

BEST Trustees' Meeting

13 May 2025, 10:30am – 12.30pm

BEST House, Conference Room

✓
J. Bond 26/6/25



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

Apologies: Akhtar Ahamed (AA),

Meeting Chair: Ilona Bond (IB)

Governance Professional: Lisa Little (LL)

Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest: None

Previous minutes: Trustees meeting minutes (18/03/25) reviewed and unanimously approved for signature.

ETA Ofsted – Jo Young (JY) joined for this item only

Pre-read: Confidential – Draft ETA Ofsted Report

JY provided a summary of the Ofsted experience at ETA (presentation circulated with the minutes – see document for more detail). The inspection was a Section 8, 2-day inspection carried out on 23 – 24 April 2025. Final Ofsted report now received and due to be published on 19 May 2025.

IB congratulated JY and her team on the outcome and thanked her for the presentation. The report is extremely pleasing and it is clear that JY has empowered her team to work with her and the consistency of approach is evident throughout. All Trustees agreed.

AL also congratulated JY and the ETA team. Incredible success, particularly given the financial challenges and change in school structure. AL noted the references to 'kindness', 'belonging' and 'nurturing' in the feedback and report. These align with the vision statement and values. Successful blend of commitment to excellence and kindness.

NGB stated that she was present at the Ofsted feedback session and noted how incredibly impressed the HMI was.

Previous actions:

- Lawnside Academy (LSA) – 1FE was modelled but final offer numbers for September '25 have since been received and the school is full for September. This has improved the budget position significantly. There is still a cumulative deficit to address but the in-year position is much improved. The Central Executive will continue to monitor the position.
- Training provision for new and updated policies – training provision and plans are ongoing; CS is considering future options and will pick this up outside of the Trustees' Meeting.
- Pay policy – union consultation has concluded. An options paper has been drafted based on union feedback. This will be presented to the Executive Team at their meeting on Thursday. The outcome will be presented at the next Trustees' Meeting.

Question: What are the main concerns raised by unions in terms of the pay policy?

Answer: Unions would like to see automatic progression for all teachers and any underperformance should be addressed via the capability policy.

Question: Would this stance have financial implications, particularly if pay settlement is unfunded? Is this factored into the budget?

Answer: Progression is always assumed in the budget.

Question: Is there any further update on the Wilstead objection from the Office of Schools Adjudicator (OSA) and how will this impact on RBA?

Answer: No final decision yet received. BEST, Wilstead Primary and both local authorities have submitted their responses. Wilstead applications have actually increased this year. Whilst a decision to remove Wilstead Primary from the named feeder list might have minimal impact in terms of offer numbers for RBA, it does set a precedent and give an undesired message to the Wilstead community.

Matters Arising

Safeguarding: No trustee reportable safeguarding incidents since the last trustees' meeting. Safeguarding audits currently taking place. Report should be available for next Trustees' Meeting.

GDPR: One ICO reportable breach since the last meeting. This breach related to a google form being mistakenly set to be viewable by other respondees. ICO have reviewed the breach report and closed the case. LL is carrying out audits in all BEST schools - annual report to be presented at the next Trustees' Meeting.

Health & Safety: **Pre-read:** Annual Health and Safety Report

No trustee reportable Health and Safety incidents since the last Trustees' Meeting. The Health and Safety Audits have been completed and Annual Health and Safety Report circulated prior to the meeting. CS drew Trustees' attention to the following points.

- The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, also known as Martyn's Law - guidance now received. This will be reviewed and information cascaded as appropriate
- 93.8% overall compliance figure for Trust
- Page 7 onward include a school-by-school list of estate health and safety issues.

Sustainability: Working towards 2025 requirements. Engaged with Lets Go Zero.

Trustees noted that they were pleased to see that funding had been secured and plans progressing for the PBA glass banister.

Question: Is there an update on the new COO?

Answer: Mark Liddiard (ML) is due to start on 2 June 2025. CS and ML will work together over the second summer half term. ML is scheduled to visit all schools and key partners and providers. He will also join future Trustee Meetings.

Question: Is there any update on the Comms Manager position?

Answer: Six applicants, two short-listed, one interviewed. The interviewee has been invited back for a follow up conversation on Thursday.

Question: Is there an update on the CNS conversion to all-through status?

Answer: The LCB and Principals have agreed to move towards formal all-through status. Leadership options paper is currently being prepared for the LCB to review. CS will be returning to work on this project next academic year. It is hoped that a plan will be agreed by 1 January 2026. Curriculum and staffing review will form part of process.

Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Update

Pre-read: Subsidiaries' Executive Committee Minutes – 29/04/25 2025 (approved by Chair)

Pre-read: Director of Education Nurseries' Report

- Nursery quality of education reports continue to improve, strong ongoing CPD and leadership – thanks given to AW and KR for their work with the nurseries
- The nursery numbers are healthy
- Financial forecast position much more positive and robust than previous years

- Shefford nursery recharge amount for use of BEST House – Subsidiaries’ Executive Committee agreed that the current arrangements of 50/50 service charge should be continued for a further year and reviewed annually
- Outstanding loan of £50,000 from Charity to the Nursery – KR recommended that the loan be repaid. Subsidiaries’ Executive Committee agreed to repay the £50,000 loan
- Recruitment - no applicants for WAC club, one applicant for Assistant Manager post, however, they did not attend for interview
- The Subsidiaries’ Executive Committee agreed that they are happy to continue supporting the Nurseries (as per the letter of support provided this academic year).

Question – Will the repayment of the loan cause an issue with the Charity’s Commission?

Answer – Approval does not need to be sought for repaying the loan.

Decision: Trustees unanimously agreed with the Subsidiaries’ Executive Committee decision to repay the loan.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Subsidiaries’ Executive Committee decision to continue the current Shefford nursery recharge amount for use of BEST House for a further year and then review.

Decision: Trustees unanimously confirmed their understanding and agreement that they have considered and understood the nurseries’ financial position and remain content with the return on investment that the subsidiary is expected to provide.

Community, Capital & Estate Committee Update

Pre-read: CCE Minutes – 29 April 2025 (approved by Chair)

Pre-read: POE Admission Applications (Sept ’25)

- Energy efficiency grant – has now been spent
- Sewerage issues at ETA – school have instigated a programme of regular servicing, which appears to have addressed the issue
- Wellbeing gardens – going ahead in remaining schools except GMA – this is being followed up with the Executive Principal (CMA and CNS both sites)
- Capital programme costs – estimated £833,000, includes all surveys, fees and head room. Operations Manager has advised that costs are coming in higher than expected therefore the programme might need to be amended accordingly. All D1s on conditions survey will be addressed
- Funding for SCA now confirmed as £978,000
- The LA is no longer going to build the LSA reception therefore the £130,000 designated for this can be released – CCE Committee agreed to release these funds. The Trust are reviewing potential redistribution of these funds including the works at LSA and potentially addressing issues at CNS
- Estimated balance reserve carry forward of £130,000
- CCE Committee noted how professionally managed the estates are by CS and team, money utilised efficiently
- No changes to risk register at this time

Question: There are a number of issues raised in the report about CNS and health and safety issues, are all costs in £833,000 programme?

Answer: These are either included in the programme or school budgets.

POE Admissions Applications (Sept ’25) and Trends - see summary report distributed prior to the meeting for more detail:

- Overview of POE applications and offers (table 2) – as at National Offer Day for on-time applications there were 44 unfilled places across the trust for a total of 1,461 places, shows a positive picture in terms of families choosing BEST schools
- There will still be late applications and changes due to appeals before September

- LSA is full for September – Trustees noted this and stated that whilst there is some local context to this, this outcome is a credit to the Principal
- RBA 1st preferences 246 for PAN 240
- CNS (both sites) are full for September – however, 1st preference is lower, particularly in the secondary. LL is obtaining data from Bedford Borough Council to review historic trends in numbers. Staff voice has been obtained to establish reasons for patterns in data
- Variances in 1st preference applications and offers highlighted for individual schools
- 1st preference applications over 3-year period (table 4) – increase in total places available and total students within BEST due to CNS joining the Trust, SWA has seen a slight shift in numbers due to local schools becoming established
- POEs at extended secondary schools – LL working with Principals to establish if an additional POE should be added to align with the local context which is made up of a combination of two and three tier schools
- Total school capacity vs total pupil numbers (table 6) – cross trust capacity has consistently grown over a 3-year period

Question: What is the position on the LVA PAN?

Answer: The school had a three-year agreement with the LA to take up to 45, this has been extended for one more year. The school require commitment from the LA to provide appropriate facilities to accommodate an increased number of pupils. Data suggests that a number of local residents have not been offered a place for September.

✓ **Action:** 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.

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.

Initial meeting with SRMA held on 1 May 2025. Next meeting arranged for June 2025.

Policies

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

- Freedom of Information Policy
- Capability Policy
- Redundancy Policy
- ECTE Policy

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Freedom of Information Policy for immediate use.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Capability Policy for immediate use.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Redundancy Policy for immediate use.

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

AOB

- Trustees' Meeting dates for next academic year – All Trustees agreed that they are happy with the current structure of meetings.

Action: IB will review proposed dates and circulate once agreed.

- Trustees questioned what the government's current position is on MATs – Trust is legal entity and some schools have reserves. No signs of change at present.

Next meeting: 10:30am on 26 June 2025, at BEST House