

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 23 January 2025 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Kate Claydon (KC - headteacher), Jim Henderson (JH – Co-Chair), Joanna McCrae ('virtual' - JMc), Joyti Stach (JS), Phil Howard (PH), Lisa Goodman (LG), James Tulley (JT– Co-Chair), Lisa Logan (LL), Tim Shutler ('virtual' -TS – Vice Chair) and Emma Gibson (EG).

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 12 governors present – meeting was quorate.

1. Apologies for Absence.

- 1.1. Judith Mackenzie (JMA) and Mark Sorrell (MS) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

2. Urgent business

- 2.1. None.

3. **Declarations of interest** – None. The Co-Chair (JT) informed governors that he had been appointed to the board of the National Governance Association (NGA) earlier in the week. The Co-Chair (JH) offered JT congratulations on this appointment on behalf of the FBG.

4. Minutes

- 4.1. The minutes (main set and confidential annex) of the meeting of 26 November 2024 were agreed by governors as a true record; and signed by the Co-Chair (JT).
- 4.2. The Co-Chair (JT) drew attention to the requests recently received for copies of the minutes and noted that these should be reviewed and approved carefully, before publication on the school website. The Co-Chair (JH) recommended that governors review minutes for accuracy, typo errors and to ensure they were fully representative; also any text that might cause difficulties.
- 4.3. Governors recommended that research be done on how many years of minutes needed retention on the school website. SHx noted that minutes of the Finance Committee needed retaining for six years. The Co-Chair (JT)

recommended the school keep two to three years on the website and file earlier ones in an archive.

5. Matters Arising

- Notification of JMO stepping down from his co-opted governor role to the LA – done.
- Finalisation and publication of governors' responsibilities and link roles table - The Co-Chair (JT) stated that this task had been done and a document circulated; publication on the website would be processed shortly.
- Supply of suggestions for governors' areas of focus – in progress.

6. School budget

Budget

- 6.1. SHx pointed to the summary set out discussing the budget in the headteacher report. SHx explained that a provisional three year budget had been compiled; showing a deficit for Year 1 of £390K; Year 2 a deficit of £1.3M and Year 3 a deficit of £2.3M. SHx emphasised that this was a first draft; after consultations on 23 January, £100K had already been taken off Year 1.
- 6.2. SHx stated that the proportion of staffing in the budget was 76%; but when taking account of the £350K carry forward, this percentage became 84%. SHx stated that the senior leadership team (SLT) had begun discussions on difficult decisions (for presentation to the FBG), which would overlap the curriculum plan.

School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA) report

- 6.3. SHx stated that the SRMA report had not raised any major surprises and drew attention to the issue of benchmarking on resource management which had come up (triggering price comparisons); also on teacher contact ratios. SHx commented that, in general, the SRMA visit and report had been a useful exercise.
- 6.4. The Co-Chair (JH) asked if the SRMA had taken account of the impact of the local authority's (LA) Published Admissions Number (PAN) reduction proposal. SHx stated that the SRMA had recognised that the task of balancing the budget would be challenging enough with a PAN of 330 and did not believe a reduction to 300 should be pursued.
- 6.5. SHx noted that 87% of the budget was driven by pupil numbers (an income of £6K per student); out of a maximum capacity of 1,650, the school currently had 1,626 on roll; no individual Year group was full. SHx commented that the school would be hit with a loss of income of £180K for each reduced year group leading to a cumulative loss of £2.7m over 5 years. The Co-Chair (JH) noted that, with a reduction from 330 to 300, there would be no economies of scale possible.

Financial Recovery Plan

- 6.6. KC stated that the school had looked at curriculum modelling in the latest version of the financial recovery plan; also at various key areas and timelines;

setting out worst case scenarios – to find savings for the least impact on the education provision.

- 6.7. The Co-Chair (JH) recommended that communications on this subject should be handled carefully, given the financial recovery plan was confidential and asked that questions on this subject be put by governors to KC, JT and himself.
- 6.8. Governors asked about the effect of the school not reducing its PAN. SHx stated that the number of students on roll was higher this year than the last; but the school would need to become more competitive to attract students in the new academic year. KC acknowledged that, because of the extent of movement within Brighton and Hove, there was no guarantee the school would be full, even with a reduced PAN of 300. KC added that this was even more difficult to predict, given the uncertain nature of factors such as the LA proposals on Free School Meal (FSM) children, catchment areas and the PAN consultation outcome.
- 6.9. Governors asked about first choices made for Blatchington Mill over the last three years and the possible increase of risk of the school not being full. KC stated that choice numbers had been fairly steady over the last three years

7. Local Authority consultation

- 7.1. The Co-Chair (JH) stated that the recent consultation evening on the LA's proposals had attracted an audience of approximately fifty; Councillor Jacob Taylor and Richard Barker from the LA had answered questions. The Co-Chair (JH) commented that the local community present had been very thoughtful in the points raised and engaged with the process
- 7.2. The Co-Chair (JT) stated that the end of the consultation process would be on 31 January; on the issues of the PAN, catchment areas and admissions criteria. The Co-Chair (JT) informed governors that he had met Messrs Taylor and Barker separately to feed in the school's concerns; included the lack of reference to a provision for Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), about which a number of families had expressed disquiet.
- 7.3. The Co-Chair (JT) added that the following additional issues had been raised; i.e. of other secondary schools taking a collegiate approach; families with Education, Health & Care (EHC) plan not being covered; the question of FSM eligibility not being addressed; the lack of a transport plan; over subscription to popular schools in the outer catchment areas (and the deduction of 20% from these areas).
- 7.4. The Co-Chair (JT) recommended that governors needed to consider and understand the school's response to the PAN proposal, i.e. to have clarity on why it should retain 330 and not reduce to 300.

Catchment areas

- 7.5. Governors expressed concern about the proposal under the new criteria that sibling places would only be given if the sibling was located in the school's catchment area; which could mean that families who move out of catchment between children may not be able to keep their children in the same school. Governors noted that the same might apply to families who are successful in achieving a place under the 20% single catchment criterion for their first child.

Federation

- 7.6. The Co-Chair (JH) noted that federation was not part of the consultation process, but this played into factors affecting it. The Co-Chair (JH) added that the LA's federation proposal had been presented to schools last summer but had not gone well. The Co-Chair (JT) commented that schools were now having to deal with the current financial situation; but nevertheless the federation proposal was likely to rise up on the agenda.
- 7.7. The Co-Chair (JT) recommended that governors consider the idea of partnerships and collaboration; also that an academy trust pay a visit to the school and present to governors. Governors asked which schools Blatchington Mill should consider joining in a partnership or collaboration agreement. The Co-Chair (JT) believed this was something KC and the SLT should consider and make a recommendation. The Co-Chair (JT) added that federating would not in any case affect the school's financial situation.

Admissions criteria

- 7.8. The Co-Chair (JH) commented that with regard to the key change of FSMs, the impact was not yet known. BH added that the lack of consideration of a transport plan, without knowing about how cross city travelling would be managed; the 20% element and FSMs proposals did not make sense and would cause schools problems.
- 7.9. Governors believed that the transport issue would just create more barriers for these students; including Pupil Premium (PP) ones, which would in turn cause attendance and punctuality issues (an already increasing problem).
- 7.10. The Co-Chair (JT) noted that governors had not expressed concerns about the Looked After Children (LAC), children with medical needs, sibling links and FSMs elements of the proposed admissions criteria; but had found the 20% catchment proposal problematic. Governors stated that 57 children in Blatchington Mill's current catchment area would not secure a place at the school, if the 20% element was applied in full at both Blatchington Mill School and Hove Park.
- 7.11. The Co-Chair (JT) noted the FBG's support of the LA's revised Admissions Criteria proposal, with the exception of the 20% element; also its concern about the lack of transport planning.

Published Admission Numbers (PAN)

- 7.12. The Co-Chair (JH) noted that governors at the Finance Committee meeting of 13 January had agreed that a PAN reduction from 330 to 300 did not serve the school's best interests. SHx agreed that such a reduction would make the school's financial situation very difficult. EE pointed out that the school's response would have to be mitigated, if it was not full. The Co-Chair (JH) stated that if the school did not fill 330, the proposal to reduce to 300 could be revisited at a later date.
- 7.13. BH commented that it was possible a reduction to 300 might improve teachers' working conditions, also staff retention and stability of the student

body. Governors believed that a reduction to 300 might also allow for better control, given the smaller number of students that would need to be managed.

7.14. The Co-Chair (JT) noted that, on balance, governors had taken the view of being minded for the school's PAN to stay at 330. The Co-Chair (JT) acknowledged however that the school would have to be in a position to fill this number; the FBG would have, in turn, to address how this was done and account for the impact on well-being and culture.

7.15. The Co-Chair (JH) noted the formal approval of the FBG to adopt a position of favouring retention of the 330 PAN.

8. Headteacher report

School Improvement Planning

8.1. KC referred to the school vision statement, five year milestones and three year school improvement plan (SIP) and a small group to work on these themes before the FBG meeting in March; and suggested governor put questions as soon as possible. KC also drew attention to the curriculum model document which had been agreed with the SLT on 21 January; this was largely operational in nature but was being shared with governors for transparency reasons.

Quality of Education

8.2. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about the leadership development programme. BH spoke of the pilot for this year and a training offer taken to heads of department, consisting of five elements – interviews; art of having hard conversations; leading effective investigations; coaching; and how to prepare at the beginning of the year.

8.3. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about engagement; BH explained that time had been set aside to gauge the impact.

8.4. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about the employability skills framework. BH explained that this was in its infancy at the moment.

8.5. Governors asked about assessment access arrangements. BH explained that this was dependent on need and different support was in place across the school.

8.6. Governors asked about managing home phone calls for English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. BH was unsure if this was in line with other students but emphasised that calls for PP students were targeted; also that the school was aware when communications were difficult. Governors asked how these were managed during parents' evenings. BH explained that interpretation was sometimes arranged with the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS); or done by the children themselves with their parents.

8.7. Governors asked about curriculum choices and subject taster lessons for the two subjects not taught at KS3. BH explained that this could not be done because of the logistics of the large numbers of Year 9 students involved.

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- 8.8. Governors asked about learning walks and the new system impact. BH commented that students were more settled in lessons now and beginnings to sessions better organised.
- 8.9. Governors asked about improvement recommendations. BH stated that these had been discussed and gone through in line management structure, to allow adjustments to be made.

Curriculum Model 2025-2026

- 8.10. BH drew attention to this document and provided an overview of planned changes which included details of an increase to groups, a reduction in curriculum contact time for a specific subject, the provision of additional periods in Key Stage 4 (including mathematics and English), a reduction in curriculum contact time for option subjects and the dropping of other specific subjects for Key Stage 4. BH also drew attention to a table setting out comparisons of local schools curriculum models, which included details of subjects and allocations; also two columns setting out anticipated key benefits and issues.
- 1.1. Governors appreciated the initiative to increase time for English and mathematics. The Co-Chair (JT) believed this task had been important for governors to see, on how these changes would be presented.

Behaviour and attendance.

- 1.2. EE informed governors that, at 90.12%, the school was above the LA average (90.09%) on attendance and within the top two or three schools in Brighton and Hove.
- 1.3. Governors asked about activities for examination anxiety. EE stated that there was some smaller group and maintenance work being done, to assess required support. EE welcomed PH's offer to visit and address students on this issue.
- 1.4. Governors asked about feedback to the prom attendance email. EE explained that this had been an initial communication, setting out the school's expectations. EE drew attention to the intention to send out a further letter to parents of children on the 'watch list', to provide opportunities to turn matters around. EE stated that feedback had largely been positive and acknowledged there had been a little negative reaction as well.
- 1.5. Governors asked about behaviour twilight. EE stated that staff felt involved in the process of how children were identified; feedback so far had been positive. EE confirmed that reviewing and monitoring would be done.
- 1.6. Governors asked about student focus groups; EE stated that feedback had been good. Governors asked about the construction of Religious Education content. EE explained that this had been done by the head of RE, taken from the core curriculum.
- 1.7. Governors asked about collaboration with other schools; EE stated that this was in the early stages of being done.
- 1.8. Governors asked about the PP attendance figure; EE stated that pastoral teams were training staff on barriers to attendance, to take into account the various factors involved such as travel, financial, uniform and anxiety.

1.9. Governors asked about the loss of a science teacher; SHx explained that this gap would be covered by supply and cover supervisors.

2. School policies

Health & Safety

2.1. SHx stated that this policy was based on an LA template and had been added to and reviewed by the school health & safety committee.

2.2. The Co-Chair (JH) noted the FBG's approval of this Health and Safety policy.

Whistleblowing

2.3. SHx explained that this was based on an LA model template.

2.4. The Co-Chair (JH) noted the FBG's approval of this whistleblowing policy.

Access Arrangements

2.5. The Co-Chair (JH) noted the FBG's approval of this access arrangements policy.

3. Governor training

3.1. EG and JT confirmed completion of lead safeguarding training; and TS of cyber security training.

4. Any Other Business – None.

Actions

Compilation of FBG response to LA PAN reduction proposal – TS, JT and KC

Research on retention time of FBG minutes on school website - JH

Next meeting – Thursday 20 March 2025 - Budget

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...