

Minutes of a (virtual) meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 10 December 2020 at 17.00 hours

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

In attendance: Sarah Hextall (SH – school business manager), Ruth King (RK – Deputy Head Teacher), 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. Apologies for Absence.

1.1. Ashley Harrold (AsH - headteacher) and Richard Mills (RM) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

2. Declarations of interest – None.

3. Minutes

3.1. The minutes of the meeting of 17 September 2020 were agreed by governors as a true record; to be signed by the Chair at the next available opportunity.

4. Matters Arising

- Governors' Declarations of Interests form – supply of model text and creation of Google template form – done.

5. School budget

5.1. SH informed governors that October 2020 was the last completed month, which had showed a forecast surplus of £104K; set against an original budgeted estimate of £143K. SH added that the school was running an in-year deficit; the main additional costs were accounted for by Covid-19 and school meals.

5.2. With regard to the latter, SH explained that this was due to having to pay more to the catering company, who had claimed a contract variance. SH stated this had come about as a result of the school closing all the service points, as part of the measures imposed because of Covid-19. SH informed governors that the school was in contact with the catering company and the local authority (LA) about the legal position.

5.3. SH anticipated that the situation would improve in the new year, when a revised timetable would come into effect; part reopening of the service points would be possible and therefore an increase of income accruing to the school.

- 5.4. In addition, SH drew attention to the additional costs incurred by the installation of two extra broadband lines; to manage the access and use of pupils' Chromebooks.
- 5.5. Governors asked how these lines had been sourced. SH explained that one had come from the LA, the other from a private company. SH added that the school had needed these to increase resilience. Once this need was deemed no longer so acute, SH stated the LA line would be given up
- 5.6. Governors asked about the extra costs of the revised catering provision and running the broadband lines. SH stated that the normal cost of catering was £90K; this had now increased to £120K (but costs here were changing every month. With regard to broadband, SH stated the two lines cost £12K (£6K each) per year.
- 5.7. SH stated that the school had applied for reimbursement of £68K from the government for Covid-19 related costs; £63K had been received back. SH added that the school would be able to claim back more up to the end of the summer.
- 5.8. The Chair asked about the situation with regard to the catering contract. SH stated that she had spoken to a consultant, who had said it was standard practice to include such a 'get-out' clause. SH added that other schools had not had the same problem, as they had kept their service points open. SH stated that this had not been possible for Blatchington Mill, given its bubble structure was much smaller.
- 5.9. Governors asked about the impact of the awnings installation. SH believed these had worked very well with the students; some 14 marquees had been hired and put up in the break spaces on the premises. SH stated these had allowed for much more flexibility, for shelter from rain and wind. AC added that the marquees had made a material difference to students' welfare, adding positively to their well-being and behaviour.

6. Headteacher report

- 6.1. In the absence of AsH, the Chair invited AC to give an overview of the first section of the headteacher report, circulated earlier.

Behaviour and attendance

- 6.2. AC stated that the school had had to manage a significant balancing act in this regard, but since the reopening of the school, attendance rates had now risen to be one of the highest in Brighton & Hove. AC drew attention to three graphs in the report, which provided data of attendance in comparison to national rates. AC stated that the school had sustained its attendance rate (the picture in Brighton & Hove was also good); parents had better confidence in the measures being taken; absences however were significant.
- 6.3. The Chair asked about the spike in X-codes for 19-23 October. AC explained that the spike referred to whole classes and individual pupils being off. The Chair noted that the weekly attendance was no different to the week before. AC agreed to check this point.

- 6.4. Governors asked about the excess over normal absence figures. AC stated that no analysis had been done for usual absence figures; the normal statistic was 95-96%, so now the school was two points down. AC added that, at the end of March, attendance had been at 94.8% finishing on 96% at the end of the school year.
- 6.5. Governors asked about parents who had elected to go for home education since March. AC stated that there none had done so formally, although some pupils had been withdrawn (and been admitted) for various reasons. RK added that, although the school was oversubscribed, a number of Year groups were under capacity.

Behaviour and attendance

- 6.6. AC stated that the school was in effect re-teaching routines and restrictions; providing rationale for the rules that had been put in place. AC commented that pupils had accepted the bubble system and overcome their anxieties as a result. AC added that the school position on face masks had been adapted to points of transition. AC spoke about normative messaging (the bringing in of subject leaders); teaching from the front; the use of SENSO screen monitoring software; parent/teacher consultation evenings (SchoolCloud & video appointments); and fixed term exclusions (the lowest in Brighton & Hove).
- 6.7. Governors asked about attitude surveys with regard to fixed term exclusions, in terms of finding out about teachers and pupils views. AC was aware of the importance of this being done; which would be carried out in the spring term.
- 6.8. Governors asked about the additional workload involved for staff, when using SchoolCloud. AC stated that, with SchoolCloud, meetings could not run on; there was a five minute buffer between each one; and that these were spread out between January and March 2021. AC added that many features had been added to support the workload; which could be handled in school spaces or at home.
- 6.9. The Chair asked if SENSO was in use at school and at home. AC confirmed that it was active in both locations; the setup allowed for reports to be produced wherever it was used. AC added that the school had stressed to pupils the laptops were for academic use only; in addition, for example, the filters showed up alerts on whatever was looked at and set at different levels of seriousness.

Child Protection

- 6.10. RK acknowledged the child protection aspect of SENSO; it was essential for the school to know that, in terms of access, students were doing the right work. With SENSO, RK stressed that teachers could see all screens at all times; were able to take over and freeze a pupil's screen; and pick up any questionable discussions (i.e. that were not work related). RK informed governors that SENSO could identify any activity, defined as low, medium or high risk; and show screen shots as evidence.
- 6.11. The Chair asked about the students' response to this level of control and supervision. RK believed they were in acceptance of the situation.
- 6.12. Governors asked if anything serious had been picked up so far, such as something under Prevent or an issue under General Data Protection

Regulation (GDPR) rules. RK stated that students would not be able to gain access to anything which could be categorised as radicalisation; also just the act of making such a search would be flagged up; and did not believe that there were any GDPR concerns.

- 6.13. Governors asked how much of students' work was handwritten. KC stated that the school was very much aware of this issue; students were given exercise books for most subjects. KC added the school would reduce the amount of keyboard time during the year; it was mindful of the right balance to strike.
- 6.14. Governors asked about teaching & learning and classroom interaction; also about students' proficiency in typing and if this skill was taught. KC stated that there was an expectation teachers would be using SENSO in the classroom and write comments on work presented. KC added that typing had not been raised as an issue; the students were able to do this quickly.
- 6.15. Governors asked about the school's policy with regard to damaged equipment and the provision for replacement units. SH stated that families had been sent loan agreements to sign; students were responsible for repairs if found to be negligible for any damage; cost of repair or replacement would be spread out in cases of hardship if appropriate; all Year offices had replacement Chromebooks for use in the school. KC added that most students had been very careful in looking after loaned equipment.

Extra-curricular provision

- 6.16. RK drew attention to the work being done by the Teaching & Learning Responsibility (TLR) postholder on whole school issues; on stand-alone experiences, activities and clubs.

Staffing

- 6.17. Governors asked about the replacement of staff moving on from posts in Art, Food & Nutrition, Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), Religious Education (RE), IT & Computing. RK provided details, explaining that these gaps had appeared for various reasons (curriculum time change, hub work, internal move & no appointment, change in part time work and new TLRs).
- 6.18. The Chair asked for an update on the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) departure at the end of term. SH stated that the recruitment process had just been closed and interviews would be held next week.
- 6.19. Governors asked how the school was managing with staff absences. SH stated that, as far as possible, cover would be provided in house by cover supervisors; at the last resort, agency staff would be brought in. SH confirmed that teachers were not being asked to cover for each other.

7. Curriculum Committee (CC)

- 7.1. JS (Committee Chair) recalled that the CC had met on 2 December and thanked KC for the provision of reports on this subject at the meeting. JS informed governors that the CC had covered the timetable adaptations to improve the offer; online assessment methods and four new TLR posts.

- 7.2. KC provided additional details of Year 10 and 11 bubbles; different curriculum decisions; breaking bubbles to implement a two week approach (one week core subjects and one week for option lessons); increase on face to face teaching; Key Stage 3 changes to class sizes; and balancing of attainment levels.
- 7.3. Governors paid tribute to KC and her team for the phenomenal amount of work that had been done and the extent of how much delivery, procedures and systems had been improved and refined. KC informed governors that new timetables with details of arrangements would be issued next week, as well as explanations of the changes.

8. Safeguarding

- 8.1. RK stated that the school had reflected carefully on the situation post lockdown and the restart in September; taking account of prevalent anxiety issues and awareness of extra pressures.
- 8.2. Governors asked about staff morale. RK believed that all staff were resilient about the current circumstances; also, department leads and teams had provided a lot of support.
- 8.3. Governors asked if there had been an increase in referrals, given anxieties being experienced by students. RK stated that there had been a slight increase in Operation Encompass referrals since the first lockdown; but these had slowed down in September. Otherwise, RK commented that other referrals such as Front Door, reflected normal teenage issues.
- 8.4. Governors asked how school services were coping, in cases of increased presentations by students. RK believed these were managing, but changes to the movement system in the new year might alter the situation. RK was not aware of school services expecting additional delays in dealing with cases.

9. School policies

Health & Safety (H&S)

- 9.1. The Chair drew governors' attention to the school health & safety policy as well as the linked documents of the Covid-19 addendum and statement of intent.
- 9.2. SH informed governors that an H&S audit had been carried out last week in Brighton & Hove; done by an LA commissioned external auditor – Blatchington Mill had been the only school included in this exercise. SH confirmed that she and AsH had participated in the online discussion process and had emphasised the school's commitment to an H&S ethos. SH stated that the end result had been for the auditor to say the school had an effective framework in place and a good grip on the risk profile; that there was no cause for concern.
- 9.3. SH stated that the H&S policy circulated earlier to governors had no revisions and had been updated to take account of personnel changes. SH turned to the Covid-19 addendum, which contained references and extensions to the pandemic ways of working. Finally, with regard to the statement of intent, SH explained this had been signed by the Chair (an audit recommendation) and

would become part of the H&S policy.

9.4. Governors suggested that a form of safeguarding text be entered into the statement of intent, saying H&S was everyone's responsibility. SH agreed to add this to the statement.

9.5. The Chair noted the approval of the FBG for the H&S policy.

10. Governor training

10.1. MC informed governors that she had undertaken courses on '*headteacher well-being during Covid-19*' and the '*governor remote monitoring role*'; also attended two Hove Partnership meetings. The Chair thanked MC for representing the school and board at these meetings.

10.2. JS informed governors that she had booked onto a '*unconscious bias and conscious inclusion*' training course in January; and agreed to provide the FBG with further information.

11. Any Other Business

11.1. On behalf of the board, the Chair expressed appreciation for how well the staff had managed the present difficult situation. The Chair noted the high levels of attendance, the positive impact of the innovative approaches brought into effect and the low level of poor behaviour incidents. The Chair recalled the Curriculum Committee at its meeting had been informed that the number of first admission preferences for September 2021 were the highest they had ever been; this was a clear indication of the school's excellent reputation continuing to grow. The Chair concluded that all these factors were a tribute to all staff at the school.

Actions

- Addition of safeguarding text into H&S statement of intent – SH
- Circulation of unconscious bias and conscious inclusion' training course details to governors – JS/DH

Next meeting – Thursday 28 January 2021

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...