

**Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body of Blatchington Mill School  
held on 25 January 2024 at 17.00 hours**

**Those Present:** Kate Claydon (KC - headteacher), James Moncrieff (JMo), Mark Sorrell (MS), Jim Henderson (JH) (Co-Chair)), Mariea Christodoulou (MC), Judith Mackenzie (JMa), Peter Sowrey (PS), Phil Howard (PH), Vernon Bamforth (VB), James Tulley (JT) (Co-Chair)) and Tim Shutler (TS).

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

**Quorum:** 11 out of 12 governors present – meeting was quorate.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Co-Chair (JH – designated Chair for the meeting) spoke of how difficult the last week had been for the school, when having to manage the impact of the tragic death of a member of staff and a serious fire on the premises. The Co-Chair (JH) drew attention to how complicated these two situations had been to deal with and the work involved not least with communicating with the school community. The Co-Chair (JH) commented that all of this had been managed excellently by the school and all governors owed a vote of thanks to the staff who had performed above and beyond the call of duty. The Co-Chair (JH) stressed the gratitude felt by all members of the FBG to the school staff in this regard.
- 1.2. The Co-Chair (JT) informed governors that he had been present on the school site on the evening of 17 January (when the fire had broken out) and had seen for himself how well staff had worked, with focus and vision, taking account of relevant policies and procedures and clearly placing the interests of parents and children as a high priority. The Co-Chair (JT) believed that school staff had done an incredibly good job, in the most challenging of circumstances.

**2. Apologies for Absence.**

- 2.1. Joanna McCrae (JMc) had sent her 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

- Notification of PS stepping down as Chair of Governor; and appointments of JT & JH as Co-Chairs; and TS & PS as Co-Vice Chairs to LA governor support – done.
- Production of a final version of the Code of Conduct (CoC) 2023-2024 for signature by the Co-Chairs – The Co-Chair (JT) drew attention to the amendments made to the draft CoC, drawing on consultation with the National Governance Association, in particular the amended paragraph 11:-  
*We will fulfil our responsibilities to school staff, ensuring a safe working environment, support for their wellbeing, and acting fairly and without bias*  
and noted the FBG's approval of this document; and signed the document on behalf of governors.
- Submission of response to LA consultation on secondary schools. KC noted that Blatchington Mill had agreed with comments submitted by other schools and the period of consultation had now ended. KC drew attention to a four week representation period now in force; there would be a lot of attention paid locally to the outcome. The Co-Chair (JH) noted that the school's focus would be on the proposed change to the admissions criteria and the Free School Meals (FSM) students impact (increased numbers). KC added that transport would be an important issue to bear in mind as well and noted the school would plan carefully for this cohort.
- Review of high prior attainment school policy at next FBG meeting – to be done.

## 6. Headteacher report

### *Tragic event and fire*

- 6.1. KC stated that the last week had been the hardest of her career. KC reported to the meeting, that all school staff had stepped up to the challenge and conducted themselves brilliantly. KC added that she had felt well supported by governors and their numerous messages of support. KC drew attention in particular, that the senior leadership team (SLT) – Lizzie Edmed, Sarah Hextall, Lee Evans, Alexis Crawford, Marcus Bennison and Brandon Hughes had been exceptional in this regard, on every level and had worked relentlessly. KC noted too that families had been very supportive and school staff complimentary about the SLT. KC emphasised that these terrible circumstances had shown clearly how great a team there was in the school.
- 6.2. In terms of education, BH stated that the SLT was picking up all the usual areas, as well as continuing with the reactive work. With regard to communications, KC drew attention to all relevant information now being on the website, with more and more updates being posted on a regular basis. KC added that the school was also focussing on staff and student well-being.
- 6.3. KC drew attention to the tragic death of the member of staff, the weekend before the fire and stated that supportive measures were being taken. With regard to his funeral (due to take place on 8 February), she would speak to the Co-Chairs about staff attendance.

- 6.4. SH provided an update of the fire aftermath; utilities supply (electrics, water and gas) had been isolated, with a check on damage being carried out and planning for reconnection. On the latter point, SH stated that specialist contractors would visit on 29 January to look at this task of reconnection. SH stated that a structural surveyor had visited the premises on 25 January and would produce an official report. SH added that hazardous materials would be removed on 26 January. SH believed that a week from now, further areas in the school presently closed off would be re-opened after a deep clean; including the alternative provision (AP) site.
- 6.5. Governors asked if there were any areas of the site that would take longer to reopen. SH believed that the girls' toilets may not be accessible until the summer term; in addition, there had been a lot of smoke damage to the design classrooms and concern about the stair well.
- 6.6. Governors asked about any possible impact on examinations being taken. SH did not think this was the case; the fire doors had worked well in minimising damage, in particular the PE and sports hall where examinations were taken.

#### *Other updates*

6.7. KC drew attention to:-

- updates being made to the OfSTED inspection handbook, including consideration of headteachers and senior leaders well-being;
- publication of the government transgender guidance – some aspects would be problematic and possible legal challenges if implemented as it stood;
- work on SLT roles and responsibilities was ongoing and would be shared with staff when complete;
- the School Improvement Plan (SIP) – the newly appointed assistant headteacher (AHT) had started work and would be involved with student development and voice; also on safeguarding (more detail would be provided shortly).

#### *Attendance*

6.8. LE stated that the general attendance picture was good; with Years 11 and 10 at 91% and Year 7 at 94% in the current week. LE confirmed that the Year teams were making a significant number of welfare calls to families of vulnerable students; work was ongoing in getting the AP up and running again after the fire.

6.9. LE spoke too of :-

- emotion coaching and a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) trauma practice session – interactions by staff with students, including a restorative conversations process and supporting staff to reset their approaches, where needed, in managing 'Restore and Repair' conversations with students);
- Musharaf Asghar from the 'Educating Yorkshire' television programme had recently visited the school to give a talk to Year 11s on making the most of relationships, which had been well received;

- a Year 9 trip to Legal and General to see an office in operation as part of the 'Dare to Dream' programme;
- students had held a Blatchington Mill Anti-Racist Community (BARC) exploratory meeting, including diversity themes, a culture day and becoming a supportive group.

#### *Quality of Education*

6.10. BH spoke of managing the twin track of face to face and remote learning education – staff teams had worked well in putting together concrete guidance.

#### *Mock Examinations*

BH drew attention to:-

- Year 11s would receive their mock examination results next week – compared to last year, these would be an improvement but a different cohort was now in place;
- progress was still unfortunately negative – the school was not where it wanted to be on English and mathematics;
- improvements to English literature, sociology, Spanish and French;
- numbers of pupils from Year 11 not attending school had increased (2% last year, 5% this year) – this issue was being worked on by the attendance team, to encourage a number of students to do at least some examinations;
- mathematics – a trend had been reversed in that boys were doing better than girls;
- mock examinations had been taken earlier this year, allowing the school more time now to manage outcomes;
- changes made to the review and planning process – this had had an impact on Year 11;
- provision of incentivised targeted revision for students;
- identification of a group of students for emotional and anxiety support.

6.11. Governors asked about the impact of the fire on Year 11 examination work. BH drew attention in particular to design; the school would apply for special consideration to the relevant examination board.

6.12. The Co-Chair (JT) asked if students had shown signs of anxiety over the last ten days. BH stated that there had been instances of anxiety detected; but this had been confined to stress about examinations and course work rather than effects of the fire.

6.13. The Co-Chair (JT) noted that there was due to be a parents workshop on 31 January 2024 and recommended the school plan an approach to manage questions put about the fire. BH confirmed this workshop would take place on site and the fire would be raised in the introductory talk.

6.14. The Co-Chair (JT) recommended there be a governors' presence at the parents' workshop; the Co-Chair (JH) agreed to take this idea forward.

#### *Curriculum*

6.15. BH spoke of :-

- Key Stage 4 curriculum choices which would be launched after half term – an options booklet would be produced;
- senior students would mentor about their experiences;
- the Year 8 pathway programme would be started at Easter;
- timetable changes and support of heads of department;
- visits to primary schools;
- common structure – timeline for activities;
- movement of CPD time;
- team discussion on pedagogy;
- data collection – well received by all teams, the process had been changed so that students received data in tutor time (attainment comparisons) allowing them to do reflective work and think about their learning, departments could add individual feedback which could be used at parents evenings.

6.16. Governors asked about the order of reflection and receipt of data by students. BH stated that it used to be that students reflected and then received data; now they received data first and then reflected.

6.17. BH went on to talk about :-

- ten students writing speeches, with the aim of entering the next stage of a competition;
- literacy interventions for Year 7 and 8 students which had had a good impact;
- Year 10 students reading with Year 8s;
- a number of forthcoming CPD sessions;
- higher attaining and prior attainment students – they would be mentored to see what more could be done.

## **7. Budget and Administration**

7.1. SH spoke of:-

- *human resources and staffing* – advertising of vacant teacher positions and recent appointments;
- *health & safety and premises* – a recent fire and rescue service visit which had identified a contradiction with local authority advice (fire extinguishers);
- *Network and Data* – the school was migrating to a new system (the facilities team had done commendable work) and network services were working well;
- work with Year 11s on Prom fundraising;
- *sustainability summit* – work by students on a project with other schools on shared priorities on waste;

- *ski trip* at half term – there had been challenges with the current provider and the school was taking mitigating action;
- *finance and budgets* – the most recent outturn forecast had shown a surplus of £411K (compared to a surplus of £261K originally budgeted), this included a government grant of £100K for the teachers' pay award and allowance for a significant staff turnover (teachers leaving who had been on high salaries replaced by new staff on low scales), a deficit of £999K was forecast for the end of the next financial year.

7.2. The Co-Chair (JH) asked about the financial impact to the school of the fire. SH expected the school to be fully covered by insurance for repairs to the damage caused. SH added that the loss adjuster had visited the premises, to whom the loss of income from the canteen had been raised; the school were issuing supermarket vouchers to all eligible students.

7.3. The Co-Chair (JT) asked if the school was looking at alternative sources of income from lettings. SH stated that this was not yet being done.

## **8. Safeguarding**

8.1. KC stated that the school was working on the safeguarding audit and will submit this to the LA.

## **9. Governor training**

9.1. The Co-Chair (JT) noted a nil return.

## **10. Governors Skills Audit exercise**

10.1. JMo introduced this exercise by noting this was an NGA model and new approach; whereby the board would work as a whole on competencies, application of skills and experiences. JMo drew attention to a Red, Amber and Green (RAG) rated set of fourteen questions and invited contributions.

10.2. JMo set out question by question as follows:-

*Q1 - Do we have strategy development experience? RAG rating of Green.*

Governors agreed on a response of 'Yes', at range of levels and in different sectors and made the following comments:-

- Some areas of improvements or develop around greater involvement of governors in the values, aims, ethos of the school.
- Emotional wellbeing of pupils as an area of focus here. Staff welfare.
- Greater understanding of each other's competencies.

*Q2 - Can we identify key strategic risks and evaluate their potential impact? RAG rating of Amber.*

Governors believed they had competencies around risk analysis and disaster recovery; but were unsure whether they had adequate coverage of all

key risks and mitigations. Governors noted that many risks were covered by governance processes, reports and committees; and the school had a policy structure. Governors commented that reporting and assurance was needed and made the following points:-

- Disaster Recovery processes
- A Schoolwide Risk Register?
- A Policy Register, mapped and 'evergreening'

*Q3 - Can we interpret and evaluate budget monitoring reports? RAG rating of Amber.*

Governors agreed a response of 'Yes' and stated that the Finance committee provided a wide array of skills. Governors commented that reporting (RAG ratings) provided an opportunity to challenge and gain assurance but believed that the FBG had yet to be challenged, in recent years with current governors. Governors made the following specific comments:-

- FBG members who are non-experts need to be able to check and gain understanding, thus assurance. Agenda design need to provide time and space, therefore.
- Governors might need training.

*Q4 - Do we understand how the school's curriculum meets the needs of all pupils? RAG rating of Amber.*

Governors commented that they had a termly Quality of Education Committee, chaired by education senior leader. Governors noted that regular live/in-year progress reports were supplied by the school, including by different groups of students, plus detailed final outcomes analysis. Governors added that they received updates about curriculum intent, structures and professional developments in teams and with staff and these are reported to full board. Governors made the following specific points:-

- Is the curriculum set up for ALL students (e.g. Pupil Premium, Low Prior Attainment)? Need to find time in agendas to provide challenge.
- Curriculum Outcomes Data needs to be clearer, including governor skills in interpretation.
- Accuracy of data – the need for assurance.

*Q5 - Do we know how to evaluate educational performance? RAG rating of Amber.*

Governors noted that this point had been discussed in the previous question and the link between evidence, monitoring, intervention and evaluation by SLT was strong as were development and quality systems. Governors made the following comments:-

- Trends need to be more carefully scrutinised.
- KS3 evidence needs to be developed.

*Q6 - Are we well-informed about the views and needs of key stakeholders?*  
RAG rating of Amber.

Governors believed that Students, Parents and Staff were a priority. Governors commented that there were many examples of very positive relations across the community (local community, Local Authority, employers also should be considered as well as some scoping about what, why, who, when, how on feedback loops). Governors made the following comment:-

- Stakeholder Voice systems may need to be augmented to provide longitudinal reports to FBG. This would need clear purpose and high quality design.

*Q7 - Is our headteacher appraisal panel suitably experienced and trained?*  
RAG rating of Green.

Governors agreed a response of 'Yes' and added that confidentiality required complete transparency, but there was a competent panel delegated to conduct this process. Governors made the following comment:-

- Some clarification about the process and an overall sense of progress to FBG would be beneficial.

JMo thanked governors for their contributions and comments to these seven questions and noted there were seven more to complete at a later stage:-

- Q8 - Do we have positive, collaborative governor relationships? ;
- Q9 - Do we understand how our board delegates its work;
- Q10 - Can we speak up if we have concerns about unethical behaviour or a lack of transparency?
- Q11 - Do we know when independent, expert advice may be required?
- Q12 - Do we know what our legal and compliance responsibilities are?
- Q13 - Do we have knowledge, experience or training that helps us to promote diversity and inclusion?
- Q14 - Do we know how to build the knowledge needed to be an effective governor?

## **Actions**

- Review of high prior attainment school policy at next FBG meeting
- Review and approval of school bereavement policy



- Discussion of high prior attainment policy at next FBG

**Next meeting – Thursday 21 March 2024**

These minutes are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

Signed ...

Position ...

Date ...