

Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School held on 21 March 2024 at 17.00 hours

Those Present: Kate Claydon (KC - headteacher), James Moncrieff (JMo – arrived at 18.00 hours), Mark Sorrell (MS), Jim Henderson (JH) (Co-Chair)), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), Joanna McCrae (JMc), Phil Howard (PH), Lisa Goodman (LG), James Tulley (JT) (Co-Chair)) and Tim Shutler (TS – by ‘virtual’ link).

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: 10 out of 12 governors present – meeting was quorate.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Co-Chair (JT) informed governors that Vernon Bamforth (VB) had stepped down from his role as co-opted governor with effect from 3 March; and noted the FBG’s expression of warm thanks and appreciation for his contribution to and work on behalf of the board, over the period of his term of office.
- 1.2. The Co-Chair (JT) drew attention to the presence of JMc at the meeting in her role as a new co-opted governor (with effect from 2 October 2023); also LG as a new staff governor (with effect from 21 March 2024) – who introduced themselves to the board.
- 1.3. The Co-Chair (JT) informed the board that two of the three candidates for the parent governor vacancies had attended the school for interviews earlier in the day at the school (21 March 2024) – Miranda Wells (MW) and Lisa Logan (LL); the third candidate (Joyti Stach) would be interviewed shortly, in consideration for filling the co-opted governor vacancy.
- 1.4. The Co-Chair (JT) highlighted publication of the new schools governance guide produced by the Department for Education (DfE); intended to replace the existing governance handbook of 2019; also the governance competency framework, clerking competency framework, governance structures and roles & statutory policies for schools documents.
- 1.5. The Co-Chair (JT) informed governors of the necessity to convene a panel to consider a pupil suspension review, which could be carried out remotely, i.e. on a ‘virtual’ basis; and thanked JMc, PH and TS for participating. The Co-Chair (JT) explained that this was a question of reviewing and assessing the school procedure and decision – and not one of reinstatement.
- 1.6. The Co-Chair (JH) drew attention to an investigation he was discussing with the school, and welcomed TS’ offer of participation in this process. The Co-Chair (JH) stated that this process should start next week, with the aim of producing a report.

2. Apologies for Absence.

2.1. Mariea Christodoulou (MC) and Peter Sowrey (PS) had sent their apologies for absence which were accepted.

3. **Declarations of interest** – None.

4. Minutes

4.1. The minutes of the meeting of 7 December 2023 were agreed by governors as a true record; and signed by the Co-Chair (JT).

5. Matters Arising

- Discussion and review of high prior attainment school policy at next FBG meeting – to be discussed at the present meeting.
- Review of crisis management procedure and policies to be deferred to the next meeting.
- Fire - The Co-Chair (JT) noted that there had been a positive press article in the Argus on the aftermath of the fire at the school; also the many expressions of support and appreciation in feedback from parents in praising the school's follow up work carried out as a result of this incident. KC anticipated that the Food & Design classrooms would be ready in January 2025.
- Visits - the Co-Chair (JT) informed the FBG that he, PH and TS had attended the school on 18 March to carry out a visit to look at tuition of art, drama and music – they had spoken to staff and students which had been very informative. The Co-Chair (JT) added that disruptive behaviour levels had been raised as a concern, which all SLT had made a focus of attention post-fire as the school settled back into normal routines. KC commented that there were a number of students who were finding this challenging, as well as there being wider issues in corridors with punctuality to lessons. KC stated that this was a question of resetting expectations, applying a consistent approach – the situation was becoming incrementally better. The Co-Chair (JT) noted that students had asked for more detailed feedback and extra-curricular activities (to have sessions where their skill sets could be applied from their curriculum knowledge. The Co-Chair (JT) added that there was a need for the school to present a careers update to governors at an FBG meeting.

6. Headteacher report

National Landscape

6.1. Governors commented about the possible move by OfSTED from issuing single word assessments. KC commented that this went to discussions which suggested OfSTED publish four different sections and maybe put in place a more nuanced report – however this was all unconfirmed as yet.

6.2. The Co-Chair (JT) noted that the DfE was pulling its funding of the governor recruitment service – 'Inspiring Governance' – with effect from September.

School Partnership Advisor (SPA) visit

6.3. Governors commented that the recent SPA visit had been a positive experience.

Challenge Partners visit

6.4. The Co-Chair (JT) noted this report, emphasising that there had been a number of formal governor visits to the school, displaying a significant amount of engagement. KC explained that this report reflected an observation made about governors' engagement from about a year and half ago.

6.5. BH noted JMa and JH's offers of attendance at the school for the next Challenge Partners visit on 24 April.

6.6. The Co-Chair (JT) recommended that governors be provided with a summary of points of engagement, for their visits to the school.

Staff Well-being

6.7. Governors asked about the quad resources, in the staff well-being context. SH explained that the school was looking at various companies providing grounds maintenance; one company would take on landscaping work in the quad – there was an opportunity here to take this forward.

6.8. The Co-Chair (JT) asked if there were any financial implications of this work being done. SH stated that funding could be allocated in the final budget, by ring-fencing some of the carry forward money. SH commented that the company concerned had not yet advised the school on how much this work would cost; once this information was available, it would be discussed by the Finance Committee.

6.9. SH stated that governors could consider whether funding would come from public or non-public funds – there might be a preference for public funds as non-public was more usually used for enrichment activities or school trips. . KC added that she had met with the Friends at Blatchington Mill (FAB) who were keen to continue fundraising for the school.

6.10. Governors asked if parents and the wider school community might be approached to take part in this work. SH believed that this was possible on e.g. planting and landscaping; but a safe environment would have to be created first. The Co-Chair (JT) recommended leveraging the school community to secure this assistance. SH commented that there was a question of capacity to make these links.

6.11. Governors asked about privacy considerations in the wild quad. SH confirmed that this issue would be taken account of.

6.12. Governors asked whether staff well-being was reflected in absence levels. KC commented that this had not been an easy time, particularly for the Food and Design team who had been impacted negatively by the fire and faced challenges as a result. SH added that staff absence level was lower this year than the last; the situation had improved but the last five months had had an impact.

6.13. The Co-Chair (JT) asked about the paid day off work idea; if governors would need to authorise it and the cost impact. SH stated that the school wanted to minimise the cost impact and the need to provide cover, e.g. for

teachers; but considered that it should be possible to pick days that would have the least impact.

- 6.14. The Co-Chair (JT) asked when this would be implemented. KC believed this would be launched from May half-term; there would be careful parameters in place and a formal proposal presented to the Finance Committee for its consideration.
- 6.15. Governors asked if this would be trialled for a year. KC stated that the proposal was to have this as a one-off exercise to start with, it could then be assessed whether to bring in again to support staff well-being. SH added that, in the light of the budgetary situation, there should be full transparency about having this provision in place and balancing it against funding constraints.

Quality of Education

- 6.16. Governors asked about higher and foundation results. BH stated that carrying out an analysis of data was possible and decisions for examination entries would be made in the next few weeks.
- 6.17. Governors asked about the percentages given for Art in actuals and mocks. BH confirmed that Art should have been quoted at 10% (not 1% as stated). BH added that staffing issues in the Art department had now been addressed and results were now going in the right direction.
- 6.18. Governors asked about the task and specification in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). BH stated that the examination board had changed its way of assessing MFL and would be putting in a new and revamped grading system; lessons would be restructured as a result.
- 6.19. The Co-Chair (JT) commented that there was now an opportunity to review the Quality of Education (QoEC) and Pastoral Committees' approach; so that governors could review and challenge main issues of focus at the FBG; and make better use of the board's time as a result. The Co-Chair (JT) added that this could take the form of lead governors in these committees making short statements of their experiences.
- 6.20. BH noted that there had been discussion in the QoEC about making presentations of data more clear and understandable; on which he was taking action when preparing his future tables of statistics. The Co-Chair (JT) added that each FBG could focus on a particular area, e.g. safeguarding, in a condensed manner in order to help the governors' discussion of these subjects.

Staffing

- 6.21. Governors asked about staff turnover. KC stated that the current overall average was 11 to 12 % a year since September 2019; there had been a 50% turnover of teaching staff (this would not be as high this year); since September 2019 business staff turnover had been 35% - since her headship this was 25%. KC added that whilst staff turnover could be a healthy and positive development for the school; retention of experienced staff was also of significant value.
- 6.22. The Co-Chair (JT) asked if the school carried out exit interviews. KC confirmed that this was done, to help the school unpick what could be done

better – no major problems had been raised. The Co-Chair (JT) asked if the cost of living had been a factor in staff's decisions to leave. KC commented that this did not seem to have been a factor; and undertook to tabulate this information, in terms of themes that came up in exit interviews.

Premises

- 6.23. Governors asked about facilities. SH stated that six temporary classrooms would be installed; four in the west car park and two north of the theatre – this would have an impact on parking.
- 6.24. Governors asked for an update on dealings with the insurers, post fire. SH stated that the insurers had taken away the project management from the local authority (LA); but there had been a delay with the insurers signing off on provision of the temporary classrooms.

7. Budget and Administration

Budget

- 7.1. Governors asked about deficit budgets guidance. SH believed this would be posted on Brighton and Hove Education and Enterprise Marketplace (BEEM) before the final deadline of submission. SH anticipated that the school might be asked by the LA to reduce its deficit and move towards balancing its budget; the majority of secondary schools in Brighton and Hove had deficits this year.
- 7.2. (Note – TS left the meeting at 18.10 hours)
- 7.3. Governors asked about the final budget submission deadline. SH confirmed this was 19 May. SH added that, at first, the LA had accounted for schools deficits by treating them as loans from the dedicated schools grant; but now anything further might have to come from the LA's core budget.
- 7.4. JMa (Finance Committee chair) noted that at the last committee meeting, governors had been informed of the school's in-year deficit of £1M (out of a total budget of £9.7M); were looking at options to reduce the 2024-2025 in-year deficit; considering the longer term with regard to having a licensed deficit and the LA requirement to submit a recovery plan.
- 7.5. JMa noted that the school had had a licensed deficit in 2017-2018 which had been addressed by a staffing restructure exercise. JMa recalled that the school had then had a surplus and been challenged to spend some of it, in order to avoid a funding clawback by the LA; now there was a need to consider a strategic plan to balance the budget.
- 7.6. SH drew attention to the percentages of staffing costs as a proportion of the total budget; Year 1 – 78%; Year 2 – 87% and Year 3 96%; staff turnover 0% in Year 1; 1% in Year 2 and 1.5% in Year 3; the budget included allowance for a 2.5% pay rise and continuation of the pay grant. KC added that Blatchington Mill was nearly the lowest in Brighton and Hove for Free School Meals (FSMs) and Pupil Premium (PP) students, the least deprived; although this might change in Year 3.

School Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

- 7.7. JMa explained that the SFVS exercise went to the school's financial management of its resources; she and PH had reviewed and completed it, working with SH and the school finance team. JMa drew attention to the dashboard and the Red, Amber and Green (RAG) ratings – the in-year balance was rated amber. JMa noted that ratios of expenditure were comparatively very competitive.
- 7.8. JMa informed governors that she and PH had selected a few areas to review in the checklist; including the business continuity plan (assured and served an effective purpose); pupil numbers (readiness to make changes); timetabling (numbers out of the school's control); new accounting system (implementation had gone well).
- 7.9. JMa stated that, overall, there were no areas of concern to flag up. The Co-Chair (JT) noted the FBG's approval of the SFVS report and its thanks to JMa, PH, SH and her team for their hard work on this exercise.

8. Safeguarding

- 8.1. KC informed governors that the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) Lee Evans (LE) had completed the safeguarding audit and passed to her for review; for submission to the LA next week. KC added that a decision on outcomes would be taken and form the basis of an action plan; to be presented to the FBG at its meeting of 4 May.

9. Governor training

- 9.1. The Co-Chair (JT) reported having attended a very good 'making secondary school data less daunting' training course.
- 9.2. The Co-Chair (JT) asked when governors could do refresher safeguarding training. KC confirmed that this was usually done in September.
- 9.3. The Co-Chair (JT) confirmed he would be attending the LA Governance Conference on 23 March; and BH to an anti-racism conference.

10. School policies

- 10.1. KC stated that work was being done on preparing the bereavement, Business Continuity Plan and Crisis Management Plan policies to present to governors for review and approval in due course. The Co-Chair (JT) added that these were part of the risk management discussion; also that health and safety on school trips would be done.

(**Note** – KC, EE, SHx and BH left the meeting at 18.30 hours)

11. Governors Skills Audit exercise

- 11.1. JMo introduced this section of the meeting, explaining that this was the second part of the skill audit exercise; the first having been carried out at the FBG of 7 December. JMo invited governors to consider the second set of questions (starting at Q7) and provide comment, as follows:-

Q7 - Is our headteacher appraisal panel suitably experienced and trained?

RAG rating of Green.

Governors agreed this question and commented that confidentiality was prioritised over complete transparency, but there was a competent panel delegated to conduct these sessions.

Action: Governors recommended having clarification about the process and an overall sense of progress to FBG would be beneficial.

Q8 - Do we have positive, collaborative governor relationships? RAG rating of Green.

Governors commented that the board had a wide range of skills, possessed a healthy challenge culture; and there was good participation from all in committees and on panels. Governors noted the existence of robust board engagement and dialogue with SLT.

Action: Governors recommended that when board members and committees changed, processes for good handover and opportunities to understand and get to know each other should be in place.

Q 9 - Do we understand how our board delegates its work? RAG rating of Amber.

Governors noted that Committees' structures had recently been reviewed and updated; also that reporting methods under review. Governors recalled that they had formulated a schedule of agenda items for committees and these were checked annually by the committees in question; in addition there were link governors for all statutory areas of assurance; and work was being done on finalising terms of reference for all committees.

Action: Completion of agenda schedules for all committees.

Action: Definition of the most efficient flow of committee reporting into the full board.

Action: Refinement of terms of reference for committees (especially pay/personnel and finance).

Action: Organisation of all key information and schedules, with effective curating.

Q10 - Can we speak up if we have concerns about unethical behaviour or a lack of transparency? RAG rating of Green

Governors believed that the culture was open, transparent and healthy. Governors reported that they felt they would be able to raise any concerns. Governors noted that, if something occurred, it would be reviewed and learnt from - any changes needed would be implemented; in addition, Chairs were available for any confidential conversations.

Q 11 - Do we know when independent, expert advice may be required? RAG

rating of Green

Governors confirmed this was the case, that they had high levels of professional experience within the board, such as legal, education and finance. Governors expressed confidence and noted they used external advice regularly and had sought legal advice. Governors recalled having dealt with serious incidents, leading the board to make use of external advice where necessary. Governors noted they had an experienced clerk who worked in other schools. Governors believed that their link governor system should bring in external advice (for example, careers/safeguarding). Governors pointed to the availability of network support to seek advice on where to go if they recognised a gap in knowledge. Governors understood the concept of impartial; independent; accurate; compliant; and noted their membership of the NGA.

Action: Effective use to be made of the clerk's knowledge and advice.

Action: A link to be made to the Risk Register - to avoid unknown unknowns.

Q12 - Do we know what our legal and compliance responsibilities are? RAG rating of Amber.

Governors noted that there was a Local Authority induction process; but were uncertain this comprehensively covered what was needed, despite there being a module within this particular course.

Action: Running an evaluation of confidence and knowledge of this through new governors' induction training.

Action: Exploration of an online, training and review system, which might be provided by a DfE tool, or by taking a KCSIE approach (annual update) or access to BEEM.

Q13 - Do we have knowledge, experience or training that helps us to promote diversity and inclusion? RAG rating of Amber.

Governors noted that some of them had regular professional development, knowledge and experience; but others did not. Governors recommended ensuring that they were strategically aligned with school, local and national priorities.

Action : Evaluation of whether all should have governor regular training; making use of board or committee meetings to sequence such training, in bitesize chunks; and investigation to see if this could be cascaded by the SLT, as it would be strategically relevant to the school and community

Q14 - Do we know how to build the knowledge needed to be an effective governor? RAG rating of Green

Governors noted that there was a wide array of options, training and development for them provided by the Local Authority and all activity was tracked and reported back to the board. Governors were aware of their access

to The Key, BEEM and the NGA Learning accounts. Governors were confident that any gaps in training were identified and ways to close these were taken forward (see Q11 and 12).

Action: Exploration of other sources of input and advice, to progress governance at Blatchington Mill, perhaps exploring governor networks outside of area; as a focussed activity (good practice in a particular area of governance).

Actions

- Tabulation of exit interview themes – KC
- Presentation of paid day off work proposal to Finance Committee – KC and SH
- Presentation of safeguarding action plan to FBG at its next meeting of 2 May - KC

The meeting concluded at 19.15 hours.

Next meeting – Thursday 2 May 2024

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...