

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 20 March 2025 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Kate Claydon (KC - headteacher), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), James Tulley ('virtual' - JT- Co-Chair), Lisa Logan (LL), Phil Howard (PH), Tim Shutler (TS – Vice (and acting) Chair) and Emma Gibson (EG).

In attendance: Sarah Hextall (SHx – school business manager) and David Harvey (DH – clerk).

Quorum: 7 out of 11 governors present – meeting was quorate.

1. Apologies for Absence.

- 1.1. Jim Henderson (JH – Co-Chair), Joanna McCrae (JMc), Joyti Stach (JS) and Lisa Goodman (LG) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

2. Urgent business

- 2.1. None.

3. Declarations of interest – None.

4. Minutes

- 4.1. The minutes of the meeting of 23 January 2025 were agreed by governors as a true record; to be signed by the Co-Chair (JT) at the next available opportunity.

5. Matters Arising

- Compilation of FBG response to LA PAN reduction proposal – done.
- Research on retention time of Full Board of Governors (FBG) minutes on school website – to be done.

6. School budget

Budget

- 6.1. SHx informed governors that she had submitted the school's draft three year budget plan to the local authority (LA) at the end of February. SHx drew attention to the cumulative deficit figure of £219K in Year one; also the In-Year deficit figure of £533K. SHx explained that the final version of the draft budget was due for submission to the LA in the middle of May.

- 6.2. SHx highlighted a number of factors; there would be a number of staffing changes to anticipate in the summer and resultant alterations to working patterns to be fed into the budget. SHx referred also to the change to Pupil Premium (PP) funding; also expected funding for the National Insurance increase – both would be reflected in the budget.
- 6.3. Governors noted that the budget had been calculated on the basis of the Published Admission Number (PAN) being 330 for three years; but the possibility of a reduction to 300 remained in the background.
- 6.4. Governors asked if there was any net positive effect to these changes. SHx stated that there would not be such a change to the outturn forecast; but in others there would be. SHx added that there were presently a number of staff absences to manage, resulting in a significant increase to agency costs.

Staff absences

- 6.5. Governors asked for clarification on staff absences. KC explained that these had occurred for various reasons; including injuries from the school ski trip, long term sickness and illnesses. Governors asked if the school agency costs would be covered by insurance in the cases of the ski trip injuries. SHx confirmed that this was the case.
- 6.6. KC stated that the school would review the absences situation to see if these had occurred at the same time of the year in the past; five supply teachers had attended the school on 20 March, on some recent days this number had been as much as eight. SHx added that it was normal school practice for absences to be covered by cover supervisors; but some were away themselves.
- 6.7. Governors asked if the reasons for absence included not just illnesses and viruses but also mental health or workplace stress. KC believed that morale amongst staff was generally good; there might be a re-set in staffing levels after Easter.
- 6.8. Governors asked if staff absences had impacted on the school's preparation for GCSEs. KC stated that staff were being moved around or reallocated to ensure cover was provided.

Free School Meals (FSMs) pupils

- 6.9. Governors asked about the impact of FSMs on the budget; given this was part of the LA consultation process and would affect the school with a possible increase of admissions. SHx commented that there would not be a major change to the school this year; the present percentage of FSMs was 22% and likely to increase to 24%.
- 6.10. Governors noted that, although the school would see an increase in income, there would be a linked increase to costs over the next three years, e.g. for staffing and premises.
- 6.11. SHx drew attention to the fact of the LA funding vouchers for FSMs after Easter in the next financial year. SHx added that the school contributed in a similar way for families who were facing financial difficulties but were not eligible for FSMs; at a cost of £500. SHx requested that governors approved this expenditure and confirmed it was already covered in the budget.

- 6.12. Governors asked how many families were included in this scheme; also how the relevant children were selected. SHx believed some 15 to 20 families were helped in this way; Year offices provided information about eligible children, not just SEN but also English as an Additional Language (EAL).
- 6.13. The acting Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval for this expenditure, i.e. vouchers contribution for SEN and EAL pupils.

7. Local Authority consultation

Published Admissions Number (PAN)

- 7.1. The acting Chair provided a brief background to this issue, by explaining that the school had learnt of the LA PAN proposal (a reduction from 330 to 300) in November 2024 and had responded in January 2025. The acting Chair referred to the School resource management adviser (SRMA) report; this independent review had highlighted the likelihood of a PAN reduction causing a loss of £180K over the school year.
- 7.2. The acting Chair recalled that governors in the Finance Committee and FBG had agreed to submit a detailed response to the LA (see 7.1), opposing the PAN reduction to 300 and desire to retain the existing figure of 330. The acting Chair informed governors that, nevertheless, the LA had confirmed the reduction.
- 7.3. The acting Chair stated that it was now open to the school to appeal the LA decision to reduce the PAN; which would have to be submitted to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA). The acting Chair commented that the presumption would be for the school's appeal to be upheld; not least because of the principle of parental selection. The acting Chair added that the LA had asked for a meeting on 3 April at which Blatchington Mill would emphasise the negative impact of a PAN reduction and the risks to its academic performance and budget.
- 7.4. Governors asked if there were any disadvantages to the school by its submitting an appeal. The acting Chair commented that there might be a loss of goodwill in the LA; but governors had been clear in the Finance Committee that such a reduction would not make financial sense and the FBG had agreed to oppose this LA proposal. KC added that, if an appeal was not submitted, there was a risk of the school having to make staff redundant; also a loss to the breadth of the curriculum and the putting on of trips.
- 7.5. Governors asked if other schools in Brighton and Hove had been asked to reduce their PANs. KC confirmed that this was the case, noting that some had agreed with the LA decision.
- 7.6. Governors commented that it had only been very recently that the LA had responded in any detail to the school's opposition. Governors were open to hear more from the LA about their thinking on the issue, particularly on the point of its impact on the school's income, in that this would be reduced; also on education in Brighton and Hove as a whole. Governors commented however that nothing had materially changed to impact the FBG's position on appealing the PAN reduction.
- 7.7. The acting Chair noted that the appeal had to be submitted to the OSA by the end of May and recommended nevertheless this action be taken as soon as

possible. Governors noted though that the school would have to present good grounds in its appeal; commenting that its case had merit and would meet OSA criteria. KC added that the local MP (Peter Kyle) had written to the school, recommending it accept the LA's reduction proposal. KC commented that, by making such an appeal, the school would show staff it had done all it could to save jobs; in that this demonstrated a clear effort to fight and resist such a measure being taken.

- 7.8. The acting Chair noted the FBG's unanimous decision to approve the school's appeal of the LA decision to reduce its PAN.

Federation and catchment area proposals

- 7.9. The acting Chair noted that the catchment area proposal did not really adversely affect Blatchington Mill, as it was located in the west of the city; also that there was no movement lately by the LA in taking its proposal on federation forward. KC added that headteachers were meeting on 26 March; one item of discussion would be on a partnership collaboration work stream.

8. Headteacher report

National Landscape

- 8.1. Governors asked about the national recruitment situation and impact on the school's retention of staff. KC stated that recruitment had slowed down recently; there would be a number of resignations taking effect in August; every member of staff leaving was asked to attend an exit interview with her; and a number of mathematics teacher appointments had been made for September.
- 8.2. KC stated that reasons given for leaving at exit interviews varied; some wanted to move on, take advantage of different opportunities; and retirement. KC believed that staff were not unhappy at Blatchington Mill and took pride in working in the school, feeling it to be a good place to work.
- 8.3. Governors asked if housing costs were a factor in attracting staff. KC commented that this did affect recruitment a little; however some living in Brighton & Hove and working further afield were now coming back.
- 8.4. Governors asked about the PAN proposal and noted the decision to support an appeal to the OSA. KC added that if this meant the school having to restructure, this would create a whole level of uncertainty and be destabilising.
- 8.5. Governors asked about Challenge Partners and the 'Area of Excellence' accreditation. KC pointed to work related to partnerships and collaboration; also the need to more promote the school. Governors noted that, as a part of the new OfSTED framework, there was a desire for families to have a greater understanding of what the school represented and offered.

Quality of Education Committee (QoEC)

- 8.6. LL updated governors with information about the QoEC meeting of 5 March 2025; highlighting the presentation given by Qasim Haque (QH – Head of Science & Director of Learning). LL stated that QH had set out the innovative approach of a school initiative whereby a learning structure had been set up for students to assess their own data. KC added that Challenge Partners had been very interested in implementation of this initiative. LL stated that, as a

result of this initiative, pupils were given ownership of the work they were doing

8.7. LL also drew attention to other highlights of this QoEC meeting, including :-

- Year 11 GCSE projections (mock results had improved over last year, but this did not point to the same in the actual GCSEs themselves);
- revision workshops for families (attendance could be better);
- a focus on SEN and PP (to ensure these two pupil groups left school with achievements);
- the underperforming of Physical Education (PE)(with moderation on marking);
- school improvement plan (SIP)(working with supply teachers);
- Years 7 and 8 reading programme;
- Year 9 reading emphasis on current affairs;
- and the governors school visit on 17 March.

8.8. Governors asked if the school organised revision classes to take place during the Easter holidays. KC stated that this was not done; as it was not felt it was effective to do so.

Pastoral Committee

8.9. The acting Chair referred to the Pastoral Committee meeting of 25 February 2025 and spoke of the governors' visit to the Alternative Provision (AP). The acting Chair stated that governors had met students in the AP, who had spoken of how much of a massive difference this provision had made. The acting Chair stated that it had been rewarding to hear about the AP's positive impact and learn how it fitted in with the LA's engagement. The acting Chair stated that governors would visit the AP again in the autumn of the new academic year.

8.10. The acting Chair stated that the Committee had also looked at attendance and behaviour trends; also the achievement points award system and its consistency. The acting Chair also referred to the Committee's discussion of communications with parents; what SEN students went on to do after leaving Blatchington Mill; and hearing a report of senior students fund raising efforts.

8.11. Governors asked about the outcomes of behaviour and achievement points. KC stated that this had been discussed with subject leaders, in terms of who had been given points in their departments; individual conversations would be held in the longer term, drawing on data evidence. KC acknowledged that points might have been done in different ways; this approach needed further consideration, in terms of why those for behaviour were given.

8.12. Governors asked why there was a negative picture on attendance. KC believed this was because of a variety of reasons; the school could take more off roll, but wanted to be sure of reasons for absenteeism. KC added that she and Lizzie Edmed (EE) would meet with LA attendance leads; also attendance would be a focus of the next SIP. KC stated that there were capacity issues in dealing with attendance, and that more could be done with additional staff allocated to this task.

Finance Committee

8.13. PH drew attention to the recent meeting of the Finance Committee on 10 February 2025; in particular three items which needed FBG approval:-

i. Services to Schools

8.14. PH explained that this LA package came at a cost of £136K; with one particular component of strategic property function (£44K). SHx informed governors that this component was of considerable value to the school.

8.15. The acting Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of expenditure on the Services to Schools package.

ii. School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

8.16. PH explained that this was an annual return completed by the school for submission to the LA in March; it had been completed and circulated for review by governors earlier. SHx thanked PH for his work on this task, which was much appreciated.

8.17. The acting Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of the School Financial Value Standard (SFVS) form. JT agreed to sign the document on behalf of the FBG.

8.18. Governors asked whether the Services to Schools package offered value for money. SHx acknowledged that some services were of questionable value; and agreed to review and compare to others available outside the LA.

iii. Pay Policy

8.19. PH pointed to phrasing in the policy which would be reworded – '*authority to advertise vacancies on a like for like basis*'; and the implication that the board would determine the pay range of a vacancy – and delegate this authority to the headteacher.

8.20. PH pointed to another amendment with regard to headteacher written statements for part time staff and their working time obligations and arrangements.

8.21. The acting Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of the two text changes set out by PH; also of the pay policy as a whole.

Health and Safety

8.22. The acting Chair undertook to arrange a health and safety meeting to discuss staff absences.

8.23. Governors asked about the number of incidents with regard to the recent ski trip, in particular about a risk review. SHx confirmed all were ski-ing incidents; all had been reviewed, reflected on and reported to the LA.

8.24. Governors asked about the ratio of staff to students on this ski trip. SHx stated that this was 15 staff for 115 students; however the size of the trip would be reduced for the one planned for 2026.

8.25. Governors asked about the number of students from low income backgrounds going on trips; there was a need to monitor this issue, to provide support to those who required it. SHx confirmed that this was provided for several students and this information was tracked.

- 8.26. Governors asked if there had been any negative feedback because of these incidents. SHx stated that there had not been any; rather families had expressed gratitude for the care of students. KC added that there was a clear and transparent system for the allocation of staff; ensuring a mix of those who had gone on such a trip before and those who had not.

Network, Devices Systems and Data

- 8.27. Governors asked about the change to the new cashless payment system. SHx explained that the school operated a cashless payment portal for catering accounts; which also handled payments for trips and other expenses. SHx stated that the school had moved from using the ESS system to the Squid one; but with effect from 14 March, Squid had ceased trading. SHx stated that, drawing on the procurement process from before, which had looked at five suppliers, the school had selected the iPayimpact system to replace Squid. SHx added that the school was now in the middle of arranging a transition between the two payment portals.
- 8.28. Governors asked if any families had lost money because of what had happened. SHx acknowledged that this had occurred and confirmed the school was taking legal advice. SHx stated that, for the moment, the school was advising parents to apply to Squid for refunds; the school was also in contact with Squid about this matter.
- 8.29. Governors asked if iPayimpact was regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). SHx confirmed that this was the case, but unfortunately not true of Squid (despite having been informed earlier that it (Squid) was).
- 8.30. Governors asked about implications for students. SHx stated that safeguards were already in place, so that problematic debts would not arise.
- 8.31. Governors asked about the instigation of Freedom of Information requests. SHx listed the most recent requests which included ones on the school's contact with the LA about its consultation; the national secular society on Personal Social Health & Economic (PSHE) education; numbers of vapes confiscated; toxic masculinity and work done by the school on this phrase; and numbers of knife crime incidents.

Business leadership

- 8.32. Governors asked about the Wild Quad development. SHx stated that a diversity survey was being carried out. The acting Chair added that funding for this project was linked to the Moda development in Hove and the Section 106 agreement to improve local facilities; the school would secure a share for the Wild Quad if it qualified.

9. Safeguarding

- 9.1. KC noted that Lee Evans (LE – assistant headteacher) had reported to the Pastoral Committee at its meeting of 25 February on safeguarding issues; one development was that he had now completed the safeguarding audit check which was with her for review.

10. School policies

Complaints

- 10.1. Governors recommended a number of text changes and additions; an overarching statement at the beginning to cover courtesy; panels language heading dealing with serial, persistent and vexatious complaints; and language on clarity to do with the practice of having additional meetings to support the process.
- 10.2. KC noted these suggestions and agreed to amend the policy; the Co-Chair (TS) noted the FBG's approval of this complaints policy (subject to the suggested changes being made)

Online safeguarding

- 10.3. Governors recommended changing the name of the board representative overseeing online safety from Peter Sowrey to EG; also a change to the text with regard to seeing images on devices not sent to staff. KC agreed to review this text to ensure there was no loophole; with regard to preventing images being sent in any way. Governors asked as well about how the self audit table was used. KC agreed to check on how outcomes in this regard were addressed.
- 10.4. The Co-Chair (TS) noted the FBG's approval of this online safeguarding policy (subject to the suggested changes being made).

11. Governor training

- 11.1. Governors provided information about training courses recently completed; LL on anti-racism; PH & EG on understanding school data; PH on exclusions and appeals; JT on tackling educational disadvantage.
- 11.2. SHx recommended governors consider undertaking training on safer recruitment in education; the school could purchase a suitable package and circulate links.

12. Any Other Business – None.

Actions

Submission of school PAN appeal to OSA – TS and KC

Amendment of the school pay policy - SHx

Amendment of school complaints and online safeguarding policies - KC

Next meeting – Thursday 8 May 2025 - Budget

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...