

Minutes of a (virtual) meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 8 July 2021 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Peter Sowrey (PS) (Chair), Ashley Harrold (AsH - headteacher), Claire Harrington (CH), James Moncrieff (JMo), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), John Barker (JB), Deborah Hillier (DHi), Mariea Christodoulou (MC), Janet Such (JS), Richard Mills (RM), Addy Balogun (AB), Adam Harvey (AdH) and Lee Redmond (LR)

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. Alex Morrison (AM) and Gareth Chan (GC) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

2. Declarations of interest – None.

3. Minutes

3.1. The minutes of the meeting of 29 April 2021 were agreed by governors as a true record; to be signed by the Chair at the next available opportunity.

4. Matters Arising

- Posting of governors' business & pecuniary interests register table on school website – done.
- Addition of PAN as an agenda item for the 8 July 2021 meeting of the FBG – done.
- Scheduling of Health & Safety Committee meeting before the end of term – done.
- Addition of review of administration of medications policy as an agenda item for the 8 July 2021 meeting of the FBG – done.

5. School budget

5.1. SH informed governors that she had just received the local authority (LA) finance department budget template spreadsheet. SH reported the budget cost centres to be in a healthy situation, with 25% spent so far; a consistent spend was anticipated for the rest of the year. In addition, SH stated that Covid-19 costs were being balanced across the budget. SH added that the

catch-up funding was in the process of being allocated across the curriculum for the rest of the academic year.

- 5.2. Governors asked if the cancelled Finance Committee meeting of 28 June 2021 would be rescheduled this term. SH regretted that it would not be, as there was not enough time between now and the end of term to fit a new date for this meeting.
- 5.3. The Chair asked if a projection for the three year budget plan could be given. SH stated that there a £400K surplus carry forward was forecast for the end of the current financial year; £566K for the second year; and £705K for the third. SH explained that this projection was based on the information that salaries would be frozen for the second year; figures for the third were difficult to quantify definitively.
- 5.4. SH stated that the LA had questioned the carry forward into the current year, as it had been over the 5% limit permitted. SH had explained that this was due to a combination of examinations invoices not having gone through; also the school was still assessing students in terms of allocating catch up and the bulk of Covid-19 funding allocated.
- 5.5. The Chair expressed appreciation for this positive picture for the next three years, especially when considering the situation where the school was three years ago. The Chair noted the reasons given for the significant carry forward figure; the Finance Committee would go into these in more detail at its next meeting.

6. Headteacher report

- 6.1. AsH referred to his report circulated to governors earlier and highlighted the following issues:-

Senior Leadership Team (SLT) development & progress

- 6.2. AsH reported that planning was underway for September; the process would take account of Department for Education (DfE) guidance just published.

Covid – 19 impact

- 6.3. AsH stated that there had been an upsurge of Covid-19 cases in Brighton and Hove last week, predominantly affecting those of secondary school and college ages; which had had a significant impact on Blatchington Mill operations. AsH commented that it had almost been a case of not being able to run the school, due to a lack of cover being available; the LA had been consulted at every stage of the worsening situation and a backup plan had been in place. AsH paid tribute to all staff who had willingly volunteered to provide cover and take on additional duties.
- 6.4. Governors asked if the school had adopted the new Covid-19 protocols. AsH stated that the school had kept to these; but drew attention to a letter received on 8 July from the LA public health department, carrying an instruction to resume mask wearing on the premises. However, overall, AsH believed that the changed patterns of operations had been working well – students were demonstrably happier and more relaxed.

Year 11 grades

- 6.5. AsH reported that these had been submitted to the examinations board; who, as part of the process, had requested random samples of work (these had been sent in as well). AsH stated that the school was ready too for any quality assurance checks that might be required.
- 6.6. Governors noted that this Year 11 was academically one of the best seen at the school and asked if its performance had fed through to the grades issued. AsH commented that the grades submitted this year were higher than the last, in turn higher than the year before that one. AsH stated that the average grade this year (the best ever) was 5.7 – indication of a strong pass. AsH acknowledged however that circumstances had not allowed for the calculation of progress measures.
- 6.7. Governors asked about the performance of Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils. AsH stated that the SEN indicators showed outcomes to be significantly improved and a big increase on previous scores. AsH stated that the average SEN grade was just over 4, which was a pass (this had been below a pass in the previous year). AsH urged caution, when looking for comparisons; nevertheless the school possessed robust evidence for these grades.
- 6.8. Governors asked about risk based examination board requests and the school's confidence that these grades would stand. KC confirmed that no risk based requests had been received and that everything had been done thoroughly – processes had been checked carefully and more evidence than was required had been produced; also moderation and standardisation had taken place.
- 6.9. Governors asked if the school had any concerns about its capacity to deliver an appeals process. KC confirmed the school would make sure everything was covered as effectively as possible. AsH added that, whilst official guidance contained some challenging aspects for institutions, the set up benefitted users, such as parents and students. AsH believed that students were well served by their right of appeal; it would be good to know if the school had made any mistakes. AsH emphasised that the school was well prepared to field all appeals.
- 6.10. The Chair asked about the school's bank of evidence used to back up the grades. AsH stated that links to these resources were embedded in his report to governors. AsH added that all evidence had been weighted, also scanned (a lengthy operation carried out by an outside company). In the long term, AsH stated that this bank would be a valuable resource for teachers, containing as it did hundreds of pieces of work.

Assessment Review and Planning

- 6.11. AsH confirmed that assessment of all Year groups had been done; student scores had been ranked (both below and above expectations); teachers' strategies were being planned to manage these outcomes, i.e. assessing students' needs; funding would be identified in the coming months up to September.

- 6.12. Governors asked if this would all happen just in September, or be done in summer school. AsH stated that the summer school would be organised for the Year 6 transition to Year 7; all other Year groups for September.

Feature on Blatchington Mill in DfE Guidance

- 6.13. AsH reported that the school had been selected by the DfE to be drawn on as an example in its guidance on education recovery; in terms of how Blatchington Mill had adapted its curriculum; with emphasis on languages. AsH commented that this showed DfE's appreciation of the school's good practice, to the extent that it would be used as an example to follow nationally.

September planning

- 6.14. AsH stated that the school planned to open in September on the basis of a normal start to term; but would adapt this approach as required by current guidance. AsH explained that teachers would return to have their own classrooms; departments to work together again, re-establishing teamwork and camaraderie; subject leaders in reorganised locations; students to move around the building.
- 6.15. AsH highlighted KC's work on re-writing the timetable for September; also that the Year 9 options had been done this week and were now ready; and homework clubs and the library would be operational in September. AsH acknowledged that all these plans were being made under the constant threat of Covid-19; therefore there would be a back-up plan in place.
- 6.16. The Chair asked about the school day being full length. AsH confirmed this was the case, to allow for movement around school and the splitting of break and lunch times.
- 6.17. Governors asked if any Covid-19 measures would be retained regardless. AsH stated that Blatchington Mill's priority would be to focus on what a well-run school should look like, e.g. corridors call and not crowded; and the wider benefits of the arrangements in place.
- 6.18. Governors asked about the number of staff changes and if there were any shortages. AsH acknowledged that there had been a higher turnover than usual; but exit interviews had not shown any grand theme. AsH confirmed that the school would be fully staffed for teaching, but there were vacancies still in the business team.
- 6.19. The Chair asked about Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). AsH confirmed that the school had taken on a number of these; whose titles were now rebranded as Early Career Teachers (ECTs). AsH stated the key differences lay in the training period (two years not one); and extra funding being made available for training. KC added that another innovation was that there would be induction tutors taken on to impart subject expertise; also mentors on general pedagogy; who would work with who had been finalised on 8 July.
- 6.20. The Chair asked about the existing NQTs, taken on for the current academic year. KC confirmed that these had access to a level of support, in place already.

- 6.21. The Chair recommended that a programme of visits be arranged for governors to come to the school and see the classroom setups in September. AsH welcomed this suggestion.

Transition for Year 6 – current activity

- 6.22. RK explained that it had not been possible to run taster days or induction events this year; all such presentations had been done virtually. RK drew attention to a video link set up on 5 July, for access given to several staff speeches, including one by AsH; there had also been a virtual appointments facility for parents to talk to form tutors on 2 July. RK also pointed to activities where children could write to form tutors; flexibility had been allowed for primary schools to access these in terms of timing; also Blatchington Mill were doing virtual question and answer sessions for primary schools. Governors welcomed news of all these measures, which were good and supportive of future students.

Transition for Year 6 - Summer School

- 6.23. RK reported that 290 students had registered an interest in participating, which would take place from 23 to 27 August 2021; a full week with each day running from 10.00 to 14.00 hours, comprised of 3 sessions with a variety of activities. RK stated that this would include an ethos discussion as part of a group, with a reward system included within the activities – a Blatchington Mill ‘thread’ would run throughout.
- 6.24. RK listed the activities as to include cooking (e.g. scones); treasure hunts (to introduce new students to find their way around the buildings); first aid; sports (football, rounders and trampolining); outdoor team building; subject introductions (including design, English and science – loosely linked to the curriculum, but would be different to actual lessons); computing (bots); gardening; clay modelling; spray painting; culture (e.g. African music); and bouldering.
- 6.25. The Chair welcomed this information which sounded good; also news of the high proportion of anticipated attendance. RK stated that governors were welcome to visit and attend any of the planned sessions; those interested should email her to arrange a time and a date.

7. Published Admission Numbers (PAN)

- 7.1. AsH reported that the LA had launched a pre-consultation engagement activity; to set out its priorities on managing school places. AsH added that there was an LA acknowledgement that popular over-subscribed schools could not be forced to change their PANs.
- 7.2. The Chair reported having attended one of these public meetings, run by the LA to hear respondents’ views. The Chair welcomed the LA’s stance on wanting to take account of views expressed but it had been vague on what it saw as the way forward. The Chair stated that the LA wanted all responses to be submitted by 18 July.

8. Health & Safety

- 8.1. SH referred to the annual report circulated to governors, reporting that an external audit had been commissioned by the LA in December 2020, who had

spent a day at the school. SH highlighted the audit's conclusion that the school's implementation of its H&S system was thorough; and had made a number of recommendations including on the risk assessment process in the curriculum areas.

- 8.2. SH highlighted too a fire risk assessment carried out in December 2020 and confirmed that its recommendations had been carried out, e.g. emergency lighting. SH confirmed that the school's H&S committee had held a meeting and discussed adaptations, control measures and risk assessments. SH added that the Committee had agreed the school administration of medicines policy and recommended approval by the FBG.
- 8.3. SH provided details of facilities improvements, including work on the covered walkway; toilets refurbishment (with LA support); installation of new boilers (no oil fired systems remained on site now); installation of solar panels; Innovate catering company operations. SH added that, with regard to technology and the dependence on remote working, the school had tested its infrastructure and brought in improvements to its broadband bandwidth provision.
- 8.4. SH confirmed that the level of H&S training provided was good, taken up by the facilities management team. SH also drew attention to the accidents summary reports document circulated earlier; the first aid team had stayed on top of all situations and tracked all incidents. SH thanked GC and AdH for their contribution to the H&S committee work; who had reviewed all the risk assessments and provided valued support.

9. Safeguarding

School uniforms

- 9.1. Governors raised a question about school policy on uniform. RK confirmed that the school would continue to monitor the situation, to ensure all pupils were following school policy.
- 9.2. AsH emphasised that this issue was an operational one; the school needed to be very considered on its guidance to pupils on how they wore their uniforms – especially on escalating this to become a safeguarding issue. AC added that there was a review on some specific aspects of uniform underway; the school's main focus was to ensure uniform inclusivity.

Sexual disclosures

- 9.3. RK provided an update on the trajectory of the sexual disclosures discussion; on which a lot of work had been done before Easter. RK stated that some situations involving specific individuals were still being dealt with; police action in some cases was still ongoing. RK confirmed the school was very aware of everything going on with this issue and spending time talking to families, where this was appropriate.

10. School policies

Review of administration of medications policy

- 10.1. SH drew governors' attention to this draft policy, circulated earlier; in which amendments, additions, deletions had all been highlighted. The Chair

noted the FBG's unanimous approval of this policy.

Review of safeguarding and child protection policy

10.2. RK drew attention to the changes required by the government to this draft policy. AsH added that this was to allow governors sight of the current draft; it would be subject to further changes in August required by the LA. AsH recommended that a final, updated version be formally approved by the FBG at its meeting of 16 September. The Chair noted the FBG's agreement to this course of action.

11. Governors' meetings dates for 2021-2022

11.1. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of this list, which took account of two changes requested by SH for the Finance Committee. AsH noted that work was still being done on the general school calendar, but going ahead with the governors' list was in order.

12. Governor training

12.1. The Chair reported that AM had attended an LA governance forum on climate change on 24 June; who had volunteered to lead on this subject on behalf of the FBG and would raise at the next meeting.

13. Any Other Business

Governor departures

13.1. The Chair noted that JS and AdH had given notice of stepping down from their co-opted governor roles, with effect from the end of term, i.e. 23 July 2021. The Chair thanked both warmly for their service and dedication to the school; JS in particular for setting up the Curriculum Committee and AdH for his work on H&S in the school committee on reviewing risk assessments

Staff appreciation

13.2. The Chair noted that AM had asked for his appreciation of all school staff to be officially recorded; he echoed this sentiment strongly. The Chair added that he would be sending a thank you message to all staff shortly, on behalf of the FBG.

13.3. AsH extended his thanks on behalf of the school to all governors; he noted that all were volunteers and gave their time freely in service to Blatchington Mill.

Actions

- Setting up of governors' classroom visit programme for September – PS/AsH
- Addition of safeguarding & child protection policy approval as an agenda item for the FBG meeting of 16 September – DH

- Addition of climate change to agenda for the FBG meeting of 16 September - DH
- Despatch of message of appreciation to all staff - PS

Next meeting – Thursday 16 September 2021

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...