

Minutes of a (virtual) meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 17 September 2020 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Peter Sowrey (PS) (Chair), Ashley Harrold (AsH - headteacher), Claire Harrington (CH), Lee Redmond (LR), James Moncrieff (JMo), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), John Barker (JB), Alex Morrison (AM), Deborah Hillier (DHi) Mariea Christodoulou (MC), Addy Balogun (AB), Adam Harvey (AdH) and Gareth Chan (GC).

In attendance: Sarah Hextall (SH – school business manager), Ruth King (RK – staff), Kate Claydon (KC - Deputy Head Teacher), Alessandro Capozzi (AC - Deputy Head Teacher) and David Harvey (DHa – clerk).

Quorum: 13 out of 15 governors present – meeting was quorate throughout.

1. **Election of Chair and Vice Chair** – DHa noted the nomination of PS to the position of Chair; and nominations of AB and (jointly) LR & JMo as Vice Chair. AB agreed to withdraw her name for consideration; the FBG gave its' unanimous approval of both appointments. PS expressed his intention to step down at some stage during the new academic year and the hope that another candidate would step forward at such a time to take on this role. PS also voiced his thanks to AB for her service as Vice Chair and Committee tasks over the last four years; also a warm welcome to LR and JMo for jointly taking on the Vice Chair role for the coming year.

2. Apologies for Absence.

2.1. Janet Such (JS) and Richard Mills (RM) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

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

4. Introduction

4.1. The Chair offered his congratulations to AsH and his team for a successful reopening of the school, which had happened as a result of a lot of hard work being done.

5. Minutes

5.1. The minutes of the meeting of 9 July 2020 were agreed by governors as a true record; to be signed by the Chair at the next available opportunity.

6. Matters Arising

- Amendment of governors' meetings dates list for 2020-2021 – done.
- Recording of appreciation video to staff on behalf of FBG – done.

7. Governing Board Code of Conduct 2019-2020

- 7.1. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of this document; a hard copy to be signed on the board's behalf at the next available opportunity.

8. Headteacher report

- 8.1. AsH explained that he would give an oral overview of recent events, as the usual format of report did not fit the current circumstances.

Reopening of school - planning

- 8.2. AsH stated that staff had worked through the summer holiday period (taking earmarked breaks) on planning for the school's reopening. AsH explained that this had involved rethinking on how the school operated and having to reconfigure aspects of teaching. As a result, AsH believed that the plan devised by this process was robust enough for the school to avoid closure.

- 8.3. AsH pointed to the example of the management of two INSET days, to ensure that large meetings were avoided had been a challenge. AsH believed that the outcome was of staff understanding expectations while at the same time working under a major culture change. AsH highlighted that anxieties about returning had been addressed; the continuation of those staff able to work from home; reminders to those finding it hard to adjust to different ways of working.

Reopening of school - implementation

- 8.4. AsH described the process of running induction days for each Year group; the taking of students around the premises to introduce routines e.g. handwashing; with the full timetable being in operation over a week. AsH acknowledged the difficulties in managing (an initially) slow IT network; work had been done to improve the capacity, which had now been stabilised. AsH believed that students had coped very well and appreciated the value of being in classrooms and beginning the learning process again.

- 8.5. AsH stated that whilst the situation was still complex, systems were working and the general atmosphere calm; with students managing the content of lessons. AsH highlighted the excellent attendance rate of 98% at the start, now down to just under 95% (comparing well to a Brighton & Hove average of 90%).

Reopening of school - risks

- 8.6. AsH pointed to the possible major problem of managing numbers of people who became symptomatic. At present, AsH explained that the school was running a test and trace system at a (presently) calm level, with bubble sizes of 20 to 24. With one, some students had shown symptoms but tested negative; so it had not been necessary to close the bubble. AsH pointed to one Year nine group that had had to work from home for two days; the lessons being done were the same as those at school and backed up; the teacher had been available for a video Q&A.
- 8.7. AsH commented that the city wide testing system was not coping with demand; staff had had to wait up to eight days for results. AsH provided details of numbers of staff not in work who were awaiting test results, which

was having an impact on resources at school. AsH confirmed that the school had used up its allocation of ten testing kits and had ordered more.

Reopening of school - overview

- 8.8. AsH pointed to the positives of everyone having returned to school, systems working well and learning going ahead. AsH believed that the school was now at a stage of being able to look ahead, e.g. Year 11 assessments. AsH described the outlook as having the bubble structure in place until December; the school was in a position where it could change quickly from offline to online learning.

Reopening of school – governor questions

- 8.9. Governors asked about staff going into self isolation and sick pay entitlement. AsH confirmed that such staff continued to be on full pay conditions.
- 8.10. Governors complimented AsH and his team on their efforts; the complexity of what they had had to deal with was unimaginable. Governors paid tribute to the arrangements that had been put in place; that children knew their lesson plans and could do a full day of learning – a much better method than had been the case during lockdown.
- 8.11. Governors asked about the advisability of students congregating in public areas near the school, both before and after the school day. AsH confirmed that students had been advised on safe practice in this regard and that this guidance should be followed. AsH acknowledged however that there was a difficult balance to be struck, as there was no desire to increase anxieties.
- 8.12. Governors asked about staff at school providing cover. AsH explained that he and SH had, over the summer, boosted the school's cover capacity – whether this was in-house or agency staff. AsH stated that the procedure of pre-planning lessons and allowing students to access learning had helped in this regard; e.g. they could ask questions using Google Classroom. AsH believed that the school would not run out of staffing; if necessary a bubble or bubbles could be closed, with Year 11 being a priority for resources.
- 8.13. The Chair noted that sustainability was a factor; pupils were able to continue in an uninterrupted manner as possible. Governors asked if this principle applied to home learning. AsH believed that the system was sustainable and had been managed by compressing the school day and ensuring that breaks were taken. AsH added that staff had been linked to Year groups and in some cases, workloads had been reduced.
- 8.14. Governors asked about non-contact across the school. AsH stated that each teacher had one and a half hours of non-contact a day (i.e. one free lesson every day).
- 8.15. Governors asked about the unique path taken by Blatchington Mill to other schools in Brighton and Hove, with regard to the bubble size of 20 in place. AsH acknowledged that the school's approach was different, but the logic that underpinned it was sound. AsH believed that it would pay dividends in the long run; but acknowledged its restrictive nature in the short term. AsH emphasised that the overriding concern was to avoid interruption and maintain a consistency of attendance. AsH stated that it would be easier to close a

bubble of 20 if necessary and was thankful that this action would not have to be taken on a whole year of 300.

- 8.16. Governors noted that 45 days of teaching had been lost and asked if there had been benchmarking of students, to see where interventions should be targeted. AsH stated that the school's priority should be to assess at what stage the students were in their learning. AsH acknowledged that planning for Year 11 was different; examinations were expected to take place but might not take place. AsH stated that it was a question of assessing students fairly, at all times explaining the purpose of testing and spread this type of examination and assessment over a period of time.
- 8.17. On the point with regard to 45 days of learning, AsH clarified that this referred to the fact that a bubble closure had meant 15 students missing 3 days and working online at home; in comparison to a whole year group closure of 14 days - which would mean 4,620 days of learning missed.
- 8.18. Governors asked about Year 11 and the bubble structure; the advantage to students if the entire Year group was in a bubble. AsH did not believe that these students were at a disadvantage, many of them had done a lot of work during lockdown. AsH informed the FBG that the most experienced teachers had been assigned to this Year group; with banks of resources made available as well as specific structured learning.
- 8.19. Governors asked about how students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) had responded to longer lessons. KC believed they had been calm, very positive and displayed a sense of purpose during the day; students had been working well in the new structures. KC added that, although circumstances for Key Stage 4 were a bit different, students here were nevertheless very focussed.
- 8.20. The Chair noted from the Key Stage 4 curriculum statistics document circulated earlier that lessons were a combination of some students working independently with headphones and others listening to teachers. KC confirmed that this mix of learning was going on; all work done was being reviewed – children appeared to understand requirements.
- 8.21. Governors asked about extracurricular activities. AsH acknowledged that current circumstances made such activities difficult to put on, given the distancing requirements that had to be observed if more than one bubble was involved. RK added that, nevertheless, the school was looking at the possibility of offering an afterschool club provision, perhaps in a virtual format.
- 8.22. The Chair asked how SEN students were coping with less hands on support and having to do more online learning. AsH stated that the school's approach was to keep them included as much as possible in the classroom. AsH acknowledged the challenges in managing contact, given the requirement for separate zones for adults and children. AsH added that, given the canteen was not fully operational; this area had been repurposed as a SEN area (special spacing arrangements for 8 to 9 students). AsH stated that, in any case, the school was in close contact with each family, reviewing how it could meet the SEN needs of the student in question.
- 8.23. The Chair asked about GCSE outcomes. AsH stated that, given the circumstances, it would not be valid to do a comparison exercise (with

previous years). That said, AsH informed governors that the school performance had been slightly better than last year; all the assessed grades had been awarded to students demonstrating the accuracy of teachers' predictions. AsH added that staff had worked with students during the summer to help with their future study options.

8.24. The Chair thanked GC for paying an official governor monitoring visit to the school. GC praised AsH and SH for their efforts, noting that the school premises were as secure as any workplace he had seen.

8.25. The Chair highlighted the impressive effort made by the school in its communications with parents; e.g. the letter that had gone out to the Year 9 bubble. The Chair also pointed to the packs of documents (56!) which had been circulated to governors earlier; the work that had gone into the intricate nature of the timetables was clearly evident.

9. Safeguarding

9.1. RK stated that there were no major concerns to report. RK confirmed that safeguarding training had been carried out by staff at the beginning of term.

9.2. The Chair asked if the Department for Education (DfE) Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) document had been shared with staff. RK confirmed that this had been reviewed by staff on the last INSET day. RK added that staff had been given a week to go over the school safeguarding policy and KCSiE document; and sign a survey confirming having read, understood and ready to comply with them.

9.3. The Chair recommended all governors read the relevant sections of the KCSiE document.

9.4. Governors asked about safe recruitment. SH confirmed that ID documentation and other safeguarding documents had been obtained online from successful candidates and subjected to verification procedures. SH added that it was local authority policy that such this should be done within eight weeks of starting the job.

9.5. Governors asked about safeguarding procedures adopted for the interviews themselves. SH stated that the majority of candidates had provided relevant documentation in advance of their interviews – which had been carried out virtually (except for cover supervisors – this had been done on site). AsH added that all virtual interviews had been recorded on Google Meet.

10. Committees' membership for 2019-2020 (Finance, Pay & Personnel, Recruitment and Panels).

10.1. The Chair noted that governors had reviewed the membership table and were content to continue with the existing arrangements.

11. Governors' meetings dates list 2020-2021

Finance Committee

11.1. The Chair asked if the meeting scheduled for 5 October should go ahead. SH believed that there would be value in providing members with an update of the school's finances and review of the budget.

Pay and Personnel Committee

- 11.2. The Chair asked if the meeting scheduled for 4 November should go ahead; e.g. to cover issues such as performance management and appraisals. AsH recommended this meeting go ahead; given that performance management and appraisals would have to be done differently in the coming year.

Curriculum Committee

- 11.3. The Chair asked if the meeting scheduled for 2 December should go ahead; that JS and KC would be involved in the planning. AsH recommended this meeting go ahead, to look e.g. at the issue of re-bubbling.

12. School policies

Safeguarding

- 12.1. RK drew attention to the revised safeguarding policy, commenting that there were no major changes to previous years. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of this policy.

13. Governor training

- 13.1. DH confirmed that Governor Support in the LA continued to provide training facilities, in a blended format – including online. The Chair noted that the LA was running a headteacher appraisal training session next week.

14. Governors' Declarations of Interests forms

- 14.1. SH offered to create a Google template form that could be completed and submitted by governors online. DH thanked SH for this offer and agreed to provide a model text.

15. Any Other Business

- 15.1. The Chair reiterated his praise to AsH and his team for their work on communications with parents; also for the school's management of the reopening process. The Chair asked if there was any help that the governors could offer. AsH asked governors to take up any available opportunity to press the government and LA for an improvement to the test and trace system. AsH welcomed the agreement reached to hold the next Committee meetings, governor members would be able to use these as opportunities to keep on top of the detail of what was going on at the school.

Actions

Governors' Declarations of Interests form – supply of model text and creation of Google template form – DH & SH

Next meeting – 10 December 2020 (Exam data (full picture))

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...