

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 2 May 2024 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Kate Claydon (KC - headteacher), James Moncrieff (JMo – arrived at 18.00 hours), Jim Henderson (JH) (Co-Chair), Peter Sowrey (PS), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), Joanna McCrae (JMc), Phil Howard (PH), Lisa Goodman (LG), James Tulley (JT) (Co-Chair), Joyti Stach (JS), Miranda Wells (MW), Lisa Logan (LL) and Tim Shutler (TS).

In attendance: Sarah Hextall (SH – school business manager), Brandon Hughes (BH - Deputy Head Teacher), Lizzie Edmed (EE – deputy headteacher) and David Harvey (DH – clerk).

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

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Co-Chair (JH) welcomed the attendance of JS (co-opted governor), MW (parent governor) and LL (parent governor) as newly appointed members of the board; who introduced themselves to those present. The Co-Chair (JH) noted that MW and LL's four year terms of office had begun on 22 March 2024; and that of JS from the date of this meeting, i.e. 2 May 2024.
- 1.2. The Co-Chair (JH) recalled that PS had notified the board of his intention to step down as the local authority (LA) nominated governor, on the expiry of his term of office on 4 July; with this in mind both he (JH) and JT were in the process of interviewing PS' successor and contacting the LA about taking forward this appointment.
- 1.3. The Co-Chair (JH) informed governors of Mariea Christodoulou (MC)'s decision to step down from the board as a co-opted governor, with effect from 18 April 2024. The Co-Chair (JH) spoke warmly of and paid tribute to MC's conscientious, diligent and hard-working contribution in support of the school and the board, over the number of years she had served in her role as co-opted governor.

2. Apologies for Absence.

- 2.1. Mark Sorrell (MS) had sent his apologies for absence which were accepted.

3. Declarations of interest – None.

4. Minutes

- 4.1. The minutes of the meeting of 21 March 2024 were agreed by governors as a true record; and signed by the Co-Chair (JT).

5. Matters Arising

- Tabulation of exit interview themes – to be done.
- Presentation of paid day off work proposal to Finance Committee – the Co-Chair (JH) noted that this had come about as a recognition of the pressure staff were working under; as a proposal to set up a mechanism to provide paid days off – there was a need to assess the impact on the budget, which would be considered by the Finance Committee.
- Presentation of safeguarding action plan to FBG at its next meeting of 2 May – to be discussed at the present meeting.

6. Headteacher report

Trans Inclusion

- 6.1. The Co-Chair (JH) informed governors that the LA were currently reviewing its toolkit and reflected that this issue represented a complex debate, both locally and nationally. The Co-Chair (JH) added that it was important for the FBG to learn how the school was navigating this debate.
- 6.2. KC stated that the school had had to deal with a number of challenging instances raised on this issue over time and were managing these with considerable care. KC added that, to mitigate this challenge, the school had drawn not just on the LA toolkit for guidance, but had used other sources of information where these had been available; to ensure all children at the school were safe and supported.
- 6.3. KC emphasised that she dealt personally with all cases that had arisen and had worked with individual families when issues had arisen. KC confirmed that the school had a good understanding of the issue and had always taken an impartial line.

Anti-Racist work

- 6.4. The Co-Chair (JT) reminded governors to undertake training on this subject, when available; KC confirmed that there were specific courses.

Exit Interviews

- 6.5. Governors valued the information provided on this subject. KC undertook to provide additional analysis based on these interviews.

Quality of Education

- 6.6. Governors asked about the pathways process. BH explained that the school was making changes to the curricular model for the next academic year. BH described the creative pathway programme for Year 8 going to Year 9, for three out of six creative subjects; students would have four pathway options.
- 6.7. Governors asked about the numbers of classes for computer science. BH stated that there would be three classes for computer science; there would be bespoke teaching for Year 9, e.g. the ability to touch type.
- 6.8. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about the likely conversion rates – there were two computer science groups in Year 10 and three in Year 9. BH expressed a hope to increase the number of groups.

- 6.9. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about Art. BH explained that this went into other subjects, such as photography and textiles.
- 6.10. Governors asked about the underlined principles and the minimum numbers to run GCSE courses; BH stated that this was eight.
- 6.11. Governors asked about numbers for the tuition of Latin; BH explained that this was timetabled in the same way as languages.
- 6.12. Governors asked about the tuition of music and that there were two classes of fourteen; also about life skills. BH stated that, on life skills, students had moved into a non-language pathway. With regard to music, BH felt that having one class with 28 would have caused too big a burden for effective teaching of a practical subject.
- 6.13. Governors asked about the proposed school day times, which they supported and asked about the parental response. BH stated that this addition of ten minutes to the beginning of the day had not yet been communicated to parents.
- 6.14. Governors asked about timetabling. BH explained that double lessons were not leading to expected engagement; better results would be obtained with the frequency of learning rather than having one long period. Governors noted that movement time had been taken away from break times.
- 6.15. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about gender imbalances. BH stated that there was no specific data; a check through names had shown up no major imbalances – e.g. on art, drama and music.
- 6.16. The Co-Chair (JH) asked what the picture would have been three or four years ago on class sizes. KC stated that the school had fewer groups now, e.g. on languages but the balance had not changed in terms of numbers – art and music were smaller now. BH added that having a class of thirty was untenable at Key Stage 4.
- 6.17. Governors asked about literacy. BH confirmed that the school ran reading tests at the beginning of the year.

Behaviour and Attendance

Attendance

- 6.18. Governors asked about the codings used in the information provided. EE explained that T&F indicated true and false; E for Education, Health & Care (EHC) plan; K for Special Educational Needs (SEN) support level students, with English as an Additional Language (EAL) receiving additional support.
- 6.19. Governors asked about the whole school figure pre-pandemic. EE stated that this was 94%, post pandemic, the school remained in the top three locally.
- 6.20. The Co-Chair (JT) asked about learning from other schools. EE commented that other schools were stricter than Blatchington Mill on fining; this option was used at the school sparingly as it had been found to impact negatively on relationships with families. EE added that the LA had been complimentary about the school's work on attendance.
- 6.21. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about the large number of school refusers. EE commented that as the practice of working from home had increased, so had

the inclination for parents to allow children to do the same more readily; a push therefore had been necessary to encourage them to attend school.

6.22. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about absence due to sickness or going on holidays. EE stated that this situation was changing, with an increase in families taking children on holidays during term time and choosing to accept being fined for unauthorised absences as a consequence.

6.23. Governors asked if the school was pro or re – active, with regard to fining. EE stated that the school was re-active, in terms of informing families that absences would be reported to the LA.

Onsite alternative provision

Governors asked about the alternative provision and the opportunity for them to visit. EE stated that the school was opening up levels of support and the student categories involved were from all Year groups; with priority groups from Years 8 (concern about some key students), 10 and 11. EE added that the register of Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA) students was growing – this was a new provision being set up. EE welcomed the request from governors to pay the provision a visit and would suggest a date.

Celebrating ‘Brilliant Blatch Behaviour’

6.24. The Co-Chair (JH) praised this scheme and asked how awards were publicised. EE stated that certificates were issued and assemblies were organised to highlight awards.

6.25. The Co-Chair (JT) asked about gender breakdown. EE stated that a review would be done on a breakdown of gender and ethnicity. EE added that work would be done on the apparent disparity of some students on behaviour points but still receiving awards – there was a need to ensure equity within the system.

Barriers to Learning

Admissions

6.26. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about unfilled places. KC stated that the school was achieving a good rotation of places that it had; the LA was in control on whether the school could over subscribe, but it had a waiting list.

Pupil Premium strategy

6.27. PS noted that the PP strategy in place ran from 2022 to 2025 and he had met Alexis Crawford (AC – assistant headteacher) to look at an updated version and its impact. PS recommended that the FBG discuss this more fully at another meeting. BH confirmed that staff were identifying PP students and were devising strategies and interventions; also checking on attendance and parental engagement.

Pastoral

Child Protection

6.28. Governors asked about comments from the LA after the school’s submission of the safeguarding audit. KC confirmed that the school had not yet received a response.

- 6.29. The Co-Chair (JT) asked about the recent National Crime Agency sextortion alert. KC confirmed that the school was working through official guidance.

Pastoral

Student leadership

- 6.30. The Co-Chair (JT) asked about the gender breakdown of those students who had applied. KC stated that, out of 27 applicants, 20 were girls and 7 were boys.

7. Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) tribunal outcome

- 7.1. **Note** – Text recording discussion on this item appears in a confidential annex to these minutes.

8. Budget and Administration

Health and Safety

- 8.1. Governors asked about the new design classrooms. SH stated that the portakabin temporary classrooms had been put up on 2 May, the food ones would be done in half term; permanent accommodation would happen in January and February 2025.
- 8.2. Governors asked about plans to paint over the mural. SH stated that a decision on a replacement had not yet been decided, but the work would be done in the summer. The Co-Chair (JT) asked if consideration could be given to covering it, rather than painting over it – it was after all part of the school's heritage. SH commented that this might be complicated and expensive to arrange and suggested that photographs could be taken and used to make a display. The Co-Chair (JH) recommended that governors look at the mural and discuss again at the next meeting of the FBG.

Facilities

- 8.3. Governors asked about plans to construct a sports pavilion. SH confirmed that the primary school had not yet been approached about this matter yet; the process was still right at the beginning, a plan would be developed by the Brighton & Hove Hockey Club (BHHC).
- 8.4. Governors asked about the provision for utilities. SH confirmed that the new pavilion would be metered separately; plans would include it being self-sustaining. SH added that the BHHC wanted to work closely with the school on this project, was interested in what Blatchington Mill wanted and wanted to be helpful.
- 8.5. The Co-Chair (JH) noted this information and made the following statement:- *the governing body and leadership of Blatchington Mill School are in support of the proposal by Brighton and Hove Hockey Club to erect a pavilion/club house in school grounds;* adding that there were a number of details to discuss as this project progressed.

Finance

- 8.6. SH spoke of the requirement to present a three year budget plan to the LA; five if it were in deficit. SH confirmed that it had been possible to balance the budget and pointed to the changes made, showing how this had been achieved; e.g. adjustment of payment for examination fees. SH stated this meant that the school would not now have to approach the LA for a licensed deficit; adding that (at a meeting of school business managers on 1 May) it had emerged that four out of five schools were submitting deficit budgets.
- (Note – PS left the meeting at 19.40 hours)**
- 8.7. SH commented that this outcome had been as a result of being very carefully financially over recent years; e.g. with staffing levels. SH added that the school had been under pressure not to carry forward too much in the way of surpluses (there was a ceiling of 5%); a strong case had been put to the LA to avoid a clawback.
- 8.8. The Co-Chair (JT) commented that, out of the main pillars governors were responsible for, finance was a key one – and balancing the books a major aim; but in future years the school faced an issue over managing cost over income. SH stated that, for Years 2 and 3, Year 3 figures were speculative, given the changes that were likely to happen. JMa (Finance Committee Chair) recalled that the school had already gone through a staffing restructure and had used past years' surpluses carefully, e.g. infrastructure improvements.
- 8.9. The Co-Chair (JH) commented that considerable credit was due to SH, KC and their teams in achieving this outcome; this had allowed the school and governors time to look closely at costs and take action and plan for the next year. The Co-Chair (JT) echoed this praise and paid tribute to SH and KC's hard work; as a result the school had avoided having to put forward a five year recovery plan.
- 8.10. The Co-Chair (JH) noted that the staffing cost proportion projections for Year 1, 2 and 3 amounted to 77%, 83% and 99% respectively. KC commented that government underfunding of education was a national issue. SH added that the school received £5.5K per student (£3.5K at primary schools); modelling on anticipated student admissions needed to be done and how this impacted the curriculum.
- 8.11. The Co-Chair (JH) noted the FBG's agreement of the budget and stated a final version would go for approval to the Finance Committee at its meeting of 13 May.

Contract approval

- 8.12. SH explained that the Finance Committee delegated limit of expenditure approval was £25K; the school was planning to take on a contract of £47.5K for an LED lighting installation for the all weather pitches (AWPs), being a 50% share of the total cost (the other 50% being picked up by the BHHC). SH added that all the quotes for this work had been reviewed by the Finance Committee; although the final choice was not the cheapest, it was the best and recommended by the BHHC.
- 8.13. The Co-Chair (JH) noted the Finance Committee's recommendation that this expenditure be approved; and the FBG's agreement to this course of action.

9. Safeguarding

9.1. The Co-Chair (JH) noted the information provided by KC under 'child protection' above.

10. School policies

10.1. The Co-Chair (JH) noted the following policies - High Prior Attainment; Overseas Travel; Business Continuity; Bereavement; Crisis Management Procedure – would be circulated prior to the next meeting of the FBG for review and approval by governors.

11. Any other business

11.1. The Co-Chair (JH) informed governors that he and JT had met with KC to talk about a vision and strategy for the school, looking at the school improvement plan in the process; and would follow this up with another meeting on 16 May. The Co-Chair (JH) explained that the aim would be to set a direction for the school over the next three years

11.2. KC informed governors that the BBC 'One Show' would be coming to film at the school, on a Personal Social Health & Economic (PSHE) education theme.

11.3. KC informed governors that the school would participate in Brighton's children's parade on 4 May with a specially built build and structure.

Actions

- Proposal of a date for governors to visit the alternative provision – EE
- Submission of final budget to Finance Committee for approval - SH
- Follow up meeting with KC on the school's strategy and vision – JH and JT

The meeting concluded at 19.15 hours.

Next meeting – Thursday 4 July 2024

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...