



## Balfour Primary School

### Full Governing Body Minutes

**27<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

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Present	Kirstin Baker (KB), Alan Gunn (AG) - Head, Ray Leeke (RL), Shelley Baker (SB), Alun Price (AP), Adam Knott (AK), Marcus O'Dair (MO), Thomas Holman (TH), Katie Wood (KW), Victoria Jones (VJ).
Apologies	Michaela Francis-Hicks (MFH),
In attendance	Caroline Stabb, Clerk to Governors
Quorum	10 out of 11 governors were present so the meeting was quorate (at least 50% of governors present)

Governor questions and comments to the SLT are highlighted in bold

Decisions and approvals are in bold CAPITALS

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#### **Welcome and apologies**

RL welcomed all governors and staff to his first meeting as chair. Apologies are noted above.

#### **Declaration of business**

RL asked for declaration of business. There was none

#### **Approval of previous minutes**

Minutes of the meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> October were approved.

#### **Disadvantaged Pupil Update (Sandra Mulholland SM)**

- The school believes it is making strong progress increasing disadvantaged pupils' sense of belonging and happiness. However, this improvement is not yet fully reflected in the data, and a gap remains between pupils eligible for pupil premium and those who are not. This pattern is consistent across the city. Closing the disadvantage gap continues to be a long-term priority.
- The local authority has been working in partnership with the University of Sussex, and Balfour was fortunate to be involved in the pilot project. This pilot focused on pupil premium children and included a survey to explore their experiences. As part of this work, in June 2024 Balfour received their first Discover Report, based on a survey of pupils in Years 3 to 6. The survey asked ten questions about their sense of belonging in school, for example, whether they felt they had adults they could turn to for support (both teaching and non-teaching staff), and whether they believed families like theirs were successful in school.
- In September 2024, the University team worked with Balfour to create an action plan with clear annual targets, including boosting classroom participation. SM and AG reviewed classroom interactions, transition systems, and pupil handovers, as well as bias and belonging for children in high-deprivation areas. This informed a working action plan used throughout the year.

- When the survey was repeated in June 2025, results showed a significant improvement in pupils' sense of belonging, driven by the combined impact of all school initiatives. Highlights were:
  - Pupil premium children reported a higher average score (4.02) than non-pupil premium children (3.76) when asked if "families like mine do well at school," showing clear progress.
  - The statement "My school treats everyone the same, regardless of family background" scored 4.44 for pupil premium children and 4.38 for non-pupil premium, showing almost no gap.
  - Another highlight was "One teacher cares about me", where pupil premium children scored 4.27 compared to 3.96 for non-pupil premium.
  - Pupils said that another adult in school cared for them, reinforcing multiple trusted relationships.
  - Progress was seen in girls confidence; a sense of belonging was 3.94 compared to 3.88 for boys.
- Building on this, the team has continued to use the action plan and are developing the "warm demander" approach, ensuring children feel supported, while also being challenged to achieve their best.
- It's important work links effectively to secondary, ensuring pupils are prepared for the transition. Advice from the local secondary schools highlighted the need to avoid practices that won't continue beyond primary. This year, in Year 6, fewer children were disengaged compared to last year.
- School attendance is 96.5%, above the national average (95.1%). Disadvantaged pupil attendance is 92.4%, now in line with the national figure.
- Research shows that when children feel safe, understand expectations, and experience respectful behaviour management, classrooms become collaborative environments where pupils thrive. This sense of belonging drives achievement, helps close the disadvantage gap and is already showing measurable improvements.
- Embedding a culture that links learning with belonging is vital for pupil engagement, supported by family attitudes. This is a long-term commitment, over the past 2–3 years and will continue for at least 5 more.
- The strong relationships our staff build with families lead to positive conversations at home, with parents and carers expressing gratitude for the support their children receive.
- Because the University project was so successful, SM has been asked by the University to support their work with around 15–18 schools across Brighton sharing research and practical strategies. AG recognised that SM's leadership has been key to driving this work forward.

**Q: You mentioned parents supporting this positively. What part of the program focuses on engaging families? A: Staff are encouraged to build belonging by consistently reaching out to families, especially pupil premium. Natasha Paling's work has been outstanding, her initiatives, like Christmas parcels and Advent calendars, were well received, with families feeling confident to accept them because of the strong relationships built. Engagement now focuses less on large events and more on ongoing consultation about children's progress, embedding a culture where families feel valued and connected to the school.**

RL congratulated SM on the excellence of this work and looked forward to hearing more over time

## **Head Teachers Report (AG)**

### **Intake and Census Update**

- The school is almost full, with 693 pupils on roll (97% capacity, up from 690 at the October census). No class has fewer than 28 pupils; most gaps are in Key Stage 2, where classes already have 30–32.
- Prospective parent meetings have been well attended, averaging 15–20 families weekly, with 30 at the most recent. The final stay and play event before Christmas drew around 40 families, with very positive feedback.
- Local nursery feedback highlights the school as a preferred choice alongside Downs, with families impressed by EYFS provision and classroom visits.

- A key differentiator is the school's emphasis on music, creativity and the arts, which families value highly and which aligns with national curriculum priorities. Sustaining this provision will depend on future funding.

### **Staffing and recruitment**

- The school remains under a recruitment freeze. Following a resignation in the office team, some of the hours have been absorbed by existing staff.
- Our music teacher will provide maternity cover from January, which will limit her availability for extracurricular clubs. To help sustain provision, an HLTA recruited before half term may take on some music responsibilities, supported by other staff.
- One of our Assistant Heads has secured a promotion in another primary school and will leave at Christmas. Her post will not be replaced, in line with the planned SLT structure. Teaching cover has been arranged using part-time staff and an HLTA, ensuring continuity for pupils.
- Overall, staffing adjustments are working well, but future provision, particularly in music and extracurricular activities, will depend on budget outcomes.
- A review of the support staff model is also underway and will be discussed further.

### **Safeguarding Update (AG)**

- There have been no official complaints. A few informal discussions with families around Christmas songs have taken place, but nothing requiring formal action.
- The Single Central Record (SCR) is in good order and is checked at least once every half term.
- Vulnerable child meetings are held fortnightly with SLT, ensuring early identification and intervention.
- Currently, there are no children on a child protection plan. One family previously in this category has moved to another school closer to their home.
- Three families are classed as children in need and another three families are working closely with social services and family support workers.
- Two pupils are identified as young carers.
- Two suspensions (totalling 2.5 days) this term: one KS2 pupil suspended for aggression towards another child, with behaviour now improved; and another suspended for aggression towards an adult, addressed through family support and a part-time timetable to meet complex needs.
- Behaviour across the school is generally very good, with minimal low-level disruption to learning. A small number of high-profile pupils sit outside the general behaviour policy, but overall systems are effective. Celebration certificates in assemblies have been increased, which has had a positive impact.

**Q:** At the last meeting there was a discussion about updating the behaviour policy and sharing it. Could you provide an update? **A:** The updated policy was shared with staff at the start of the year, reinforced during September INSET, and supported by local authority training on emotional regulation and behaviour management.

### **School Improvement Plan (AG)**

- As mentioned at the last meeting work has begun that aligns with the new Ofsted criteria.
- We are progressing across several aspects of the school improvement plan, from developing our warm demanders approach to enhancing spoken language delivery.
- The Durrington project is going well, with Sally Pink leading on spoken language and vocabulary acquisition, supported by Kirsty Kingsbury (Year 1) and Sharon Williams (Year 5). Kirsty and Sharon will take over the leadership of this priority when Sally leaves at the end of the Autumn term. Their commitment is greatly appreciated.

## Thrive Together School Alliance

- TTSA activities have been very positive. SB hosted the “Inspiring Voices” public speaking celebration event, with three pupils selected to represent the school at Varndean alongside other local schools. Children spoke on a wide range of topics, from animal welfare to racism and families responded very positively.
- Discussions are underway about organising further termly events, potentially around STEM.
- Teacher CPD is progressing well, with bespoke sessions led by SM and MFH across partner schools.
- Coaching support is being provided as well as group coaching for headteachers through action learning sets. This has been highly valuable for staff development.
- Sandra supported Queen’s Park this week as part of a Quality Assurance Review, which was successful. Additional support has also been provided to another school with a disciplinary matter.
- Funding has been secured to appoint a coordinator to manage organisation and administration, though recruitment has proved challenging.
- The local authority recognises the value of TTSA and is committed to supporting this work.
- Communication with families is being enhanced through a TTSA newsletter highlighting pupil opportunities and improved use of Arbor.
- Being based on a campus site also enables collaboration with Dorothy Stringer and other nearby schools, strengthening the school’s network and appeal.
- Effective use of time and avoiding duplication remain key, with the local authority refining its citywide partnership vision. Workstreams have been streamlined from eight to three to reduce overlap and further meetings are planned to confirm next steps.
- In addition to TTSA, the school is part of the Hill Group. SM joined other deputy heads and writing leads at Stamford Juniors today to review writing across local schools. This is regaining momentum since TTSA

**Q: Could those young people give their speeches to the school? A: Yes, they were front and centre in the Friday assembly. They did extremely well, and we are now considering how we can build on that success.**

**Governors noted that when the TTSA was first established, they had questioned its potential benefits. They now commented that the positive impact is clearly evident.**

## Finance Committee Report

- The deficit position has worsened and the council expects schools to take steps to close the gap.
- Actions already taken include redeploying the music teacher into a class teaching role and agreeing to use part of the school fund to support Forest School. The Finance Committee recognises that difficult choices will be required.
- Staffing reductions are not possible, as teacher numbers are already at minimum levels and SLT has been streamlined. Further restructuring options are limited.
- Savings in cleaning have been achieved through daily “five-minute cleans” by staff and pupils, with offices and communal areas cleaned less often. While this relies on goodwill, staff have been supportive. Concerns about illness have been noted, but sickness levels are slightly lower than last year and communication has helped maintain understanding despite some unease.
- Office capacity is tight, sickness cover challenging, and any additional needs must be met from existing staff. Despite pressures and recent illness, the school has remained safe and operational.
- Benchmarking with other primaries is underway to compare expenditure across leadership, site services and wider functions. Local authority data will guide future planning, alongside ongoing reviews of support models, lunchtime organisation and essential vs. non-essential tasks.
- Front-of-school improvements are under review, balancing cosmetic and budget restraints.

- The SRMA audit has been commissioned by the local authority and will take place in the coming months. Recommendations will inform future financial decisions.
- The school must save £200,000 annually on top of existing cuts, equivalent to losing around a third of support staff (7 of 19), which is not considered safe or viable. Discussions with the local authority will focus on what support and timescales can be agreed, as the deficit must be addressed each year.
- Benchmarking shows the school is already in the bottom third nationally for spending across leadership, office staff, maintenance and staff-to-pupil ratios.
- It was noted that if the school received the local authority average funding per pupil, the deficit would be eliminated. Governors highlighted that, being in a less deprived area, the school receives less government funding.
- The Finance Committee has been tasked with reviewing all possible income options and savings, assessing their impact and bringing forward specific proposals for governors to consider. The Finance Committee will prepare proposals for the next term.
- Reminder: online financial management training is available for governors, with two sessions specifically for Finance Committee members.

**Q: Can we emphasise the need for improved forecasting and financial management to avoid unexpected increases? What was the plan for the deficit budget? Can we generate more income? A: Income generation is being explored through clubs, lettings, and rent adjustments, which already operate most evenings and weekends. Additional options include renting out the Forest School, with TTSA offering modest efficiencies. Brighton Pride has approached the school about using the site as a campsite and the playground could be used for event parking at Preston Park. If the school were to manage these directly, however, the associated costs and responsibilities, such as staffing, insurance, and logistics, would be significant.**

**Q: Is there scope for combining provision and sharing services alongside Varndean and Dorothy Stringer? A: The school's Forest School remains a valued provision and there could possibly be scope to generate income by sharing access with Year 7 cohorts at Varndean and Dorothy Stringer, strengthening collaboration and widening pupil experiences.**

**Q: Are other schools communicating their deficits? A: Governors proposed including a small section in a proposed newsletter next term to include information on the school's budgetary situation, and the challenges these present.**

### **Policies and Procedures for approval**

- FGB approved the Pay Policy, ECT Induction, Schemes of Delegation, and Child Protection Policies.

### **Governor Activities**

- Future meeting dates were all approved
- Governor monitoring roles were all approved
- Update on monitoring visits - all monitoring visit reports to be copied to CS for filing on OneDrive. AK carried out his first monitoring visit (focused on SEN) and was hugely impressed. Despite funding pressures, the work observed was described as phenomenal and shows the school is succeeding in delivering strong provision.
- Health & Safety Policy has been ratified.

### **Vacancies**

The Governing Body currently has a Local Authority Governor vacancy, which the Governor Support Team has advertised and is actively seeking to fill.

**Q: Could AK be the LA Governor. CS to ask the LA if this is possible.**

- **Actions**

Action	By Whom	Status
Review current school values and vision to ensure alignment with the belonging strategy. Featuring them more consistently in school communications and displays	AG	
Finance Committee to review all income and savings options, assess impact, and present specific proposals to governors.	KB	
Ask LA is AK could be the LA Governor	CS	

**Agenda item for next / future meeting**

- Vision and values
- Implications for the FGB and school regarding the new OFSTED framework.

**AOB**

- Governors discussed publishing redacted minutes.
- KB and RL met with DL on her final day and presented her with flowers.
- Congratulations were offered to SB's team for their excellent achievement, particularly to Jolie Bartley for winning the Teacher of the Year in a secondary school in the 2025 Pearson National Teaching Awards.
- School INSET is scheduled for 5 January, focusing on vocabulary and spoken language across science, history, and geography. All governors are welcome to attend in the morning if they are available.

**Date of next meeting: 15<sup>th</sup> January 2026**

**Time closed: 07:11pm**

Agreed as a true record and approved for circulation

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Chair of Governors)

Dated: