



Balfour Primary School

Full Governing Body Minutes

19th March 2026

Present	Kirstin Baker (KB), Alan Gunn (AG) - Head, Ray Leeke (RL), Adam Knott (AK), Marcus O'Dair (MO), Thomas Holman (TH), Katie Wood (KW), Michaela Francis-Hicks (MFH), Alun Price (AP),
Apologies	Shelley Baker (SB), Victoria Jones (VJ); Katie Wood (KW)
In attendance	Caroline Stabb, Clerk to Governors
Quorum	9 out of 12 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

Welcome and apologies

RL welcomed all governors and staff. 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 15th January 2026 were APPROVED.

- The Finance Committee has met twice, and the overall financial position looks comparatively strong when set against other schools. The benchmarking group being used through SMRA is quite small (one other three form entry school), and Balfour has not yet received the final benchmarking data.
- Doing nothing is not an option; without action, the risk is moving into a £1 million deficit.
- LC and AG have carried out extensive work (15 different variants) exploring a wide range of options. The proposal presented is considered the most realistic and sustainable.
- The recommendation from SMRA was that leadership and management time (excluding the SENCO) should not exceed 2 FTE. This could be achieved through an Assistant Head model.
- The early indicators from SMRA suggested higher than average SLT and administrative costs however AG revisited the benchmarked school, which operates with 2.8 FTE and also spoke to a very similar three form entry school that has 3 full time out of class leaders. While this actually suggests we are broadly in line with benchmarking, it is important to note that both of those schools are currently in deficit.

- In discussions around the budget, LC highlighted that the leadership team currently provides some cover and middle leaders receive a TLR which costs approximately £20k.
- There is concern about the potential loss of goodwill if staff changes are made and because staff would be pay-protected, the financial benefit may be limited in the short term.
- It was noted that the benchmarked school is reported to have a SENCO for three days; the accuracy of this information is questionable, as the Balfour SENCO liaises with this school.
- Governor: In light of the White Paper recommendations, some of the proposed changes may feel counterintuitive.
- Response: AG said that a range of structural models had been explored. One alternative model involved reducing support staff by 4 FTE, as the benchmark school operates with fewer support staff however the school relies heavily on supply staff.
- The SRMA adviser visited the school, reviewed all financial and staffing information, and was highly complementary about the systems in place and the extent to which staff goodwill has helped reduce costs. It was noted that in year savings have already reduced the projected deficit from £350k to £250k, largely due to goodwill and internal efficiencies.
- The adviser noted that this was the most challenging school he had worked with in identifying further savings, and he recommended pushing back firmly on the LA as the formula appears to have a disproportionate impact on schools which operate with lower levels of deprivation / prior attainment funding.
- Balfour has already challenged the LA on how the funding formula is applied. Although it is funded only at the minimum per pupil level, there are a significant number of children from the most economically deprived areas of the city. This places Balfour around the midpoint compared with other schools, yet it still receives less funding than comparable schools.
- Governors mentioned that the school has sought an accountant's view on the funding formula.
- LC explained that the Schools Forum agrees the funding formula and the LA implements it. LC agreed that Balfour should campaign at Schools Forum level for a formula that reflects both per pupil funding and need. This will require substantial work.
- It was highlighted that if the school had no SEN pupils and no pupils eligible for Pupil Premium, the funding formula would still allocate the same amount, which illustrates the lack of responsiveness to need.
- Governors suggested identifying other schools in a similar position to strengthen the case.
- AG noted that the funding gap is not due to money being redirected into other schools.
- The school is prioritising highly deprived children yet receives no additional funding for doing so. The SRMA adviser stated that the LA should consider the negative impact the current funding formula has on schools like Balfour.
- Further information will be circulated once available.
- LC presented the five-year financial recovery plan that has been requested by the LA. The plan outlines the steps required to bring the school into a balanced budget position, including projected savings, staffing adjustments and the timeline.
- In addition to the main proposals:
 - Balfour could consider requesting voluntary donations for swimming, as benchmarking suggests many other schools already do this
 - Funding Nature School for five years is an important part of the curriculum and pupil experience.

- A target has been set to reduce photocopying by 6%. Current photocopying expenditure is £25,500, compared with £9,000 at another school. Staff were surprised by the scale of this difference when presented with the figures.
- Governor: Do we know which departments or individuals are responsible for the highest levels of photocopying?
Response: a league table was suggested to raise awareness, but this was not well received. A different approach will be developed to ensure that this data is useful.
The aim of the plan is to bring the school back into an in-year surplus within five years, as required by the LA. LC said that producing a five-year forecast is extremely challenging, as there are many variables that cannot be predicted with certainty.
- Even when the government states that pay awards will be fully funded, this is not always reflected in the actual allocations received by schools.
- Governor: What assumptions have been built into the budget?
Response: Pay remains one of the most significant risks. There is no way to predict future pay awards and external factors, such as geopolitical instability, could drive inflation sharply upwards. If inflation were to rise to 10%, it is unclear whether school funding would increase proportionately. This uncertainty must be kept in mind.
- The removal of the Assistant Headteacher role in Year 3 of the plan represents a significant operational risk and could affect the efficient running of the school. In addition, downgrading the Head role would make recruiting a new Head at a lower salary difficult.
- Governor: If we were to reduce TAs would this be in specific year groups? How would we maintain provision for the most vulnerable children, particularly those requiring 1:1 support? Response: If the model moves towards assigning one adult to a year group, that person might remain in the mornings for pastoral support. Removing this entirely would be very difficult. Reception and Year 1 could potentially be trimmed slightly, but this would go against the nurturing ethos of early years practice.
- LC noted that the hope is to achieve staffing reductions through attrition and there is confidence that redundancies may not be necessary. AG noted if redundancies were required, it may be preferable to be in a position where the school can select which roles to retain, rather than losing staff through attrition alone.
- Governor: Given all the caveats, achieving an in-year surplus by Year 5 would be a significant achievement, especially as the school is otherwise projected to be £1 million in deficit. The plan needs to be agreed this evening so it can be submitted to the LA.
- Governors praised the work undertaken, acknowledging the scale of the task, but noted that the plan contains many assumptions. Questions were raised about whether pay costs have been matched to actuals and whether this is a fair assumption.
- Governors asked whether the assumptions have been stress-tested and whether the risks and potential financial impacts could be quantified. This would provide reassurance that the plan is fully thought through and that the governing body can confidently endorse it.
- Governors also asked whether any alternative models had been considered.
- Response: AG confirmed that there are no viable alternative options and the LA will not accept any plan that does not return the school to a balanced position. The risk of not meeting this requirement is that the LA could appoint an Interim Executive Board to take over governance.
- LC explained that many of the assumptions, particularly around salary costs, are set by the LA as the baseline for all schools.

- Governors noted that there is another option, the model proposed by the SRMA and that the governing body needs a clear explanation of why that option is not being pursued.
- Response: AG confirmed that the reasons are set out in the report. A key issue is that the SRMA's figures were not realistic, as they relied heavily on goodwill, additional time from middle leaders and assumptions that would place significant extra pressure on the remaining leadership team. This would carry a substantial risk to the quality of teaching and learning.
- Governor: it is difficult to hold all of these reasons in mind and that they should be clearly documented. The budget must be agreed as soon as possible, ideally by mid-May.
- Response: KB explained that the school must set a one-year budget alongside a five-year forecast. AG stated he is as confident as possible that the Year 1 budget is achievable. However, signing off Year 3 at this stage is extremely difficult. Forecasting five years ahead in a school context is challenging.
- LC reported that the LA has been clear that outcomes are not their priority; they simply require the school to return to a balanced position. The school is pushing back, emphasising that there are significant operational costs associated with the required cuts.
- AG highlighted the disconnect between numbers on paper and the practical realities of running a school.
- MFH noted that pupil numbers are a major factor in the budget. AG explained that the forecast includes a decline in numbers based on city-wide trends. The five-year plan uses these falling numbers, but even a small increase, for example, two additional pupils, could bring in around £10,000. KB felt the pupil number assumptions were realistic.
- LC added that the Finance Committee was comfortable with the projections. AG emphasised that the school is also trying to maintain the elements that differentiate it from other schools so that families continue to choose Balfour.
- Governor: given the caveats and the additional information discussed did the governing body feel able to agree the draft budget. ALL GOVERNORS AGREED.
- The updated Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Finance Committee were presented.
- All governors present were in AGREEMENT with the proposed TOR.
- RL expressed particular thanks to AG and LC for the significant amount of work undertaken to reach this point in the financial planning process.

Safeguarding Report

- The safeguarding update was presented, covering current caseloads, attendance concerns, and ongoing monitoring arrangements.
- Fortnightly vulnerable children meetings continue to take place, ensuring regular oversight and coordinated support for pupils of concern.
- A section of the report focused specifically on persistent absence, with several children being monitored closely due to ongoing attendance issues.
- Current safeguarding caseload includes: 1 child on a Child Protection Plan; 5 children classified as Children in Need (CiN); 3 additional cases being monitored (category not fully specified); 2 young carers; 9 Front Door for Families referrals; 11 welfare checks.
- Staff noted that, anecdotally, the level of need feels higher than the numbers alone suggest.
- Rachel Clarke (RC), as the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), continues to hold overall responsibility for safeguarding.

- A review has identified tasks that could be delegated or streamlined to ease pressure on the DSL role. Not all referrals may need to go through RC and some responsibilities could be redistributed to keep capacity and workload manageable.

Head Teachers Report (AG)

- The Headteacher provided an update covering progress on School Improvement Plan (SIP) priorities, external reports, safeguarding, and health and safety.
- The school is currently 97% full and the initial selection shows Balfour is oversubscribed. Given the wider context of falling pupil numbers across the city, this is a significant achievement and reflects the strong reputation the school continues to build.
- Governors noted that the school should feel proud of the progress made and the positive perception held by families.
- Leadership continues to lead school tours, supported by pupils who act as ambassadors. While it is valuable for children to show families around, parents often ask questions that require senior leadership input.
- EYFS staff are working closely with MFH to strengthen transition and parental engagement.
- Many prospective parents are asking whether they should apply even though they are out of catchment, which reflects the school's growing appeal.
- The Stay and Play sessions have been highly successful, with strong attendance and positive feedback from families. These sessions have contributed to continued in-year admissions, with children still joining the school.
- The school's positive reputation extends beyond the local area, with some families from outside the city expressing interest.
- Governors acknowledged that this is a collective achievement for the school community.

1. Attendance Update

- Although the headline attendance figures remain strong and the school's persistent absence rate is low overall, a deeper analysis of specific groups reveals some concerns. EAL pupils are attending well, but attendance for SEND and Pupil Premium pupils is below national levels. When SEND pupils are removed from the Pupil Premium group, the key issue becomes clear: the majority of concerns sit within the EBSA (Emotionally Based School Avoidance) cohort.
- Current Attendance Concerns: 4 pupils have attendance below 50%; 5 additional pupils are starting to show patterns of school avoidance; The majority of these cases are in Upper Key Stage 2.
- Staff are working closely with other schools in the TTSA, where a firmer approach has been shown to be effective. This includes marking all unexplained absences as unauthorised and intervening earlier when patterns begin to emerge.
- A governor noted that this aligns with the school's ethos of belonging and the "warm demander" approach: supportive, but with clear expectations.
- AG emphasised the need to support families while also being clear about parental responsibility. There is a balance between "carrot and stick," and both are needed. MFH has begun work with teachers to ensure they know which children are absent, being positive on their return and to

build anticipation for upcoming learning, creating a “carrot” that encourages attendance. However, a softer approach, while well-intentioned, has sometimes had the opposite effect. For some children, extended absence has made returning feel overwhelming and the issue has grown larger over time.

- Governor: have these children have always struggled with attendance?
- Response: Many of the pupils affected are autistic girls, for whom school avoidance can be a coping mechanism. They often mask their difficulties successfully in the earlier years, but this becomes much harder from Year 4 onwards, when social and academic demands increase. As AG noted, challenges typically become more visible in Years 4 and 5, when the pressure, both academically and socially, intensifies and masking is no longer sustainable. Transitions can also be a trigger, for example, the move from Year 2 to 3, where lunchtime arrangements change. The school is focusing on belonging, curriculum design, and pastoral support to ensure vulnerable groups feel secure.
- Governor: is work provided for pupils who are absent?
- Response: Work is provided, but the school is mindful not to make home learning so easy or rewarding that it becomes an incentive to stay at home. In a few Year 6 cases, completing work at home has reduced motivation to attend school.
- Governors highlighted that much of this work involves conversations with parents, who have a legal responsibility to ensure their child attends school.
- AG noted that persistent non-attendance can, in some cases, be considered a form of neglect, particularly when it impacts a child’s long-term life chances.
- MFH explained that the office team now follows a clear script when calling families, including referencing the number of days missed. Standard template letters can be inflammatory, so the school is taking a more relational approach, calling, checking symptoms, and following up with positive emails to reinforce partnership.
- Some parents are very aware of how to avoid unauthorised marks, using phrases such as “family circumstances.” Others are less clear about what unauthorised absence means.
- Attendance communication is being strengthened so families understand expectations and the importance of being in school. The school cannot keep children safe if it does not know where they are and pupils cannot achieve if they are not attending.
- AG explained that, where part-time timetables are used, pupils are expected to attend both morning and afternoon sessions which encourages a return to full-time attendance.
- A governor noted this approach ensures both AM and PM attendance marks are recorded.
- MFH reported that attendance is improving and trends are moving in the right direction. AG emphasised the importance of governors understanding the specific groups being monitored and the strategies being used.

2. Behaviour, Culture & Pupil Wellbeing

- There have been three fixed-term suspensions, all linked to significant behaviour incidents.
- The school is exploring ways to strengthen pupils’ understanding of positive learning behaviours, including the possibility of a recognition system (such as badges or certificates) to reinforce what good behaviour looks like. This is seen as particularly important when supporting higher-profile pupils to remain successfully in the classroom and to develop positive role-model behaviours.

- RL highlighted that helping children understand what good behaviour looks like is essential. Encouraging pupils to self-evaluate, reflect on their actions, and recognise both their strengths and areas for development aligns well with the school's approach. RL referenced the "talk detective" model as an example of how children can learn to identify and articulate their own learning behaviours.
- AG emphasised that pupils need clarity about what is being asked of them and what they need to work on. Developing pupils' ability to lead themselves, build resilience and take responsibility for their choices is a key part of the behaviour strategy.
- Governor: who holds overall responsibility for behaviour across the school.
- Response: AG confirmed that he has direct oversight of behaviour, ensuring consistency, monitoring patterns and supporting staff with strategies for individual pupils.

3. Staffing

- A recruitment freeze remains in place as part of the school's financial recovery plan.
- Having our dedicated music teacher back in class is working very well, with strong positive feedback from both children and parents. A discussion will take place with her about future plans.
- The Senior Leadership Team is now at four members, due to one departure and the decision not to replace the role due to financial constraints.
- The school continues to review the support staff model, ensuring it remains inclusive and aligned with the school's long-term strategic direction.
- There is a clear commitment to ensuring that support spaces and interventions are not seen as a "naughty child room," but instead as supportive, inclusive environments forming part of a coherent pastoral journey for pupils needing additional help

4. Partnerships including TTSA

- The TTSA is increasingly aligned with collaborative working, and this may offer more coherence than the current Partnership in Leading and Learning (PiLL) group. It may be that the school engages more with TTSA groups and less with PiLL to reduce duplication and strengthen shared practice. There are indications that new groupings may emerge across the city.
- A further TTSA Governor Day is planned. If the LA moves towards establishing its own trust, governors will need to consider whether that is a direction the school would want to pursue and what alternative options might exist. Joining or forming a MAT is not currently feasible for the school, and federation models appear quite different from what is needed. Governors agreed it would be helpful to have a future meeting dedicated to exploring structural options and what each would entail.
- AG noted that the school is waiting for the LA to set out the formal options. The autumn term may be the right time for governors to consider these in detail, ensuring any decision has long-term sustainability.
- AG has been involved in quality assurance visits across TTSA schools, including Mile Oak, Hill Park, and Brackenbury, gaining valuable insight into practice across the partnership. Recent TTSA initiatives, such as the art competition (with work displayed in Jubilee Library) and the spoken language competition, have been well received. A STEM-focused project is being considered for the autumn term.

- Coaching for headteachers has been particularly beneficial, strengthening leadership collaboration. Leadership groups focusing on SEND and safeguarding are also proving effective.
- CPD for teachers has now reached its fourth session. Some groups have been very successful, others less so, and planning for next year's CPD offer is underway. The programme has been valuable in helping staff feel part of a wider group of schools.
- There have been no formal complaints.
- David Cole (SPA) visited to conduct case sampling, pupil voice and discussions with Year 6 Pupil Premium pupils. He noted a slight mismatch between pupils' perceptions of their academic performance and their actual outcomes. He also provided feedback on early Ofsted findings and what the school should prioritise in preparation for the next inspection.

New Ofsted Framework

- RL emphasised the need for the governing body to reflect on the new Ofsted framework
- TH will lead a session on what the school does well, where practice needs strengthening, and how governors evaluate performance and challenge leaders effectively.
- RL also noted the importance of understanding what governors should and should not say during inspection. One weakness in the current Ofsted model is an over-reliance on what headteachers say, so governors need to strike the right balance between support and appropriate challenge.
- AG welcomed this challenge, noting that it often prompts leaders to consider things they may not have thought about. The new framework is a tight-fit model with little flexibility: if a school does not meet all aspects of a standard, it will not achieve that grading.
- A "strong good" now aligns more closely with what used to be considered "outstanding," while "exceptional" is reserved for the top 0.5% of schools nationally.
- Behaviour and attendance remain critical, as weaknesses in either area can limit the overall judgement. Governors will need a clear understanding of the framework over the next 18 months, and the school should aim to be strong across all areas.
- AG emphasised that Ofsted looks at the impact of governance over time, not just recent activity. Longevity and consistency within the governing body are therefore important. The school is in a strong position but must avoid complacency.
- Behaviour and attendance may be judged separately, and schools are still finding their way through the new framework. MFH noted that the school will have a full year to refine its strategic approach before inspection. The aim is to be fully ready by September 2027.

Policies and Procedures for approval

- Instruments of governments - APPROVED

Governor Activities

LA Governor

- SB has volunteered to become an LA Governor, and the school is awaiting confirmation of her appointment. If approved, this will create space for two additional co-opted governors.
- Several applicants with financial expertise have expressed interest. Governors discussed what specific skills and experience they could bring to the governing body and how these align with the school's needs.
- Governors were asked to indicate if they are not planning to continue, so succession planning can be managed proactively.
- The Skills Audit will be converted into a shared OneDrive document for governors to update and amend, ensuring an accurate overview of current strengths and any gaps.

Monitoring Visits & Training

- Health & Safety monitoring is scheduled for next week.
- Belonging and Oracy monitoring was completed and the feedback is as follows:
 - Belonging continues to strengthen across the school, with a clear focus on expectations and consistency.
 - Oracy Leads are demonstrating strong knowledge and confidence in the role and have developed a well-structured action plan. Their leadership gives the impression of having been in post far longer, which governors noted positively.

Governors discussed the importance of building a bank of visit reports to create a clear track record of monitoring over time. This will support both internal evaluation and future Ofsted readiness.

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	
Review the safeguarding meetings and look at the possibility of procuring some clinical supervision.	AG	
Add staffing allocation to the summer agenda.	All	
Schedule a meeting to explore structural options: MAT and federation models	AG	
Lead a session on what the Governing Body does well, where practice needs strengthening, and how governors evaluate performance and challenge leaders effectively.	TH	

Agenda item for next / future meeting

- Data drop – useful to share a few snapshots to prompt critical questions about the data, including attainment and the reasons behind current outcomes.

AOB

- RL thanked Governors for the suggestions for the newsletter
- Governors discussed the opportunity to review the school's communication approach, as some parents feel over-communicated with. Governors could take a role in reviewing this, including rotating authorship of messages and drawing on parent governors' anecdotal insights into how communications are perceived.
- A governor asked whether a school newsletter is currently sent out.
- Response: AG noted that a questionnaire was previously issued to gauge how widely it was read and only one response was received. This raised the question of whether the newsletter is needed at all if its absence goes unnoticed.
- Governors agreed that families should not feel bombarded, and that a parent-governor perspective would be helpful in shaping a brief oral report on communication. It would also be useful to have a copy of key communications available via the school office.
- In relation to Health & Safety, governors noted the importance of communicating successes and positive developments, not only issues.
- TH emphasised that the focus should not be on the software used, but on what is being communicated, how well it is landing, and the extent to which parents are engaging. Governors discussed how certain communication channels might be streamlined or replaced to improve clarity and reduce overload.

Date of next meeting: 7th May 2026 at 5:30pm

Time closed: 07:32pm

Agreed as a true record and approved for circulation

Signed: _____ (Chair of Governors)

Dated: