

## Minutes of a (virtual) meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 28 January 2021 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 (DH), Maria Christodoulou (MC), Addy Balogun (AB), Adam Harvey (AdH) and Gareth Chan (GC – arrived 17.30 hours).

**In attendance:** Sarah Hextall (SH – school business manager), 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. Ruth King (RK – Deputy Head Teacher), Janet Such (JS) and Richard Mills (RM) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

2. **Declarations of interest** – None. The Chair noted that the individual form had been circulated prior to the meeting; also that this had been adapted by SH to include an embedded Google link; and asked governors to complete it and return to DH.

### 3. Minutes

3.1. The minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2020 were agreed by governors as a true record; to be signed by the Chair at the next available opportunity.

### 4. Matters Arising

- Addition of safeguarding text into H&S statement of intent – to be done.
- Circulation of unconscious bias and conscious inclusion' training course details to governors – done.
- Spike in X-Codes. The Chair recalled that, at the meeting of 10 December 2020, he had drawn attention to the fact of a spike in X-Codes being reported but that corresponding attendance figures had stayed the same. The Chair reported that AC had informed him the X-Codes were Covid-19 related absences and so not counted against the overall absence figures. AC had explained this practice by way of pointing out that such students were still attending school, but doing this remotely.

### 5. School budget

5.1. The Chair drew attention to a meeting of the Finance Committee which had

taken place on 25 January. SH highlighted the outturn forecast circulated to governors, which showed the anticipated end of year position of a £340K surplus (compared to the original one budgeted of £140K). SH believed this to show the budget to be in a healthy position; but should be considered in the context of including the unspent catch-up grant (£40K) and the curriculum contingency fund. That said, SH acknowledged that the school had achieved significant savings in some areas.

5.2. SH drew attention to planning for the 2021/2022 budget, which would take account of the change of formula – this would be to the school's benefit to the amount of £300K. SH pointed out that the school could carry forward a surplus of up to 5% of the budget; anything above this threshold would require special authority. SH added that consideration was being given to transferring some of the existing surplus to the All Weather Pitches (AWPs) sinking fund – to allow for expenditure on renewal and maintenance.

5.3. The Chair noted that, with an overall budget of £8M, this meant the threshold limit for a carry forward surplus would be £400K. SH commented that, although the next two years would be manageable in this regard, this may be more difficult in the third. The Chair complimented SH and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) for bringing the school through this difficult period.

5.4. The Chair noted that the examination fees budget was low. SH stated that the examination board had indicated to the school that it would issue invoices as usual (the budget was presently set at £120K); but would reimburse expenditure as and when the picture for the summer became clearer.

5.5. SH drew attention to the Write-Off schedule submitted to the Finance Committee on 25 January; highlighting three amounts that needed FBG approval to write off. SH listed these as follows:

- £1,527 invoice issued to Hove Park school in 2009; reimbursement had been made via a central payment;
- £1,553 invoice issued to Wayne Newton for hire of the AWP and pursued for payment subsequently without success;
- £10K owed by Hove Park for a balance owed on the Sixth Form provision, a total of £30K had originally been outstanding with only £20K repaid. SH stated that, when taking account of various budget changes, the school's view was that it would not be possible to pursue this debt.

Governors questioned why this debt had not been addressed by Hove Park school, expressing their disapproval of this action, and suggested writing to the school noting this view.

The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval to write off these three amounts as requested.

## **6. Headteacher report**

6.1. AsH referred to his report, circulated earlier to governors, highlighting the key sections of remote education, onsite provision, safeguarding, the School

Partnership Advisor (SPA) report and future planning (likely examination outcomes).

#### *Remote Education*

- 6.2. AsH drew attention to the online learning facility and the good system put in place by KC, embedding the best ways for students to learn.
- 6.3. Governors found the table of work listing details of completion and quality very reassuring. Governors asked about the opportunities for live interaction with teachers and suggested a breakdown in the table indicating different categories of students doing well or raising concerns.
- 6.4. KC stated that subject leaders were holding meetings every week. KC drew the example of Years 10 and 11, where students were doing full days of subject options, as individuals or small groups. KC assured governors that the school was constantly developing ways of checking in with individual students; more and more were becoming involved with live interaction – this was being pushed all the time.
- 6.5. The Chair noted that the SPA report had highlighted the higher quality of work through this method of learning. AsH stated that the school was seeing very good work completed by students, in particular by many Special Educational Needs (SEN K) pupils who were working longer on tasks before handing them in when finished. AsH commented that it was also a case of students becoming more accustomed to using chromebooks and receiving whole day subject immersion. CH added that students who before might have struggled in class, were benefitting from having longer time and working on their own.
- 6.6. Governors noted that the learning guides had been received very well and asked about the figures on overall work completion and the differences between the three categories. AsH stated that these were to do with the number of pieces of work expected, the percentages missing and the follow up with emails or phone calls (rather than adopt a punitive approach). AsH added that there were instances of students completing work too quickly, when teachers knew tasks could be done better and in more depth. AsH stated that the school had put in place different pastoral approaches and felt that, for the most part, there was an improving picture. AsH informed governors that systems were in place to address the issue of any work that was not being handed in.
- 6.7. Governors asked how assessment was going (e.g. the principle of recall). KC stated that staff were using different Google tools to understand whether students had grasped elements of lessons; at the same time building in more provision for assessment. CH added that students were receiving more feedback than usual and were doing well on recall.
- 6.8. The Chair drew attention to the SPA report which stated that the school '*had refined a model, a blended approach with live elements*'. AsH stated that the school had now a massive resource in place, with recorded versions of all lessons, and a revision and recap bank of material. Drawing on KC's model, AsH noted that this had taken the best elements of different technologies – students interacting on a live basis was important but AsH also believed that those working independently were producing work of much higher quality;

consideration would be given what aspects of the model to keep in place for September.

- 6.9. Governors asked about staff well-being. AsH acknowledged that the current situation was hard for staff, but they were well motivated and putting in a great deal of effort. AsH assured governors that the school constantly reviewed and took great care about what was being asked of staff; asking where points of friction were occurring and what was not working – to be addressed wherever possible.

#### *Onsite provision*

- 6.10. AsH stated that this was similar to that in place for the first lockdown, which had been a challenge to ensure the right set up was in place. AsH stated that this was mainly led by cover supervisors; with individual Risk Assessments (RAs) in place and their following all the recommended guidelines.
- 6.11. AsH confirmed that the school was conducting lateral flow testing and had invited consent from parents. AsH stated that tests were being carried out on students and staff at least once a week, with no positive results showing up so far. AsH stated that this would be stepped up, to include all results in a test and trace system.

#### *Safeguarding*

- 6.12. AsH provided details of numbers of students, with whom the school checked in regularly; there was a hierarchy of phone calls established at different frequencies, with all issues identified duly followed up. AsH also referred to the refined tracking systems in place, the regular meetings of key pastoral staff, the policy in place to deal with bereavement and drugs awareness, safety and welfare.

#### *Examinations*

- 6.13. AsH drew attention to the mock examinations and felt that there was not a sense these would yield interesting enough information as to how assessments would turn out. AsH highlighted the three categories – mock examinations; teachers' predicted grades; and last year's results.
- 6.14. AsH felt that, overall, the data produced was reassuring for the school, with Year 11 on track and building up a good bank of information. AsH added that the review and planning process would look at how less well performing students were doing; for a plan to be put in place.
- 6.15. Governors asked how this year's mock results compared with the last. AsH stated that they were not substantially different; broadly speaking they were the same distance away from predicted grades.
- 6.16. Governors asked about Department for Education (DfE) and Ofqual pronouncements on summer gradings and whether there were any concerns here for the school. AsH stated that Year 11 students' interests were best served by sitting examinations. That said, AsH pointed to consultations underway and how well prepared the school was; the more points of data available would benefit students – ideally on work done at the end of the course rather than the beginning.

- 6.17. AsH commented that the appeals timetable was very tight. AsH informed governors that the school was discussing a reciprocal appeal arrangement and agreement with Varndean school.
- 6.18. The Chair asked how many times the learning bulletins had been accessed, across a range of subjects. AsH believed that this information could be provided.
- 6.19. The Chair noted the following statement from the SPA report:-

*'SC congratulated AH and his staff team in providing a coherent and thorough programme of work for students. SC is highly impressed by the calm and strategic way that leaders are dealing with the immense challenges at this time. Please pass on my congratulations and best wishes to all.'*

The Chair felt it was useful to have this external view; adding his appreciation to AsH on behalf of the FBG.

## **7. local authority Published Admission Numbers (PAN) proposals**

- 7.1. AsH explained that the local authority (LA) was the school's admission authority and part of its responsibilities was to set the PAN number. AsH gave the background to the issue, explaining that the proposal covered a ten year period into the future, adjusting Brighton & Hove schools' PANs. AsH stated that this included reducing Blatchington Mill's twice by thirty pupils each time; from its current figure of 330.
- 7.2. AsH stated that the response from similarly adversely affected headteachers, including himself, was not positive about the proposal. AsH pointed out that Blatchington Mill was very over-subscribed (400 first preference choices for September) and the school's finances was based on a PAN of 330; the overall impact of a reduction to 270 would reduce its funding and therefore ability to function efficiently. AsH believed that, by presenting this proposal, the LA was attempting to resolve the problem of falling student numbers.
- 7.3. Governors commented that a fall of 240 in numbers over the ten year period in Brighton and Hove presented the LA with a huge challenge; and put schools in a very difficult position. AsH believed that the LA core position was not to close any school in Brighton & Hove and had decided, arbitrarily, on the figure of 180 as constituting a minimum size for a school.
- 7.4. Governors asked about the opinions of AsH's fellow headteachers and the city wide approach on the issue. AsH believed a number to be entirely negative about the proposal. As a result, AsH reported the LA to have introduced a pause to the process. MC added that the PAN issue was a live topic at the Hove Partnership meetings lately, particularly for primary schools.
- 7.5. The Chair noted that the biggest drop was being faced by the Hove Park and Blatchington Mill catchment area and this was not a good prospect for the school to face; also that the primary school reductions were due to take effect in September 2022.
- 7.6. AsH stated that he would be starting work on consulting with the LA as a matter of urgency. Governors considered themselves to be on high alert and to be available at short notice to provide support to the school on this matter.

## **8. Safeguarding**

8.1. In RK's absence, AsH had nothing to add to the information provided in paragraph 6.12 above.

## **9. Health & Safety**

9.1. SH confirmed that the school continued with a similar RA in continuation with the previous lockdown setup; all H&S measures were fully embedded, including those with regard to testing.

## **10. School policies**

### *Whistleblowing*

10.1. SH referred to the draft circulated earlier to governors, explaining that this policy was now due for review. SH stated that the text was based on an LA template and had had key contact details updated.

10.2. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval for this policy.

## **11. Governor training**

11.1. The Chair noted that JS, JMa and AM had undertaken the unconscious bias and conscious inclusion' training course – JMa and AM commented that they had found it useful.

## **12. Any Other Business**

12.1. The Chair noted that the process to put in place a governors' Fixed Term Exclusion panel was underway and thanked those who had come forward to participate.

12.2. AsH informed the FBG that the vacant SENCo position had recently been filled by an in-house appointment.

## **Actions**

- Access to learning bulletins data – AsH

**Next meeting – Thursday 25 March 2021**

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...