

BEST Trustees' Meeting

01 October 2024, 10:30am – 12:30pm

BEST House, Conference Room

Attendees: Ilona Bond (IB), Paul Walker (PW), Alan Lee (AL), Tony Sanderson (TS), Nafia Baust (NB), Maggie Farrar (MF), Akhtar Ahamed (AA), Craig Smith (CS), Alison Wilshaw (AW), Kim Rowe (KR)

Apologies: David Morgan

Chair: Ilona Bond

Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphries

Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest: None

Previous Minutes (02/07/2024): Previous minutes reviewed and approved subject to the following amends:

- Page 2 – Ofsted look forward to seeing what LVA have achieved in three years, not two years
- Page 3 – ‘Reserves are not pooled’ to be amended to ‘Reserves are pooled’.

IB welcomed trustees to a new academic year.

Matters Arising

Safeguarding: No trustee reportable safeguarding incidents since the last trustees' meeting.

GDPR: Two GDPR breaches over the Summer relating to a subject access request (SAR) at SCA. Whilst both breaches were deemed low risk and none ICO reportable, a review is being undertaken and action taken to improve processes at SCA.

Health & Safety

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

Heavy rainfall has resulted in leaks across several schools; some of the £100,000 contingency SCA funds may need to be spent on fixing the leaks.

A trustee asked about the higher level of reportable incidents at ETA. CS advised he has looked into this and he has no concerns, he believes it is just different thresholds in regards to reporting incidents across the schools.

When asked, CS confirmed the PBA Bannisters meet building regulations.

The H&S report is pleasing and will include CNS next time round.

One civil claim is outstanding and with our Insurers legal team. In the meantime, BEST Insurance Premiums continue to be affected.

Sustainability: DfE have mandated that all schools must have Climate Action Plans and a Sustainability Lead by September 2025. A working group has been established and plans continue to look at how to save energy.

Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Update

Pre-read: Subsidiaries Executive Committee meeting minutes 24/09/24 distributed prior to the meeting

AL as Chair of the Subsidiaries' Executive Committee provided trustees with an update:

- The nurseries are beginning to look 'rosier' under AW's leadership. AW has implemented improvement plans; there has been a huge improvement in ethos. AL expressed gratitude to AW for her hard work in supporting the nurseries during the Nursery Hub Manager's maternity leave
- SIA Reports and Safeguarding Audits are good
- The nurseries financial position has improved; there has been a £40,000 improvement since last month
- The strategical plan for all primary schools to have a nursery provision has been paused owing to the pause on 2Tier
- The Charity is doing well having secured a surplus balance

- Nursery staff do not receive sick pay, thus making it easy for staff to take a day off. HR advice has been taken and conversations with staff had explaining the consequences of absences. Absences are being managed through a compassionate and supportive lens e.g. sometimes cheaper/easier to pay for a taxi if a staff member cannot get in, as opposed to paying overtime.

Community, Capital and Estates Committee (CCEC) Update

Pre-read: CCEC meeting minutes 17/09/24 distributed prior to the meeting

NB as Chair of the CCEC provided trustees with an update:

- CCEC 2024/25 Terms of Reference finalised and approved
- A lot of Capital works have taken place at a great rate and quality. This is largely owing to the good work of BEST Operations Manager, AA, and Barkers
- Condition Surveys are currently being completed, following which projects will be higher priority as opposed to betterment projects
- BEST is achieving value you for money on the projects; budgets are well managed by AA & CS year on year
- Pendleton Centre contract has been taken over by Inspire All. The clause that BEST will underwrite losses has been removed and utilities arrangement remain unchanged. The 125 lease remains the only concern as BEST keep responsibility for maintaining the buildings; income earned is put aside to address future maintenance. There may be a negotiation to be had with CBC re: the lease at a later date
- Solar panel investigation at ETA has reaped rewards with a £50,000 back payment and £7,000 per year going forward
- As the end user, BEST is not involved in the six classroom block at LSA – planning permission for the permanent class room block has not yet been submitted. Issues with the temporary block are now resolved
- Hale Trust approached SWA/BEST re: developing on a plot of land in exchange for an additional access road into SWA and a new 4G Pitch. Savills have advised against the proposition. Hale Trust have submitted planning permission and released details to local media without SWA/BEST buy in or support
- ETA now have their first year 2 at ETA Sixth Form

AL advised trustees that ETA have been experiencing sewerage issues. This is potentially as a consequence of insufficient plumbing to facilitate the school's growth from 360 to 1260 pupils. AL has requested a sewerage survey to ascertain the root cause, in order to ascertain whether sewerage should've been addressed earlier as part of the school's growth. Awaiting survey results.

Monthly Cash Flow and Management Accounts

The BEST Executive Team have collectively worked hard to improve finances.

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

BEST School Pay Award Update (Teachers & Support)

AL strongly advised trustees to approve teaching and support staff pay awards to align with the nationally approved pay awards. Budget assumptions included 3% for teachers. Subject to parliamentary approval next month, 5.5% has been approved by Government for teachers and a Core Schools budget grant (CSBG) provided for the differential until March 2025. The CSBG amounts from April – August have been estimated pending Government budgets to be agreed from April 2025. BEST budgets assumptions included a fixed rate of £1290 for support staff. However, this is being challenged by Unison. If strike action is agreed, this could drag on. Any award over and above the £1290 would also need to be covered by the CSBG.

Decision: Trustees present unanimously approved teacher and support staff pay awards in line with the parliamentary nationally approved rates to be announced next month (possibly later for support staff).

Summary of BEST Examination Results 2024

Pre-read: BEST Examination Results Summary Document 2024 distributed prior to the meeting – see document for more detail

The Performance Committee have a day scheduled in November to meet with each of the Principals to go through their results in more detail. In the meantime, AW provided trustees with a high level summary:

- EYFS: With the exception of GMA, all BEST schools compare well against L/A and N/A data. The SI Team are looking into outcomes at GMA and will provide support/intervention accordingly
- Phonics: LSA fall just below the L/A (79%) with 76%. GMA's new phonics system is now embedded and reaping rewards
- KS2: Overall results disappointing. RBA have been adversely affected by 2Tier/staff movement which has attributed to the three year decline in RBA's KS2 data. Staffing has now stabilised as a result of the 2Tier pause and improvements should be seen going forward. ETA have a new head of year 5 and 6, who has been on a full-time teaching timetable. ETA suffer with transitional pupils and movement
- LSA have transitioned to Primary this year, much of the lessons learned from the LVA transition to primary will be shared with LSA
- BEST Schools providing KS2 are working collaboratively to create a strategy for improving outcomes
- KS4/Attainment 8: Both SWA and ETA are expected to achieve above national – to be confirmed in October
- KS4/Progress 8: ETA Progress increased to 0.16, thus meaning the average grade of 0.16 higher than pupils from the same Key Stage 2 scores. SWA progress data is below the national average
- KS4: At 5+ English and Maths SWA are the highest in the L/A, closely followed by ETA
- KS4: BEST Director of SEND will be working with ETA and SWA to address required improvements for pupil premium and SEN pupils
- KS5: SWA's average A Level score increased from 2023 and the overall average grade remained at C+
- TS noted performance issues at GMA. AL concurred, advising it is not unusual to have a bad year as results can vary dependent upon the cohort. However, GMA have had a three year decline in outcomes. AW advised this does need to be addressed and is being looked into. This said, AW suspects grading consistency may play a part
- MF asked about the challenges experienced with 'transition children'. This can be tricky as some pupils have not been at the school long enough to form effective relationships before they are being asked to sit exams
- Trustees were pleased to see attendance and exclusion data, alongside boy and girl data. There is an increase in the number of girls being excluded
- Seven Ofsted Inspections were completed across BEST during 2023/24, of which, all achieved at least a Good. GHA achieved Outstanding; a very small percentage of schools with less than 100 pupils achieve this.

Castle Newnham (CNS)

- BEST successfully onboarded CNS on 1 September 2024. BEST Central Executive presented a welcome presentation during CNS Inset Day on 2 September
- Legal work and land registry completed; as the school was a federation, BEST have benefited from freehold land
- CNS LCB Chair will remain in role until December 2024 and then a governor for the remaining academic year, standing down thereafter
- A staff misconduct dismissal is being appealed – CS will join the panel
- All systems have been transferred over
- Estimated reserves position at 31 August 2024 is £301,111 surplus, awaiting final agreement from the Local Authority.
- Historically CNS have completed their budgets/accounts in line with the financial year. 2024/25 budget is being finalised to align with BEST schools (was set until March 2025 as a local authority school). CNS currently have a projected £188,000 deficit; there are a number of assumptions to be questioned
- An area of focus will be the 2025/26 deficit budget, that KR hopes will achieve a small balance budget

Policies

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

Decision: Trustees present unanimously approved the Attendance Policy for BEST-Wide use with immediate effect. Attendance Leads were consulted as part of the review process.

Decision: Trustees present unanimously approved the ECT Policy for BEST-Wide use with immediate effect. Unions had been consulted as part of the review process.

Decision: Trustees present unanimously approved the Recruitment and Selection Policy for BEST-Wide use subject to Union Consultation.

Decision: Trustees present unanimously approved the Admission Arrangements September 2026 in principle (consultation will start prior to the next trustees' meeting). Arrangements in relation to feeder schools and/or catchment at RBA, CNS and LSA need to be finalised prior to consultation.

AOB

CBC School Organisation Plan Consultation:

Pre-read: CBC letter regarding the School Organisation Plan Consultation distributed prior to the meeting CS will attend the meeting on 11 October but suspects the consultation is taking place to meet a statutory requirement, as opposed to having any connection to 2Tier. CS will feedback in due course.

Broadband:

Faster more cost effective broadband implemented with a £9,500 financial saving. Less than originally anticipated but still a saving.

Vice Chair of Trustees:

PW will be resigning as a trustee on 31 December. **Action:** Trustees to contact YH with any nominations for the upcoming Vice Chair of Trustees vacancy by 1 November 2024.

Confidential Item: CS, AW, KR and YH left the meeting.

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

J. Bond

Minutes approved by trustees and signed by Ilona Bond, Chair of Trustees, on 10/12/2024