

## **BEST Trustees' Meeting**

19 March 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), Nafia Baust (NB), Craig Smith (CS), Alison Wilshaw (AW) and Kim Rowe (KR)

**Meeting Chair:** Ilona Bond

**Guest Speaker:** Steve Adams (SA)

**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 30/01/24 - previous actions checked - approved and signed electronically.

### **Introduction**

IB welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced PBA Principal, Steve Adams. Steve was invited to the start of the meeting to provide trustees with an overview of PBA's Ofsted Inspection experience.

### **Pix Brook Academy (PBA) Ofsted Inspection – Guest Speaker: Steve Adams**

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

PBA had their first inspection since opening in 2019. The school achieved an Ofsted overall rating 'Good'; Leadership and Behaviour were rated outstanding. SA provided trustees with an overview of the experience:

- The experience is intense (extensive framework with 492 bullets)
- As a standalone academy would be lonely and a lot of responsibility, SA welcomed the support available from being in a MAT; the SI team were available throughout the process
- SA believes PBA were at an advantage as a new school, as they knew roughly when to expect Ofsted and were able to prepare accordingly; something SA has been able to instil into staff since interview
- SA has been at the school since it launched and has been involved in everything at the school e.g. creating the ethos, systems, procedures and appointing staff
- PBA have a lot of new/inexperienced staff and so for many, this was their first experience
- A balance between allowing staff the opportunity to be involved and gain Ofsted experience, versus using the right people with the experience to use the right language
- Behaviour over the two days was good, but inspectors did engage in a lengthy discussion regarding three boys who tried to push to the front of the breakfast queue
- Quality of Education was questioned on the back of lesson observations; had SA been present, he would have made the inspector aware it was not the usual standard but that the teacher was nervous
- Too much information offered by SENCO, thus leading to some deep digging in regards to pupil premium
- Deep dives into Maths, English and Science – school able to offer two others, one strong and one weak
- Governance session with governors and trustees went well and demonstrated good support
- For personal development to be outstanding, SDP needed to be exemplary and worthy of sharing with others

- Inspectors gave no indication outcomes were deemed as ‘broadly average’ as such, case for showing the schools outcomes are above national average were not to hand
- There was much to prepare and the days were long
- SA feels the school has not been open long enough (done a full cycle) to evidence excellence/outstanding and feels the decision is fair. This said, SA believes much is based on luck.

Trustees thanked SA for his candid overview and passed thanks/praise onto PBA for doing so well at inspection. AL thanked SA for his insight and wisdom and asked that he share his experience at the next Executive Team meeting.

*SA left the meeting.*

### **Matters Arising**

**Pre-read:** Annual GDPR Report distributed prior to the meeting – see document for more detail

**GDPR:** CS provided a summary of the annual GDPR report:

Themes similar to previous years i.e. information left unattended and correspondence to wrong email addresses. The latter is invariably always contained within BEST and therefore not a breach. Schools respond well and DPLs have recently attended refresher training on understanding reportable breaches. BEST work with transparency, keeping ICO aware of any potential breaches. Last year BEST had two reportable breaches – ICO were comfortable with BEST’s approach.

**Safeguarding:** Nothing of note reportable safeguarding incidents since the last trustees’ meeting. New ICT Filtering and Monitoring being implemented. Minor KCSIE change and will be updated at the SG Lead meeting tomorrow.

**Health & Safety:** No Riddor reportable incidents since the last trustees’ meeting. H&S Audits completed across the trust during January and February, awaiting reports.

### **Performance Committee Update**

**Pre-read:** Performance Committee Minutes (12/3/2024) distributed prior to the meeting

- TS provided trustees with an overview of the forecasted data for each key stage. Most on track and monitoring/intervention is in place where data has fallen slightly below national average (see minutes for detail). Committee members are keen to see SWA achieve positive P8 data
- SIA have praised BEST with effectiveness of cross-trust working ‘challenge but in a supportive manner’. AL has written to the SIA to thank them for their support and comments
- RBA are likely to have their Ofsted inspection very soon and therefore a focus of discussion – training/support is in place
- A slight amendment to the educational section of the Risk Register has been made to ensure it aligns with the BEST Vision, for 30% of BEST schools to achieve an Ofsted rated Outstanding
- Committee members are pleased with and extended thanks to the SI team for all their cross trust work.

### **Finance and Audit Committee Update**

**Pre-read:** Finance & Audit Committee Minutes (05/3/2024) distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for detail

**Pre-read:** SRMSA submission distributed prior to the meeting for information purposes

DM provided trustees with a summary from the Finance and Audit Committee meeting:

- Budget assumptions were discussed. Observer NM, provided input.
- SRMSA has been submitted – document shared with trustees for information purposes.
- Much work has been done in regards to the Solar Panel leases; it is less expensive to renew the leases.

Committee members discussed various options posed at previous meetings relating to the nurseries: Nurseries are rolled into the MAT and whether their debt is written off? The latter has since been looked into further and is not without implication. **Action:** KR to continue investigation into the implications of writing off nursery debt.

Trustees discussed whether the nurseries sustainable and whether a better solution would be to help (on a short term basis) by reducing the day to day running costs. Nurseries currently pay 5% to BEST but in reality, the central team support provided disproportionately exceeds their fee.

The nurseries have introduced additional income generators – the impact of which is not yet costed.

**Decision:** Trustees would like new rates to be modelled. **Action:** KR to model impact change in costs.

**Decision:** Trustees have agreed to look at supporting the nurseries on a temporary basis via two possible avenues: Hub Manager costs and Shefford Nurseries Rent.

**Action:** KR to review and prepare a paper on the financial support BEST could look to offer.

Any trust support is offered on the assumption the nurseries are doing all they can to improve their finances.

Arlesey's debt write-off needs to be looked into and be much tighter.

**Action:** AW to look at the GMA and Arlesey nursery constitution and provide a paper with the advantages and disadvantages of being one i.e. GMA nursery and school.

### **Monthly Cash Flow and Management Accounts**

Finance and Audit Committee members i.e. DM, AL, IB and PW 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. However, trustees are keen for schools to present a balance budget for 2024/25 to avoid a further reduction in reserves.

### **BGHB Consultation 2024/25**

**Pre-Read:** Compassionate Leadership document distributed prior to the meeting – see document for detail  
BEST Governance Handbook (BGHB) consultation ends on 28 March 2024, trustees to email YH with any suggestions for inclusion.

The BEST Action Plan aligns to the white paper from March 2022. AL felt Operation was underplayed and added a sixth key area.

In July 2023 (post production and distribution of the last edition of the BGHB) trust descriptors reinforced the five areas identified within the White Paper. However, following an External Advisory Body Review, this has now significantly changed with a focus upon Finance and Operation, Governance and Leadership i.e. role of the Board, Chair and CEO. AL will ensure the updated descriptors are reflected within the 2024/25 Scheme of Delegation (appendix 1 of the BGHB).

The DfE's Governance Handbook has been replaced with seven guides specific to either maintained or Academy schools – the guides represent significant change:

e.g. Local Governing Bodies are Local Committees

Purpose of Governance has been redefined in terms of:

- Strategic Leadership
- Accountability and Assurance
- Strategic Engagement

Much of the content remains the same but the language and emphasis has changed. Vision will need revisiting; the role of the Governance Professional needs to be clear and the Scheme of Delegation needs updating to ensure the role of the Chair is clear.

## 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, Flexible Working Policy for BEST-wide use.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved, subject to Union Consultation, Family Related Leave Policy for BEST-wide use.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved, subject to Union Consultation, Leave of Absence Policy for BEST-wide use.

**Action:** Typo within the third section of 4.7 to be corrected: Reasonable to Reasonably.

**Action:** YH to provide further information to trustees relating to leave of absence relating to a child's death.

## AOB

Emails have been exchanged by trustees since the last meeting to confirm the following changes:

Jerry Tonge resigned from the board of trustees on 1 February 2024.

Maggie Farrar has been co-opted and will join the next trustees meeting as an observer pending formal onboarding.

**Confidential items:** [REDACTED]

**Confidential item:** [REDACTED]

**Confidential items:** [REDACTED]

*NB left the meeting owing to a Conflict of Interest with the final agenda item.*

## ICT Tendering Decision

The ICT tendering process has now concluded.

All ten schools were involved in the process. The process/framework was led by Schools Buying Club.

Representatives from BEST Central, one Principal and four Vice Principals attended Bidders day.

The panel reached a consensus to move forward with Partnership Education (PE) based on the balance of risk and value for money.

Going forward, the support offered to PBA needs to be more in line with other large BEST Schools.

Large ICT contracts would be in addition to the service agreement e.g. onboarding a new school.

Every school has an ICT strategy in place.

Advice has been sought and costs can not be negotiated unless all bidders have the opportunity to reprice.

**Recommendation:** CS would like to award the three year contract (option of additional two years) to PE. Stage one would be to issue an 'award letter' to the successful bidder, following which BEST would enter into a 10 day stand still. Subject to no objections, CS can then discuss/try to negotiate costs such as the 7% mark up cost on appliances with PE.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the decision to move forward with Partnership Education.

**Next meeting:** 10:00am on 14 May 2024 at BEST House.

J. Bond

Minutes approved and electronically signed on 14/05/2024