

BEST Trustees' Meeting

14 May 2024, 10:00am – 12:00pm

BEST House, Conference Room



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

Apologies: Tony Sanderson (TS)

Observer: Maggie Farrer

Guest Speaker: Debbie Randall

Chair: Ilona Bond

Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphryes

Introduction

IB welcomed everyone to the meeting. Maggie is currently being onboarded as a trustee and attended the meeting in an observational capacity. IB introduced GHA Principal, Debbie Randall. Debbie was invited to the start of the meeting to provide trustees with an overview of GHA's Ofsted Inspection experience.

Gravenhurst Academy (GHA) Ofsted Inspection – Guest Speaker: Debbie Randall (DR)

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

GHA had their last inspection in 2011. The school maintained their Ofsted rating of 'Outstanding'. Debbie provided trustees with an overview of the experience:

- Everyone at GHA is thrilled with the outcome – everyone pulled together. DR thanked the SI team for their support throughout the whole process
- Having waited 13 years since their last inspection, DR was pleased to finally receive the call and told the inspectors she was looking forward to meeting them/the inspection; this was well received
- Inspectors asked about behaviour. There are a challenging group of children – DR answered with honesty and explained the processes in place for managing the behaviours
- Inspectors asked why Maths was so good at the school. This is owing to the mixed year groups, skilled teaching assistants and Maths Fluency introduced at the school by the BEST Director of Maths
- With only three teachers, there was a lot of pressure but all staff pulled together and delivered well on the day
- Science, History and Maths were presented as areas of strength. A geography lesson was observed. The children's books are very good
- Quality of learning was evidenced through pupil interviews; the children articulated their learning amazingly
- The School Improvement team provide great support across both schools and the Director of Science, Jo, has supported with additional leadership capacity
- The inspectors were able to see the school's values in action by observing kindness and thoughtfulness
- Inspectors were impressed the teachers were able to adapt the learning to be fit for purpose. Staff demonstrated confidence in what part of the scheme they needed to use and why
- DR has worked hard since joining the school to create a learning flow from reception to year 4. The reception teacher is very strong, giving the pupils a strong educational start
- DR took some learning from an outstanding Luton school and implemented schemes, that whilst creating more work in the first instance, reduces staff workloads in the long term
- Pupil's books are amazing and demonstrate strong vocabulary and writing
- Staff were anxious, tired and emotional at the end of day one
- An external visitor had been booked to attend the school assembly dressed as a frog. Children were understandably very excited by this but were able to settle and calm in a pleasing way
- DR feels the benefit of being able to share learnings of both successes and improvement across both schools. The previous inspection at LVA had helped prepare for this
- Parental feedback was amazing, with 100% of parents saying they would recommend the school
- DR remained confident in her decision to rate the school outstanding within GHA's SEF

- Day 2 moved away from observing teaching and learning, to gathering evidence to secure an outstanding. Every single staff member stepped up to the mark to make this happen. Staff had put themselves under a lot of pressure to not lose their 'outstanding status' and were delighted when they succeeded.

DR advised next steps would be maintaining the standard and look at using 'insight' to improve their assessment. As Executive Principal at GHA and LVA, DR will continue to share good practice across both schools.

Trustees commended DR and the staff at GHA. AL feels the inspection showcases the benefits of a small school being part of a trust – a real team effort. The culture of the school has been led and developed well; kindness and support are key values. Only 3% of schools with less than 100 pupils achieve an Outstanding Ofsted rating. AL on behalf of trustees thanked DR and advised she should take credit.

Action: GHA Ofsted Inspection to be written up as a case study

Action: LVA's draft Ofsted Inspection is available for viewing – DR will share the report with trustees.

DR is very proud of both schools and what they have achieved. LVA has a beacon status for Mindfulness.

DR left the meeting

Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest: None

Approval of previous minutes: Trustees' meeting minutes 19/3/24 – previous actions checked – approved for electronic signature

Matters Arising

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

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

Safeguarding audits are in progress – reports should be available next meeting.

Safeguarding across the trust is being reviewed as part of the trusts' annual internal scrutiny.

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

However, BEST is escalating a concern regarding a data breach by CBC in which a BEST employees' personal details were breached resulting in our employee receiving a home visit from a disgruntled family.

Health & Safety: Trust-wide Health and Safety Audits completed and report compiled. The report was shared with the Capital and Estates Committee but brought to this meeting also for completeness. Trustees commended the quality of Health and Safety across the trust and continual improvements seen over the past four years. One school is below where they should be, this is not owing to compliance but behavioural around who is responsible for what. The school contested the report (first challenge in over 40 audits) and were offered a 're-sit'. The school declined and will address the issues raised.

Civil claim regarding a door at ETA ongoing; CS is confident this claim should be closed shortly.

PBA Bannisters and energy bill are both still with CBC for their consideration – awaiting feedback.

Capital & Estates Committee Meeting Update

Pre-read: Capital & Estates Committee meeting minutes (30/4/24) distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Health & Safety Policy approved by the Capital & Estates Committee on 30/4/24 shared with trustees for information purposes only. See documents for more detail.

NB as Chair of the Capital and Estates Committee provided trustees with a summary of the meeting:

- Schools Allocation Funding (SCA) has gone up by 8.4%, this is more than previous years but less than costs have gone up, thus making things tight; the upcoming priorities have been agreed
- ETA changing room upgrade remains a priority but has been placed on hold owing to recent gas leak costs. **Update:** CS advised the gas leak has now been remedied and the changing rooms will be upgraded. The project will go out to tender this Summer
- CBC have confirmed the GMA relocation will not be happening, nor was it ever their intention. An additional new 2FE Primary school will be built in Arlesey
- SLL have been taken over by Inspire All – a new contract for the Pendleton Centre is not yet in place

Update: CS advised several meetings have taken place since the Capital & Estates Committee Meeting on 30 April and a new contract to supersede the community use agreement should be in place shortly.

- Committee members reviewed the Pupil Admissions data analysis. LVA community unhappy with PAN 45.

Action: YH to add 'Annual Pupil Numbers review' to the next Board meeting agenda to comply with Academy Trust Handbook requirements. Pupil Admissions data analysis document to be shared with Trustees.

CBC have received a planning application for 200 houses in Arlesey – plans include the abovementioned new 2FE Primary school. For seven years CBC have known there is insufficient land for a 4FE primary school. The new 2FE Primary school is out to tender. GMA Principal was invited to a local stakeholder meeting regarding the plans. It was reported that a Local Councillor allegedly publicly misrepresented and spoke badly of BEST. AL and CS will initiate a meeting with the Councillor in question to better understand and provide appropriate challenge. CS confirmed there are no updates on CMA, the programme is on hold for the Shefford/Stotfold cluster.

Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Meeting Update

Pre-read: Subsidiaries' Executive Committee meeting minutes (30/4/24) distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Nursery Manager's Report (30/4/24) distributed prior to the meeting. See documents for more detail.

AL as Chair of the Subsidiaries' Executive Committee provided trustees with an update from the meeting.

The meeting was largely dominated by finances. As evidenced through audits, monitoring visits, L/A visits and Ofsted, the nursery provision continues to develop and show a positive improvement.

However, with a forecasted in-year deficit of £33,000 and a moderate surplus of only £2,500 budgeted for next year, finances remain a challenge. Reasons were explored and discussed:

1. Minimum wage increases
2. A one-off unpaid utilities invoice to GMA
3. Low number of children in attendance

KR has produced a paper (next agenda item) offering solutions to support the nurseries. BEST will continue to support the nurseries during the Nursery Hub Managers (NHM) maternity leave. However, the NHM will need to step up and steady the ship through business modelling and a development plan. AW has spent a lot of time supporting the nurseries. The NHM has reviewed their pricing policy and ratios/demands. A new pricing strategy is in place.

Many nurseries are closing. AW is meeting with an expert later today to obtain a view through a 'fresh set of eyes'.

Trustees discussed the nurseries and accept that some areas of the business may lose money but are aware GAG funding cannot be used to support the nurseries. This said, the period of time in which the trust can accept a deficit balance is limited. KR confirmed debt recovery is now being monitored more closely.

Question: Trustees questioned whether the funding rate should be less than the fee.

Answer: KR will look into this question and update trustees accordingly.

KR advised government funding is not guaranteed to remain at the same level next year.

Next steps: Trustees await the outcome of the external expert review of the BEST Nurseries.

Financial Support – BEST Nurseries

Pre-read: Nursery fees increase – financial impact document distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Financial Support Review Paper distributed prior to the meeting. See documents for more detail.

KR Briefing note: There are significant challenges. Any action taken will impact on another area of the MAT. Taking from one, to give to the other; passing the problem on.

Trustees reviewed and discussed the pre-read documentation. The BEST House service charge paid by Shefford Nursery has been benchmarked and is in line with market rate. However, occupancy of BEST House is 50% Shefford Nursery and 50% BEST Central Team and the costs should be shared on that basis.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved a 50/50 split of the BEST House service charge amongst the nurseries and BEST Central team on the basis of equal occupancy.

KR confirmed the newly implemented administration fees will introduce £13,860 per year and that this together with the recently reviewed fee structure should improve finances for the nurseries going forward.

Action: KR to thank RH on behalf of the board of trustees for all her hard work.

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 satisfied the trust remains financially sound. However, trustees discussed the difficulties of deficit budgets/forecasts... a difficult context. Central Executive continue to work with schools to try and achieve a balance budget.

As a trust, BEST is doing well and supporting struggling schools as intended by government (hence the option is now available for GAG Pooling). Reserves belong to the trust, not individual schools. Deficit budgets were agreed last year knowing 2Tier was coming. CBC's decision to freeze the Schools for the Future programme for the Shefford/Stotfold cluster will make the coming years financially challenging.

Policies

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

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved, subject to union consultation, Sickness Absence Policy for BEST-Wide use.

Action: Formatting to be checked first as some wording missed off printed version.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved, subject to union consultation, ECT Policy for BEST-Wide use

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved, subject to union consultation, Pay Policy for BEST-Wide use

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved, subject to union consultation, Redundancy Policy for BEST-Wide use

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved, subject to union consultation, the Trade Union Recognition Agreement

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved, subject to union consultation, Staff Code of Conduct for BEST-Wide use.

AOB

Pre-read: Proposed BEST Meeting Scheduled 2024/25 distributed prior to the meeting – see document for details

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the proposed BEST Meeting Schedule for 2024/25.

Action: YH to send outlook invites for the 2024/25 trustee, committee and AGM meetings.

Positive news regarding Castle Newnham; everyone is working towards an agreed onboarding date of 01/09/2024. Trustees thanked the team involved in the application for all their hard work.

Some operational issues to be worked through as the school presents as all-through with one LGB and the Year 5 and 6 pupils reside on the secondary site, but run as separate schools for budgeting purposes and have separate URNs.

The Regional Director is attending Castle Newnham's LGB meeting on 24 May at 7:30pm – any trustees wishing to attend are welcome.

Action: YH to invite Akhtar to the next Trustees' meeting as an 'Observer' ahead of being officially onboarded from September 2024.

Wellbeing is being added to the Performance Committee for the next academic year (2024/25).

Next meeting: 10:00am on 2 July 2024 at BEST House.

J. Bond

Minutes approved and electronically signed on 02/07/2024