

BEST Trustees' Meeting

2 July 2024, 10:00am – 12:00pm

BEST House, Conference Room



Attendees: Ilona Bond (IB), Paul Walker (PW), Tony Sanderson (TS), David Morgan (DM), Maggie Farrar (MF), Craig Smith (CS), Alison Wilshaw (AW), Kim Rowe (KR) and Akhtar Ahamed (AA)

Apologies: Alan Lee (AL) and Nafia Baust (NB)

Board Chair: Ilona Bond

Guest/Observer: Akhtar Ahamed

Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphryes (YH)

Notifications of any perceived conflicts of interest: None

Previous Minutes (14/5/2024): Reviewed and approved for electronic signature.

Actions reviewed, discussed and confirmed as complete. Trustees' process for reviewing pupil admission numbers is under review.

Introduction

IB thanked everyone for their attendance, particularly AA who attended the meeting as an observer pending formal onboarding to the Board of Trustees on 1 September 2024 and MF who was attending her first full board meeting as a Trustee. IB thanked trustees for their support and kind messages and provided an update on AL.

Langford Village Academy (LVA) Ofsted Inspection

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

LVA Principal sent apologies but provided AW with some notes to share with trustees. AW provided a summary: LVA received intervention and support following their last (ungraded) Ofsted Inspection 18 months ago, the results of which were disappointing. School and Leadership Action Plans were put in place and a review of leadership capacity across the two schools. Trustees had approved two leadership appointments to help drive standards. The results of which were reflected in LVA's latest Ofsted Inspection in April 2024. The school was on the cusp of 'outstanding' and secured a very strong 'Good'. Changes/improvements made were discussed during the school/Ofsted phone call. The original report referenced behaviour, the school challenged this.

The school provided the inspectors with context around last Summers' SATs results; half the cohort left to join extended middle schools, of which several of the remaining pupils had SEN. Furthermore, the newly appointed primary staff have now been trained.

The school Principal and SI Team have provided staff training around SEND, providing challenge for all pupils, presenting case studies for Ofsted and devising 'one page wonders' for easy recall of key information and evidence. One page wonders have been adopted by many BEST schools.

LVA use an alternative provision recommended by CBC for one of their pupils. Ofsted asked if this provision is Ofsted registered – it is not; the inspector confirmed the provision will need a follow up visit from Ofsted.

Three inspectors attended day one, dropping to two inspectors of day two.

Curriculum, SEND and pastoral were presented well and all members of staff rallied round and played their part; a very different feel to the last inspection. High absenteeism seen, albeit improved since last time but the school were able to provide case studies and demonstrate robust processes.

Both LVA and GHA have moved away from individual pupil books for 'personal development' as completion was time consuming and took away from healthy class discussions/debates. Instead the class now collectively fill in a class 'personal development' book in which sessions are summarised and photos/samples included. Ofsted were impressed and deemed this a much better process.

AW was questioned by Ofsted at the end of day one in regards to leadership, capacity and SATs data. Assemblies were attended by the inspectors. Teaching in the school is very good but one teacher was nervous. Following a lesson observation, the teacher returned to teaching and AW demonstrated how History is taught across several different subjects e.g. Fire of London Artwork and historical debates in English. AW obtained the books while Ofsted interviewed pupils; AW and the SI team regularly visit BEST schools and review the books.

The feedback at the end of day one was positive, with no negative trail identified. Day two the inspection widened with a review of SEN and detailed review of the Early Years. Inspectors were very impressed by the care and kindness shown to each other. Behaviour of pupils and adaption of the curriculum for SEN pupils was very good.

An Outstanding rating was within grasp but the school just fell short. The Inspector commended the schools' exciting journey and looks forward to seeing what the school have achieved in another two years.

Trustees and LGB members worked well together and represented the school well.

Trustees expressed pleasure and gratitude for LVA's journey during the past 18 months – testament to the Principal, the two new members of the Leadership team and the SI Team. A real culture shift...

Trustees thanked AW for the part she and her team played in supporting the school.

Arlesey Nursery Ofsted Inspection

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

A one day inspection concluded by 2:00pm. The Inspection was hosted by the Nursery Manager and supported by the BEST SI Team and CBC. The Inspector commended the quality of staff/pupil relationships, a 'family feel'. Higher number of SEN and social services families, all of whom are well supported by the nursery; records reviewed by Ofsted. Ofsted were pleased with the curriculum and had no learning points to offer but 'needed to write something' and so wrote in the report 'To further improve the quality of the early years provision, the provider should: help staff to consistently build on activities to further stretch and challenge Children's thinking.'

Trustees discussed how the recommendation was contradictory to the report, that was very strong. AW did challenge why not Outstanding. Trustees commended the nursery for their very good inspection.

Matters Arising

Pre-read: Annual Safeguarding Summary distributed prior to the meeting – see document for more detail.

Pre-read: Individual School Safeguarding Audits distributed prior to the meeting – see audits for more detail.

Safeguarding: CS provided a summary of the safeguarding reports and summary document. Across the trust there are 1638 marks available, of which only one was identified as a 'red' risk and addressed immediately. Across BEST every provision did well, scoring a minimum of 93.7%. All schools/nurseries are tasked with addressing any red or amber risks within an agreed timeframe. A couple of items have been identified for discussion/focus at the DSL meetings.

Trustees discussed the findings from the RBA Pupil interviews; CS advised the Safeguarding Link Governor attended the meeting and they were not concerned, as it was felt an influential pupil was leading the group. A trustee asked why the low level concerns at CMA and uncertainty of process for reporting the head teacher at RBA had not been mirrored across the audits and internal scrutiny reports. There are slight differences within the review templates. However, overall the reports are very good.

GDPR: Two reportable ICO incidents shared with Trustees. Action, consequence, learning and outcomes discussed. ICO deemed no further action required for both incidents. GDPR training for September has been updated to include reminders of good practice.

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

Performance Committee Update

Pre-read: Performance Committee Meeting Minutes (18/06/2024) distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for more details.

Director of Maths, AS, attended the Performance Committee meeting as a guest and to provide committee members with an overview of Maths across the trust. AS shared a very detailed and informative report and presentation with committee members, highlighting a successful uplift in Maths results across the trust.

Action: YH to share the Director of Maths Report with the full Board of Trustees.

TS as Chair of the Performance Committee provided trustees with a high level overview of the performance outcomes data/forecasts, majority of which are above or in line with 2023 national average data.

From September 2024 the Committee title will incorporate Wellbeing.

Action: AL and AW to review how Wellbeing may be incorporated and presented to the committee. MF has offered to support with this, with a suggestion of looking at how wellbeing can drive standards and attendance.

Finance & Audit Committee Update

Pre-read: Finance & Audit Committee (FAC) Meeting Minutes (18/06/2024) distributed prior to the meeting.

Pre-read: FAC Recommended 2024/25 budget for BEST and subsidiaries distributed prior to the meeting.

Pre-read: Internal Scrutiny Procurement and Safeguarding reports distributed prior to the meeting.

See above documents for more details.

DM as FAC Chair provided trustees with a summary:

A forecasted deficit for the year end (a slight improvement seen since the meeting):

BEST: FAC = £1.15 million deficit; now = £1.013 million deficit

Charity: FAC = £10,370 surplus; now = £10,713 surplus

Nurseries: FAC = £48,330 deficit; now = £31,954 deficit owing to the reduction in service charge agreed.

Losses have been budgeted for the next three years; this situation is not unique to BEST, with similar financial challenges being experienced nationally. Unless changes are made, by 2027 BEST will be looking at a reduction in reserves from £3.4 million down to £200,000. Six of the BEST ten schools are budgeting losses for the next three years, this is not sustainable. Castle Newnham have submitted a balanced budget but have no reserves. There are lots of adjustments to be made, recovery plans to be implemented and HR intervention to review staffing structures in order to balance budgets and start working back towards the vision of 5% reserves.

KR advised ETA have received some good news as the ESFA have agreed the school's application for some growth funding towards the ETA sixth form. The school are hopeful they will receive £139,000, although this has not yet been confirmed; the amount will be between £56,000 - £176,000.

AL was very clear at the Executive Team meeting on 20 June and Chairs Forum meeting on 21 June, that budgets do need to balance and that the responsibility for balancing the budgets lies with the Principal. KR, AW and HR are meeting with the schools regularly and working hard to help support the schools in achieving balanced budgets.

Trustees discussed how one of the advantages of a school joining a MAT is the financial security during troubled times. However, three years on and funds are depleting, reserves are not pooled and some difficult decisions will need to start being made if budgets are unable to balance. However, trustees were mindful of the careful balance needed for maintaining the quality of learning. CS concurred, advising this is the reason the Director of Education attends the meetings with Finance and HR to ensure there is no compromise to learning or the schools' legal responsibilities; the newly appointed Director of SEND and Safeguarding is supporting with this.

The three key factors effecting the schools' finances are:

1. Schools not at full capacity
2. High levels of staff on UPS
3. High levels of SEND

Kings Oak School in Bedford pool their LSA's, allowing for more flexibility and the teachers adapt. EHCPs are being reviewed from a need viewpoint as opposed to hours and LSA's will be allocated accordingly. AW is organising some BEST School visits to Kings Oak School to see how effectively this works.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the BEST and subsidiary budgets for submission, on the understanding that these are worse case scenario budgets and that work is taking place to improve the position.

Confirmation: Trustees were made aware and confirmed agreement, that FAC for the purposes of the auditors and HMRC (as per the letter of support provided this academic year) are aware and have authorised the support being provided for the nurseries.

Trustees commended the internal scrutiny reports on procurement and safeguarding – very positive.

RBA Changing Room Refurbishment > £250K – Board Approval Required

Pre-read: Tender Report and Plans distributed prior to the meeting – see documents for more details.

Trustees reviewed and discussed the documents submitted. CS confirmed Barkers completed the tendering process and received quotes in accordance with the financial scheme of delegation, as per their report. Quotes received have come through within budget. £200,000 of SCA funds will be used, RBA will cover the remaining costs of almost £65,000. RBA have submitted a bid for funds to make improvements to the outdoor area. YH read out an email from NB, confirming she is happy to approve the request subject to due diligence into the company's financial position. KR and CS confirmed due diligence has been completed and that they are satisfied the company (AM Builders) have capacity.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the RBA Refurbishment contract with AM Builders for £264,978.40.

External Report of Nursery Provision at BEST

Pre-read: Report of Nursery Provision at BEST distributed prior to the meeting – see report for more detail.

Dina Combe (DC), who works for a Chain of nurseries and knows the systems, provided BEST with an external report with a view to confirming whether the nurseries are a financially viable provision, following several years of deficits. The nurseries overall salary costs are high but not high for the locality on an individual level. DC when asked, did feel the nurseries are a going concern but has recommended a 'deep dive' into staffing costs i.e. absenteeism: supply costs compared to usual staffing costs; TUPE staff receive sick pay, what % of absences is TUPE staff. Consideration may need to be given to:

- minimising staff development to maintain some staffing costs at the lower level
- introducing a higher fee for new enrolments
- capping the number of Government funded sessions or being more specific around when these sessions can be used i.e. quieter times of the day, thus leaving full days available for working families.

A trustee queried the impact this may have on families in need. AW advised Government Funded sessions are not means tested. Further investigation required and more information will follow in due course.

Monthly Cashflow 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 present agreed they are satisfied the trust remains financially sound. However, much work continues across the trust to reduce costs and produce balanced budget, to ensure financial stability beyond 2027-28.

Risk Register

Pre-read: BEST 2023/24 Risk Register distributed prior to the meeting

The Master Risk Register includes the operational, financial and educational risks; trustees reviewed the document – no changes required.

The Risk Register is reviewed on a termly basis by the relevant Committee:

- Capital and Estates Committee review the operational risks
- Finance and Audit Committee review the financial risks
- Performance Committee review the educational risks

Decision: Trustees confirmed they are happy with the process and would like to continue reviewing the Risk Register in this way for the next academic year (2024/25).

Central Services Stakeholder Surveys 2023/24

Pre-read: Central Team Survey Results 2023/24 and 2021-24 comparison table distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Finance Team Survey Results 2023/24 and 2021-24 comparison table distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: SI Team Survey Results 2023/24 and 2021-24 comparison table distributed prior to the meeting

Trustees reviewed and discussed the stakeholder surveys for 2023/24 and the 2021-24 comparison tables.

Trustees concluded the stakeholder surveys for the Central and SI Team were very good, particularly the SI Team. The Finance stakeholder surveys have taken a dip, it was felt that this may be as a result of the financial challenges and therefore difficult conversations that have needed to take place this year.

Trustees noted the lower results achieved by external providers, this will continue to be monitored closely.

Castle Newnham (CN) also use Bedford Borough and Horizon HR, which will make the transition over easier. CN ICT provider is currently being reviewed.

Policies

Pre-read: The following policies were distributed prior to the meeting for review and consideration:

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Safeguarding Policy Template for BEST-wide use from 01/09/2024. *BEST DSLs were consulted as part of the review process.*

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Child-on-Child Abuse Policy Template for BEST-wide use from 01/09/2024. *BEST DSLs were consulted as part of the review process.*

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Online Safety Policy Template for BEST-wide use from 01/09/2024. *BEST DSLs were consulted as part of the review process.*

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Managing Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy for BEST-wide use from 01/09/2024. *BEST DSLs were consulted as part of the review process.* Policy will be shared with unions for information purposes.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Data Protection (GDPR) Policy including privacy notices and retention schedule for BEST-wide use from 01/09/2024. *BEST DPLs were consulted as part of the review process.* It was noted that the Data Protection Bill has still not been passed, once it has, the policy will need reviewing to reflect any changes.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Cybersecurity Policy for BEST-wide use with immediate effect.

Admission arrangements September 2026 shared for information purposes and will be reviewed next term.

BEST Governance Handbook 2024/25

Pre-read: Draft BGHB 2024/25 together with listed changes document distributed prior to the meeting.

CS provided trustees with a summary of the changes made to the BGHB; changes reflect the updates made by government, namely around strategic engagement. See supporting documentation and/or BEST Governor training for full details of changes made.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the BGHB 2024/25 for use from 1 September 2024.

Board of Trustees Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Chairs nomination results

YH shared the results of the trustee nominations and subsequent voting of Board and Committee Chairs. The process took place during May 2024 via email. There was a unanimous decision for the board to remain 'as is':

- Chair of Trustees: Ilona Bond
- Vice Chair of Trustees: Paul Walker
- Finance and Audit Committee Chair: David Morgan
- Community, Capital and Estates Committee Chair: Nafia Baust
- Performance and Wellbeing Chair: Tony Sanderson

- Safeguarding Lead Trustee: Ilona Bond
- Wellbeing Lead Trustee: Paul Walker
- NEW! Sustainability Lead Trustee: Nafia Baust

YH advised trustees nominations will need to take place next term to determine who will become Vice Chair and Wellbeing Lead Trustee when Paul steps down at the end of December 2024. MF is happy to be considered for the Wellbeing Lead Trustee.

AOB

Trustees invited to attend the CN 'Welcome' Presentation at 9:00am on 2 September 2024.

Action: YH will email trustees for individual confirmation of whether they are happy and willing to become a nursery trustee. If yes, this will be organised next term.

Martin Petts' resignation date as a BEST Member is 31 August 2024. **Action:** IB to email Martin Petts on behalf of Members and Trustees to thank him for his time and service to BEST.

IB thanked Trustees for everything they have done this academic year and wished them a wonderful Summer.

Next meeting: 10:30am on 1 October 2024 at BEST House.

J. Bond

Minutes approved by trustees and signed by Ilona Bond on 01/10/2024