

## **BEST Trustees' Meeting**

26 June 2025, 10:30am – 12.30pm

BEST House, Conference Room



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

**Apologies:** None received.

**Meeting Chair:** Ilona Bond (IB)

**Governance Professional:** Lisa Little (LL)

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

**Previous minutes:** Trustees meeting minutes (13/05/25) reviewed and unanimously approved for signature.

### **Previous actions:**

- IB to write to all BEST schools congratulating them on the admission numbers for September '25 – CS to support with the co-ordination of this. **Action: IB/CS to complete by e/o term.**

### **Matters Arising**

**Safeguarding:** Safeguarding audits completed and a summary will be presented at the Trustees' Meeting in September. Many very strong reports.

**GDPR:** **Pre-read:** Annual GDPR Report – distributed prior to the meeting

- Data collated for period January to December 2024
- There has been a steady increase in low risk breaches year on year – the trust have reviewed the causes of the breaches and analysed trends. Emails sent to the incorrect recipient represent the highest percentage of breaches. This aligns with the national data published by ICO
- Although breach numbers are increasing, it is believed that this represents better reporting and is not of concern
- The number of SARs remains steady although they remain extremely time consuming and complex in nature. Some schools receive a higher number than others
- FOI requests are increasing from data collection agencies and parents
- Overall, the report is positive and shows that the trust is strong in terms of data protection
- All Data Protection Leads will present a trust presentation on INSET day outlining trends and key reminders.

**Q.** Is there a cultural reason behind the increase in SARs and breaches?

**A.** All SARs relate to either a complaint or SEND. Schools have reported that some parents are being advised by external agencies to request a full SAR to gather evidence for SEND needs assessments. In terms of breaches, if staff are working at speed, human errors can occur.

**Health & Safety:** No trustee reportable Health and Safety incidents since the last Trustees' Meeting.

**Sustainability:** Working towards 2025 requirements.

### **Performance Committee Update**

**Pre-read:** Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Minutes – 17 June 2025 – distributed prior to the meeting

- Staff wellbeing survey report presented to Committee
- Wellbeing Week 24 to 30 June 2025
- Director of SEND and Safeguarding presented to the Committee:
  - EHCP numbers high across trust with GMA having the highest figure
  - SEN support % high in several schools, again particularly in GMA

- Potential under identification in one school
- Three schools attract higher numbers of SEN than others
- Lengthy discussion around GMA – high support being provided by the Trust, discussion around robustness of behaviour management policy. New HoS has been appointed and the SI Team will be providing support until they start
- BEST Mindfulness Coach presented to the Committee – wide offer in place, healthy interest with waiting list in some areas. Mindfulness acknowledged in recent Ofsted report
- Data review provided to Committee by Director of Education – discussion around outcomes being clustered around national average, need to be more aspirational
- Director of Education report– GMA and PBA highlighted. PBA will have their first Year 11 in September 2025, the first group through GCSEs.

AL felt that wellbeing has been at the core of BEST and questioned if it is now expected and now at the 'margin', need to look at fundamentals and lean into compassionate leadership. AL would like to empower mindful leaders in schools. MiSP want BEST to do a case study.

Recent analysis has shown that BEST is the only Trust in area where all Ofsted gradings are Good or Outstanding. Outcomes are in the top 3 but cluster around national average. There needs to be a move to being more aspirational.

MF advised that the Mindfulness Leads want to be more strategic and some are starting to invest in mentoring.

**Q.** How do you quantify impact on those schools who fully adopt mindfulness?

**A.** Course evaluations and take up rate. Courses are out of working hours with no additional pay but have a significant value. Discussion around mindfulness often attracting those who are struggling.

Discussion followed around power of leaders being mindfulness practitioners. Difficult to be compassionate if not mindful. Everyone is responsible for their own wellbeing and the Trust must be careful that Mindfulness Leads are not leaned on by all staff.

AL includes quotes from compassionate leadership model at every Executive Team Meeting.

Trustees commented that it would be useful if the mindfulness report presented to the Committee focused on take up and impact rather than the offer available.

AL explained that there has been a positive recruitment trend reported by the Executive Team this year - there is something within that.

### **Finance & Audit Committee Update**

**Pre-read:** Finance & Audit Committee Meeting Minutes – 17 June 2025 (approved by Chair)

- 2025/2026 Budget main area of discussion at Committee meeting
- March was the first cut of the budgets and showed budget pressures over a 3 year period (based on assumptions at that point). There has been pressure on Principals to ensure the budgets balance. By 17 June 2025 (Finance & Audit Committee Meeting) a number of macro assumptions changed, including the Government announcement of the proposed Teachers and Support Staff pay awards and the new School Budget Support Grant. The budgets are now showing in-year surplus and an improving position at the end of 3 year period.
- The Finance & Audit Committee are recommending that the Full Board approve the 2025/2026 budget to go forward to the ESFA for submission

**Decision:** The Trustees unanimously agreed the 2025/2026 MAT budget for submission to the ESFA.

IB gave thanks to KR and her team for all the work with schools on the budget.

- 2025/2026 Budget for subsidiaries (BEST House and Nurseries) – circulated prior to meeting
- Nurseries previously set an in year loss and Trustees letters of support were required, now financial position has improved and the 2025/2026 budget has returned to an expected in-year surplus.
- BEST House and nurseries are surplus forecast budgets for next year – see papers circulated prior to meeting – require Trustee approval. As previously approved by Trustees, Nurseries are repaying the loan to Charity in 2024/2025.

**Decision:** The Trustees unanimously agreed the subsidiaries 2025/2026 budget.

- Payroll internal scrutiny – two low and two medium recommendations, no high. Payroll was selected for audit due to the recent transfer from EPM to Beds Borough. This will provide assurance of new provider. Overall positive report. Two areas noted for consideration; incorporation of the nurseries into the financial procedures and Scheme of Delegation to include detail of who can authorise compensation/ex gratia payments. It is not deemed appropriate to incorporate the nursery due to variation in requirements.

**Q.** In terms of Teachers’ pension audit, what was the response from Bedford Borough?

**A.** Reports hadn’t been produced with the correct data included. Manual input required as provided in format that could not be inserted into the return. This matter has been picked up with Bedford Borough and they have changed reporting processes.

- Attendance internal scrutiny by Juniper – four schools received deep dive. Recommendation given to consider implementing student voice in action, showing how it impact the school development plan etc. Many positives in report including uniform practice, and Attendance Leads feeling valued, supported and challenged. There is sensitive handling of issues brought to the meetings. Strong proactive leadership. Robustness in data at school and trust level. Accountability is strong but Leads felt supported through that. Regular meetings and Attendance Leads Conferences. Many positives for individual school Attendance Leads.

**Q.** Report suggests that technical structures and protocols are sound and they explored deeper cultural approaches, like family engagement etc, are these shared across schools and is there confidence that the practice seen in this sample would be reflected across all schools?

**A.** AW believed practice is shared across the trust. CNS new to trust but showing promise.

Confidential item - [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

#### 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.

#### Risk Register

[Pre-read:](#) Annual Risk Register Overview (2024/25)

Approximately 18 months ago the risk register was split into three Committees (PWC, FAC and CCE). This has worked quite well as each Committee has clarity on the content. However, CS raised concern that there is not now sufficient overview.

**Action:** CS to review the overall risk register and work with ML to find a solution to allow more sufficient overview of the register.

**Decision:** The Trustees unanimously agreed to risk E6 – text updated following the Performance and Wellbeing Committee.

**Q.** In terms of risk E1, nursery viability, could this be reduced to 1?

**A.** This will be revisited after the final accounts have concluded.

#### Central Services Stakeholder Surveys 2024/25

[Pre-read:](#) Central Team Survey Results – distributed prior to the meeting

[Pre-read:](#) Finance Survey Results – distributed prior to the meeting

[Pre-read:](#) School Improvement Survey Results – distributed prior to the meeting

- School improvement outcomes – always strong
- Finance outcomes – budgets have been challenging this year which is reflected in results. New team also in place who are learning

- Central team survey – strong outcomes for BEST provided services, mixed reviews for outsourced services. ML will benchmark and review how to move forward
- Important to reflect on what we do and how we can do better. Honest responses.

## Policies

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

- Admission Arrangements September 2027 – included for information. Final draft of arrangements will be presented to the Trustees in September 2025 in preparation for a potential consultation within the statutory time frame
- Safeguarding Policy Template
- Child-on-Child Abuse Policy Template
- Online Safety Policy Template
- Cyber Security Policy (full and user versions)
- Data Protection (GDPR) Policy, Privacy Notices and Retention Schedule
- Managing Allegations of Abuse Against Staff
- Attendance Policy
- Pay Policy
- Family Related Leave Policy

**Q.** Generative AI is included in the Safeguarding Policy and Online Safety Policy – can the Trust assure security from this?

**A.** There are filtering and monitoring systems in place across the Trust which are triggered by key words and phrases. Schools are also including this in their pupil education. A cross Trust AI working group has been set up and guidelines and principles are being set up for introduction to staff on the September INSET day with a view to developing a more in depth policy.

Discussion followed re teacher pay award 25/26. CBC schools aiming to implement from 1 September 2025 but Beds Borough potentially following in October 2025. BEST will try to align all Trust schools but will not share with staff until details are agreed.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously agreed to adopt the national agreement from the review body in relation to the teacher pay award.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Safeguarding Policy** for use from 1 September 2025 – DoE to agree any changes required for the nurseries

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Child-on-Child Abuse Policy** for use from 1 September 2025

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Online Safety Policy** for use from 1 September 2025

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Cyber Security Policy** for immediate use

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Data Protection (GDPR) Policy, Privacy Notices and Retention Schedule** for use from 1 September 2025

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Managing Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy** for immediate use

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Attendance Policy** for use from 1 September 2025

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Pay Policy** for use from 1 September 2025

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the **Family Related Leave Policy** subject to union consultation

## BEST Governance Handbook (BGHB)

**Pre-read:** BGHB 2025 – distributed prior to the meeting

**Pre-read:** BGHB schedule of updates – distributed prior to the meeting

The BGHB has been review and consultation, and is ready for Trustee approval. However, the DfE published updated versions of the Academy Trust Handbook and Academy Governance Guide yesterday (25 June 2025).

AL thanked Trustees for the contributions received during the review process – see schedule of updates for full list of updates. Strengthened need to balance budgets throughout BGHB.

Trustees asked if there should be a sub note on page 11 (subsidiaries) to recognise that they are independent of the Trust Board, although they are the same members and the Trust Board may act on behalf of the subsidiaries.

**Decision:** Trustees' unanimously agreed the updates to the BGHB subject to the review of the updated DfE guidance published on 25 June 2025.

#### **Board of Trustees, Chair, Vice Chair and Committee Chairs**

AL gave thanks to Trustees for all they have contributed over the last academic year. It has been a challenging year with challenging budgets and several changes in terms of central staffing.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously to continue with IB as the Chair of the Trust Board

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously to continue with NB as the Vice Chair of the Trust Board

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously to continue with DM as the Chair of the Finance & Audit Committee

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously to continue with TS as the Chair of the Performance & Wellbeing Committee

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously to continue with NB as the Chair of the Community, Capital & Estates Committee

**Action:** YH to formally renew the Terms of Office for IB and TS.

The Trustees gave their thanks to CS for his work during this time at BEST and for his absolute commitment to the children within the Trust. CS gave his thanks for the support provided to him during his time.

#### **AOB**

- Letter to CBC re SEND – Principals did not sign the SEND letter proposed by neighbouring schools/trust. AL keen to work with CBC to resolve the issues. The Trust Board have sent a separate letter re SEND, appropriately challenging.
- School transport consultation - ML has worked with the LA and schools to better understand the transport proposals and has circulated a letter for Trustees to approve. ML has sought clarification on several elements from CBC Officers including two/three tier implications and children already in the system. ML has also requested that the safer route to school documentation/maps are released as part of the consultation. RBA and SWA are looking at joined up solution to lessen the impact on the traditional catchment.

**Q.** How many children are affected at SWA and RBA?

**A.** It is believed that there will be less impact in the upper years of both schools, but a growing number at point of entry. It is anticipated that approximately 180 children will not be offered transport. Need to drill down where those children are coming from. This could impact school numbers.

**Next meeting:** 10.30am on 30 September 2025 at BEST House Conference Room

Minutes approved and electronically signed on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2025: *J. Bond*