

BEST Trustees' Meeting

30 January 2024, 10:00am – 12:00pm

BEST House, Conference Room

Attendees: Ilona Bond (IB), Paul Walker (PW), Alan Lee (AL), Tony Sanderson (TS) David Morgan (DM), Jerry Tonge (JT), Nafia Baust (NB), Craig Smith (CS), Alison Wilshaw (AW) and Kim Rowe (KR)

Meeting Chair: Ilona Bond

Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphries

Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest:

NB is an employee of Partnership Education

IB is a Board Member of the OLICAT Board of Trustees

Approval of previous minutes:

- Trustees' meeting minutes 12/12/23 - previous actions checked - approved and signed electronically.
- AGM minutes 12/12/23 – approved and signed electronically.

Previous Actions:

- Trustees to reflect on Members comments regarding the nurseries – ongoing
- CMA Ofsted Report Shared with Trustees
- Risk Register template/process reviewed – an agenda item for further discussion

Introduction

NB joined the BEST board of trustees earlier this month – IB welcomed NB to the meeting/Board.

IB also welcomed guest speaker, CMA Principal, Sarah Fraher (SF), to the meeting.

Campton Academy (CMA) Ofsted Inspection – Guest Speaker: Sarah Fraher

Pre-read: CMA Ofsted Report distributed prior to the meeting – see report for more detail

SF provided trustees with an overview of CMA's recent Ofsted Inspection. The inspection took place over two days:

Day one with two inspections and Day two with one Inspector. The structure of the two days discussed:

- The reading curriculum is well sequenced – children enjoy reading and spoke positively about it
- Maths Lead and subject Director interviewed – Maths is on task and a strong focus on developing fluency and peer support articulated/demonstrated
- Behaviour was monitored for 10-15 minutes of the lunch break on both days; kindness witnessed and pupils showed an understanding of behavioural expectations
- Deep dive conducted into Computers, with each year group reviewed. Head TLA leads on computing and helps develop the curriculum. Positive feedback received and strong pupil/parental e-safety offering
- Single Central Record all present and correct but interrogated thoroughly to ensure understanding
- Safeguarding training, process and procedure together with live scenarios reviewed and scrutinised. The Ofsted Inspector said CMA's Safeguarding is exemplary but for reporting purposes can only use 'effective'
- SEND and monitoring arrangements, together with a calendar of events reviewed
- School Development Plan questioned and supporting evidence reviewed regarding internal and trust support
- Behaviour Policy reviewed and discussed with questions around how CMA encourage positive behaviour
- Attendance monitoring process and systems discussed, as was the emotional support offered to pupils from military families. Ofsted provided good feedback on CMA's monitoring arrangements
- Local authority challenges questioned and discussed
- Staff support/training discussed

Summary: Leaders know subjects well. Trust support is evident. Children are motivated and pupils with SEN are well catered for. Staff are engaged. SF believes pupil context to be important with effectively managing behaviour, as some pupils respond better to being spoken to on their own, in order to maximise learning output.

CMA achieved an Ofsted 'Good' rating. SF is disappointed with the rating, as CMA achieves much more than was evidenced during the inspection (including outcomes in top one percent nationally) but feels the rating reflects CMA at that moment in time. Trustees commended SF, CMA Staff, Governors and pupils for their successful inspection.

SF left the meeting

WG joined the meeting

BEST Mindfulness – Guest Speaker: Will George

Pre-read: Mindfulness Impact Summary document shared prior to the meeting – see document for more detail
Will (WG) presented a PPT to trustees providing an overview of the Mindfulness work undertaken across BEST during 2023-24, together with the details of growth and impact. WG, as BEST's Mindfulness Coach, attends school Inset days to introduce staff to Mindfulness and the make them aware of the BEST offering:

- All BEST staff have access to Mindfulness training. To date, 127 staff (10 cohorts) have attended the Mindfulness foundation course. 67 staff (six cohorts) have accessed the Mindfulness Leadership courses
- Eight schools attend the termly BEST Mindfulness Strategy meetings led by WG and supported by AL
- Three senior leaders are receiving one to one Mindfulness coaching
- 350 Online Community Members via the BEST Mindfulness platform, VivaEngage
- 14 staff have trained via MiSP to teach Mindfulness to pupils; 36 courses have been delivered to pupils
- Four schools with Mindfulness on the timetable: SWA, ETA, LVA and CMA
- 1500+ pupils have received an introduction to Mindfulness via school assemblies
- Positive pupil feedback received
- A cluster wellbeing pupil conference took place last week, the event was framed through the lens of mindfulness.

AL commended WG for the positive work being undertaken across BEST. BEST is one of four multi-academy trusts nationally offering mindfulness – a real USP for BEST. Mindfulness at BEST started with staff, then pupils and in time will hopefully become a community offering (if there is an appetite). Trustees thanked WG for all his work.

WG left the meeting

Matters Arising

Pre-read: Termly Health & Safety Report distributed prior to the meeting – see document for more detail

GDPR: No ICO reportable incidents since the last trustees' meeting.

Safeguarding: Nothing of note reportable safeguarding incidents since the last trustees' meeting.

Health & Safety: No Riddor reportable incidents since the last trustees' meeting.

Report taken as read and CS invited questions. CS provided trustees with an overview:

Happy with report. PBA snagging issues with the exception of the top floor bannister have been resolved; a solution has been found with a cost of £40,000. As yet, a decision has not been made as to who will pay for this, as the current bannister design is H&S compliant. However, the beams (Principal concerned pupils can access) were not included and signed off as part of the original design. The manufacturer of the PBA doors has found a solution/fix – this will take place during February Half-term; Wilmot Dixon will cover the cost and warranties will not be affected.

Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Update

Pre-read: Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Minutes (9/1/2024) distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Nursery Manager's Report distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes and report for more detail

AL, as Chair of the Subsidiaries' Executive Committee provided trustees with an overview, drawing on the information provided within the minutes and Nursery Manager's Report, there are four key areas:

1. Attracting and retaining staff is critical
2. SIA/external reports are positive – the Nursery Manager, RH is very good
3. Government funding model is not working. CBC are taking 15% of the funds, compared to an average 5% taken by other local authorities nationally. BEST is looking into whether there is an option to opt out
4. Financial situation remains a problem (£24,000 deficit). BEST is commissioning an external report to see if there are things we could do differently. Nurseries rent or their 5% contributions to BEST could be reviewed, although it was noted the central support offered to nurseries exceeds their contributions. BEST await a date for the review and will share the report with trustees in due course.

Trustees asked what impact Shefford Nursery moving to term-time only had had on their finances. To which, AL advised nothing financial but there has been a positive effect on staff morale as many are parents of young children.

Capital and Estates Committee Update

Pre-read: Capital & Estates Committee Minutes (9/1/2024) distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for detail NB, as Chair of the Capital and Estates Committee provided trustees with an overview:

- Awaiting the conditions survey for Castle Newnham (CN) and looking into what contributions Bedford Borough may be looking to make
- Condition surveys have dictated SCA spending for the past five years. Decision was made to leave the commissioning of the next surveys an extra year or two to allow funds to be spent on the green agenda and school betterment
- Committee Members were supportive of the Green Plan presented by CS
- Committee Members agreed to pause the Development Strategy Plan in favour of other large projects currently taking place e.g. 2Tier
- The CBC quote for the LSA Reception costs are within the provision previously made by the Committee
- No success in obtaining funds from CBC towards PBA's electrical bill. Committee Members felt that after two years the claim should be closed down, subject to a conversation with the Principal .
Update: CS has not broached this subject with the Principal as their LGB have since re-chased the issue directly with CBC
- Committee Members were advised ETA need access to the Pendleton Centre and approved, on the recommendation of CS, pursuing the Stevenage Leisure (SL) contract
Update: CS advised SL are unwilling to sign the contract with the inclusion of utilities (highlighted to SL by Active All as part of their take over due diligence). As such, all options are now available for consideration.

Trustees asked for further information regarding a school's overspend of Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) monies. CS provided details and advised this is now being monitored closely. CS is reluctant to revoke Principal autonomy to manage their own DFC but this may need to be considered, if more overspends are seen.

Monthly Cash Flow and Management Accounts

Finance and Audit Committee members i.e. DM, AL, IB, PW and JT receive the cashflow reports on behalf of the board of trustees, all of whom agreed they are happy with the accounts and are satisfied the Trust is financially sound.

Castle Newnham Update

CN is progressing well. The new framework is of a high quality and requires more supporting information/evidence than with previous application; it has been good and shows strong due diligence. The application will go to the Regional Teachers' Board on 29 February 2024.

CN's Federation Principal retires this summer; it is not clear if CN's LGB intend to re-appoint for this position. AL is meeting with CN's LGB next Monday to discuss models. Legally two schools, that are run as one.

BEST is awaiting CN's condition survey report; nothing of concern has been flagged.

Submission of BEST Accounts

BEST Accounts were approved and signed on 12 December, as per the minutes from the last trustees' meeting. However, our auditors, Bishop Fleming, then made some last minute 'presentational changes' on the last day of term that required further trustee approval. Accounts submission to the EFSA was due by 31 December 2023.

Trustees' approved the accounts via email on 22 December 2023; the accounts were then signed by AL and IB. It has recently come to light that BF failed to sign the subsidiary accounts and letters of support within the required 14 days of trustee approval and as such, further trustee confirmation was required that no changes have occurred. Trustees expressed disappointment with the service received from their BF Partner, AW.

Trustees discussed and gave consideration as to whether BEST should overturn the decision (agreed 12 Dec 2023) to remain with BF as auditors for one further year. **Decision:** On the whole, the audit was OK and the BF team assigned to BEST did well. However, trustees believe the BF partner (AW) demonstrated unusual and bad practice. An audit review meeting has been scheduled for 1 February 2024. **Action:** Review team to request a new partner going forward.

BEST Admissions

Pre-read: BEST Admissions September 2024 document distributed prior to the meeting – see document for detail
Overall, first choice options have gone up. Schools have been responding to the challenge by attracting pupils outside the usual catchment; data relating to Bedford Borough and Hertfordshire first choices have not yet been received. LSA figures show an increase in second choice; these may come to fruition as many of the local schools are oversubscribed. School offers are made on 16 April (SWA = 1 March) and will provide a clearer picture.

Policies

Pre-read: All policies and review papers shared with trustees prior to the meeting – see documents for details

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved, subject to Union Consultation, Whistleblowing Policy for BEST-wide use.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Equality Policy for BEST-Wide use.

Equality review paper reviewed and discussed. Trustees noted the inclusion of ensuring ‘admission arrangements do not discriminate’ and ensuring ‘equal opportunities in the trust’s staff recruitment’, and asked for assurances that trustees would be provided with the necessary information.

Action: CS to provide trustees with annual Recruitment and Admission equality reports.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Final Admission Arrangements for September 2025.

Risk Register (template/process review)

Pre-read: Risk Register Draft template distributed prior to the meeting – see document for more detail

Trustees reviewed the proposed template and discussed the suggested process. The Risk Register has been split into three core areas, each with an Executive Lead: Operation/Estate = CS; Finance = KR and Education = AW. CS proposed that each of the leads take their sections to the relevant committee of the board for review, with a whole document annual review at full board level. Priority settings have been removed as colour coded ranking will determine priority by default.

Decision: Trustees approved the suggested Risk Register template and process:

- Operational Risks will be reviewed on a termly basis by the Capital and Estates Committee
- Financial Risks will be reviewed on a termly basis by the Finance and Audit Committee
- Educational Risks will be reviewed on a termly basis by the Performance Committee

AOB

DM questioned whether there is any flexibility within the 2Tier models offered by CBC for the Shefford/Stotfold Cluster. CS believes none of the models offered provide a collective suitable solution for BEST Schools. A 2025/2026 transition from 3Tier to 2Tier is now unlikely, thus creating time to pause and await CBC’s next proposal.

Confidential Item:

BEST Senior Leaders Appraisals

YH, CS, AW and KR left the meeting whilst trustees discussed BEST Senior Leaders Appraisal.

Pre-read: BEST Senior Leaders Appraisal Summary Document 2022-23 shared with trustees (only) prior to the meeting.

Next meeting: 10:00am on 19 March 2024 at BEST House.

J. Bond

Minutes approved and electronically signed 19 March 2024.