

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 22 January 2026 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Kate Claydon (KC - headteacher), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), Joyti Stach (JS), Phil Howard (PH), Lisa Goodman (LG), Lisa Logan (LL), Tim Shutler (TS – Vice Chair), James Tulley (JT– Chair), Kirsty Walker (KW – ‘virtual’), Harriet Russell (HR) 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: 11 out of 15 governors present – meeting was quorate.

1. Apologies for Absence.

1.1. Paul Edwards (PE) and Joanna McCrae (JMc) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

2. Urgent business - None

3. Declarations of interest – None.

4. Minutes

4.1. The minutes of the meeting of 2 October 2025 were agreed by governors as a true record; and signed by the Chair.

5. Matters Arising –

- Notification of governor and associate member appointments and resignations to LA – done.

6. Headteacher Governors' report

Headteacher

OfSTED

6.1. Governors asked about tracking progress on actions. KC drew attention to work being done on the Self Evaluation Form (SEF) and the School Development Plan (SDP) and noted that the governor committees monitored these activities for certain aspects. KC referred to the overall targets set for a three year period; committees would be able to look at the evidence provided by the school.

- 6.2. Governors asked about timeframes for actions. KC stated that documentation on these actions had been transferred from various locations into one place; the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) had been asked to carry out this work; the longest timeframe for one particular action was the end of year, but others would be completed sooner.
- 6.3. Governors asked about the one page summaries. KC stated that these helped everyone understand the different areas covered, over the whole school picture and allowed for the impact in these areas to be articulated.
- 6.4. Governors asked about the management of the OfSTED preparation process. KC stated that this was being done by the SLT, the extended SLT (including the head of Personal Social Health & Economic (PSHE) education and the heads of science and English).
- 6.5. Governors asked if the one page summaries would be provided to the OfSTED inspector. KC stated that a list would be given on the first day of the inspection; it was likely there would be additional material nearer the time.
- 6.6. The Chair asked about behaviour and attendance. KC described an OfSTED wish to reduce categories but believed there was a benefit in keeping behaviour and attendance separate. KC stated that the school was ready to present its case, with all the additional measures in place; and paid tribute to EE who had a good grasp of the strategic situation.
- 6.7. The Chair recognised and praised the work done by KC, the SLT and extended SLT in preparation for OfSTED. The Chair recommended governors be informed of what work they should be doing more of; a lot had already been done on teaching & learning and the curriculum; but there was scope to extend their activity on attendance, behaviour and Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND). The Chair recommended that governors ask more questions on these areas, during their official visits to the school.
- 6.8. KC drew attention to the year development plan being compiled by heads of department, for presentation to governors by the end of term. KC expressed confidence that matters were working as they should be, taking into account strategic thinking.
- 6.9. The Chair spoke of decisions being made about the allocation of resources on providing support for the issue of attendance and the hard choices being faced. The Chair recommended that governors' committees be more clearly aligned to the OfSTED framework.

Falling Rolls

- 6.10. Governors asked about the falling rolls in Brighton and Hove. KC stated that as yet there had been no local authority (LA) strategic response to this issue. The Chair noted that the LA were looking at the next stage of admissions criteria at Full Council on 29 January. The Chair also noted the LA were continuing to work on issues such as schools collaboration and schools improvement services.
- 6.11. The Chair stated that governors on the Finance Committee were already aware of income volatility and linked issues that had an impact such as Published Admission Numbers (PAN), SEND funding, fund raising and

thinking about structures. Governors asked if the falling birth rate was a factor being considered. KC stated that LA records were mainly being considered.

Challenge Partners

- 6.12. BH notified governors that the forthcoming Challenge Partners meeting was scheduled for 4 February and thanked JS and PH for agreeing to attend. BH added that if this date clashed with the OfSTED inspection, then the Challenge Partners visit would be cancelled.

Staffing

- 6.13. Governors asked about added stress for staff. SHx did not believe this was related to the forthcoming OfSTED inspection; rather the main causes were personal circumstances and work procedures related. SHx confirmed that contact with staff on well-being issues was maintained.
- 6.14. Governors asked about the contrast now with less absences reported last time. KC commented that this was likely to be seasonally related, combined with a number of long term health issues – there was supply in place to provide cover. BH added that he had spoken to the curriculum team last week about the OfSTED inspection; there had been no drip feeding of information and the SLT/extended SLT were doing all the legwork and taking the brunt of preparation.
- 6.15. Governors asked about the school's capacity to manage absences due to illness. SHx confirmed this was being done, with good relations established with supply agencies. SHx added that the school managed the situation with use of cover supervisors first, then supply, then agency staff.
- 6.16. Governors asked about the school's policy on portability. SHx stated that this was automatic for teachers; for other staff it was a case of taking into account like for like roles.
- 6.17. Governors asked about market conditions. SHx stated that the school did not have a restriction on pay points for teachers; also the LA pay policy allowed for relocation costs only for headteachers.
- 6.18. Governors asked about how the school would take forward the 'Maths Axiom' project. SHx stated that staff would be recruited internally, fixed term based on funding and having an impact, with better progress being made. SHx commented that this project would be grown and expanded.

Facilities

- 6.19. Governors asked about the additional access controls to the school premises. SHx stated there had been a change of advice, following staff attendance at an acts of aggression training course. SHx explained that the emphasis now needed to be on controlling access to the school site; also, perimeter fencing would be repaired during half term.
- 6.20. Governors asked about communication with parents and the wider community about these access changes. SHx stated that the SLT would be drafting a letter with her, with appropriate wording to be decided.
- 6.21. Governors asked about Subject Access Requests (SARs) and Third Party Material (TPM) policy requests. SHx stated that this involved the school

providing information but redacting it first; there were no common themes as such and requests covered incidents both current and old; but safeguarding as an issue did come up frequently. SHx acknowledged that more TPM requests were being made this year than before. SHx confirmed that she would be reporting updates on SARs on a termly basis.

Network Services & Data

- 6.22. Governors asked about cyber security. SHx stated that this issue was not Blatchington Mill specific and that other schools had experienced lapses in cyber security; adding that the Department of Education had selected a cyber security audit company.
- 6.23. The Chair recommended that the board review and discuss the issue of cyber security on a regular basis; governors should ask questions about the risks posed, to understand them and how they should be mitigated; and a link governor should be appointed. The Chair also noted a planned Department for Education EdTech pilot scheme this September and that the board would assess how it can strategically respond in embracing best practice in AI and emerging technology in the school setting.
- 6.24. Governors asked about the closure of the Brighton schools' support service and the impact on provision of the 'schmail' email address system. SHx confirmed having spoken to the LA ICT department on 22 January to find out that the 'schmail' system would end in March 2027. SHx stated that ICT would provide more information about access to historic emails in the system.
- 6.25. SHx stated that the school's priority was establishing a secure way of communications with outside agencies; the present Google 'org.uk' one was secure. SHx stated that information on having a similar 'schmail' system from another provider was not yet available.
- 6.26. Governors asked about the provision of backups. SHx stated that, for the two servers on site, there were two backups, one in the Alternative Provision (AP) building, the other in the main building; there were two other backups – one in the LA the other in the cloud.

7. Budget

- 7.1. SHx informed governors that a surplus of £137K was forecast for the end of the financial year; this figure might improve nearer this time. SHx stated that a reminder had been sent out to budget holders to stop ordering by half term.
- 7.2. SHx stated that the school had been provided with an indicative budget; this was in line with last year's budget with a 4.6% increase reflecting the rolling in of grants (e.g. the national insurance increase). SHx reported that the staffing budget had been presented for review by the Finance Committee on 19 January 2026; the staffing proportion of the whole budget was 85% (compared to 82% from last year) – the difference was due to the pay awards and less of a carry forward.
- 7.3. SHx confirmed that the LA was monitoring the school's budget carefully (along with other schools in Brighton and Hove); asking for monthly updates. The Chair, on behalf of the board, thanked SHx and her team for all the work done on the fire insurance claims.

8. Safeguarding

8.1. KC stated that the Chair and JS had met with senior leaders and SHx to look at the Single Central Record (SCR); the SCR would be checked in this way on a half termly basis. The Chair noted this had been a productive meeting and that future visits to the school by governors would have a lens of focus around safeguarding.

9. School policies

9.1. The Chair informed governors that he had spoken to KC about future management of the review and approval process for school policies. The Chair stated that while this would continue to involve the use of a central tracking sheet, setting out all policies coming up for review and approval, it would be underpinned by a risk informed approach.

9.2. The Chair stated that this process would also take account of the need to delegate authority to KC or policy holder, to make minor amendments on non-statutory policies (but not exclusively); the FBG would be advised of reviews and work done in this way, but would not need to re-approve the policies in question.

9.3. The Chair stated that this would require a standing resolution to be issued, where high risk policies would be mapped out (i.e. those requiring FBG oversight) with amendments if needed, for notification to the FBG. The Chair noted that, until such time as this process was completed, the board would continue to exercise full oversight on policies issued and amended. The Chair stressed that there was a need for governors to be pro-active on policies that set out key responsibilities for them to take action on.

9.4. The Chair commented that the DfE had recently updated its guidance on complaints and had produced recommendations; also information on a social media ban and work on an Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy area. The Chair added that these developments would be considered in reference to existing school policies and any policy revisions would be brought to the board.

Anti-Bullying

9.5. KC stated that this policy remained unchanged from the previous version. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's Anti-Bullying policy.

Teachers' Pay

9.6. KC explained this policy was based on an LA template model policy. SHx added that this point notwithstanding, the school could personalise aspects of it, e.g. rules on pay to teachers for running after-school clubs. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's Teachers' Pay policy.

School Staff Code of Conduct

9.7. SHx explained that this was being re-circulated by request for information; the staff code of conduct had already been reviewed and approved by governors in October 2025.

Education of Children In Care & Children Previously In Care

- 9.8. The Chair recommended that a CiC and CPiC link governor be appointed or included as part of the Safeguarding link and undertake training in this role; and noted the FBG's approval of the Education of Children In Care & Children Previously In Care policy. The Chair noted that he had asked Emma Gibson, a former LA nominated governor and now Associate Member with extensive professional experience of children in care, to provide the board with guidance and advice where needed.

Charging and Remissions

- 9.9. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's Charging and Remissions policy.

Safer Recruitment

- 9.10. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the school's Safer Recruitment policy.

Equality

- 9.11. KC stated that this policy drew on the text of an LA model policy template. The Chair noted the responsibilities contained therein for governors including designating a governor or team of governors with specific responsibility for the Equality Policy and to carry out monitoring activity and oversight. The Chair noted that JM JS and JT were currently designated as Equity Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) links; also the FBG's approval of the school's Equality policy.

'Thinking Reading' project funding request

- 9.12. The Chair stated that a request had been put to the Finance Committee at its meeting of 19 January 2026, to authorise the expenditure of £26K on this 'Thinking Reading' project, requested by the school. The Chair asked BH and EE to provide further information on this project.
- 9.13. BH stated that this was a unique project, as it had a focus on decoding aspects of reading. BH explained that the programme targeted students below the 35% percentile and consisted of three thirty minute interventions a week. BH stated that evidence had shown this programme to be very successful; another secondary school in Brighton was already using it.
- 9.14. BH stated that the school would be able to train teaching assistants to do deeper interventions; and the entire literacy strategy could be looked at by this team. BH explained that the programme would last for three years and although expensive, the impact made it worthwhile. BH stated that the school planned to start using it with Year 10 students after April; six teachers would be trained in the first year.
- 9.15. EE added that use of this programme would benefit the whole school community not just the AP; the company providing the project would track the

impact. The Chair asked if the other secondary school possessed data on the programme's impact; EE confirmed this was the case and this would be made available to Blatchington Mill.

9.16. The Chair asked how many students would be taught the programme. BH stated that this would begin with twelve students in Year 10; more would be added depending on progress. The Chair commented that £26K was a lot of money to spend on a comparatively small number of students and asked if this was the right focus to adopt. BH believed that it would be, although this depended on how rapidly the students went through the course.

9.17. The Chair noted that the FBG could monitor progress, in order for governors to have oversight of this project. The Chair also asked for a year-end report to the board on impact, and for governor visits to see the programme in action. Governors asked about the impact of this expenditure on the budget. SHx commented that this could be managed in the current financial year. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of this expenditure on the 'Thinking Reading' project.

10. Governor training

10.1. The Chair undertook to circulate links on suggested training for governors, to tackle key topics. The Chair drew attention to a detailed table recently circulated by Governor Support; also to the next LA Governance Briefing session on 5 February – which would focus on attendance and OfSTED inspections.

11. Clerk update

11.1. DH drew attention to his attendance of a Governor Support organised Clerks' Forum on 20 January; specifically the items of a BEEM update (with particular focus on the three key link governor roles of safeguarding, health & safety and SEND), vacancies for governor representatives on the LA schools' forum and the People Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

12. Any Other Business

PH highlighted his and SHx's work on the *School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)* exercise; stating it would be completed in time for review and approval by the Finance Committee at its meeting of 23 February, for signature by the Chair of Governors; in time for submission to the LA to meet its deadline of 13 March 2026.

Actions –

Circulation of training course links to governors - JT

Next meeting – Thursday 19 March 2026 (Curriculum)

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...