

BEST Trustees' Meeting

30 September 2025, 10:30am – 12.30pm

BEST House, Conference Room



Attendees: Alan Lee (AL), Ilona Bond (IB), Nafia Baust (NB), Akhtar Ahamed (AA), David Morgan (DM), Mark Liddiard (ML), Alison Wilshaw (AW) and Kim Rowe (KR)

Apologies: Tony Sanderson (TS) and Maggie Farrar (MF)

Meeting Chair: Ilona Bond (IB)

Governance Professional: Lisa Little (LL)

IB welcomed ML to the Trustees' Meeting.

Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest: None

Previous minutes: Trustees meeting minutes (26/06/25) reviewed and unanimously approved for signature with the amendment of the following:

- Page 2 – sentence to be adjusted to 'the Wellbeing Leads want to be more strategic and it is good to see that the BEST Mindfulness Coach is investing in support and mentoring for school-based Mindfulness Leads'.

Previous actions:

- CS to review the overall risk register and work with ML to find a solution to allow more sufficient overview of the register. **Action complete.**
- YH to formally renew the Terms of Office for IB and TS. **Action complete.**

Matters Arising

Safeguarding:

Pre-read: External safeguarding audit summary - distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Safeguarding audit central feedback - distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: School and Nursery audit reports - distributed prior to the meeting

- All recommended actions monitored by Director of SEND and Safeguarding
- CNS joined the trust on 1st September 2024. They received a safeguarding audit early last academic year to provide assurance of their safeguarding provision. This highlighted some areas to address therefore a second audit was carried out later in the year to ensure these had been resolved
- The external safeguarding consultant meets with the Director of Education, Director of SEND and Safeguarding and Compliance Manager to provide feedback following the audits
- The Director of SEND and Safeguarding is providing supervision to all DSLs
- Cross trust DSL meeting held once per term, central and SI team also attend these meetings
- All trust recommended actions have been followed up by the Director of SEND and Safeguarding
- All school safeguarding audit reports are shared with the LCBs. Safeguarding is a standing item on each LCB agenda and form part of the school reports to the LCB.

Trustees commented that the safeguarding overview is excellent and the audit reports are very thorough. The new Ofsted inspection toolkit and framework, effective from November 2025, places an enhanced focus on safeguarding and directly includes the role of governors and trustees.

GDPR: ICO registration has been transferred from CS to ML. There have been no ICO reportable breaches since the last report. BEST GDPR training was cascaded to all staff on INSET days - this includes common breach trends. Recent rise in open unlocked laptops noted in some schools. Reminder circulated to all staff via the Data Protection Leads (DPLs).

Trustees noted a recent spate of fraudulent calls in neighbouring schools/trusts. This topic was discussed at a recent BEST DPLs meeting. Partnership Education gave advice on verifying identities of individuals. Several FOI requests have been received recently but these were not considered suspicious.

Health & Safety:

Pre-read: Health & safety report - distributed prior to the meeting

- Schools/nurseries have confirmed that the majority of regular PPM checks are up to date. Where there are deficiencies, these are monitored via SmartLog and chased as required
- The next round of health and safety audits with Cousins Safety have been arranged for the Autumn Term. Reports will be shared with LCBs. Cousins Safety will be paying particular attention to asbestos records to ensure that they meet the new requirements. A new asbestos management survey has been commissioned for CNS and is due to be completed in October half term
- Compliance reports – the trust continue to work closely with the schools that have areas to address
- Accident data – 2 RIDDOR reportable accidents, both cases have been internally reviewed and appropriate action taken.
- Estates and health and safety – overview of key issues provided in report, areas highlighted in conditions survey have been addressed and were delivered over the summer.

Q. Does the data/information provided for CNS refer to both sites.

A. ML confirmed that it does.

Q. The report includes categories such as acts of violence and behaviour related staff incidents, do these relate to incidents between pupils and staff or pupil to pupil etc?

A. Sub categories have been introduced for standardisation and comparison purposes. Behaviour related staff incident would relate to incidents against staff but acts of violence could relate to either pupil or staff depending on the severity and context of the incident.

Sustainability:

- Trust secured a deal for food waste for BEST CBC schools in line with Simpler Recycling legislation. BBC provided the service for CNS
- All schools have sustainability leads. Let's Go Zero are offering ongoing support for schools
- CBC have various tree planting initiatives
- Recycling high on school agendas, particularly around single use plastics
- Two wellbeing gardens completed at CNS (both sites).

Subsidiaries Executive Committee Update

Pre-read: Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Minutes – 16 September 2025 – distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Director of Education Report – distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Subsidiary Finance Report – distributed prior to the meeting

- Positive picture overall, healthy numbers for Arlesey and Langford Wraparound Care (WAC) Club and nurseries are fully staffed
- Loan of £50,000 has now been repaid by Nursery to Charity
- Nursery reserves/surplus – ML and AW looking at a bidding process approach based on the needs of the nurseries. Policy is being developed
- BEST House – financially stable. ML will be undertaking a benchmarking exercise. Consideration to be given as to whether BEST House could be utilised more by the community.

Trustees noted that there were previously discussions around any surplus from the nurseries being gift aided to the Charity with some funds ringfenced to be available for the nurseries to use. Any surplus that is gift aided

should be given with no conditions. Nursery Managers have questioned whether funds can be set aside for any future unforeseen costs.

Action: KR to take advice from HMRC and report to the Finance Committee.

Community, Capital and Estates (CCEC) Update

Pre-read: CCEC Minutes – 24 September 2025 (approved by Chair) – distributed prior to the meeting

- Communications Manager post is vacant – unfortunately, the person previously appointed has decided not to continue with the role
- Wellbeing gardens – one school garden yet to be commenced. ML pursuing plans with the school
- Capital works programme – largest programme to date with all outstanding D1s from conditions survey being cleared
- CMA works delayed due to planning process - further drawings required by Conservation Office as CMA is a listed building, this is adding additional cost
- The BEST Operations Manager shared a presentation of completed works, this will also be shared with Principals
- Capital funds well managed and remain healthy
- Pendleton Centre – new contract with Inspire All is working well to date. Discussions continuing with CBC in terms of lease and potential expansion of centre
- Samuel Whitbread – North Side new housing application still ongoing. No decision has yet been made by CBC Planning Department. Meeting held to explore option of siting a 3G pitch on playing field – effect on PFI contract is being explored with CBC
- Lawnside – unfortunately CBC are no longer able to deliver the build previously agreed. Conversations continuing with CBC to obtain the best possible facilities for the school.

Trustees praised the management of the capital works and expressed their gratitude to the Operations Manager for her hard work in managing this area.

Q. Trustees questioned if the 3G pitch at SWA is likely to progress?

A. Conversations are ongoing and the PFI implications are being explored with CBC. There is only outline planning at present but this is not anticipated to be an issue.

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, those present at the meeting agreed that the FAC committee are happy with the accounts and are satisfied the trust is financially sound at this moment in time.

Year Ahead (inc Governance Conference)

Pre-read: Governance Conference Presentation – distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: BEST Action Plan 2024-25 Review – distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: BEST Action Plan 2025-26 – distributed prior to the meeting

- BEST Governance Conference due to take place on Saturday 4 October 2025 with the 10 Year Celebration taking place in May 2026. The focus this year is to listen to the views of the community and to revisit processes and protocols
- The BEST Action Plan from last year has been reviewed and updated for this academic year. The plan is based on the Confederation of Schools Trust (CST) descriptors. These documents will be recreated in summer term
- Governance Conference presentation – focuses on what we are doing now and where do we want to go next. AL is keen to ascertain if the trust values stand test of time or require amendment. AL would also like to seek to understand governor views on the identity, location, reach and size of the trust/schools (growth vs local focus). What are the right school structures? There needs to be a coherent learning pathway for young people. Trust pupil numbers are likely to grow over the next few years.

- CNS All-through School – Craig Smith is leading on this project. Principal interviews are due to take place on 3 and 4 December 2025. AL invited trustees to join the interview panel.

ML advised that it is apparent that there is no LA funding available for school reorganisation. School structures need to be reviewed to ensure they are providing the best possible pathway for our young people.

Trustees commented that there are a number of references to mindfulness in the conference presentation and suggested that a link is made between mindfulness, wellbeing and effectiveness – happy teachers, happy pupils. This could also be linked with the attainment data and compassion.

Summary of BEST Examination Results 2025

Pre-read: BEST Summary of 2025 Results – distributed prior to the meeting

- Performance Committee scheduled for 18 November 2025 – each Principal will present to the committee
- KS2 results
 - KS2 results overview (page 6) shows comparison against national average. Trust is in line with LA outcomes. KS2 is an area of focus for the year ahead
 - AW highlighted the results of several schools: LVA achieved 62% of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined), ETA achieved 67% and CNS primary 67%
 - The overall data is skewed by a decreased % outcome in a large school
 - Areas of decline are being addressed - review meeting held with all BEST KS2 schools to share best practice, Directors of English and Maths have outlined the non-negotiables to enable the pupils to hit the benchmarks. Provision statements have been completed outlining trust support. Reviews scheduled to look at practices from senior leadership through to the classroom. These reviews will take place in all schools but those with areas of decline will be prioritised. Moderation, CPD and visits to high performing schools planned
 - LSA will have their first SATs exams this year – SI team are working with the school to prepare the staff and pupils for this

Q. KS2 outcomes have declined in two schools, was this predicted?

A. Yes, those schools had expected lower outcomes than the previous year, however, not to that extent.

Discussion held around writing moderation.

The SI team will be analysing the school tracking of data through the year. A calendar of 'check points' is provided to schools. The SI team will also be included in this.

- KS4 results
 - No areas of concern for SWA or ETA
 - CNS have improved on the year previous – the SI team will continue to work with the school in this area
- KS5 results
- SWA – pleasing results, average grade B-
- ETA – first year of Year 13 exams, average grade C – Principal and Head of Sixth Form keen to move this forward further. School reviewing processes for assessment of intake to sixth form to ensure appropriate courses are selected.

AL encouraged Trustees to be robust in their scrutinization of outcomes. National average is a benchmark, not aspiration.

Q. Has the number of pupils with SEND at RBA doubled in 2 years? Is this a significant rise?

A. The rise is not dramatic when considered in a national context, however, RBA is 4% above national average. The Director of SEND and Safeguarding will be working with the school leaders and SENCo further in this area.

Q. Is there a criteria for classification of children with SEND which enables a clear comparison between school numbers or is the classification reliant on school judgement?

A. The categories are the same nationally but this will always be dependent on how the school assess the children. The Director of SEND and Safeguarding (TR) is an expert in this area, sits on most CBC panels and delivers nationally. TR pursues any additional funding and assistance available for all BEST schools.

AL encouraged trustees to recognise that whilst there are areas of decline at KS2, the overall trust % is still 5% above the CBC average. The schools are performing well in the local context. It should also be noted that BEST have a wide range of school structures including primary, middle and extended secondaries at this KS, whereas most other areas have a singular primary/secondary model.

RBA Outcomes

Pre-read: RBA Summary Analysis – distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: RBA KS2 Results Analysis – distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: KS2 Improvement Plan – distributed prior to the meeting

- Long-term trend identified
- AL assigned AW to conduct a review by half term
- Principal has provided an analysis and plan
- Ofsted graded school as Outstanding in all areas during their visit in February 2025

Trustees noted the subjective language within the report and determined that the Performance Committee would thoroughly interrogate the underlying data at their next meeting. The Principal's report highlighted that while outcomes are important, the school must not lose sight of everything else. The analysis also takes into account the nature of the cohort, which has changed.

The school suffered significant staff losses during the two-tier planning process due to the uncertainty. The trust must ensure that leaders are sufficiently able to implement improvement and that this is effective. Leaders must engage with the support available.

Trustees discussed the power of self-belief and confidence.

SRMA Report

Pre-read: SRMA Report – distributed prior to the meeting

Pre-read: Recommendations and Savings – distributed prior to the meeting

- Final SRMA Report has been received. The trust engaged with the DfE in March in a voluntary capacity and the analysis took place in May. The DfE appointed advisor was Marc Lewis. Marc reviewed the information available from the trust perspective reviewing governance, financial governance and financial controls. Deeper dives were carried out in some schools (CMA, GMA, LSA and CNS).
- Overall, the report is positive report and confirmed that the trust has good financial management but acknowledges that there are challenges with the budgets.
- The data analysed was based on 2023/24, as this was the latest data available. The financial position has improved in 2024/25 and will be shown in the outturn and accounts as they come through.
- The report includes recommendations for specific areas of savings and efficiencies. The recommendations will be considered by the trust and schools.
- The SRMA stated that this was 'the best report' he had completed which is very positive feedback. The report acknowledges that the financial position is starting to turn.

A. The DfE are aware of the report and recommendations. The trust engaged with the DfE on a voluntary capacity. The trust must do what is best for the local context. A follow up meeting will be held in 6 months with the DfE. The budget forecast return submitted over the summer shows an improved financial position. The Year End accounts may be available for the meeting, dependent on the date. If the trust overall financial position is positive, recommendations are unlikely to be questioned further.

[illegible]

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

- Action:** Trustees to consider the LVA PAN at the Trustees' Meeting due to be held in January 2026 – ML to continue discussions with CBC continuing the school facilities.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the **Admission Arrangements** for September 2027 for consultation.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the **Sickness Absence Policy** subject to consultation with unions.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the **Travel & Subsistence Policy, DSL Supervision Policy and ECTE Policy** for implementation.

Confidential Item

Board only confidential personnel item.

AOB

No items raised.

Next meeting: 10.00am on 9 December 2025 at BEST House Conference Room

J. Bond

Minutes approved and electronically signed on 9 December 2025