

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 26 January 2023 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Kate Claydon (KC - headteacher), Peter Sowrey (PS) (Chair), Mark Sorrell (MS), Jim Henderson (JH) Judith Mackenzie (JMa), Vernon Bamforth (VB), Alex Morrison (AM), Phil Howard (PH), James Tulley (JT), Tim Shutler (TS), Bonnie Brito Costa (BBC) and Mariea Christodoulou (MC).

In attendance: Sarah Hextall (SH – school business manager), Brandon Hughes (BH - Deputy Head Teacher), Lizzie Edmed (EE – deputy headteacher) and David Harvey (DHa – clerk).

Quorum: 12 out of 13 governors present – meeting was quorate.

1. Apologies for Absence.

- 1.1. James Moncrieff (JMo) had sent his apologies for absence which were accepted.

2. Welcomes

- 2.1. The Chair welcomed the presence of two new co-opted governors (JT and TS); also a new staff governor (BBC – whose four year term of office would start from the date of this meeting, i.e. 26 January 2023); who introduced themselves to the FBG.
- 2.2. The Chair asked governors to consider stepping forward to act as mentors to the new governors. JT welcomed this provision, emphasising the importance of learning about the FBG's perspective and terminology.
- 2.3. The Chair thanked JMa for agreeing to serve another four year term of office as a co-opted governor (with effect from 31 January 2023, with her present term due to conclude on 30 January 2023); and noted the FBG's unanimous approval of this re-appointment.

3. Urgent business

H&SE prosecution of LA

- 3.1. KC informed governors that the Health & Safety Executive (H&SE) prosecution of the local authority (LA), as a result of the death of a school employee on the premises in the summer of 2018, was due to take place in court on 30 January. KC added that the LA would be sharing its planned press release on the issue with the school; and was not expecting any individuals to be named.
- 3.2. SH asked that, if any governor was approached for comment on the issue, to refer such enquiries to the LA press department. The Chair added that the LA

had circulated a brief statement on 26 January, setting out the various actions taken since the incident, to address issues identified by the investigative report at the time.

H&S school policy

- 3.3. Governors asked, with regard to the school Health & Safety policy, which policy was relevant on the issue of violence to staff. KC explained that this would be covered under the behaviour policy.

Complaint

- 3.4. The Chair informed governors that a parent had lodged a formal complaint with the school; alternative dates for a panel would shortly be circulated; and asked governors to consider stepping forward to participate.
- 3.5. The Chair stated the aim was to complete this process by 1 March and to present dates on which a panel might be held in the week beginning 20 February, after half term. The Chair asked that, when requested, governors indicate (or otherwise) their availability.

4. **Declarations of interest** – None.

5. Minutes

- 5.1. The minutes of the meeting of 8 December 2022 were agreed by governors as a true record; and signed by the Chair.

6. Matters Arising

- Production of three year staffing plan draft outline – SH explained that this was work in progress; this plan would be presented for review by the Finance Committee in February and reflect a balance of possibilities and what the school wanted to do.
- Consideration of changes to committee membership – to be considered at the present meeting.
- Circulation of Hove Partnership meeting minutes (academisation presentation) – done.

7. Headteacher report

Communication

- 7.1. KC informed governors of school plans to push forward with communications with Year 11 students; with a focus on talking to pupils individually – all staff were invested in this process. KC drew attention to the mock examinations results day as part of this process; also parents evening with support suggestions.
- 7.2. KC added that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) were working on improving communications, which had been highlighted as something that was happening in the Challenge Partners report.

Senior Leadership Principles

- 7.3. KC highlighted the three key strands – ‘deliberate restlessness’ (the need to drive a sense of urgency and energy); ‘trust and verify’ (this was being monitored with staff to check it was happening); and ‘excellent communication’ (methods of sending messages). KC added that the SLT were continuing to work on this initiative, to see if there were areas needing more support.

External Analysis

- 7.4. The Chair noted the Challenge Partners report having highlighted the areas of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and governor visits as areas to develop.
- 7.5. Governors asked about the school’s plan to tackle the issue of performance on mathematics. BH confirmed that the head of the department and his team were fully aware of the situation and was working to improve it; data from the mock examination results would help in this process. KC added that there were specific interventions planned for Pupil Premium (PP) students on mathematics.

Blatchington Mill Anti-Racist Community (BARC)

- 7.6. KC drew attention to this Anti-Racist action plan, based on a LA template, with a lot of work on this issue to be done, including training for staff.
- 7.7. Governors asked if this was an issue for the school. KC confirmed that prejudice based incidents were all recorded, of which there were some. KC acknowledged the school’s need to be aware of unconscious bias, to understand how the children themselves felt about the issue (e.g. to know about their lived experiences) and have expertise in place.
- 7.8. Governors asked about the teaching of de-colonisation and if this was a challenge for the curriculum. BH stated that there was a licence to teach this in Key Stage 3 as part of the curriculum; where other parts of history looked at and other perspectives brought in. Governors asked if there had been any feedback from parents – BH stated nothing negative had been heard.
- 7.9. Governors asked about school action in addressing social media concerns and issues (e.g. the recent Andrew Tate controversy). EE confirmed that key themes in this regard were being addressed with, in particular, Years 8 and 9, for example misogyny – this was also part of work being done on Personal Social Health & Economic (PSHE) education.

Student Development and student voice

- 7.10. KC stated that work was being done on the school’s offer and bringing in more of the parents partnership element; with views being taken on the provision of trips and making them more inclusive. KC drew attention in particular to planning for GCSE curriculum trips but acknowledged there was an issue of staff capacity to address.
- 7.11. KC highlighted the work going on student voice with regard to inclusivity; a meeting with the student governors had been held on 26 January, with a focus on discussing matters such as lavatories, littering, lessons and the student role. The Chair asked if the student governors could attend the next FBG; KC confirmed that this would be arranged.

- 7.12. Governors asked how much an issue was vaping by students in lavatories. KC acknowledged there were such incidents which were dealt with. Governors asked what sanction was imposed; EE stated this was a suspension.
- 7.13. KC drew attention to the recent publication of a student-led magazine – ‘The Typographic’ – under a staff member supervision, on the school website. Governors praised this publication, noting its highly informative nature.
- 7.14. Governors about students’ input into the curriculum. KC stated that this was an issue of quality assurance, with departments carrying out this action. BH added that he would report on this work to the Quality of Education Committee.

Staff recognition / Parent voice

- 7.15. KC drew attention to this staff recognition scheme, which promoted ‘superstaff’ nominations (thanks for work done) and the award of spot prizes. With regard to parent voice, KC stated that short questions were being put to parents at various in-person events and useful feedback obtained; as well as appreciation expressed for these events.

Strike Action

- 7.16. KC informed governors that the school would follow LA advice and, as a result of SLT working through the permutations, would close the school on 1 February. KC assured governor that she had discussed this decision with the Chair.
- 7.17. Governors asked what would happen on the other planned strike days (2, 15 & 16 March 2023). KC confirmed that the school would take separate decisions for each of these days, given it was uncertain what action each union would take.

(Note – BH left the meeting at 17.45 hours)

School Improvement Plan (SIS)

- 7.18. KC highlighted the challenge being faced by the school with regard to literacy and transition of Year 6 to 7 pupils. KC stated that Blatchington Mill was working with the Hove Partnership, in order to plan better in preparation; but noted that primary schools had significant gaps, with writing as well. KC stressed that the school would identify measures to take, a lot of work was being done on the issue.
- 7.19. Governors asked about the careers skill-builder framework and the overarching purpose. KC drew attention to the cross curricular links; the use of careers skills and the attention being paid to this by subject leaders.
- 7.20. Governors asked about the low levels of literacy and if there was a need to change the English curriculum. KC stated that this was linked to a staffing issue; the need for the head of the English department to carry out a review.
- 7.21. The Chair raised the issue of literacy across the whole curriculum. KC confirmed that subject leaders were thinking carefully about vocabulary used in their subjects. Governors asked if there was a need to have a literacy lead. KC believed this was served by the deployment of a teaching and research

coach. Governors asked about Quality Assurance, improved accountability and formal and informal support. KC confirmed this was in place.

Curriculum Model / Academic phone calls

7.22. KC pointed to the work being done by BH on improving processes, to make tuition as effective as possible. KC stated that, whilst it was too soon to move to this model in the next academic year, some changes would be made soon such as reducing the number of double lessons.

7.23. Governors asked if there had been any objections to these proposed changes, e.g. the move to one hour lessons. KC stated that it was just a case of there being not enough time to make these changes; there was a need to have a longer run in time.

7.24. With regard to academic phone calls, KC believed this initiative had been received positively; these had taken the nature of contacts of a positive nature by teachers with families.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

7.25. The Chair asked about lesson observations. KC stated that CPD was part of the twilight programme, in the sense of how observations were carried out – making them a collaborative process. Governors asked about staff feedback to lesson observations. KC stated that there was an element of changing the present culture and to emphasise what was going well.

7.26. Governors noted that there was a risk of there being an element of tension with observations, to have separate elements between being clear about weaknesses and wanting to be open about the process. KC stated that the school was focussing on appraisals being developmental; nevertheless with anything serious being raised, the head of department would put staff on a support plan. KC confirmed that there had been no resistance to the observation process.

Attendance

7.27. EE drew attention to the dip in December and stated that the school's priority was focussing on Years 10 and 11. With regard to persistent absentees (PAs), EE stated that the school was following the Child Missing in Education (CME) route and doing everything possible to support the families concerned; but in some cases, issues pre-dated lockdown.

7.28. The Chair noted the overall PA rate of Blatchington Mill at 28% and that similar schools comparisons were broadly similar; and asked why Year 11 was higher. EE stated that some cases dated back to Year 7, where particular situations arose; with these, the school had looked at them on an individual basis. EE stated that, with one exception, other schools' record in Brighton and Hove were similar to Blatchington Mill.

Family Partnership Evenings

7.29. The Chair asked about the response to these evenings. EE stated that a survey had been sent out, with parents expressing appreciation and liking the opportunity to visit the school. EE added that this initiative had been led by the Year teams and would be built into the school calendar.

Barriers to Learning

- 7.30. KC described the work being done in these areas and the move towards PP students; looking more at interventions and the capacity of team leaders to carry these out; the SEN team was part of this effort. Governors asked for statistics of Children in Care / Children Previously In Care; KC agreed to provide this information.
- 7.31. Governors asked about movement of students into the school in Year 11. KC stated that this development was unprecedented and appeared to be on the increase; this was a challenge to both teachers and students.

Human Resources (HR)

- 7.32. SH drew attention to the new staff well-being group; there was a school priority to improve staff attendance and have vacancies for shorter periods. SH highlighted information in a summary of the recruitment situation; and confirmed the school followed safer recruitment guidelines.
- 7.33. Governors asked if the staff attendance rate was better than last year. SH acknowledged that those away from school for Covid reasons had not been consistently monitored; but the base rate was currently being assessed up to this half term.

Finance (budget monitoring)

- 7.34. SH pointed to a slight skewing of the staffing structure, in that there was an increase between 2021-2022 of 4.5% to 2022-2023 of 6.9%; and not 10% as stated in the present document. SH highlighted the ring-fenced surplus of £460K, leaving a carry forward of £328K – which, as 3.5% of the total budget was within the limit authorised by the LA.
- 7.35. SH drew attention to the particular concern of utilities costs; because the school bought this provision through the LA, its costs were protected this year; but there would be increases expected in 2023-2024 of 32% for electricity, 41% for gas and 13% for water.
- 7.36. SH confirmed that she was working on the draft three year budget plan at the moment (the in-year surplus was not yet clear) and would report to the Finance Committee at its meeting of 20 February.

School Fund Terms of Reference (ToR)

- 7.37. The Chair provided the background to this document, explaining that it related to funds taken in by the school for trips and also that a surplus had been retained for historical reasons. JMa (Finance Committee Chair) added that members of the Committee had reviewed these ToR and recommended their approval by the FBG; the Chair noted governors' unanimous agreement to this document.

8. Budget

- 8.1. The Chair noted this item had been covered in paragraphs 7.35 to 7.38 above.

9. Governor visits dates

- 9.1. The Chair noted that new dates for the proposed SEND monitoring visit had been suggested; 3, 10 and 24 February. KC added that those governors

carrying out this visit would meet with the SEN co-ordinator, other staff and students. The Chair noted that this visit would build on an earlier introductory one and focus on specific aspects of SEND.

- 9.2. The Chair noted that the visit would involve PH and MS and would take place on 10 February; the Chair agreed to use the 3 February date to meet with new governors JT, PH, TS and BBC as part of their induction.
- 9.3. The Chair drew attention to BH's proposal set out in the Quality of Education Committee meeting of 10 January; that governors visit to attend curriculum team and subject leads presentation of their plans. The Chair noted MC's agreement to undertake this visit on 1 March. KC agreed to produce a schedule with specific times, for circulation to governors and increase participation.
- 9.4. KC highlighted the forthcoming school production of the 'Little Shop of Horrors' from 7 to 9 February; governors were most welcome to apply for tickets and attend.

10. Safeguarding

- 10.1. KC informed governors that an audit was due by the end of February; she would be meeting the LA shortly to take this exercise forward.

11. School policies

Complaints

- 11.1. The Chair informed governors that the LA had recently revised its template policy document; which had now been adapted for Blatchington Mill. The Chair stated that this version and a toolkit had been circulated to governors for comment; some minor changes to the LA version had been made such as increasing the timescale limit to 20 days from 15.
- 11.2. Governors informed the Chair that they would be submitting some detailed comments. The Chair stated that these would be taken into account by himself and KC; an amended version would then be approved by them and published on the school website.
- 11.3. Governors asked if the present policy on the website could still be used, while work on the updated version was in progress. The Chair confirmed this was the case.

(**Note** – MC left the meeting at 18.55 hours)

12. Governors committees membership

- 12.1. The Chair requested governors to let DH know of their preferences on which Committees to join.
- 12.2. The Chair noted BBC's offer to take the role of link Health & Safety governor (also of JH's decision to step down from this role) and attend the school's internal H&S committee.
- 12.3. Governors recommended that consideration be given to looking at the remit of Committees, highlighting the issues of safeguarding and well-being;

and questioned why there was a separate Pay & Personnel Committee (P&PC) to the Finance Committee. The Chair agreed to consider these points in due course. SH added that personnel issues should not be impacted by budgetary considerations.

12.4. The Chair noted JT's offer to join the P&PC and FC; also TS for the P&PC and H&S link role.

13. Governor training

13.1. PH informed the FBG that he was booked to undertake the governors' induction course. JT stated that he had done a LA lead safeguarding governor training course on 24 January.

14. Actions by the Chair

14.1. The Chair reported that, as previously stated, he had consulted with KC about closing the school on 1 February, for reason of strike action by staff.

14.2. SH stated that, at the Finance Committee meeting of 16 January, she had proposed expenditure of approximately £32K on replacement netting for the All Weather Pitches (AWPs) – this required FBG authorisation, as the amount was over the Committee's delegated limit. SH added that she had received three quotes; the money would come out of the infrastructure budget; and there was an obligation to maintain the AWPs in this way.

14.3. JMa confirmed the information provided by SH and recommended approval by the FBG of her proposal; the Chair noted the FBG's unanimous agreement for this expenditure.

15. Any Other Business – None.

Actions

- Consideration of Chair request for volunteers to act as mentors to new governors – all
- Notification of JMa re-appointment for four year term of office as a co-opted governor to school and Governor Support – DH
- Production of curriculum leaders presentations schedule and times for governors – KC
- Processing of further comments and amendments to complaints policy – PS & KC

Next meeting – Thursday 23 March 2023 (Budget).

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...