

Minutes of a (virtual) meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 25 March 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), Mariea Christodoulou (MC), Addy Balogun (AB), Janet Such (JS) and Richard Mills (RM) 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. Re-appointment of co-opted governor

- 1.1. DH informed the FBG that LR had agreed for his appointment as co-opted governor to be renewed for a further four year term of office; to be backdated to take effect from 13 February 2021; subject to the approval of governors. The Chair noted the unanimous agreement of the FBG to this re-appointment and thanked LR for his continuing service to the board.

2. Apologies for Absence.

- 2.1. Adam Harvey (AdH) and Deborah Hillier (DHi) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

3. **Declarations of interest** – None. SH informed the FBG that nine had been completed; the Chair encouraged those who had not yet done so, to send in their forms.

4. Minutes

- 4.1. The minutes of the meeting of 28 January 2021 were agreed by governors as a true record; to be signed by the Chair at the next available opportunity.

5. Matters Arising

Hove Park School debt

The Chair recalled that this debt of £10K had arisen over the Sixth Form provision. AsH stated that the Finance Committee had agreed this amount could be written off, noted that SH had written to Hove Park on the subject and undertook to inform the local authority (LA) of this decision.

Access to learning bulletins data

The Chair recalled that this had been a question of evidence of access to learning bulletins. AsH stated that these were online bulletins of good work done, a recognition of efforts made. The Chair noted that there had been over 3,000 views of four newsletters; demonstrating the value of putting information into this facility.

6. School budget

- 6.1. SH referred to the three year summary spreadsheet circulated earlier to governors. SH explained that this was a draft; the final version was due for approval by the FBG and submission at the end of May. SH drew attention to the healthy carry forward figure this year; there would be surpluses to carry forward in the next three years as well. SH stated that this would give the school leeway on making decisions on what resources needs could be met.
- 6.2. SH explained that Covid-19 was the main reason for the carry forward; subject areas were underspent; additional expenses had been recovered; agency staff had not been needed; and a good staff team effort in identifying savings. AsH warned that forecast costings for Years 2 and 3 might be higher, given that it had not been possible to fully account for Key Stage 4 needs – so there could be additional staffing costs in these years and affect the £807K surplus forecast for 2023-2024.
- 6.3. The Chair confirmed that the Finance Committee had reviewed the draft budget at its meeting of 22 February 2021; commenting this reflected a positive way forward in contrast to previous years, where savings and restructuring exercises had had to be put in place. The Chair praised the senior leadership team (SLT) for its work in turning the financial situation around.
- 6.4. Governors asked about additional costs for reopening the school. SH confirmed that, with respect to health & safety this had not been the case. However SH acknowledged that the rental of additional lavatories (up to the end of summer) might amount to a significant additional cost – which would be reflected in the final version of the budget to be submitted.

School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

- 6.5. The Chair stated that this form could be considered again by the FBG at its meeting of 29 April, if additional time was required.
- 6.6. SH stated the Red, Amber & Green (RAG) rated figures on the dashboard had been updated from June and July 2020, given there were no changes. SH drew attention to two governors' review of the form (JMa & LR) whose findings on the outcomes had been added to the template.
- 6.7. LR confirmed that he was content with the form as presented. JMa suggested insertion of the word 'financial' into the outcomes section – '*school does have a realistic financial strategy*'; the Chair suggested the insertion of 'yes' against the checklist gaps.

6.8. The Chair noted the FBG's approval of the SFVS form, subject to these changes being made. The Chair undertook to send SH an amended and signed copy; and thanked SH, LR and JMa for their work on this exercise.

7. Headteacher report

7.1. AsH referred to his report circulated earlier to governors, which focussed on attendance, Covid-19 testing and staffing changes.

Attendance

7.2. AC reported that the school was doing well at 95%, above the Brighton & Hove rate of 93%. AC stated that students had been keen to return to school and parents were being supportive; in addition attendance by protected groups was good.

7.3. Governors asked about Special Educational Needs students' attendance. AsH stated that this picture was fluctuating, because of low numbers, just one absence could have a big impact on the statistics

Testing

7.4. AsH paid tribute to the excellent testing operation set up and coordinated by SH; all tests (over three thousand) taken by students had been negative; the system had now moved to home testing being carried out.

7.5. The Chair agreed to send a message to AsH and SH, a collective response from governors, complimenting staff for their efforts. SH agreed to collate these responses and pass on the staff by 30 March. Governors approved too a proposal to make a gift to staff, paid for from Non-Public Funds – AsH and SH agreed to act on this idea (some form of enhancement to the working environment) and report to the Finance Committee.

Teaching schools

7.6. AsH drew attention to the school's involvement with the Pavilion and Downs Teaching School alliance; and informed governors of a change of national approach to this provision, which would mean a shift to regional hubs. AsH stated that Blatchington Mill's involvement with the Teaching School Alliance would therefore cease at the end of 2021.

7.7. AsH added that the school would continue to work with the Primary School alliance.

Student's mental health

7.8. The Chair asked for an update on the school's work with regard to students' mental health. AsH confirmed that the school continued to carry out its usual checks to see how students were doing; including good work by the year offices. AsH believed that the majority of students had returned to school in good health, whilst acknowledging that all had had different experiences in lockdown. AsH was confident that support was in place for those who needed it.

7.9. RK added that the assistant headteachers were meeting on a weekly basis, to go over the full range of options available. RK drew the example of one year group being fine but another where the level of anxiety was rising – this situation was being monitored. RK was confident that the school was

becoming aware of issues more quickly. AsH added that RK was doing work on happiness and well-being. RK drew attention to the 'museum of happiness' where support was available for staff as well as students.

8. Award of Year 11 grades

- 8.1. AsH confirmed that the school had taken this forward, building in flexibility to adapt its process to future guidance, as and when this was received. AsH highlighted the school website for further information, including a letter, timetable, revision guide and how the grades would be benchmarked. AsH stated that the school's process was in very good shape and expressed confidence about the approach adopted.
- 8.2. KC added that the school's subject leaders had done significant amounts of work on assessments and the weighting to be used; as much information about what was being done had been made available – all to ensure students were where they should be. AsH stated that, in addition, intervention sessions were being run for Year 11 students as well as an Easter revision programme, targeted to students in need of this facility.
- 8.3. The Chair noted that the governors' Curriculum Committee had been informed that the school was carrying out a cross school moderation exercise. AsH stated that this related to the appeals process; a reciprocal monitoring arrangement had been suggested with Varndean school to ensure the appropriate checks and balances were in place.

9. Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) stakeholders group

- 9.1. AsH stated that work on this initiative had started in the summer, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement. AsH drew attention to a meeting held on 4 March 2021 where students had spoken of their less than positive experiences in schools. AsH drew attention to the presentation made at this meeting, which included data, students' own slides, a school overview and details of training. AsH thanked AB for her involvement in this initiative.
- 9.2. AB highlighted the three students from Years 10 and 11 who were acting as mentors and presented examples of difficulties experienced. AB noted that parents had been present at this meeting, which had been rolled out to staff as well – it was a clear demonstration of how seriously the school was taking the issue.
- 9.3. Governors expressed admiration for this initiative, in particular the information provided about actions and next steps. Governors wondered however whether the emphasis should not be on positivity rather than the 'anti' in the anti-racism ambassador.
- 9.4. AsH agreed that the tone of the meeting was all about the focus on seeking positive solutions. However, AsH acknowledged that some experiences related were negative in nature. AsH was confident that the school's approach was right overall and could do better.
- 9.5. Governors noted the number of letters forwarded, setting out female students concerns and asked if it was time to survey pupil's attitudes to each other and teachers. AsH highlighted the LA 'safe and well' school survey; the school

could use this initiative to benchmark Blatchington Mill, the next time this was done.

- 9.6. Governors asked if exclusions and disciplinary measures were disproportionately imposed. AsH stated that the data in the presentation reflected a nationwide figure, as well as for the school. AsH pointed to the interesting data on attendance (BAME were better than non BAME); also applied to progress & achievement (BAME had recorded better progress). AsH acknowledged however that, with regard to behaviour and achievement points, there was a difference in this area – pointing to a need for support and to address potential unconscious bias in systems.

10. Transition Year 6 to Year 7

- 10.1. RK spoke of the LA vulnerability index, completed by primary schools and operated by Brighton & Hove. RK explained that the primary schools filled this in by identifying needs, SEN, attendance and behaviour; and then obtained a score for each child. Primary schools then sent this information to the LA; who would then send on information to secondary schools - only on their own specific students.
- 10.2. RK gave a general overview of the school's activity on this issue, including its key approaches and the admin communications effort. RK drew attention to the school's year offices and assistant headteacher contact with primary schools; both online and phone calls; also communications with families and students online.
- 10.3. The Chair noted how much the school was engaged on this effort, the significant degree of its involvement and engagement; for example the 'befrienders' tea' event. Governors appreciated the background documents on this effort circulated by RK in advance; having the timelines in advance was very useful.
- 10.4. Governors asked about the curriculum, in particular Relationships & Sex Education, which had not been completed in Year 5 and was supposed to be done in Year 6. RK stated that this was subject to considerable discussion, pointing to the local City Wide Assessment Planning to Progress initiative, on reading, writing, mathematics and Early Years – which detailed what had been done in this regard.
- 10.5. The Chair asked if Blatchington Mill had shared its policy with other schools. RK spoke of a transition meeting group (Varndean, Patcham and Blatchington Mill) who had discussed vulnerability index plans last week; consideration would be given to sharing practice, to be reviewed in May and September.
- 10.6. Governors asked if there was anything noticeably different with the current Year 7, whether they could benefit from an extended transition. RK stated that the school was aware of these students' transition difficulties and was monitoring the situation. AC added that data from behaviour monitoring had not raised any concern; no physical issues had been raised, just that the bubble structures had affected behaviour in a minor way; but tutors for this Year group had been specially selected.

11. Local authority Published Admission Numbers (PAN) proposals

- 11.1. AsH confirmed having met with the LA and explaining the school's objections to its proposals in detail. AsH added that there were discussions amongst primary schools in the city on federation plans; with a view to sharing resources and making savings.
- 11.2. Governors asked if this was an indication of possible academisation. AsH emphasised that this was not the case at all; there were different models of federation to follow, e.g. staff working across two sites. AsH pointed to the considerable cost pressures being faced by primary schools, following the dip in admission numbers.
- 11.3. Governors asked about the LA's justification for reducing schools' PANs. AsH stated that the LA had been clear this was a politically driven proposal, underpinned by maintaining the principle of retaining the same number of schools.

12. Safeguarding

- 12.1. RK spoke of how the national issue of treatment of women in society had filtered down to the school; with pupils now raising concerns about not being treated as they should be. RK drew attention to a significant number of cases now being raised, going through safeguarding procedures – with the Year offices working hard on them.
- 12.2. RK stated that the cases raised were both appropriate and valid; and would not be rushed. RK commented that the school would consider a strategic overview on how to take the issue forward; presently work was being done from a Personal Social Health & Economic (PSHE) education perspective with a group of students.
- 12.3. AsH confirmed that the LA had been updated on what had been happening at the school; extra support in the form of counselling and group work had been commissioned for the students involved. AsH commented that the national issue had translated into the school very quickly, especially on social media which had been difficult to control.
- 12.4. The Chair confirmed that he had been alerted to media interest in the issue by AsH. AsH added that he had worked with the LA press office; with reporting being responsible and contained as a result. The Chair noted that all appropriate school processes were in place and working.

13. School policies

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)

- 13.1. RK recalled that, from September 2020, there had been a statutory requirement to teach RSE lessons. RK added that the school had made parents and carers aware of how RSE was applied across the school.
- 13.2. The Chair suggested the policy be dated. AsH agreed to enter 25 March 2021 and make the policy subject to three yearly review thereafter. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval for this policy.

14. Governor training

14.1. The Chair noted that there was none to report.

15. Any Other Business

15.1. The Chair noted that a governors' hearing panel had met to consider a parent's representation and school evidence; and provided a conclusion and summary to the issue. The Chair thanked the three governors involved for their work on this issue

Actions

- Message to staff from governors, expressing appreciation for work done on the Covid-19 testing operation – PS, SH and AsH
- Gift to staff, from NPFs, as appreciation for work done on the Covid-19 testing operation – SH and AsH

Next meeting – Thursday 29 April 2021

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...