

**MEETING MINUTES FOR the INFORMATION-SHARING EVENT HELD BY THE TRUSTEES OF THE ST ATHANASIOS GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY CAMBRIDGE and THE ARCHDIOCESE OF THYATEIRA and GREAT BRITAIN – Minute version 2**

**I. MEETING DETAILS**

Chairperson: Mrs Ismini Chatzigianni-Gkika

Date: SUNDAY 12.06.2022

Time: 18:00

Location: Virtual meeting / Open discussion on Zoom platform

**II. TOPIC /REASON OF THE MEETING**

**Meeting about the future status of the Greek School of St Athanasios, Cambridge**

**III. ATTENDANCE**

At peak time ca. 90 ZOOM accounts had joined

**IV. Actions PREVIOUS to this meeting**

An invitation to attend the meeting was circulated which mentioned, among others:

Following:

1. The School Committee's decision at the AGM on the 15th May 2022 to register the School as a separate charity organization.
2. Expressed concerns of parents and of members and Trustees of the Community that this decision is incompatible with the School's and Community's Constitutions.
3. Concerns of parents and Trustees that the information presented at the AGM was inadequate, that participation and vote-differences were too low to allow taking a decision which affects the legal status of the School, and that the procedures for announcing and holding the AGM failed to meet the expected standards,

The [Central Education Council](#) of the [Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain](#) and the Trustees of the Community of St Athanasios of Cambridge made the decision to organize an online information-sharing meeting aiming at sharing important information on the School's relation with the local Parish, with the St Athanasios charity and the organisations that support its educational mission. Considering the fact that the majority of parents and members of the School and the Parish had not heard the view of the Trustees of the Community of St Athanasios yet, and that they might be interested in knowing the actual consequences behind the School Committee's decisions, it was considered that by attending this meeting they would have the most authoritative information that enables them to make informed decisions.

## V. MEETING AGENDA

- Prayer: Fr Konstantinos Garivaldinos, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain and Trustee of the Community of St Athanasios
- 18.00 – 18.20: Welcome & Why the School of St Athanasios is embedded within the Charity of the Community; Mr George Pippas, Chairman of the Community Committee and Trustee, Dr Napoleon Katsos, Secretary of the Community Committee.
- 18.20-18.30: Good governance within Community Schools of the Archdiocese: Mrs Ismini Chatzigianni-Gkika, Central Education Council of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain
- 18.30-18.40: How Greece supports the School: Dr Eirini Veroni, Head of Education Office, Greek Embassy, London
- 18.40-18.50: How Cyprus supports the School : Dr Vasiliki Kouma, Head of the Cyprus Educational Mission, London
- 18.50-19.00: Mr Evaggelos Giannoudis, Chairman of the School Committee
- 19.00-19.20: Questions from the audience
- 19.20-19.30: Concluding remarks and further actions: Mr George Pippas

## VI. Main points in keynote speeches

Terminological point: The Charity of St Athanasios is officially registered as ‘the Greek Orthodox Community of St Athanasios, Cambridge’<sup>1</sup>; in the minutes below, this Charity is referred to by the various speakers as ‘the Charity of St Athanasios’, ‘the Charity of the Community of St Athanasios’, or as ‘the Charity of the church’. The Committee of this Charity is referred to by some as the ‘the Community Committee’ but also by others as the ‘Church Committee’. In the minutes below, every effort has been made to spell ‘Community’ with upper case ‘C’ when referring to the Greek Orthodox Community of St Athanasios which has a Charity status and is bound by the rules and regulations of its Governing documents and the rules of the Charity Commission for England and Wales; and to spell ‘community’ with lower case ‘c’ when referring to similarly-minded people who may wish to form a network based on common beliefs and practices, such as the Greek & Cypriots in Cambridge who feel that they belong to the Greek-Cypriot community of Cambridge.

1 <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regid=1040908&subid=0>

Mr George Pippas and Prof Napoleon Katsos approved the following text for inclusion in the minutes

➤ **Welcome & Why the School of St Athanasios is embedded within the Charity of the Community; Mr George Pippas, Chairman of the Community Committee and Trustee**

The starting point of this event is the School Committee’s decision to put to vote at the AGM of 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 the proposition to create a separate registered charity for the Greek School of St Athanasios, thereby taking the School outside of the Charity of the Community of St Athanasios.

G.P. gave a brief overview of how the Greek School of St Athanasios was established and why it will remain under the Charity of St Athanasios and the auspices of the Archdiocese. He pointed out the importance of maintaining the harmonious cooperation and open communication between the School and Community committees. He highlighted the importance of protecting the sustainable future of the school by nurturing the young generations with the values of the Greek language and culture. At this point, he gave the floor to Prof Napoleon Katsos, who is a member of the Community Committee and parent of a child at the School.

➤ **The benefits of the School within the charity of St Athanasios: Prof Napoleon Katsos, Secretary- St Athanasios, Cambridge, Community Committee**

N.K. presented the present-day status of the school governance based on the current Constitutions and the rules and regulations of the Charity Commission. He pointed out that it is the Trustees of the Charity that have the ultimate responsibility for the Church, the School and every aspect of the Charity, and that the Trustees are bound by the mission statement of the Charity to always have a Greek School within the Charity.

The school is making excellent progress, drawing on the support from the Archdiocese and the Greek and Cypriot governments, as well as the outstanding academic staff.

N.K. noted that in the past two years the Community Committee had worked hard to come to a mutual understanding with the School Officers and that an agreement had been achieved and minuted in the summer of 2021 (with Minutes available on request from the Secretaries of each Committee). This agreement, among other points, noted that for all the big decisions that the School needs to take, the School and the Community Committees and the Trustees should always work jointly to find the best solutions. They should then submit these to the Archbishop, who will give guidance, and indicate which one(s) should be put to the vote by the Parents of the School. This procedure of cooperation was put in writing by H.E. Archbishop Nikitas (1<sup>st</sup> June 2021) and the School and Community Officers agreed to follow it, as noted in Minutes.

When on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 the School Committee put to vote to create a new charity for the School, thereby taking it outside the Charity of St Athanasios, they did not inform, let alone ask for the feedback of the Archbishop, the Trustees or the Community Officers – in effect this move single-handedly cancelled two years of hard work to create harmony and instead created division and confusion. Other, technical flaws of the 15<sup>th</sup> of May decision are that according to the Charity Commission, when taking important decisions, the agenda and the propositions that will be voted upon must be circulated to everyone with reasonable notice (typically 21 days in advance of the meeting; whereas in the case of the AGM of 15<sup>th</sup> of May they were circulated the night before the AGM), and a majority of at least 75% members present must vote in favour for any changes to take effect. None of the above conditions were the case at the AGM of 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2022, rendering any decisions taken there as regards the future of the School invalid.

Other areas where the Trustees of St Athanasios have been asking the School Committee to correct its practices include:

1. the School's Complaints Procedure needs to come into line with the Charity Commission's regulations
2. The School accounts need to be reported to the Charity Commission every year, and they need to be periodically audited by an external accountant. By failing to do this, the School Committee fails to comply with the law.
3. The present School Committee believes that they cannot claim GiftAid, and donations through Amazon Smile; but the Community Committee can help with both matters, without the need for the school to create a new charity
4. The present Officers of the School regularly claim in public meetings (such as the AGM of the 15<sup>th</sup> of May) that the School itself owns the premises where the classes are taking place, which is simply untrue, and it also divisive. The funds to purchase 5 Mill Road were sent by the late Archbishop Gregorios, and the

property in 154 Cherry Hinton Rd belongs to the Trustees for the benefit of the Community.

5. The present School Committee refuses to accept members nominated by the Community to join the Committee, despite the fact that this was agreed in the past by other School Committees and also by parents (and it is also prescribed in the Constitution).

N.K. concluded his presentation stating the following:

- The decision to remove the School from the Charity of the Community of St Athanasios is invalid
- There will always be a School within the Charity of St Athanasios, in its current premises
- This school receives tremendous support from the Archdiocese and the Greek and Cypriot governments – it has outstanding teachers and it is a very successful school
- Anyone may create a new charity and a new Greek school in Cambridge– but it will be their own private initiative, not the school of St Athanasios, which will continue to operate as it is now.
- The real question is not one or two charities, but the cooperation of the School committee with the Community and the Trustees and compliance with the laws and regulations of this country for the benefit of the children.

The full presentation given by G.P. and N.K. and the references they cited can be found here: <http://www.stathanasios.uk/docs.html>

**Mrs Ismini Chatzigianni-Gkika approved the following text for inclusion in the minutes**

➤ **Good governance within Community Schools of the Archdiocese: Mrs Ismini Chatzigianni-Gkika, Coordinator of the Central Education Council of the Archdiocese**

Mrs Gkika initially congratulated all parts actively involved and participating in the school's success; she acknowledged the fact that the remarkable growth of the school during the last few years is owed to their commitment, hard work and resilience towards producing excellent results at all levels of the school operations.

Mrs Gkika, then, pointed out that the Central Educational Council (also known as 'KES') of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, based in London, aims to promote Hellenic Education, which means to protect the Greek language, the Orthodox Christian Religion and the Greek & Cypriot general cultural tradition.

Based on this line of reasoning, she clarified that the Archdiocese will continue guiding and consistently supporting the actions of the St Athanasios school at Cambridge provided that the school remains united with the church community. Mrs Gkika mentioned that the school does not teach Christianity and is not a religious school, yet, it has a 'taftotita', an identity as a school. For example, a few particular aspects of the Greek Orthodox tradition, e.g. Agiasmos and main Christian celebrations will continue taking place. Nevertheless, it remains a matter of free choice for those who wish to not participate in the Christian celebrations and activities.

Further on, Mrs Gkika pointed out that as a matter of principle, the parents should be asked to vote about matters that the Trustees are aware of. Most importantly, operational matters should be openly communicated in written format and the established hierarchical structure [‘ιεραρχία’] of the Community of St Athanasios should be maintained and

respected so that clarity and transparency in all communication lines are maintained; hence, the Archbishop, who is ex officio the Chair of Trustees, should be the first rather than the last one to be informed about major decisions that need to be taken.

**Dr Eirini Veroni approved the following text for inclusion in the minutes**

➤ **How Greece supports the School: Dr Eirini Veroni, Head of Education Office, Greek Embassy, London**

Dr Veroni noted that the mission of the Greek Education Office at the Greek Embassy in London as a department of the Ministry of Education in Greece is to coordinate and support Greek Language Education and promote the Greek culture through the Greek schools – the Greek school of St Athanasios, Cambridge was recognized as such a school many years ago. The Education Office is responsible for producing and protecting the education policy of the school. The current policy of St Athanasios School is recognized by the Greek government, and this is operated in line with the existing constitution and in unity with the wider Greek community.

If a new, independent school is set up, then new procedures should be initiated for the recognition of the new school by the Greek Ministry of Education. Mrs Veroni, finally pointed out that any changes in the governance status of the St Athanasios school which are not the ones present today will not be recognized by the Education Office.

**Dr Vassiliki Kouma approved the following text for inclusion in the minutes**

➤ **How Cyprus supports the School: Dr Vasiliki Kouma, Head of the Cyprus Educational Mission**

Dr Kouma pointed out that The Greek–Cyprus Office/ Cyprus Educational Mission of the Cypriot High Commission in London supports the language and culture of St Athanasios School in Cambridge. The Office’s aim is to support the development of Greek & Cypriot communities and that, in turn, these communities should support the Greek schools towards the expansion of the Greek language and culture. The St Athanasios Community is one such recognised community, and it is this entity, the St Athanasios Community, that the Education Mission has been supported to date. Dr Kouma encouraged all parties involved to stay united and to continue operating the school with united, concerted efforts. Towards this direction she pointed out that the School and Community committees should try and find common grounds for better communication and cooperation both at school and community levels. Following a question from the audience on whether a School Committee may take educational policy decisions, Dr Kouma clarified that all Community schools shall follow the curriculum that is recognized and suggested by both the Greek and Cypriot Ministries of Education.

**Mr Evangelos Giannoudis approved the following text for inclusion in the minutes**

➤ **Mr Evaggelos Giannoudis, Head of the School Committee**

Mr. Giannoudis in his presentation as the Chairman of the St Athanasios School Committee pointed out that:

- The School Committee has no intention to split the school from the Greek community of St Athanasios, but it has decided to create a separate charity account for functional reasons. (Payment of Teachers’ salaries, payment of rent to additional classrooms, payment of the storage depot and other school’s obligations)
- He made clear again why the School Committee made this proposal focusing on the administrative and practical issues we are trying to resolve and that under no circumstances we proposed to go separate from the St Athanasios Community.

- Instead, we seek an agreement between the School and the Community to work together and prosper together.
- The school has an amazing record of excellent results: Ellinomathia- Arista, GCSE Arista, A-Levels-Arista. We are a recognized KEF Centre of Greek Language.
- The school has a healthy economic balance.
- School Committee members are volunteers, elected by the parents and follow the instructions of the parents. If parents are not happy the school will perish but we are pleased to say that the Greek school of St Athanasios is flourishing and continuous to grow at a very fast pace.
- The mission of the school is the promotion of the Greek language and culture and includes everybody who would like to participate in it, irrespectively of its religion or origin!
- The School Committee has for years live in peace next to the Church Committee and has benefit from the advice of its former Chairman and trustee Mr. Nikos Harris. However, the School has been autonomous and self-governed. All the members of the Committee are elected by the parents and the decisions are taken by majority of the School Committee alone.

There are some considerations on the School Committee's side, i.e.

- o The Greek Community of Cambridge includes all the Greeks and Cypriots in Cambridge and the surrounding areas, and it is very much wider than the church Community. A tiny number of these families are members of the church. And these families who are members of the church are the minority in the Community of the school which currently includes 170 families. And many of these 170 families have repeatedly express the opinion that they do not belong to the church committee, and nobody has ever approached them about this community.
- o The constitution of the 1960s cannot be applied anymore.
- o The current Charity account of St Athanasios is inflexible- e.g., issue with the banks in the recent past (Frozen Account)
- o The school must be autonomous and self-governed - the church committee does not understand the problems of the school community
- o During the last AGM (15th of May 2022), 58.4% of the parents voted for 26.6% against and 15% abstained.
- o The Hall cannot be used by the school. And when allowed to be used the rent price is too high (£330 per day). Therefore, the Scholl asks, how does this give a feeling that we have the same charity?
- o The New church Committee includes members who want to damage the school, for their own personal reasons. These are people who in the past accused the school with lies. If the community cares for the school how they have elected these persons in the church committee, these people went against the school and since as we all considered the school is part of the community therefore, they went against the community without any regrets whatsoever.
- o The school community do not feel to be part of the church community
- o School uses 3 different premises to accommodate the needs of the 250 students currently enrolled and attending the school of St Athanasios.
- o They want to have a new charity account to ensure flexibility in payment processes – to be able to protect the teachers and make sure that they can timely make payments.

Looking to the future:

§ A new charity, which will exist in parallel to the Church of St Athanasios and under the canopy of the Archdiocese

§ Our school, in this multicultural society where it operates, needs to be inclusive, respect differences, be open minded and democratic.

§ Our school needs to continue to thrive and support the education needs of our community and beyond (i.e., adult classes).

§ Our school, representing hundreds of our community members and given its educational role in our community from one side.

§ The School Committee wish to continue their cooperation with the church and the archdiocese on amicable terms

§ They agree that the Greek community must remain united

§ Mr. Giannoudis assured the parents and everyone you that the school of St. Athanasios of Cambridge will operate next September as usual, because the school committee will have the register with the new students ready, the timetable with the classes ready to accommodate 250 students and 170 families with different needs. We will have appointed the additional teacher we need to run our school and we will have secured that additional space we need to operate, since the community refuses to give us the unoccupied hall which belongs to the community and off course because the school volunteers from the school committee will be ready to support and run the school. which will make sure for once again that the books are available and delivered to the school.

➤ **Comments in the Q&A [indicatively mentioned] – everyone whose comments are minuted had a two-week period post-publication of the first version of the Minutes to make changes.**



Father Konstantinos pointed out that a new charity number for the school would not only be unnecessary but also confusing – the school should be run with united efforts by both sides

Mrs Pepi Drositi noted this is not an international school – it is a Greek school – the purpose of the school is to promote the Greek language and culture this is part of the identity of the school.

Dr Giotikas noted that this is not an internal meeting – The trustees invited us – the school team has to do the hard work to run the school properly - this is its role; kind request: please understand the regulations and come back to the table to discuss a solution.

Dr Reggina Karouzou Fokas noted that the success of the school depends on many people and it is guaranteed only if all these people work harmoniously – it is not only about the parents – everybody should focus on the issue of the general governance – we also need to understand what is the reason of this dispute – all want to see the school continue and be united - the school has a Constitution – the Constitution is not a live document and it should be followed right now, although it has to be updated – and we need to look towards the future united

Professor Fokas – ideologically there is not a conflict between religion and education – there is no reason to have an antithetical or polarised decision – there is no conflict between institutions- there is a conflict between persons – here is a question for everyone: does what I am doing benefit myself or does it benefit the community? - we need to express our pure appreciation – at the same time together with appreciation comes personal responsibility - concluding : we should go beyond personal animosity or concerns - and we should think what is to the benefit of the community – we have huge responsibility – the creation of a new charity is not the correct decision – and the procedure must be the right, because the Trustees have to be involved and when we are talking about a vote that was taken by the majority of the parents, it is about the majority of the parents not just the parents who were present at a meeting at short notice.

Dr Homenidou: The School produces accounts every year and presents them at the School AGM. The accounts are given to the Chair of the Church Committee so the Charity can include them in the accounts they have to submit to the Charity Commission. The School cannot submit accounts; this is the responsibility of the Charity. As the treasurer of the Greek School she felt offended by Prof Katsos' hypothetical example of a financial problem in the charity – and clarified that the School accounts are transparent. She questioned how Prof Katsos, a member of the Church Committee, could assure the parents that the School will work normally in September. She pointed out to the fact that the Church Committee members have not been involved in the running of the School so far. [comment updated on 12/07/2022]

Prof Katsos replied that if the school committee does not align with the regulations and the laws of this country there will be a clash – explanation about regulations and accountabilities of the school committees have to be revised – the school committee is accountable to the parents because the parents are beneficiaries of the services of the school – but the accountability for governance and decision making is to the Trustees – if we do not follow this it is a problem that has to do with the law – he strongly advised everyone to try and understand the framework.

[The following comment was added on 12/07/2022] In response to Dr Homenidou's edited comment above, Prof Katsos added the following comment, part of which he had posted in the written chat of the ZOOM session: The Charity Commission does not work this way. Submitting the accounts means that the School accounts must be audited by an external accountant, not the Treasurer of the School or the Treasurer of the Community –this entails submitting all receipts, invoices, chequebooks and other supporting information to the external accountant for auditing. The Treasurer's report is not enough. Importantly, the funds within the School account are ring-fenced for the use of the School only (in technical terms, they are within a 'restricted account'). Reporting the accounts to the Charity Commission does not in any way endanger the use of the funds exclusively for the benefit of the School.

Dr Kazanis talked as a parent of children who have been part of the Greek school for many years. He stated that the parents are happy with the school but they know very little about the people who populate the other community committees and what exactly they do. In his opinion, the independence of the School is a very important issue that needs to be maintained.

[A note added by Mr Pippas 12/07/2022] Many people ask about the use of the Hall, why can't the School use it? However, the Hall was in very poor condition when the Community moved in. The Hall was renovated using tax payers money (Grant S106, Cambridge City Council); a

condition of this money is that the Hall cannot be used routinely and systematically either by the Community or the School, because there is a Covenant that prevents such use for 9 more years. Instead priority must be given to local use outside the Community. The School has the right to use it three days of the year for free, and upon discussion, it may make limited additional use paying the lowest possible rate agreed by Cambridge City Council.

➤ **Concluding remarks and further actions: Mr George Pippas**

- The school will be in its place in September whatever happens
- The vision is to have a Greek school within the Charity of St Athanasios for the next thousand years
- The proposition to create a new charity for the School does not comply with existing laws and regulations and it is void
- Anyone may create a new charity and a new Greek school in Cambridge– but it will be their own private initiative, not the school of St Athanasios
- This was an Information-sharing event
- The Trustees will write to the School Committee to ask if they want to continue discussions towards the amicable resolution of the school governance issue.
- As Mrs Chatzigianni-Gkika pointed out, the School has an identity, and this will not change.

**VII. Further steps to be taken (based on the above discussed points]**

1. The discussions about the school governance issue will continue at next level – on the side of the School Committee, the Chairman said that they intend to have a meeting with the Chair of Trustees of St Athanasios, H.E. Archbishop Nikitas in London.
2. A report summarizing the meeting minutes including also important additions should be circulated so that the results of this meeting are openly communicated to as many as possible members of the Greek community and parents of students in the school of St Athanasios.

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting ended after Mr Pippas’s presented the conclusions and summed up the meeting.

First version of the Minutes submitted by: Napoleon Katsos, co-Secretary of the Community Committee; Minutes circulated: 24 June 2022; Version 2 circulated 12/07/2022

**Each main contributor has approved their part of the minutes in writing prior to circulation.** In any occasion where they added or edited text upon the draft minutes, their own original wording has been maintained. In order of taking the floor, the main contributors were: Mr George Pippas, Prof Napoleon Katsos, Mrs Ismini Chatzigianni Gkika, Dr Eirini Veroni, Dr Eirini Kouma, Mr Evangelos Giannoudis; the minutes regarding comments by the audience are indicative only; **everyone whose comments are included in the Minutes had a two-week period since the publication of the first version of the Minutes to amend/change/delete their comments.** Three people made use of this opportunity.

These minutes can be found at: <http://www.stathanasios.uk/docs.html>