

## BEST Trustees' Meeting

28 January 2025, 10:30am – 12:30pm

BEST House, Conference Room



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

**Meeting Chair:** Nafia Baust

**Governance Professional:** Yvonne Humphries

**Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest:** None

**Previous minutes:** Trustees meeting minutes (10/12/2024) reviewed and unanimously approved for signature.  
AGM minutes (10/12/2024) reviewed and unanimously approved for signature.

## Matters Arising

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

**Health & Safety:** 1 Riddor reportable Health and Safety incident relating to a misjudged science experiment. CNS incidents and H&S report discussed – work being undertaken to align CNS to BEST's robust systems, processes and high expectations.

**Action:** Discrepancy between the Ofsted Handbook and Local Authority advice in regards to the Ofsted window for CNS' inspection. This is being looked into in order to establish the true timeline.

Central Executive have a meeting with CNS on 10 February to review Governance and Leadership – reports will be available by February half-term.

The long standing legal claim at ETA has now been resolved.

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

The CNS safeguarding audit has been completed and some actions identified, AW will work with the school to address these. Safeguarding audits are scheduled to take place across the trust this term – reports will follow in due course.

**GDPR:** No reportable GDPR breaches since the last trustees' meeting. However, complaints are on the rise and include threats of being accelerated to ICO; this is a theme both at BEST and nationally.

**Question:** Are there any themes to the rise in complaints?

**Answer:** No, the complaints tend to focus around challenging a decision and can relate to any situation. This said, many complaints relate to SEN children, from either their family or from families effected by a SEN pupils' behaviour.

18 trust level complaints were received last year (across 8,000 pupils), of those 18, 58% relate to two schools – this is being looked into.

## Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Update

**Pre-read:** Subsidiaries Executive Committee minutes distributed prior to the meeting – see report for more detail

**Pre-read:** Director of Education's nursery report distributed prior to the meeting – see report for more detail  
AL as Chair of the Subsidiaries Executive Committee provided trustees with a summary of the meeting:

- Laura has been appointed as Langford's Nursery Manager; Laura is still learning the role but is well supported
- Standards and outcomes are good
- The nurseries have built a positive relationship with the local authority
- Nurseries have a forecast currently showing a £96,000 surplus
- BEST House has a forecast of £12,500 surplus
- Next steps are to look at the nurseries' growth strategy. This was put on hold whilst the nurseries stabilise financially. It had been intended that all BEST primary/lower schools would have a nursery provision, this was placed on pause with 2Tier.



**Question:** Please may we have more information regarding the arrangement between Arlesey nursery and GMA?

**Answer:** The School and Nursery share a site. The nursery onboard the children from babies and when they turn three years old they go to the school and the school receive the government funding accordingly. However, the nursery needs to employ staff to look after the children before and after school hours and this proves logistically a challenge. To unpick the arrangement would create further financial hardship for GMA and parents seem to prefer sending their child to school for the education, although nurseries are now required to provide the same educational standards.

### Community, Capital & Estates Committee (CCEC) Update

**Pre-read:** CCEC minutes distributed prior to the meeting – see report for more detail

NB as Chair of the Community, Capital & Estates Committee provided trustees with a summary:

- Following completion of the summer works, there is a £99,000 surplus in SCA funding
- SCA funding for 2025 has been confirmed
- BEST schools collectively received an energy efficiency grants of £232,000, of which £36,000 remains unspent across GMA and SCA. If left unspent by April 2025, the remaining funds could be recalled. BEST Central are working with schools to ensure the funds are spent and if needs be, will spend the funds at the schools on their behalf
- Condition surveys have been completed, in which only £250,000 relates to high priority items. This is testament to how well estates are managed centrally
- CBC have offered and BEST have accepted, £100,000 as full and final settlement for the electricity bill problems of 2022 and the upgraded balustrades required. PBA Principal will now resolve the balustrade issue
- Hales Trust submitted a planning application for 60 dwellings in the land adjacent to SWA; Hales were asked not to reference SWA but have regardless. Both BEST and SWA have objected to the application
- The Operations Risk Register was reviewed and updated to reflect the Pendleton Centre contract changes.

### Monthly Cashflow and Management Accounts

Finance and Audit Committee members i.e. DM, AL, IB, NB and AA receive the cashflow and management account 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 at this moment in time.

### BEST Action Plans & Strategic Objectives

**Pre-read:** 2023-24 Action Plan and Strategic Objective review document distributed prior to the meeting

**Pre-read:** 2024-25 Action Plan and Strategic Objectives distributed prior to the meeting

BEST Action Plan and Strategic Objectives review has been delayed from the Autumn term to the Spring term owing to unforeseen circumstances of the Summer 2024. AL provided trustees with an overview:

- Every item not achieved within the 2023-24 review relates to 2Tier
- KS2 outcomes did less well; middle schools were badly affected in terms of 2Tier uncertainty, staff retention and priorities
- Castle Newnham onboarded
- Budget was a challenge: £850,000 deficit budgeted, achieved an improved position of £350,000 deficit
- Ethos continues to develop around wellbeing and compassion
- This year's theme is around 'Belonging'
- The next phase (2024-28) will look at growth from 10 to 15 Schools
- The next phase included 2Tier, however, this has now been left behind and CBC have created a partially transitioned cluster
- Page 3 of the Action Plan revisits the values and operating principals as agreed at a Vision and Values day on 5 May 2016. AL is keen to hold a similar event on the ten year anniversary to agree the next phase of BEST
- Page 19 includes an overview of the schools; BEST continues to grow and innovate as evidenced with the ETA Sixth form and newly onboard schools

**Action:** YH to replace the final page of the Action Plan with the most up to date Ofsted Inspection document.



MF thanked AL for the document. As a relatively new trustee, MF felt the document is clean, clear and provides helpful history, which will prove useful for any future handovers.

**Question:** Do you feel the document tells the heart soul of BEST?

**Answer:** No, that comes from the people. Promotional work has always come from word of mouth but a promotional video is being considered. I would like the video to show authenticity and show our differences.

**Question:** Yes, I believe it's about what are we going to do? And how are we going to do it? It is about behaviours, relationships and how we are with each other.

**Answer:** Yes, we don't articulate this – the document states lots about what we do. BEST has a strong message and it would be good to articulate the behaviours throughout the action plan. Consideration to be given to how this could be incorporated.

### **BEST Admissions 2026 Consultation**

**Pre-read:** BEST Admission Sept'26 Consultation Responses shared prior to the meeting – see document for details  
Trustees reviewed and discussed the comments received in relation to the Admission Consultation 2026.

Wilstead school as feeder school to RBA – Wilstead have been listed as a feeder school to RBA for many years and has remained so since Wilstead school became a primary school in 2016. In the past few years, there have been a dwindling number of applicants. However, to remove the feeder school element removes parental choice.

To remove Wilstead as a feeder school could have unintended consequences for RBA should other schools follow suit. In addition to this, to align with BEST values, trustees like to support Principal decisions where possible.

CS tabled a document with details relating to BEST School Pupil applications for September 2025, CS provided trustees with a summary:

- With a secondary applications closing date of October 2024 and Primary 16 January 2025, the numbers are not final but a close indication (late applications and out of county applications still to be included)
- CNS figures were removed for year upon year comparison purposes; the effects of 2Tier and the partially completed cluster are now starting to show
- The following schools are a concern: GMA: PAN 60/ Applications 44 and SCA: PAN 60/ Applications 31
- SWA have received 407 applications against a PAN of 400. However, approx. 25% of the applications are from pupils within an extended secondary provision and so may stay on – there is no obligation to confirm their place. This supports NM's decision to lower the PAN to 380 from September 2026
- Three schools are causing financial difficulties:

**CMA** have received 20 applications against a PAN of 26. The new build promised by CBC has been withdrawn and the full-time Principal has stood down

**LSA** have received total applications of 124 compared to 77 last year. However, numbers are still financially damaging with a PAN 60/ Applications 39. It had been hoped the good Ofsted Inspection and transition to Primary would help numbers but that has not been the case. However, 1FE has been removed from the Biggleswade cluster and may create re-distribution. Trustees would like to invite LSA Principal to the next trustees' meeting to discuss whether the school needs to consider a reduction from 2FE to 1FE.

**Action:** YH/AL to invite LSA Principal to the next trustees' meeting.

**GMA** are not full and have a high-level of SEN need, this in turn creates financial pressure. As a consequence, the Full-time Principal, minimally timetabled Head of School and full-time SENCo are no longer available to support with disruptive pupils at any given time. The Principal is now Executive Principal across two schools, the Head of School has a larger timetable commitment and the SENCo is now three days per week. BEST Central Executive and NB are meeting with a Union Representative (representing 36 GMA staff members) on Monday 3 February.

- BEST have accepted the opportunity from CBC to work alongside a School Resource Management Adviser.

## Policies

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

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the BEST Admission Arrangements for September 2026.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved extending the review period for the Equality Policy by one year.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Disciplinary Policy for Union Consultation.

## AOB

COO Recruitment Update: 20 Applications – a very strong field. Shortlisting will take place tomorrow and interviews will be held on 5 and 6 February 2025.

**CONFIDENTIAL ITEM: BEST Senior Leaders Appraisal** – CS, AW, KR and YH left the meeting for this agenda item.

**Pre-read:** BEST Senior Leaders Appraisal Summary Document shared with trustees prior to the meeting.

**Next meeting:** 10:30am on 18 March 2025 at BEST House.

J. Bond 18/3/25