

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School and Sixth Form College held on 26 May 2016

Those Present: Peter Sowrey (PS) (Chair), Kevin Fry (KF), Gareth Chan (GC), Addy Balogun (AB), John Barker (JB), Peter Gerry (PG), Richard Goodsell (RG – joined the meeting at 17.40 hours), Ashley Harrold (AH), Richard Mills (RM) and Andrew Wallace (AW).

In attendance: David Harvey (DH – clerk), Sarah Hextall (SH) and Lyndsey Thompson (LT)

Quorum: 10 out of 12 governors present with 3 vacancies – meeting was quorate throughout.

0. Welcome.

1. Apologies for Absence.

- 1.1. Sally Hunt (SH) and Fiona Bauermeister (FB) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted. The Chair notified the GB of Jenny Rusted's (JR) resignation with effect from 16 May 2016 and expressed gratitude for her work and commitment on behalf of the governors and school during her term of office.

2. Urgent Business

Teaching school status

- 2.1. AH informed governors that Blatchington Mill was putting in a bid to acquire teaching school status. AH noted that previously the government had applied very strict criteria to schools wishing to carry out this service, e.g. it had to be OfSTED 'outstanding' rated, to be deemed suitable to sell its expertise.
- 2.2. AH stated that this criteria had now been relaxed, so Blatchington Mill were bidding with five other schools (Varndean, Dorothy Stringer, Steyning College and Hove Park) and would be calling this group the 'Pavilion Alliance'. The intention was for this group to share teaching school responsibilities and provide services such as Continuing Professional Development (CPD). AH added that, no matter how many of the schools in this group were awarded teaching school status, all would take part in the exercise.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) inspection

- 2.3. AH informed governors that the local authority's (LA) SEN provision was currently the subject of an inspection, resulting in seven schools being visited including Blatchington Mill. The inspection had found children and parents very positive about the school's SEN provision, with a key point being their view that they were in charge of it. In addition, parents had expressed happiness with the school. AH reported that the LA had echoed the positive result of this inspection, by sending an email stating that the school had emerged with considerable credit from the process.

3. Declaration of interest

- 3.1. RG noted his interest as included in the register in the tender process for construction of the school's "C South" building project.

4. Minutes

- 4.1. The minutes of the meetings of 17 March 2016 were agreed as a true record and duly signed. GC asked for one amendment to be made (Page 1, 1.1, that his apologies had been made and accepted), which was done and initialled by the Chair.

Action – Amendment to minutes to reflect GC apologies for absence from 17 March meeting - Clerk

5. Matters Arising

RAISEOnline access

- 5.1. AH confirmed that governor logins had been created and available for use. Emails had been sent to governors' official school email accounts. The Chair asked governors to check their logins and that these RAISEOnline details had been sent to their accounts.

Safeguarding presentation

- 5.2. The Chair confirmed that the clerk had circulated the presentation made on this subject to all governors.

6. Headteacher report

- 6.1. AH referred to his report circulated earlier to governors and invited questions.
- 6.2. The Chair asked for clarification about staff vacancies and numbers being replaced. AH stated that information in his report reflected changes since March 2016, in the form of a full list every time; details of those positions being filled would be provided to governors at the next meeting.
- 6.3. The Chair highlighted the 'headlines' data page and noted that the predicted AS figures were not good. AH drew attention to the Spring term predicted Key Stage 5 figures of 79%, 43%, 64% and 58%; acknowledging the challenge with this Year Group and concerns expressed. However, AH commented that teachers were sometimes reluctant to make predictions without first seeing and assessing the relevant coursework.
- 6.4. Governors asked about the documentation aspect. AH stated that there was an internal verification process. Although data information was shared with students, they could not be told that this meant they had succeeded already. Nevertheless AH shared governors' concerns about the AS figures.
- 6.5. Governors asked about the discrepancy between the AS and A2 figures and if there were any changes happening that was causing this to happen (e.g. the AS drop from 99% to 58%). AH believed that the predicted figure of 58% would not be this low at the end and in any case, AS was being phased out.
- 6.6. Governors drew attention to the students numbers figures, of those currently on roll, specifically Years 12 and 13, asking about the inclusion of students from the EU. AH confirmed that these figures included 20 such students from central Europe (mainly

Germany), who added great value to the school.

- 6.7. Governors asked about numbers of future entry to the sixth form, noting the very high criteria being demanded by BHASVIC. AH reported an LA move to have a more fair process across the city – by means of a common application form – from which the school would benefit.
- 6.8. Governors asked about the validated Pupil Premium (PP) gap data. AH stated that there would be a Challenge Partnership review for October, on closing the gap. AH commented that the school took the lead in the city on closing the gap, with PP students doing better than non-PP ones. Governors commented that staff should be praised for their good work in this area. AH stated that, with this in mind, the staff welfare survey was due to be done very soon.
- 6.9. Governors asked about the gap prediction for English and Maths. AH acknowledged that the gap in Maths was challenging, more so than English.

7. Finance Committee

- *school budget 2016/2017*

- 7.1. AH set out the background to this issue, referring to the budget's structural issues and asking that governors consider his recommendations for the necessary next steps. AH stated that, at present, the proposed budget did not balance, despite use of the carry forward figure from last year.
- 7.2. AH explained that the school was funded according to an LA formula based on categories. However, the school was now facing a decrease to its basic income by £700K. AH set out the main reasons:-

Main school

- 7.3. Fewer students coming to the main school (Years 7 to 11). Although the capacity for each Year Group was 310, quite often this reduced to between 292 and 297, because of mobility reasons. Even though there was a waiting list of 5 to 10 students for each Year Group, the school was still not operating to full capacity. There was a flaw in the LA system for placing students in schools from waiting lists, which had still not been addressed.

Post 16 provision

- 7.4. AH pointed to the fact that Post 16 funding had also dropped significantly this year, because of lower student numbers. Not only that, but the fact of some students failing courses or dropping out of them before finishing was having an effect, given that when this happened their funding was withdrawn.

SEND funding

- 7.5. AH pointed to this issue being a major factor of difficulty. The school was expecting the attendance of 65 Education, Health & Care (EHC) plan and statemented students, that would require a specific number of hours of support. The school would have to provide this support for their statutory needs, requiring a significant amount of staff time. However the amount of SEN funding available did not match the demand.
- 7.6. AH stated that amongst this number of students were some that should be attending

special schools, where available funding would be much higher. As matters stood, the SEND funding paid to the school should be much higher; there was no justification for it being low. AH stated that the LA formula budget did not work for the school in this regard. This was partly due to the fact that the disadvantaged block of this budget had been devised before the arrival of PP, resulting in almost a double weighting situation.

Expenditure - staffing

- 7.7. AH stated that officially recommended proportion of budget to staffing costs was 80%. However the school's spend was increasing for teaching, business, pastoral and supply staff – to take account of increment and pay progression payments, which had resulted in weighting to the high end of the scale. Of course, having such experienced teaching staff meant the school was becoming more successful, but at a high cost. This was going to be addressed by hiring Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) to replace some Upper Pay Scale (UPS) staff, but this might have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- 7.8. AH stated that the school was not hiring more staff and becoming more efficient in using the existing complement. There were fewer staff across the board, across all the categories. As a proportion of the budget, out of an income of £8.8M, the school would spend £7.8M on staffing. This was not an abnormal figure and not an increase on levels in place five years ago, but nevertheless amounted to 89% of the budget. To have just 11% to spend on all other areas of expenditure was not sustainable.

Expenditure – non staff

- 7.9. AH explained that less was being spent on premises costs (running the buildings, cleaning, licenses etc) each year. However the condition of the buildings was deteriorating. The spend on subject costs, devolved to leaders, was also declining. On curriculum, covering everything that was not a devolved subject area e.g. homework diaries – this was not being reduced. In total, the cost of having 4 teachers was covering all this expenditure.

Options

- 7.10. AH stated that, as far as staffing levels were concerned, the school had some choice but not very much. This meant having a look at Year Group sizes and numbers of periods; making the curriculum plan more efficient with less lessons and less teachers. AH recalled that from 2013/2014 to 2014/2015, the school had changed to a 6 period day and went into detail on provision of lessons for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. AH believed that in some areas it would be possible to have fewer lessons – but this would have an effect on exam results, which at present were good.
- 7.11. AH did not think it would be possible to reduce KS4 lessons, but that there was scope to do this for KS 3 and 5. On KS5 for example costs had increased due to an expansion of lessons three years ago and a present decrease in student numbers.

Governor comments

- 7.12. Governors asked about agency and supply costs. AH acknowledged the big mark up in agency costs; also that cover costs were higher than they should be. Governors asked if these could not be reduced in some way. AH stated that the school always went for the lower option first in this regard, namely approaching the LA direct supply. AH added that, in some areas, in any case there were not enough supply teachers e.g. maths. There was also a question of quality and continuity of teaching suffering when using

supply teachers.

- 7.13. Governors asked about additional costs linked with staffing. AH noted that the school's costs included paying for National Insurance (NI) and pension contributions. SH added that both had increased significantly recently.
- 7.14. Governors asked about prospects for balancing the budget. AH stated that when work had started on this issue, the deficit amounted to £600K. Thanks to SH's hard work, the deficit had been reduced to £290K, since the meeting of the Finance Committee on 9 May. But this was still too high a difference, particularly since the LA would only licence a deficit of £250K.
- 7.15. Governors asked how much was the SEN shortfall. AH thought that, overall the LA funding on SEN was as much its problem as it was that of the school. AH asked for governors to make a representation to the LA on this issue. With regard to figures, AH stated that the school had to find the first £6K for each SEN student. So that meant for example a £30K cost for 5 students. When the school was having to manage a group of 65 SEN students, the extent of the funding problem could clearly be seen.
- 7.16. AH added that the school had access to an LA SEN top up fund of £300K. However, when it was realised that this fund was for all schools in the city and Blatchington Mill had already drawn down £80K, it could be seen that this would not go very far. AH added that, if the school was allowed to carry forward a deficit of £290K in the first year, the situation would be worse in the second (£722K) and catastrophic in the third (£1.29M).

Income

- 7.17. AH pointed to a number of proposals to increase income, although acknowledging that none of these would improve the situation this year:-
- Increase formula income, by operating at capacity level in every year group.
 - Lesson numbers and curriculum plan review
 - Teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) structure – review the spend of £265K on TLR across the school. This could be cut by £40K by restructuring, given that some roles were much more demanding than others.
 - SEN funding, subject to review by the LA. A £100K was needed to improve funding in this regard.
 - Application for teaching school status.
 - SEN specialist unit set up in the school – could draw in up to £200K.
 - Increase in student numbers.
 - Retention of students.
 - Expansion of the Hove Park provision.
- 7.18. AH asked governors to approve action being taken on the following options:-
- Agreement on restructuring the TLR provision.

- Explore the possibility of staff restructuring.
- Submission of a statement on SEN funding to the LA.
- Exploration of the academisation option.

7.19. Governors agreed AH's proposals on TLR restructuring and making the SEN case to the LA unanimously. SH added that the TLR structure was presently in place for three years, so the saving timeframe would be further down the line.

Action – AH to produce SEN submission for governors (AB & KF) to send to LA.

7.20. Governors thought that the one on staff restructuring could be examined, with a look at the time spent by teachers in front of classes – 71% to 75% contact time. AH stated that this issue of contact ratio was not straightforward in that the higher this was, the better lessons went; the lower allowed more time for planning.

7.21. Governors asked if any modelling had been done on how the 29% was managed and if there was any surplus time available. AH agreed that there could be an examination of what teachers did, their available time and cover. AH thought the structure could bear two fewer teachers, but the school would have to be sure with what was happening with the curriculum and subject areas.

7.22. Governors felt that caution should be exercised with regard to the academy enquiry proposal and this should be held in reserve as an option to pursue. There was a question as to whether the LA would pick up the school's deficit, if Blatchington Mill chose to convert its status. SH explained that the Education Funding Agency would look at a three year deficit projection.

7.23. AH stated that schools and colleges in the city were considering forming alliances. However it was the case that if there was a proportion of 20/80 academies to maintained schools, the LA would no longer be able to deliver services on a sustainable basis. AH felt that the school could only go ahead with expressing an interest if it had accurate figures on which to base a case, before this became public knowledge.

7.24. Governors asked when the budget had to be submitted to the LA. SH stated that this was 9 June, going to 1 July when it would be rejected because of the deficit. SH did not think there would be any penalty suffered by the school as a result of this rejection. Governors agreed that the budget should be submitted as it stood, with no attempt made to misrepresent the situation.

AH commented that the school, in addition, would have to anticipate a cut to the post 16 funding, given the anticipated drop in students attending the sixth form. Governors stated that the school needed more students in the sixth form, who stayed on the courses and completed them.

8. Safeguarding and endorse school policy on safeguarding

8.1. The Chair stated that this agenda item would be deferred to the next meeting of the FBG.

Action – Safeguarding to be put on the agenda for the next meeting - Clerk.

9. Governors training

- 9.1. KF reported having attended Parts I & II of the governor induction training. PG asked governors to report any training courses undertaken to him, copied to the Clerk.

10. Chair's Actions

- 10.1. The Chair noted that there were three governor vacancies, with the school retaining contact details of some who had expressed an interest in applying.

Action – AH to provide contact details of potential governor applicants.

- 10.2. The Chair noted that a proposed list of dates for forthcoming governor meetings in the new academic year of 2016/2017 had been circulated. The Chair asked governors to send any comments on these dates to the Clerk. AB asked that the start time of the Personnel Committee meetings be amended to read 17.00 hours and not 17.30 hours. The Chair suggested to AB that the Personnel Committee consider revisiting the governors' skills audit exercise in due course.

Action – Comments on proposed 2016/2017 meeting dates to the Clerk – All.

Action – Amendment to start time of Personnel Committee meeting dates – Clerk.

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...