

Minutes of a (virtual) meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 24 March 2022 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Peter Sowrey (PS) (Chair), James Moncrieff (JMo – arrived 18.30 hours), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), Mariea Christodoulou (MC), Lee Redmond (LR), Mark Sorrell (MS), Jim Henderson (JH), Vernon Bamforth (VB), Richard Mills (RM), Alex Morrison (AM), Claire Harrington (CH), Deborah Hillier (DHi) and Kate Claydon (KC - Head Teacher).

In attendance: Sarah Hextall (SH – school business manager), Ruth King (RK – deputy Head Teacher), Lizzie Edmed (deputy Head Teacher) and David Harvey (DHa – clerk).

Quorum: 13 out of 14 governors present – meeting was quorate throughout.

1. Apologies for Absence.

1.1. Gareth Chan (GC) apologies for absence were accepted.

2. Urgent business

2.1. The Chair drew attention to three permanent exclusion panels held on 9 March at the school and thanked AM and JH for their participation. The Chair stated that, after due consideration of the appeals, the panel had decided to uphold the school's decision to permanently exclude all three pupils involved.

3. Communications

3.1. The Chair noted that both the permanent exclusion and deputy headteacher processes had highlighted a need to communicate with governors in a more streamlined manner. The Chair stated that the current system meant that emails had to be sent out to official school addresses; alongside alert notifications; then responses had to be awaited.

3.2. The Chair suggested that a Whatsapp group be set up, which would be an easier and more agile way to contact governors about administrative arrangements – with the caveat that nothing confidential would be transmitted. The Chair believed that such an arrangement would allow governors to respond much more quickly and manage matters urgently. The Chair noted the FBG's approval for this proposal to be taken forward.

3.3. Governors raised additional points with regard to use of personal emails for non-sensitive matters; use of Governor Hub; issues of confidentiality when sharing documents and control of access.

3.4. RK noted that there would be a cost to the school to subscribe to the Key (for access to Governor Hub). SH agreed to contact network services about

allocating governor access to BMS360 for deposit of documents; also governor access to the school's Google domain.

4. Declarations of interest – None.

5. Minutes

5.1. The minutes of the meeting of 27 January 2022 were agreed by governors as a true record; to be signed by the Chair at the next available opportunity.

6. Matters Arising

- Provision of educationally disadvantaged system guide for governors – to be done. KC stated that the whole rationale and technical guidance had been prepared and a twilight session would be held next week to discuss the system. The Chair asked that this guide be circulated to governors before the next meeting of the FBG; also that it should be an agenda item.
- Circulation of email asking for participation in the deputy headteacher interview process – done. The Chair thanked governors for their participation in this process, noting that it had been rigorous and successful; as a result, the school had been able to appoint 2 new deputy headteachers.

7. OfSTED inspection - 22 & 23 February 2022

7.1. KC drew attention to the OfSTED draft report circulated earlier to governors; stressing that it had not yet been published and so had to remain confidential for the time being. KC commented that the whole process had been comprehensive and worked well. KC paid tribute to staff for their hard work, particularly the senior leadership team (SLT) – a lot of planning had had to be done, including deep dives with subject leaders – as a result, the school had been well prepared for the inspection.

7.2. KC highlighted that the OfSTED inspectors had pushed hard on some issues raised by the parents/pupils/staff surveys. KC stated that the school had had to argue its case on Pupil Premium (PP) strongly; in terms of explaining how this worked alongside implementation of the Educationally Disadvantaged system. KC confirmed that the school had been able to show it had all the evidence available to support its approach. KC believed that, overall, the OfSTED report was fair – it had highlighted areas where the school could improve in an entirely reasonable way.

7.3. The Chair commented that the inspection had been an interesting process, with four governors attending on the second day, to talk to the lead inspector. The Chair described it as a rigorous process and noted that the school had chosen its deep dive subjects carefully and this had been presented clearly. The Chair noted that there had been some very positive comments in the surveys about the school – the report had stated that '*pupils are proud to be members of the 'Blatch family'.*

7.4. The Chair drew attention to an initial inspection point that there was no record

of governors certifying that they had read part on of the 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' document. The Chair had been able to show that this was not a statutory requirement but good practice instead (the lead inspector had apologised) – this would be a feature of the first FBG meeting of the new academic year.

- 7.5. The Chair recognised that some parents' comments had been critical as well as positive – this highlighted the need to carry out a specific survey. The Chair welcomed AM and DHI's offer to be involved in this aspect of communications with parents. AM agreed that this was a positive development; and believed that such a survey should be a continuous process and not just a one off exercise. AM added that the OfSTED survey could be seen to be unfair, as it had made no allowance for the two year impact of the pandemic.
- 7.6. Governors asked which subjects had been chosen for the deep dive work. KC stated that these were science, geography, modern foreign languages (MFL) and English. KC added that this exercise had raised some issues, e.g. with geography and the variability of students' books – these were being addressed.
- 7.7. Governors asked how close the school was to achieving an outstanding rating. KC stated that OfSTED had emphasised the need for consistency across all areas of the curriculum, but had not given any sense of how near it was to this higher rating.
- 7.8. The Chair asked when the report was likely to be published. KC stated that the draft had been sent back to OfSTED on 10 March; publication was likely to happen in about four weeks.
- 7.9. The Chair agreed to compile a letter on behalf of the FBG to parents, highlighting the positive aspects of the OfSTED inspection. The Chair noted that Blatchington Mill continued to be rated as good; the report would be a useful baseline for the future.

8. Headteacher report

- 8.1. KC drew attention to the School Development Plan documents circulated earlier to governors.

School Development Plan (SDP)

- 8.2. KC drew attention to the updated SDP, with the addition of a column to show evidence of impact and how different areas were being addressed. KC noted that the Quality of Education Committee had looked in detail at the areas being improved by the school, at its meeting of 9 March. KC informed governors that some areas would be longer term in nature; work on these was starting now.
- 8.3. Governors offered their congratulations on the OfSTED result and asked to what extent its conclusions would impact on SDP priorities. KC acknowledged that the school's approach on PP could be much sharper; other points identified by OfSTED were already areas that the school wanted to develop.

- 8.4. Governors picked up on the PP point and asked whether inequality issues (such as the deteriorating economy) had had an effect. KC stated that the school had a number of welfare measures in place, e.g. access to the breakfast club; supply of chromebooks to all students; checks on the availability of WiFi in homes; running of a summer school and the provision of equipment to Year 7 students; and help with uniforms purchase.
- 8.5. Governors asked about the timings in the SDP and if the provisions had been fully costed and incorporated before the end of the financial year. KC stated that the budget would be tied in to work on the SDP, using the surplus already identified. KC added that the school was using a new software tool – ‘Perspective’ – to present the new updated SDP and drew attention to the example page circulated earlier to governors KC highlighted aspects such as inspirational leadership at all levels, with descriptions of what the school was trying to achieve; also the success criteria, allied to key strategic aims. KC confirmed that costings would be done for every area of the SDP.
- 8.6. Governors welcomed that there would be a clear link between the SDP and the budget and asked when this would be done. KC stated the new SEF would be written by May half-term; the new SDP would be produced by the end of the summer term. The Chair asked that the FBG be provided with updates on progress with the SDP at its meetings in May and July.
- 8.7. Governors noted that the SDP was extremely extensive in detail and the challenge to keep a track of all its contents. KC stated that this format helped with monitoring and reviewing of targets; also of the different parts of what was built into the strategy. KC added that a one page summary would be produced to go on the school website, to add clarity. Governors welcomed the idea of having this one page summary, which could take the form of a vision and mission statement.

Absences

- 8.8. KC reported that there had been a recent increase in absences, due to the pandemic; also recovery from illness seemed now to be longer. KC stated that it had been difficult to balance cover this week.

(Note – RM left the meeting at 18.00 hours)

9. School Budget

- 9.1. SH drew attention to the three year budget plan summary, highlighting the large carry forward. SH stated that, by ring fencing four key areas (window replacement programme, extensive decoration, deep clean and the All Weather Pitches sinking fund) the school would be under the 5% limit allowed by the local authority (LA). SH drew attention also to purchase of chromebooks for the new intake of pupils and the Covid catch-up grant (outlined in the PP strategy on the website); the budget would balance up to the third year.
- 9.2. SH stated that the staffing budget showed a reasonable proportion, i.e. it was under 80% for all three years; 1.5% had been included to allow for pay increases. SH highlighted budgeting for turnover as well; £40K in year two and £82K in year three. SH drew attention to utilities, which were bought through

the LA; following advice, the budget had been inflated by 5% to allow for increases.

- 9.3. The Chair noted that this information had been discussed in detail by the Finance Committee at its meeting of 24 February and welcomed not losing any funding to the LA from the carry forward surplus. The Chair asked about the impact of imminent cost rises for utilities. SH stated that the impact for schools was less than the domestic situation; utilities purchasing was hedged by the group buying through the LA – however the amount of the anticipated rise was unknown at the moment. SH added that the school took up cost effective and environmental measures wherever possible; e.g. solar panel and LED lighting installation.
- 9.4. Governors asked about the big increase in staffing proportion figures; i.e. 70% in 2022 to 80% in 2024; given that salaries were not going up by that much. SH stated that teachers' salaries would be going up by 1.5%; non-teaching staff by 1.75% (backdated to April 2021). SH explained that the budget was calculated on the basis of all staff salaries going up by one point. The Chair noted that the proportion figures had a lot to do with budgeting for progression and recommended the FBG discuss the proportion increase at its next meeting; to see if this rise was still likely.
- 9.5. Governors noted that, by 2025, the budget was calculated on the basis of all current staff still being in the school and all their salaries increasing through progression – a wise assumption to make. Governors acknowledged that this picture might change, e.g. an experienced teacher leaving might be replaced by a successor much lower down on the pay scale.

School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

- 9.6. JMa reported having visited the school to carry out monitoring and review of the SFVS form, along with LR. JMa drew attention to a checklist, circulated earlier to governors, setting out the different areas for review. JMa stated that they had both had input from SH's finance team; also an account of the recent audit findings.
- 9.7. JMa drew attention to the governance section, which was all in order and prompted the idea of having a process to monitor governors' skills and ensuring the declarations of interests register was up to date. JMa also highlighted the business continuity plan (update needed), SLT changes; budget section financial projections presented to the Finance Committee for interrogation; audit requirement for the SDP to be fully costed; staffing section; value for money section (benchmark reviews); and protection of public money.
- 9.8. JMa noted that the auditor's feedback had not raised any areas of serious concern, but had suggested some improvements. JMa drew attention to the final section, with a dashboard completed by the LA. JMa highlighted aspects of this section, showing the school to be an outlier in four areas – educational supplies spend (the school was in the lowest 10%); teacher contact ratio (lower than recommended); administrative and technical staff spend (high) and average class size.
- 9.9. JMa stated that once the final audit outcome was available, a further report would be made to the Finance Committee and FBG. The Chair thanked JMa for her thorough analysis; also for her and LR's work on this task. SH added

her appreciation for JMa and LR's input; their challenges were a valuable part of the process. The Chair agreed to sign off the final version of the SFVS form electronically next week.

10. Governor visits

Safeguarding & Single Central Record

- 10.1. MC informed the FBG of her visit to the school of 9 March, to look in to best practice; following up one in the autumn term with PS to meet with RK on safeguarding. MC stated that she had looked at case studies and examples; with three areas to monitor in the future – training, policies & procedures and teaching & learning. MC commented that she would look at teaching & learning next term, in particular online safeguarding aspects for students

Children in Care & Children Previously in Care

- 10.2. MC noted that numbers of these students were small and drew attention to the work of assistant heads of year, producing personal education plans (PEPs); reviewed and updated each year. MC also highlighted the training undertaken by the assistant heads of year, to ensure that PEPs were in place. MC stated that her next visit would look deeper into PP spending.

Safeguarding

- 10.3. RK expressed thanks to MC for her visit and helpful comments. RK drew attention to current work being done by the school on issues of self-harm and anxiety; also issues of the impact on behaviour of the pandemic.
- 10.4. The Chair noted that the OfSTED inspectors had been complimentary and positive about the school's work on safeguarding and behaviour; and asked about the behaviour aspects. EE stated that different ones had been seen; e.g. Year 8, because of the lockdown, still had not mixed with other year groups – the school would have to think about transition in this regard. EE added that the bringing back of assemblies after Easter would help with this issue; there was a need to adopt a consistent approach.

Visits

- 10.5. The Chair informed the FBG that the OfSTED inspectors had asked about governor visits to the school; there was a clear need to re-establish a programme. The Chair suggested this be discussed at the next meeting of the FBG; future visits could be tied into specific aspects of the OfSTED report. The Chair felt that a visits programme would help governors, especially new appointees, to know the school better.

11. School policies

Charging & Remissions

- 11.1. SH explained that this was a review of the existing policy, which had tightened up the explanation of philosophy, eligibility of students for Free School Meals (FSMs) and residential trips (FSM students were not charged for food and lodging).
- 11.2. Governors raised minor drafting points, such as a reference to the Sixth Form College; also suggesting inclusion of a set of funding guidelines. SH

welcomed this idea, saying that a link to the government website page could be arranged, to the policy background.

11.3. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of this policy.

Visits

11.4. RK explained that there had been no major changes made since the last version of this policy; drawing attention to changes with regard to financial assistance costings (division of finances between PP and non PP families), consistent with the charging policy.

11.5. Governors asked about the equalities section and how emerging issues with regard to trans students would be handled. RK stated that there had been instances, pre pandemic, where arrangements had had to be clarified for trans students.

11.6. The Chair noted the FBG's unanimous approval of this policy.

Safer recruitment

11.7. SH stated that more work had to be done on this policy and would be circulated when ready for review.

12. Governors' meeting calendar

12.1. The Chair stated that there was a need to set out a calendar of regular issues, which needed consideration at different times of the year. The Chair drew attention to a draft template of a framework calendar, produced by JMa. The Chair believed this would be useful to help governors know which key issues had to be dealt and when; particularly school policies and ensuring they were updated regularly. The Chair stated the aim was to have such a framework in place for all meetings in the new academic year.

12.2. Governors emphasised the importance of rigour in the school behaviour policy, to address any school vulnerability. Governors noted that this policy was due for review in April (perhaps for approval by the FBG in May); it would be particularly important to look at process. KC stated that EE had already started this review.

12.3. Governors noted that the process allowed for a monitoring cycle to be put in place, for the FBG to delegate reviews to Committees and individual governors; which could then be recommended to the board for approval. The Chair agreed to speak with KC about how this delegation could be done. JMa stated that an extra column could be added to the calendar framework template, specifying who had to approve which policy.

13. Governor training

13.1. JMa spoke of applying to do an Internal Audit course; the Chair of doing safer recruitment and child protection for governors.

14. Any Other Business

14.1. The Chair informed governors that a skills audit exercise would be launched shortly – it would be useful to learn of any gaps before recruiting for the vacant co-opted governor position.

- 14.2. RK informed governors of a Week of Action event planned by the school from 4 to 8 April. RK stated that students from different form groups would participate in various activities, focussed on a contribution to the community, e.g. cake baking and sponsored walks. RK invited governors to contact her to arrange visits during this week to monitor the activities.
- 14.3. The Chair noted how well the school had done over the last two years; its performance was a great credit to Ashley Harrold, Kate Claydon and all the senior leaders. The Chair, on behalf of the FBG, stated a belief that Blatchington Mill was more than just a good school.

Actions

- Taking forward of governors' Whatsapp group communication system – DH
- Contact with network services about governor access to BMS360 and Google domain - SH
- Provision of educationally disadvantaged system guide for governors – KC
- Addition of educationally disadvantaged system to next FBG agenda – DH
- Taking forward of parents' survey – KC, AM and DHi
- Consultation about delegation of school policies review – PS & KC
- Circulation of governors' skills audit template form for completion - DH

Next meeting – Thursday 5 May 2022

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...