

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 23 March 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 Moncrieff (JMo – arrived at 17.50 hours), 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 (LE – deputy headteacher), Maisie (student governor – Y10), Liv (student governor – Year 11) and David Harvey (DHa – clerk).

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

1. Apologies for Absence.

1.1. None, all members of the board were present.

2. Student Governors presentation

2.1. Maisie described how discussions amongst students were held; with ideas being presented to form representatives and then transmitted to the student governors; to use as a basis for a subsequent meeting with KC.

2.2. Maisie set out a number of subjects that had been raised by students, including:-

- neurodiversity (students wanted greater awareness of this issue);
- access to well-being groups;
- 'hot' topics (statements for discussion which gave rise to inappropriate comments e.g. on trans and LGBTQ+ issues);
- lack of consistency of delivery in form times;
- discomfort amongst Year 10 students in coming forward in assemblies to collect certificates;
- lack of information about extra-curricular and after-school activities;
- erratic times for sounding of the school bell;
- choice making of GCSE subjects;
- Year eight students dislike of 'fake' forms;
- use by teachers of correct pronouns;

- opportunities for girls in Physical Education (PE) e.g. there was no rugby team for girls.
- 2.3. Governors asked about the neurodiversity issue. Maisie stated that there was a lack of awareness by students about this subject. Liv added that no explanation of neurodiversity had been raised in school assemblies, e.g. on conditions such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- 2.4. Governors asked about the issue of dissemination of information, i.e. communications and how students felt about this provision. Liv stated that she would like more students to know about the condition of ADHD and anxiety.
- 2.5. Governors asked about the making of inappropriate comments. Maisie pointed to the subject of the football World Cup competition being held in Qatar and the different views being expressed about the situation for people who are gay; this discussion had affected some students negatively. Governors asked how teachers had managed this situation, with such views being expressed and not being challenged. Maisie believed that teachers did not really know how far they could go in challenging this type of discussion. KC confirmed that notifications of such incidents were passed to the Year teams to investigate further.
- 2.6. Governors noted that this was a complex issue, with the fact of different views being articulated and asked how these were challenged. Liv stated that this was a major topic, occasionally clashed with religious views and merited discussion – but the debate should be all about being respectful.
- 2.7. Liv set out a number of recurring issues, such as:-
- the length of Key Stage 3 lessons (students felt it hard to focus);
 - limited availability of inner spaces to sit (could only be done in the canteen and sports hall);
 - reasoning for the one way system;
 - canteen food options (more healthy ones were wanted);
 - uniforms and appearance (e.g. policy on piercings and girls wearing Doc Marten boots);
 - cleanliness of toilets; school trips (more were wanted);
 - Duke of Edinburgh Award (progression from bronze to silver was wanted).
- 2.8. Governors asked which topics were of the most importance to students. Liv highlighted those of the toilets and canteen provision. Governors asked if there had been any improvements to the toilet situation since the last time this issue had been raised. Liv believed there had been some, but that this was linked to the indoor space provision issue. Governors asked why the toilets issue was difficult to resolve. Maisie stated that if more indoor seating was made available, students could avoid going into the toilets.
- 2.9. Governors asked about canteen meals pricing and healthy eating options. Liv stated that healthy options were not always available and pricing was an issue. Governors asked about the company tasked with this provision. SH explained that the company originally contracted by the school had been sold

twice and so was now different to the one appointed; the contract would expire in December 2024. SH added that students and governors had been involved in the last tendering process. Governors asked if the company heard students and school views about its service. SH believed that the company would welcome feedback and confirmed that hot meals were always available, including vegetarian options.

Next steps

- 2.10. KC confirmed that she would meet with the student governors again to talk about school assemblies and communications; follow up points made about inappropriate comments and behaviour; and would report about this follow up to governors.

(**Note** – Maisie and Liv left the meeting at 17.30 hours)

3. **Declarations of interest** – None.

4. Minutes

- 4.1. The minutes of the meeting of 26 January 2023 were agreed by governors as a true record; and signed by the Chair.

5. Matters Arising

- Consideration of Chair request for volunteers to act as mentors to new governors – done; JMa had met with JT and TS in this regard.
- Notification of JMa re-appointment for four year term of office as a co-opted governor to school and Governor Support – done.
- Production of curriculum leaders presentations schedule and times for governors – done.
- Processing of further comments and amendments to complaints policy – to be discussed later in this meeting.

6. Headteacher report

National landscape

- 6.1. KC informed governors that she had attended the ASCL (Association of School and College Leaders) annual conference and drew attention to discussion of the challenging times for education, in particular the funding crisis, industrial action, recruitment and retention of staff (vacancies had doubled) and the inadequate state of public services.
- 6.2. Governors asked if parents were aware of the full extent of the problems set out. KC commented that this would be a very difficult message to disseminate, given that it was straying into political areas. Governors emphasised the importance of parents learning about the funding issues raised. KC noted the primary school headteachers had sent out a collective letter, drawing attention to their schools all carrying budget deficits; there was scope to produce a similar letter to go out from a group of secondary schools with a similar message.

6.3. Governors recommended compiling a message in which the funding situation was set out, in comparison to the situation in place before; and the current impact. SH stated that the school was providing families with information about claiming Free School Meals (FSMs) and accessing the school hardship fund; the school had also increased the food budget so students were not asked to bring in ingredients to lessons. Governors stressed that this message had to be presented as a group and not individually; and also advised against dilution in the case of talking about funding and the support being provided.

Local landscape

6.4. . KC drew attention to Special Educational Needs (SEN) and primary headteachers' concerns in this regard, who were seeing a dip in Year 6 pupils' performance; and added that the local authority were currently going through a SEN inspection.

6.5. Governors asked about the outcome of this inspection and if this would have an impact on the alternative provision being bid for by the school. KC believed that the LA had committed some money for this initiative.

6.6. Governors asked about timelines for putting the alternative provision in place. KC stated that these had not yet been set.

MODA

6.7. KC informed governors that the developer, Moda Living, had named the school as a beneficiary of an Education Section 106 agreement; Blatchington Mill would work on bids to fund projects as a result. SH explained that this was funding for the local community, of which the school was part.

6.8. The Chair asked if this was restricted to spending on capital projects. SH stated that there was no such restriction. Governors asked if a bid could be submitted to construct a social space for students in the school. KC stated that a look could be taken on increasing the provision of covered space. Governors noted that this process could be discussed in the Finance Committee; i.e. use of the bid money.

Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

6.9. KC informed governors that, drawing on capacity of the school languages team, Blatchington Mill would be submitting an application to the National Consortium for Language Education (NCLE) as one of the 25 lead schools. Governors asked if languages teaching would continue in the same way as before, in terms of MFL pedagogy. KC confirmed that this was the right direction of travel.

Safeguarding

6.10. KC stated that the school was going through the Child Protection audit; this was work in progress and would be meeting with the Chair of Governors on 31 March before the audit was submitted.

6.11. The Chair highlighted the recent work of a governors' panel on a parental complaint and thanked those who had participated in this task. The Chair noted that there were a number of items to follow up in order to ensure future processes went smoothly. JT confirmed he would be working with TS and JMo on this task. The Chair stated that time would be taken to consider the

implications of this case, in order to report progress to the next meeting of the FBG.

- 6.12. JMo (as the panel chair) pointed to the key issues being worked on;
- a template of guidance taking account of each nuanced case;
 - as some issues raised in the complaint had been upheld, there were a number of actions for the school to take;
 - assurance for governors that actions had been taken;
 - and whilst the process had been an enormous task, it had been possible to narrow the complaint down to core issues – the key was knowing the right balance to draw.

- 6.13. The Chair hoped that a set of recommendations following this panel and follow up action would be prepared for the FBG to review before the summer break.

Quality of Education

- 6.14. BH compared predictions made in November 2022 to the ones based on the recent mock examination results; teachers had more confidence now in the latter. BH drew attention to a lot of activity being carried out by Year 11 students and the good atmosphere; also the time being spent with key individuals.
- 6.15. BH highlighted the better English mock results than those for mathematics; SEND pupils not securing the qualifications they needed; the underperformance of boys (except in mathematics); the expansion of mathematics sets; highlights which included drama, PE and combined science.
- 6.16. BH drew attention to progress measures and addressing the issue of students not attending school; student preparation and the little work they had done for the mocks; a focus on students not doing well in mathematics but fine in English; the issue of attainment in English and mathematics, particularly with regard to students not being in school.
- 6.17. BH spoke of changes in the mathematics groups and the increased number of individual interventions; there was a comprehensive intervention calendar in place which was well attended in lunchtimes and after school, with a focus on key skills gaps.
- 6.18. Governors commented that testing children on matters which had not yet been taught, was something which should be done in class. Governors noted that they had been given an assurance in the Quality of Education Committee meeting of 10 January of a quality process being in place on the basis of data projections given; this would create evidence based improvements.
- 6.19. Governors asked for more information about the difference between the autumn and final predictions. BH explained that predictions had been in-house assessment based in the autumn; with the mock examinations, there was an issue in the time given to students to revise. BH added that he had spoken to heads of department about the delivery of the curriculum, to ensure more time was given to students.

(Note – MS left the meeting at 18.05 hours)

- 6.20. Governors asked about examination technique. BH believed this was being taught well; the double periods were particularly good for doing this task. BH pointed to a change in culture now in place in terms of preparing students.
- 6.21. Governors asked about moderation of mock examinations. BH stated that a moderation period had been put into the school calendar after the marking had been done.
- 6.22. Governors asked if there would be reflection on how predictions were produced, after the results come in. BH stated that there would be a review in September and October; also on what had been learnt, what had been said and what had transpired.
- 6.23. Governors noted that their monitoring visits were a useful chance for them to call in at the school and increase their profile; BH would advise on areas for them to see in a targeted way.
- 6.24. Governors asked about homework. BH stated that, for Year 11, this was managed by each department and teacher, alongside the revision that was done in class. BH added that he was speaking to heads of department to ensure the avoidance of doubling up on revision and setting homework to follow up learning in the classroom.

Attendance

- 6.25. LE stated that the school's rate was above the national average but wanted to improve on this statistic. LE highlighted the school's focus on persistent absentees and the prevalent issue of Emotion Based School Avoidance and anxiety – on students refusing to come to school for these reasons. LE confirmed that the school's pastoral and SEND teams were looking at this issue and holding triage meetings. LE spoke of the onus on students to reflect on their attendance; the school was putting a digital log in place where pupils could secure recognition; for wins on attendance to be celebrated – a slight improvement had been seen.

Form Time Quality Assurance

- 6.26. LE drew attention to the form time quality assurance and that this programme was being refined to find out what was being effective. LE stated that early feedback had pointed to some positive relationships but some inconsistencies.
- 6.27. Governors asked about the reading age average for Year 7. LE stated that the school was identifying cohorts in Key Stage 3 which had very different needs to previous students. BH acknowledged that the current Year 7 group had a very low level of literacy.
- 6.28. Governors asked about 'desk top' truancy and how students' work and engagement with learning was checked. LE confirmed that teachers did monitor students' engagement.
- 6.29. Governors noted the 'Secret Student' idea. LE stated that this had been launched and found to be fun by students, taking in elements of expectations and standards; interactions between students and teachers were more fun and achievement points were awarded.

- 6.30. Governors noted from the student governor presentations that management of 'hot topics' was an issue and asked if training was given on controversial matters. LE stated that wider feedback obtained on 'hot topics' showed this initiative to be very popular.
- 6.31. Governors asked with regard to reading age assessment, whether Year 11 was lower than seen in the past. BH confirmed that the school was seeing this to be the case and invited governors into school to participate in reading sessions with students.

Onsite Alternative Provision

- 6.32. LE set out the rationale for this proposal, in establishing this provision to meet students' needs. LE explained that this would be led by an extended member of the leadership team – a director of alternative provision – to take forward supervision with pastoral support and provided details of a staffing plan. LE added that the restorative work would be purposeful and help children approach their learning differently.
- 6.33. LE stated that the accommodation would consist of two rooms in the old Sixth Form building, using staff who knew the school's values and focus on numeracy and literacy (maintaining a broad curriculum) on a bespoke level for individuals. SH confirmed that the budgetary implications had been taken account of; the latest draft budget included provision for the alternative provision director and supporting teaching assistants (TAs) – all had been fully costed out.
- 6.34. Governors asked if this provision would be open to all Year groups. LE confirmed there would be a referral process in place, bespoke for each individual student.
- 6.35. Governors asked about the numbers anticipated. LE stated that each classroom would take six to eight students, who would undertake differentiated activities – for pupils with low levels of literacy, behaviour issues and disengagement.
- 6.36. Governors noted that this model was intended as a space for children who found it difficult to be in mainstream classes and asked about plans for reintegration. LE confirmed that participating in the alternative provision was not intended to be a long term arrangement and reintegration would be encouraged at the right time. The Chair noted that the LA was encouraging this type of school initiative and were providing some limited funding; this also addressed well-being issues.
- 6.37. Governors asked about learning aims and how these were being articulated, taking into account elements of behaviour and well-being as well as academic ones. LE stated that the school would have its own criteria, with regular reviews e.g. on attendance and engagement. LE added that the director would monitor data; this was all about keeping these particular children part of the school community.
- 6.38. Governors asked how the risk of children preferring to stay in the alternative provision and not wanting to move back would be managed. LE confirmed that the transition in and out would be a key area of focus and made as straightforward as possible.

Barriers to Learning

- 6.39. KC highlighted the effect on the school by the numbers of students with significant issues not attending; and the impact on results, which had been exacerbated by the pandemic – and drew attention to the time and effort put in to helping these students.
- 6.40. Governors asked how the school compared to others in the city in this regard. LE confirmed that the school was in line with Brighton and Hove statistics; the LA would now be sharing figures on a fortnightly basis.

7. Budget

- 7.1. SH drew attention to the three year plan summary, submitted to the LA at the end of February; showing a £170K end of year deficit; with the pay award for non-teaching staff of 7%, this was now a deficit of £240K. SH explained that, when taking account of information on grants for the national tutoring programme and Covid, the deficit was reduced to £50K for the next two years – this was down to pay awards with no additional funding.
- 7.2. SH acknowledged that it was difficult to be realistic to produce a budget for Year 3; for Year 2 the focus would be on the turnover factor. SH believed that the deficit for Year 1 could be managed, when taking account of the current year surplus carry forward. SH added that capital funds had been spent on improvements to the school premises (e.g. windows repair and installation); there was capital available for next year's spend and this improvement work would continue.
- 7.3. KC drew attention to entry in the budget for an additional assistant headteacher. KC explained that the school was in need of this additional capacity to cover pastoral, safeguarding and well-being work; particularly as she had had to take on the role of Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) on a temporary basis.
- 7.4. Governors asked about the Published Admission Numbers (PAN) issue. KC stated that this would become worse across Brighton and Hove over time; there was no LA strategic plan in place – there would simply be increased pressure on primary schools with regard to reducing their PANs. SH added that the school expected to be full in September, with 330 allocated – this was subject however to minor fluctuations.
- 7.5. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of the school's proposal to engage an additional assistant headteacher.

School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

- 7.6. SH drew attention to the work done by PH and JMa to assist her with this task; and highlighted the previously circulated supporting documents of the checklist (self audit and details of procedures) and dashboard (comparisons). JMa added that there had been no areas of concern to note and expressed satisfaction with the explanations given on the areas highlighted in the dashboard. JMa confirmed this positive impression was also the case with examination of the thirty topic areas covered in the checklist, in terms of monitoring of management of school resources.

7.7. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of the School Financial Value Standard (SFVS).

Chromebook purchase authority request

7.8. SH drew attention to the request considered by governors at the recent meeting of the extraordinary Finance Committee, for the school to purchase 350 chromebooks for use by the incoming Year 7 students, at a cost of £88K. SH confirmed that the same company who had supplied chromebooks over the last two years would be used again, given they had provided excellent service and a training package.

7.9. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of this chromebooks purchase proposal.

8. Health & Safety Executive (H&SE) prosecution of the local authority update

8.1. (**Note** – text reflecting discussion on this item appears in a confidential annex to these minutes).

9. School policies

Code of Conduct

9.1. SH explained that this document was based on a LA template and recommended its adoption, including the model disciplinary and grievance process. SH drew attention to the highlighted changes in the update document, between this version and the previous one.

9.2. Governors recommended expanding the text in this document on the use of technology, with respect to cyber security.

9.3. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of the Code of Conduct.

Complaints

9.4. The Chair thanked governors for their comments and additions to the draft text; these had now all been taken account of and now the document had been posted on the school website.

10. Categories and number of Committees, including membership

10.1. The Chair noted that a suggestion had been made to create a Committee to deal with pastoral aspects of school life, to include safeguarding. The Chair confirmed that this idea would be reviewed for possible adoption from September. The Chair also asked governors to consider the idea of holding an away day, when issues of ways of working, self-appraisal and SEND could be discussed – perhaps in an evening. Governors agreed that this would be a good approach to take.

10.2. The Chair drew governors' attention to the process of compiling agendas for meetings; in terms of considering requests for entry of additional items; and asked for these to be submitted three or four weeks beforehand.

10.3. The Chair asked governors to consider membership of Committees, in particular the Quality of Education Committee and volunteer to participate.

11. Governors' access to relevant information

11.1. The Chair noted the work being done to secure all governors' access to the National Governance Association (NGA), The Key (& GovernorHub) and Department for Education (DfE – Get Information About Schools (GIAS)) websites; which was currently being processed.

12. Governor training

12.1. PH confirmed he would attend governor induction training on 30 March; JT having undertaken anti-racism training; VB on educationally disadvantaged.

13. Any Other Business – None.

Actions

Student governors presentation follow up action update to governors - KC

Next meeting – Thursday 4 May 2023 (Progress & Final Budget).

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...