all involved - school finance staff, central finance team, auditors - preparing schedules and evidence in advance, scanning and uploading and then responding to further requests via email. Face-to-face conversations over a lever arch file of evidence are much easier! None of our audit reviews have been compromised, as a result of coronavirus. If anything, the audits have been more thorough, certainly when considering the sample size tested, the scrutiny of payroll controls and consideration of scenarios impacting our confirmation of going concern.

We thank all involved for their immense efforts, especially in a year unlike no other, where SBMs and central team members have been highly focused on also managing risks associated with the coronavirus pandemic.

THANK YOU!

Regarding internal audit, we appointed internal audit firm TIAA Limited for 16 days, to conduct the operational review of George Abbot's 16-19 bursary fund in December 2019 and undertake two trust-wide assurance reviews in July 2020, covering budgetary controls and creditor payments (including anti-fraud-related controls). A number of improvements were suggested (important and routine recommendations), which we are implementing in an effort of continuous improvement.

Regarding external audit, which BDO LLP took over 4 weeks to complete, the draft audit completion report shows no material misstatements and no deficiencies in the control environment. At present the auditor anticipates issuing an unmodified opinion on regularity and the financial statements.

The Audit Committee reviews the status of open internal and external actions each committee meeting. Draft reports have been issued to SBMs earlier in the year; GLAC Chairs will be sent final reports, once finally issued by TIAA, for local visibility and follow-up.



Thank-you to all involved in both internal and external audits and follow-up, in an effort to assure us all that our trust is operating in line with the seven principles of public life.

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Jack's visits and meetings this week:

Chairs of AST and GEP Education committee	30.11.20	15:00 – 16:00
SCA update meeting	01.12.20	13:00 – 13:45
Loseley Fields School visit	01.12.20	14:00 – 15:00
Boxgrove School visit	03.12.20	13:30 – 14:30
Executive team meeting	04.12.20	10:00 – 12:00
Angela Richardson MP	04.12.20	12:30 – 13:00
Sandfield School visit	04.12.20	14:00 – 15:00