BEST Trustees' Meeting
19 May 2026, 10:30am – 12:30pm
BEST House, Conference Room

Attendees: Ilona Bond (IB), Nafia Baust (NB), Alan Lee (AL), Maggie Farrar (MF), Tony Sanderson (TS), David Morgan (DM), Alison Wilshaw (AW), Kim Rowe (KR) and Mark Liddiard (ML)
Apologies: Akhtar Ahamed
Chair: Ilona Bond
Guest (agenda item 2 only): Nick Martin (NM)
Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphryes

Procedural
Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest: None
Previous Minutes (Trustees 24/3/2026): Previous minutes reviewed and unanimously approved for signature

Proposal for an intake of 90 students in Year 7 at Samuel Whitbread Academy (SWA)
Pre-read: SWA Year 7 intake proposal paper distributed prior to the meeting – read document for more detail
A summary of NM's presentation is as follows:
SWA have a large sixth form offering a large curriculum and achieving the highest results in Bedfordshire. SWA's GCSE results are consistently within the top three in the borough and also have a large curriculum offering of 24 subjects. In addition to the school's academic success, SWA are ranked 73rd nationally for sports (10th excluding private schools) and most recently won a national football final and have had sporting success in Netball, Racing and Rugby.

Despite the excellent offering available, SWA have received 354 admission applications for September 2026 i.e. 50 applications less than usual; this equates to £250,000 loss of revenue, the accumulative cost over three years would equate to £1.5 million, which in addition to annual increases to the PFI, is unstainable.

This situation has been anticipated (NM and Robert Bloomfield Academy (RBA) Principal presented to trustees in December 2025) but has happened sooner than expected. NM believes the shortfall in admission applications is for the following reasons:

1. CBC are no longer funding the transport (transport is now only provided to children's closes school – this was not known last year) – the cost is expensive and people are not willing to fund the travel
2. SWA is surrounded by secondary and extended secondary schools – they have longer to build a relationship with their pupils
3. There is a decline in the number of children in the cluster.

As a middle school, RBA usually take 244 pupils per year, of which 230 usually transfer to SWA in Year 9; the two schools have a strong working relationship. Pupil in-year transfers have dropped off from Sandy, Stratton, Henlow, Etonbury and Pix Brook, all of whom are secondary or extended secondary schools. SWA competes well with Upper schools but feels they too may move to a secondary structure in due course.

NM's Proposal: Have a Year 7 intake of 90 pupils, increasing to 330[1] pupils from Year 9 onward. To minimise any impact on RBA, RBA would not be named as a feeder school at Year 7 but would remain as a named feeder school for the Year 9 POE. It is hoped that this would ease parent concern about not obtaining a place if they remain at RBA for Year 7 and 8.

Risks include:

- CBC Objection (though it meets the local authorities' requirement to move towards a Primary/Secondary 2Tier model)
- Henlow Academy objection (they are currently taking over PAN)
- RBA students apply/join in year 7 (NM feels this can be mitigated through a joined up approach/collaborative working between the schools, and being named a feeder a Year 9 POE
- RBA asks to convert to an extended upper school.

[1] Subsequent to the meeting, an agreement was reached to increase the student capacity to 360, effective from Year 9 onwards.

Benefits include:

- Financial stability
- 5 year pupil journey will help raise outcomes
- Level playing field

Trustees thanked NM for his thorough and well thought out presentation. Discussions took place around parental choice and long term plans. In the long-term NM would favour an all-through schooling structure in partnership with RBA and Shefford Lower; RBA are not yet onboard with this proposal.
In the short-term assumptions would need to be closed down and a Consultation held to obtain a parental view.
NM left the meeting.

<u>Proposal for an intake of 90 students in Year 7 at (SWA)</u>

Pre-read: COO Report for trustees distributed prior to the meeting – read document for more detail
ML prepared a report for trustees looking at the current geographical implications/opportunities. ML also shared the current view of RBA LCB and the RBA Leadership team; the leadership team are currently in favour of becoming an extended secondary school. Financial implications and risks were discussed also.
COO recommendation:
Trustees are asked to:

- Approve the proposal in principle for SWA to consult with the community on extending the age range and reducing the PAN at Year 9.
- Authorise the Principals of SWA and RBA to develop a full business case modelling the financial, admissions and operational implications of this proposal.
- Note that an all-through school model for Shefford remains a longer-term strategic aspiration and is unlikely to be deliverable within the next two to three years.
- Note that RBA might propose an alternative plan for its future.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the COO abovementioned recommendations.

<u>Castle Newnham Primary (CNP) Ofsted Inspection</u>

Pre-read: Draft CNP Ofsted Report distributed prior to the meeting – read document for additional information
AW provided trustees with a summary overview of the Castle Newnham Primary Ofsted Inspection (17-18 March):

- Ofsted call received – AW questioned whether the inspection should go ahead as the school will become an all-through school in September 2026. However, CNP Principal was keen to go ahead with inspection
- First BEST inspection under the new Ofsted framework – similar interviews with a much different focus
- Seven areas of focus in addition to Safeguarding
- CNP Principal had expected to come from a place of proving strength as opposed to defending weakness
- Gruelling questioning with no stone left unturned; far more pressure and interviews for the Principal
- AA from BEST Central team attended the single central record interview
- Parental feedback around early years readiness to transition and behaviour; this was explored in great depth
- Overall a good report with 'expected' in all areas – the new Principal is onboard to drive standards.

<u>Matters Arising</u>

Pre-read: Termly Health & Safety Report for Trustees distributed prior to the meeting – see document for details
Health & Safety: No new Riddor reportable cases since January 2026. Internal scrutiny completed on Health & Safety evidences devolved management of Health and Safety is working well; the reports are pleasing. Cambs County Council will no longer be providing asbestos specialist service outside of Cambs – BEST is currently seeking a new partner.
Safeguarding: Safeguarding reports are almost complete with pleasing scores – Safeguarding Leads are doing well.
GDPR: IT have put processes in place to minimise breaches; there have been no serious breaches since the last meeting. AI training is being put in place to ensure government standards are met.
Sustainability: ML has a meeting scheduled with Barkers to look at how sustainability is built into the BEST Capital works programme. BEST's policy has been around making sure all schools are 'warm, safe and dry' – ML will look to include 'green' and perhaps assign 10% of the Capital funding towards sustainability.

Question: Is the civil claim still ongoing?
Answer: Our insurers are satisfied the incident was an accident and that good practices are in place and have put a legal team in place to resist the 'no win, no fee' claim.

Community, Capital & Estates (CCE) Committee Update

Pre-read: Community, Capital & Estates Committee meeting minutes (12/5/26) distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for more detail.

Pre-read: Health and Safety Policy approved by the CCE Committee shared with trustees for information purposes

NB provided trustees with an overview summary from the CCE Committee:

- An informative PPT showing capital spends across the trust over the past five years; COO was reminded in conversations with LCB Chairs to explain BEST's philosophical approach
- Plans are in place for unused DFC funds
- Health and Safety audit shows stable and compliant management process; no corrective action required. Good practices are in place and managed well centrally
- Health and Safety Policy updated to include legislative changes and approved by the CCE committee
- No changes made to the Risk Register though it was noted the asbestos management section would need updating once a new asbestos specialist has been appointed by BEST
- Additional reporting required around non-priority spending of SCA funding

Question: How, if indeed they do, do pupils and staff charge their phones at school?

Answer: Any electronics need to be PAAC tested. Pupils are not allowed phones in schools and staff should not have their phones out in class and as such, should also not be charging their phones in school.

Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Update

Pre-read: Subsidiaries' Executive Committee meeting minutes (12/5/26) distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for more detail

Pre-read: Director of Education's Nursery Report distributed prior to the meeting – see report for more detail

AL provided trustees with an overview summary from the Finance and Audit Committee meeting:

- AW was thanked and commended for the 'tremendous' job she does with the nurseries
- Awaiting Shefford nurseries safeguarding audits; both Langford and Arlesey have received 100% green audits
- The nurseries are performing well, thus enabling capital projects at each of the three nursery sites:
  Shefford: Outdoor play areas resurface – project completed
  Langford: New flooring – approved, work to commence in due course
  Arlesey: New toilets – approved, work to commence in due course
- BEST House has a deficit budget owing to the costs of the newly installed boilers
- A review of external bookings at BEST House and how to increase its usage is currently underway.

Monthly Cashflow and Management Accounts

Finance and Audit Committee members i.e. DM, AL, IB, 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.

Policies

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

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Staff Code of Conduct Policy, subject to union consultation

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the ECTE Policy, subject to union consultation

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Pay Policy (no changes), subject to union consultation.

Trustees Succession Planning

DM will be stepping down as a non-executive trustee at the end of the 2025/26 academic year.

AL will be stepping down as an executive trustee at the end of the 2026/27 academic year.

BEST Board of Trustees previously approved Ruth (RW) joining the board, however, RW has decided not to join.

Former BEST COO was approached to see if they would like to join the board of trustees but have other commitments.

A trustee recruitment drive will commence after May half-term. Trustees discussed skillsets and agreed the following additional skill sets are required:

1. School/education
2. Finance

Decision: The following trustees were assigned as Committee Chairs for the 2026/27 academic year:

- Audit & Risk Committee = NB
- Finance Committee = AA
- Community, Capital and Estates Committee = TS
- Performance and Wellbeing Committee = MF
- Subsidiaries' Executive Committee = AL

AOB

Pre-read: Proposed 2026/27 BEST Meeting Schedule distributed for consideration prior to the meeting

- There will be no Governance Conference in 2026 – these will be held every other year
- BEST Finance Committee will take place first, followed by the BEST Audit and Risk Committee
- BEST Trustees' meetings will continue to be held on a Tuesday
- The Performance and Wellbeing Committee in November 2026, in which Principals attend individual slots, will be held over two days (17 & 18 November)

Pre-read: POE Admission Applications – September 2026 distributed prior to the meeting – see document for detail
CNP have has a decline in pupil admission numbers, the newly appointed Principal is committed to increasing the number of applications in the coming years. IB advised the competition in Bedford Borough is high with only 15 out of 55 schools achieving their PAN.

LVA site development drawings have been received and are being reviewed.

SCA have a lot of local competition; numbers have settled but could do with more to make the school more stable.

GMA have had the lowest number of admission applications in a while.

PBA have a lower number of admission applications than usual; the numbers fluctuates year on year between PBA and ETA and this year there are 40 less pupils in the system.

Confidential item: With the exception of AL, all BEST staff left the meeting room.

Next meeting: 10:30am on 30 June 2026 at BEST House.

J. Bond

Minutes approved and signed on 30 June 2026.