

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 19 March 2026 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Kate Claydon (KC - headteacher), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), Joyti Stach (JS), Phil Howard (PH), Joanna McCrae (JMc – ‘virtual’), Lisa Logan (LL), Tim Shutler (TS – Vice Chair), James Tulley (JT– Chair), Kirsty Walker (KW – ‘virtual’), and Andrew Fozard (AF).

In attendance: Sarah Hextall (SHx – school business manager), Brandon Hughes (BH - deputy headteacher), Lizzie Edmed (EE – deputy headteacher) and David Harvey (DH – clerk).

Quorum: 10 out of 15 governors present – meeting was quorate.

1. Apologies for Absence.

1.1. Harriet Russell (HR) and Lisa Goodman (LG) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

2. **Declarations of interest** – The Chair noted the reminders provided by AF and JS of their employment with the local authority (LA); with regard to consideration of the agenda item on the ‘services to schools’ contract.

3. Impact review of previous decisions and minutes

3.1. The minutes of the meeting of 22 January 2026 were agreed by governors as a true record; and signed by the Chair.

3.2. The Chair noted that the minutes and actions of governors demonstrated impact in the following areas:

- Sharpening strategic oversight (Ofsted readiness & SDP)
- Driving focus on attendance and behaviour
- Responding to falling rolls and financial risk
- Strengthening safeguarding assurance
- Improving policy governance (risk-based model)
- Strengthening oversight of key investments (Thinking Reading)
- Increasing focus on cyber security and technology strategy
- Strengthening governance structure (roles & links)
- Enhancing site safety and operational scrutiny

4. Matters Arising –

- Circulation of training course links to governors – done.

5. Chair's strategic framing

- 5.1. The Chair referred to the key areas under consideration by governors, including governance in action; preparation for OfSTED; the need to demonstrate governor challenge and the impact of triangulation on school improvement. The Chair noted the positive messages being relayed about Blatchington Mill from the School Partnership Advisor (SPA) and Challenge Partners; which amounted to a validation of governance.
- 5.2. The Chair highlighted the recent publication of the government (Department for Education – DfE) White Paper on education; and circulation of the National Governance Association (NGA) summary of this document; and promised to circulate a similar paper on this subject produced by Stone King solicitors. The Chair spoke of the White paper as a framework, amounting to a ten year journey and setting out a clear direction of travel; including items on Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) reform, Artificial Intelligence (AI), complaints and exclusions.
- 5.3. The Chair undertook to highlight the key elements of the White Paper and assessing its impact on the school development plan (SDP), inclusion and scrutiny on SEND during governance discussions. The Chair noted that the White Paper also set out proposals on how funding for SEND would change; allowance would have to be made for staff workload and review of the governance model.
- 5.4. Governors agreed these developments would need to inform future strategic planning, workload considerations and governance arrangements.
- 5.5. The Chair highlighted proposed changes in the appearance of the FBG minutes. The Chair stated that references to strategic oversight would be sharpened; also a focus on driving issues such as attendance and behaviour highlighted, the falling roll numbers, assurances on safeguarding, policy development, an oversight on reading, cyber security and technology; and a look at link governor roles. The Chair emphasised the importance of showing evidence of governor scrutiny of the school in the minutes.

6. Headteacher strategic report

Local landscape

- 6.1. Governors sought assurance about the issue of pupil admissions (e.g. Free School Meals – FSMs) from out of catchment – an aspect previously highlighted by the DfE for governor focus. KC believed the school would be able to identify these students from their addresses and spoke of liaising with the 25 or more feeder schools. KC added that summer school would be an opportunity to consider children's attendance and belonging.
- 6.2. Governors examined the admissions data and clarified Blatchington Mill's engagement with feeder schools. KC stated that Blatchington Mill was aware of its key feeder schools, had positive relationships and contact was managed constructively.

- 6.3. The Chair examined the recent offer data against Published Admission Number (PAN) and noted that whilst the school was not oversubscribed with first preferences, 85% of the PAN were first preferences, and total offers far exceeded PAN. The Chair believed these numbers reflected Blatchington Mill as a strong local community 'anchor' school. The Chair recommended reinforcing the school's local position, ensuring families were aware of the school's offer, especially for disadvantage and inclusion.
- 6.4. BH informed governors that 309 students had indicated acceptance of the school's offer – a positive number - this was a significant improvement on last year's figure of 270. The Chair agreed that the school was in a strong position and should keep the structural implications of PAN / offers in mind for the future.

External reports

- 6.5. Governors scrutinised the responses to the Safe and Well at School Survey (SAWSS). An initiative of the Local Authority, KC explained that the school supported it as part of Personal Social Health & Economic (PSHE) education lessons; a meeting would be held with the LA to obtain more insights into the survey results. The Chair asked if the LA could share its full report with the FBG; KC believed that this would be possible.
- 6.6. Governors sought assurance about survey feedback being given to students. KC stated that statistics were provided in assemblies; and agreed to check this was being done in PSHE lessons. The Chair noted that a reduction in bullying and anti-racism incidents from the previous survey which supported the board's focus and school's work on behaviour, engagement and anti-racism.
- 6.7. The Chair stated that the survey provided insights on well-being and health to be considered in future decision making; and in this context the issue of food should be looked at by the FBG as part of a whole school approach to food; e.g. the issues of what was on offer and selection; also pricing; as this was a major part of school life. SHx confirmed that she regularly spoke to students in the canteen about the issue of food and asked questions and sought their views on the menu. SHx stated that students' main points centred around issues of e.g. labelling, vegetarian options and the high cost of meals.
- 6.8. The Chair noted the impact of Natasha's law and allergens. Governors recalled that they had reviewed this issue as part of Health & Safety meetings, and SHx confirmed that the school had an allergen policy in place.

Attendance Strategic Work

- 6.9. Governors sought assurance over the ongoing focus on attendance. KC explained all staff understood their role in supporting attendance, including form tutors. KC acknowledged the need to be relentless on this issue and making sure staff were taking the necessary actions.
- 6.10. Governors reviewed the impact of their support for the appointment of an assistant attendance officer. KC believed that current work was having an impact, as the persistent absence rate was improving; consideration was being given on how staff were deployed. SHx added that an attendance assistant would be starting soon; EE explained that this would free up the

attendance officer to focus on strategic attendance work and less routine tasks such as referrals and contact with parents.

- 6.11. Governors sought assurance about the improvement in statistics. EE confirmed that the biggest band of concern, namely 95% to 85%, had been refined to 90% to 85%. KC added while the school was focused on attendance, it was dealing with the challenges of parental pushback.
- 6.12. Governors queried whether a clearer stance was needed from the LA. EE confirmed that this was required and drew the example of having to make decisions on whether to fine parents of Education, Health & Care (EHC) plan students for absences. EE stated that the LA were in favour of the school taking this action; however the school believed a more joined up approach with the LA was needed.
- 6.13. Governors asked about actions taken at other schools that could be drawn on by Blatchington Mill. KC noted that e.g. from Horndean, social workers did not want to force children to attend school.
- 6.14. Governors sought assurance about the impact of students with 0% attendance on the overall percentage. EE believed this number to be fairly small, about 2-3% of the Year group. EE added that the strategic approach had been changed this year; e.g. the school was now seeing an improvement (previously not making progress) in students in Year 11 with below 90% attendance. EE acknowledged that the school was waiting on medical needs assessment for some Year 10 students; in addition, this Year group had acquired some challenging in-year admissions.
- 6.15. Governors sought assurance over why there had been a decrease in Years 9 & 10 attendance. EE acknowledged that the rate in Brighton & Hove was worse than the national one. EE commented that the school was very focussed on improving the school's attendance to be in line with the national rate; the issue had therefore been addressed and the decline would be arrested.
- 6.16. Governors queried the number of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) issued. EE confirmed that none were issued for non-attendance; and added the school had been sending out letters to parents and final notices to improve – the stage before the FPN; and had imposed fines for unauthorised absences, such as being away on holiday.
- 6.17. Governors sought assurance about the impact of fining for absences. EE stated that this was difficult to measure as the school had not yet reached the stage of fining. EE believed that on occasion formal letters were having an impact, when the threat of a fine imposition was made; hence the improvement since Spring 1.
- 6.18. The Chair asked if it might be possible to issue a warning to the incoming cohort of students. KC agreed that it would be possible to make it clear what the school expected in this regard; and this applied across the whole of Blatchington Mill. EE added that parents were told how the level of attendance affected the learning of their children. EE stated that the school had obtained feedback from Year 11 Student Voice; these pupils had come up with ideas on why it was important not to miss lessons and recognition of the importance of attending school.

6.19. Governors sought assurance over positive measures to encourage attendance. KC stated that this was raised at assemblies, for Years 10 and 11, i.e. the correlation between attendance and achievement. EE added that prizes were given out at assemblies for those students achieving a 100% attendance rate; also to those with no late marks; in order to celebrate those making the most improvements.

Pastoral Committee report

6.20. LL (Committee Chair) provided headline information on Pastoral Committee discussions (meeting of 24 February 2026) including:-

- attendance (improving, with a reduction in persistent absence);
- belonging (a key area);
- meeting structure change (to include deep dives);
- use of existing data and reports (to avoid commissioning new work);
- personal development and belonging (a look at the barriers to children participating in extra-curricular activities);
- SEND provision (awareness of gaps);
- adaptive teaching (strengthening this work);
- alternative provision (the difference being made by this unit);
- different groups outcomes (a look at the data and the stories behind the work);
- next steps (continued monitoring of attendance, participation data & extra-curricular activities).

6.21. Governors sought assurance about students being able to continue to the gold award level of the Duke of Edinburgh (DoE) scheme; once they had completed the silver award. EE highlighted the hard work completed by Year 11 students in achieving the silver award and confirmed having had conversations with some of them about making connections with colleges to do the gold award; foundations were in place to achieve this next step.

Quality of Education report

6.22. Governors sought assurance about data comparisons (local and national) to do with SEND and Pupil Premium students. BH stated that SEND was not tracked as no comparative national data information on this point could be put together. BH added that the school's data on disadvantaged students was above national results.

6.23. Governors queried why boys were doing better than girls. BH stated that this was being addressed head on with girls; after data capture, this had been shared with the cohort in assembly to ask why the gap existed. BH confirmed that conversations had been held around the data, which had created an element of competition in classes. With regard to mathematics in particular, BH commented that girls generally did not feel able to ask questions in class; also seemed not to have a desire to pursue this subject to a higher level.

6.24. Governors sought assurance about the resources being dedicated to this issue and attention paid to the curriculum. BH stated that the mathematics team had examined this issue; girls' only mathematics clubs were being run – but not well attended. BH added that he had informed the Quality of Education Committee (QoEC) that the school was considering running girls' only mathematics sessions next year. BH emphasised however that girls were still out performing boys at the top end of the school.

6.25. TS (QoEC chair) provided headline information about the Committee meeting of 4 March 2026; including:-

- the domination of numbers (a suggestion to put in place dashboards, so as to see the impact better);
- mathematics paper setting (a challenge made on sample papers, which may have skewed results);
- level of judgement (effects on performance);
- Year 9 subject pathways (sight of the benefit of pathways);
- overview (some good initiatives coming through).

Staffing

6.26. SHx informed governors that staff absences in February were much improved and agreed to provide a table of information for the next meeting of the FBG. KC added that the school was having to manage a number of staff absences at the moment.

Health & Safety

6.27. TS (link health & safety governor) noted that a key issue had been how staff injuries were mitigated following the school ski trip in 2025; this year only minor ones had been suffered, partly due to a shortened trip. TS stated that the school had looked at the figures and taken appropriate action. TS also drew attention to actions taken on allergens (Natasha's law) and the lockdown procedure (the alarm had been stress tested)

6.28. SHx added that, on this last point, the bell could not be heard in some areas of the school premises – a problem now partly resolved. SHx reported too that some students had not taken the emergency procedure seriously enough; this was being addressed by teachers. SHx also informed governors about buildings works (fitting of classroom blinds & a move to use of only one gate).

7. Safeguarding

7.1. JS (link safeguarding governor) expressed confidence in the Single Central Record (SCR), with respect to its management, monitoring and scrutiny. JS confirmed having visited the school to meet staff on this subject; all enquiries had been answered satisfactorily. JS informed governors that she would carry out another visit to the school in May; these visits would be done on a termly basis.

8. OfSTED review

- 8.1. The Chair drew attention to the continuing pressure and welfare being experienced by KC, BH, EE and their colleagues of awaiting the OfSTED inspection call notification. BH stressed that the school's leadership understood the school and its high level of readiness; KC had done a good job on the logistical side of things; the SLT had prepared questions on the areas of responsibility; contact had been made with other schools recently inspected; the school was well prepared.
- 8.2. KC confirmed that the school felt ready with an action plan in place, everything had been organised. KC expressed frustration that the prospect of this inspection was still hanging over the school; but nevertheless updating of all necessary measures was still going on. KC pointed to the issue of having to manage with the new OfSTED framework; colleagues at other schools had had different experiences with recent inspections.
- 8.3. Governors asked if the new framework had affected the engagement of senior leaders. KC stated that it had had an impact on the operational running of the school; and more negative on senior leaders.
- 8.4. The Chair noted it had been a long time waiting for the call but the mindset of preparation had been positive. The Chair emphasised that the school and governors would have to address OfSTED insights, but nevertheless the leadership was well prepared – credit was due to KC, BH and EE. The Chair noted the experience in other schools from the governance perspective was a lot more challenging than before; a question asked was 'how do you know how governance has made a difference?'. In view of this, the Chair believed that governors had to have powerful examples of evidence of action to answer such a question(s). The Chair drew attention to the key areas of OfSTED interest, namely inclusion culture, staff well-being, disadvantaged students and attendance; also that the LA had met recently with OfSTED to discuss attendance.

9. Finance & Risk

- 9.1. SHx informed governors that she had submitted the draft budget to the LA, setting out a forecast deficit of £120K for the first year. SHx expressed confidence that this would be reduced to being a balanced budget by the middle of May.
- 9.2. With regard to staffing costs, SHx hoped to achieve budget proportions of 77% for Year 1 (lower than expected), 79.8% for Year 2 and 82% for Year 3. SHx stated that so long as a balanced budget could be achieved for Year 1, then work could be done on the following two years; however this would be much more difficult if Year 1 ended up being in deficit.
- 9.3. SHx stated that the school would adopt a cautious approach in recruitment, risk in staffing was the greatest one to manage; also long term absences and staff leaving mid-year. SHx pointed to the additional risks of pressure integrated curriculum and financial planning. SHx stated that by ensuring cost effectiveness did not always make for an attractive curriculum. SHx added that the PAN and admission numbers were critical issues for the school.

- 9.4. The Chair sought insight on the direction for the school on funding, with the White Paper in mind. SHx stated that the school was waiting to see more detail on SEND; also a local decision on the school structure that met the needs of students. KC added that workload and staffing capacity of the SEND department was an issue for the school; with anticipated staff changes to mitigate.
- 9.5. SHx highlighted the tight nature of the budget as another risk to manage; strategic forecasting was challenging with limited flexibility. SHx drew attention to expenditure from the Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) funding; this would be used on additional (Martyn's law) security measures.
- 9.6. SHx drew governors' attention to the latest outturn statement, specifically the £208K surplus, which included ring fenced items; also the fire insurance claim might still have a budgetary impact.
- 9.7. The Chair sought assurance on efforts being made on income diversification, e.g. donations for projects. SHx stated that some families made donations to the school at the end of their children's time; others paid extra for trips or tickets – this money went to the school fund.
- 9.8. Governors recommended considering an approach to Year 7 new parents, by setting out ways of being part of the school community. KC agreed with this proposal, suggesting a menu of different items for funding.
- *Services to Schools*
- 9.9. SHx drew attention to a request for the FBG's approval (already reviewed and agreed by the Finance Committee) of the LA's services to schools basket of contracts; at a cost of £125K. The Chair pointed out that the FBG had had very little time to consider this request, namely to consider comparing supplier costs properly to determine value for money.
- 9.10. SHx stated that one such contract in this basket was the LA strategic property function; the school was obliged to subscribe to this particular expense of £46K. SHx explained that this paid for various works by the LA on the school premises and buildings structure.
- 9.11. Governors sought assurance on whether there was flexibility on any of the other contracts in the basket. SHx stated that this would require the school to identify and investigate alternative sources of services, to assess what was needed; this would amount to a considerable amount of work to carry out.
- 9.12. The Chair informed governors that, in any case, the LA was working on creating a separate company, limited by guarantee on a non-profit basis, as a platform to provide these services and support. The Chair believed that schools would be informed by the LA shortly about progress on this initiative; Blatchington Mill would have to decide at this point whether to take part in this new structure.
- 9.13. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of this request to pay for the LA's services to schools basket of contracts.

10. School policies

Health & Safety

- 10.1. SHx noted that the school's health & safety committee had recommended approval of this policy. TS (health & safety link governor) explained his H&S Committee role which included looking at a variety of different underpinning policies, data, accident notifications, site walks, monitoring use of facilities. The Chair noted the desirability of another FBG member being appointed as a second H&S link governor; this would be deferred to such a time when board vacancies were filled. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's health & safety policy.

First Aid

- 10.2. Governors suggested removal of Jim Henderson's name as link governor; this was accepted; the Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's first aid policy.

Data protection

- 10.3. SHx explained that text for this policy had been drawn from the DfE and the Key. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's data protection policy.

Accessibility

- 10.4. KC pointed to a number of changes made to the previous policy. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's accessibility policy.

Relationships, Sex & Health Education

- 10.5. KC stated that this was based on the LA Personal Social Health & Economic (PSHE) education model. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's Relationships, Sex & Health Education policy.

School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

- 10.6. SHx explained that the SFVS exercise was to do with providing an indication of assurance of the structure of finance managed by the school. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's SFVS form. The Chair added that use of the government's new financial benchmarking and insights Tool (FBIT) would have a key part to play in next year's SFVS exercise.

School behaviour statement

- 10.7. KC noted that governors had already reviewed this document and approved it.

Pay Panel terms of reference

- 10.8. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the Pay Panel's terms of reference for 2025-2026.

Complaints

- 10.9. The Chair commented that the FBG would have to look again at the school's complaints policy, in the light of revised DfE guidance.

11. Governor Talent, Development & Training

- 11.1. The Chair drew the FBG's attention to the need to fill three vacancies (two co-opted governors and one parent governor); there was a possibility of approaching the two runners up in the recent parent governor election. The Chair welcomed the offers of LL, PH and JMa to participate in an interview selection process in this regard. The Chair also referred to the desirability for prospective governors to have specific skills, such as in inclusion, SEND, disadvantaged and fund raising.
- 11.2. The Chair also recommended consideration of carrying out another general skills audit; perhaps in six to twelve months' time, when the board's vacancies were filled.

12. Clerk update

- 12.1. DH pointed to work being done by the LA to call in some schools' headteachers and governors, to go over the specific issues of finance, budget and attendance.

13. Local Authority perspective

- 13.1. AF drew attention to LA budgetary pressures and challenges; also an impetus to bring better value, e.g. on the social care provision. AF undertook to feedback comments to the LA about the value of services to schools.

14. Chair's actions

- 14.1. The Chair informed governors that he had written to the LA about the issues of attendance, data analysis, the Brighton & Hove hub for youth futures, transparency on sharing of offers, admissions tool and modelling on school attainment.

Actions –

- Circulate Stone King White Paper summary – JT
- Provide staff absence monitoring table – SH
- Share available Safe & Well survey findings – KC
- Provide comparator data for key pupil groups (SEND / PP) – BH
- Estate update from a safeguarding perspective (gates, bell) - SH
- Return final balanced budget for approval – SH
- Menu of parental support (financial and in kind) - KC
- Review Complaints Policy against updated guidance – HT / JT
- Interview of governor candidates and skills audit – JT / JMa

Next meeting – Thursday 7 May 2026

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...