

## Spiritan Education Trust

### Minutes of the 191<sup>st</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020

**This meeting was held via teleconference**

#### **Directors Attending**

Mr. Gary Abrahamian  
Mr. Brendan Dillon  
Mr. Rory Guinan  
Mr. Pat Kitterick, Chair  
Ms. Caroline Lundy  
Ms. Emer O'Connor  
Dr. Tom Whelan CSSp  
Mr. Ronan White  
Sr. Eithne Woulfe

#### **In Attendance**

Mr. Ronan Barry, Faith & Mission Officer  
Mr. Tom Jackson, Company Secretary, Finance Officer  
Ms. Sheila Lanney, Administration Officer (Recording Secretary)  
Mr. Tom Sheridan, Executive Officer

#### **1. Prayer**

Ronan Barry played a video prayer "Taking Care of my Spirit".

#### **2. Preliminaries**

The Chair reviewed very generally SET's summer activity with, and in relation to the Spiritan schools in light of COVID-19 developments. He thanked Tom Sheridan, Ronan Barry and Tom Jackson for all their sterling and dedicated work in this regard.

- (a) Apologies received – none.
- (b) Conflicts of Interest to be declared - none.

#### **3. Minutes of the 190<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2020.**

- (a) Two minor amendments were accepted. The amended Minutes were agreed, to be formally signed at the next in-person BOD.
- (b) Matters arising (not included in this Agenda):
  - The Chair advised the BOD that Susan O'Connell has agreed to provide SET with legal advice on Trust and Charity Law and other relevant matters. It was agreed that formal engagement now be commenced.
  - Tom Jackson advised the BOD that the first moiety Licence Fee Demand Letters and Admin Letter had been issued to schools, payable by 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and payments were in process. School audits would commence shortly.

#### 4. Reports from the Board Sub-Committees

No reports.

#### 5. Executive Report – specific matters for updating & discussion.

##### (a) ***Review of COVID 19 impact on schools' planning for school year 2020-2021***

TS advised that the response from the schools has been excellent. All are open and operating well. Discontent was evident among fee-paying schools concerning COVID funding from the State. The Board noted that Blackrock College got €50,000 (non-fee-paying schools got €240,000 - €245,000); information on other Spiritan schools was not available.

Ronan Barry reported on his visits for retreats where the commitment of staff and students has been very encouraging.

##### (b) ***Rockwell College – governance & finance***

The BoD noted that Mr Cyril Hughes had stepped back from his imminent appointment as new Chairperson of the BoM. Damien Kennedy, currently CBoM of Blackrock College, had subsequently agreed to take on the position for the remainder of the current BoM term and, with the strong recommendation of the Executive, his appointment in the current circumstances was strongly commended and approved by the Directors. Ruth Doyle, former Parent Nominee and interim CBoM, will now become a Trustee Nominee.

Tom Jackson, Finance Manager, updated the BOD on engagement with the Rockwell College Finance Committee, specifically regarding the following:

- the forecast 2021 losses of €615,000 for 2021 and €70,000 for 2022, allied to assumptions regarding additional student numbers and the viability of Camp Rockwell in the current climate
- the robustness of the Strategic Plan, now 2 years in discussion with SET, with specific reference to the central element of the plan for on-site girls' boarding (BoD approval June 2019), raising serious concerns about the ambitious projected numbers of additional boarders and the efficacy of engaging an advertising agency (Fusion, Cork-based) to market the school for that purpose
- the urgent need for the school to address seriously the need for a detailed line-by-line interrogation of its current and proposed spending and its ability to live within its means, all as a pre-condition of BoD approval of its Strategic Plan in due course.

The BoD queried the level of scrutiny and due diligence undertaken by the BoM on the Strategic Plan and emphasised the need for ownership of, and accountability for the school's financial situation. In this context, the BOD acknowledged the advantages which the appointment of Damien Kennedy as Chairperson will bring, given his great knowledge and experience as school Principal within the ETB sector and, by virtue of his Blackrock College tenure,

his commitment to Spiritan ethos and values as they apply to prudent management of a school.

It was agreed that the Executive would write formally to the school authorities to request that the proposal regarding girls' boarding numbers be reconsidered in light of the current financial conditions of the school.

**(c) *Formal Approval of School Admissions Policies***

Following receipt of draft policies, the Executive engaged with schools to ensure broad compliance with statutory requirements and DES guidance. The BoD was assured of consistency across Spiritan schools, especially between schools on the same campus, in their statements of ethos and in the content of their policies in that context. Referring to admissions conditions sought in draft policies by individual schools, (e.g. in Holy Family CS, the right of the receiving school to seek information about applicants' behaviour/academic performance in previous school(s)), the BoD was advised that individual schools had some autonomy in relation to this policy and that the possibility/likelihood existed of legal challenge to individual school admissions policies.

The Board noted that the Executive had approved each school's Admission Policy on behalf of the BoD.

**(d) *Formal approval of BOM nominations as they occur***

The BOD noted that the full list of new BOM members will be formally ratified at the October 2020 meeting. One further vacancy requires to be filled for St. Michael's Junior. As new BoMs take up office from 15 October, The BoD approved the issuing of individual letters of appointment/re-appointment to allow the setting up of BoMs in good time.

**6. Any Other Business as may properly arise:**

- The BOD was advised that overtures were made to SET from another Trust in relation to possible legal challenge to Dept of Education policy on Covid-19 financial support for fee-paying schools. The BoD agreed fully that SET should not become involved.

**7. Next Meeting**

The next BOD meeting is proposed for Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

Chairperson: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_