



## Balfour Primary School

### Full Governing Body Minutes

15<sup>th</sup> January 2026

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Present	Kirstin Baker (KB), Alan Gunn (AG) - Head, Ray Leeke (RL), Shelley Baker (SB), Adam Knott (AK), Marcus O'Dair (MO), Thomas Holman (TH), Katie Wood (KW), Victoria Jones (VJ), Michaela Francis-Hicks (MFH),
Apologies	Alun Price (AP),
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. 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 27<sup>th</sup> November were approved.

#### Finance Committee Report (AG)

- The Committee reviewed the school's financial position, including benchmarking other similar primary schools across Brighton and Hove. This included consideration of staffing structures, which has resulted in deploying the music teacher back into class.
- AG and Rachel Clarke (RC) have been developing a revised support model for pupils, both in class and through targeted interventions, which may allow Balfour to operate with slightly fewer staff. This model will be presented at a future Finance Committee meeting.
- A DfE audit is scheduled and will include recommendations for financial improvement.
- **Governor: When will this work be completed?**  
**Response:** By half-term. The audit and associated work will include 3–5-year financial projections. This will help identify any gaps in planning and inform decisions such as whether a potential restructure saving approximately £70k should be considered. The

audit report may include recommendations and depending on the strength of these, the Local Authority may advise that certain actions should be taken. AG noted that if the audit strongly highlights changes that bring schools into line with expectations, it would be difficult not to act on them.

- **Governor: Is the deficit improving?**

**Response:** The projected year-end deficit remains £340k. AG noted that while the school's licensed deficit allowance is £200k, the current projection exceeds this by £140k. There is limited further scope for reductions and without an unexpected increase in income it will be challenging to reverse a deficit of this scale. The priority will be to reduce the in-year deficit to at least zero and then establish a plan for repaying the accumulated deficit.

- A key concern is that although the school is full, the funding received is not sufficient to operate sustainably. The Balfour per-pupil funding is increasing by 3.5%, while schools on average receive 5%, approximately £300 more per pupil. While AG recognises the demographic profile is different, the gap feels disproportionate. Downs School was in a similar position last year but has since received £250k more in funding, despite no significant demographic shift.
- There is a risk that the audit could conclude the school is not financially viable at current funding levels, even though it is full. Parent feedback indicates increasing concern about securing a place at Balfour, as it is becoming more competitive. It is therefore important that we continue to encourage all families who wish to join the school to submit an application.
- Staff are undertaking additional duties, including teachers cleaning classrooms, which saves approximately £40k annually. We have minimised staff recruitment and TAs are covering classes where possible.
- The hope is that the SRMA will identify opportunities or efficiencies that haven't been considered.
- **Governor: What might they recommend?**  
**Response:** They may, for example, recommend that SLT is deployed more frequently in class. However, AG feels this would be a very expensive use of resources and may not represent the best value for money.
- **Governors noted the need to acknowledge staff efforts, such as cleaning.**
- The fact that a draft three-year budget is expected mid-May. The LA will expect a downward trajectory, meaning some difficult decisions may be required.
- A licensed deficit application will be required. Options being explored include:
  - reducing the in-year deficit while addressing the overall deficit
  - considering leadership restructuring, potentially moving to a Headteacher and Inclusion Lead model
  - limiting TAs in class to only those supporting EHCP pupils, if required to achieve £200k savings.
- The extent of required reductions will depend on the Local Authority's level of flexibility.
- **Governors expressed concern that the budget demands are overshadowing so much of the positive work happening in the school.**

- **Governor:** Has the school has experienced any “near misses” caused directly by resourcing constraints, including lost learning time? What about staff wellbeing, have we surveyed recently?

**Response:** Staff are generally positive, but there are growing concerns around resourcing. Examples shared included AG covering two year groups during wet play, office staff carrying dual roles, increasing workloads across all levels, raising concerns about staff burnout. One teacher resignation citing workload as unsustainable.

- **Governors noted many parents would be shocked to learn that teachers are cleaning classrooms and covering additional duties to such an extent.** Communicating this may help build support for staff wellbeing and awareness of the pressure’s schools face.
- Governors discussed the possibility of parental communication around financial pressures.  
One governor expressed willingness to contribute financially for specific resources.
- LC advised that this is a strategic decision for governors. Given our demographic profile, we may be justified in asking for voluntary contributions.
- **Governors raised key questions such as:**
  - **When is a state school no longer a state school if it begins accepting voluntary contributions from parents?**
  - **How do we approach parental contributions sensitively and transparently?**
- Practical suggestions included exploring donation options at events, similar to church card machines or contribution points.
- LC highlighted that we will soon reach a point where we may not have enough staff to safely run lunchtime supervision. LC said that over the last 10 years, staffing costs have risen by £1.5 million, while funding has increased by only £750k.
- **Governors suggested highlighting "near misses" and concrete examples of lost learning time to help illustrate the real impact of funding shortfalls.**
- **Governor: Have we modelled becoming a two-form entry school?**  
**Response:** AG replied that they hadn’t done this yet. This would require investment but could deliver savings in office staffing, grounds maintenance and midday supervision.
- There was also a discussion about the possibility of separating into an infant and a junior school. This would generate two lump-sum allocations in addition to per-pupil funding. While not an immediate proposal, it may be an option worth exploring in the future to help protect the school’s long-term financial position.

### School Financial Value Standards (SFVS)

- The board reviewed the SFVS. All members were satisfied and it was signed.

### Safeguarding Report

- The team is continuing to strengthen safeguarding practice across the school, with a focus on developing consistent use of pupil voice, updating the behaviour policy, reviewing the crisis management plan, clarifying roles within it and delivering staff training on bullying and prejudice-based incidents.
- **Governor: Are there any new safeguarding challenges?**

- **Response:** There are more cases overall. Discussions have taken place about sharing the workload, but because RC has long-standing relationships with many families, reallocating cases can sometimes be counterproductive. AG regularly checks whether support can be shared, but RC feels consistency for families is important.
- Reallocating Child Protection cases to AG is one option for sharing workload. This could create helpful distance where RC has an existing relationship with the family and reduce pressure as external services slow. RC feels the current structure offers consistency, but this will be kept under review.
- It was noted that safeguarding continues to expand as external agency capacity decreases.
- The team holds regular in-depth meetings to share information and review all children with safeguarding concerns. Each child is RAG-rated to monitor whether their situation is improving or deteriorating, ensuring that nothing is overlooked.
- **Governor: Are these meetings being used as a "critical friend" or primarily for tracking and monitoring?**  
**Response:** At present, they are mainly focused on information-sharing and tracking actions, with some reflection on what has or hasn't worked. We could strengthen this by building in more structured critical review for key children to help refine our approach and improve outcomes.
- **Governor: You have previously mentioned the possibility of clinical supervision from the LA. Could this also be explored through the TTSA?**  
**Response:** We previously discussed that the local authority doesn't provide supervision, other than medical supervision for individual cases. There is also the safeguarding group, where safeguarding leads meet. This provides space to share concerns and discuss cases informally, even though it is not formal clinical supervision. Clinical supervision can be provided by Educational Psychologists, so it may be worth the TTSA considering whether this is something they could look into procuring more formally in the future.

## Head Teachers Report (AG)

### 1. SIP Priorities and Value Tree

- The school continues to make progress against its SIP priorities, including work linked to the school's Value Tree.
  - School roll: Census recorded 698; current roll is 695 (approx. 97% full against PAN 718).
  - SEND: Increased from 10.5% at census to 12.5%; a small number of new EHCPs issued.
  - Social care monitoring group: Created following Ofsted; 4.3% of pupils fall into this category. Attendance for this group is 92.8% compared with whole-school average of 96.2%.
  - Overall attendance: Above national (school 96.2% vs national primary 94.5%).
- Leadership update: MFH has resumed responsibility for attendance.
- Disadvantaged pupils remain a key area of focus, with leaders reviewing whether outcomes for these groups are improving.

## 2. Behaviour, Culture & Pupil Wellbeing

- Behaviour across the school remains very strong and calm, with positive feedback from visitors. There were a few individual cases post-Christmas. There was one internal suspension last term and two since returning from Christmas: one for behaviour towards an adult, one towards a child.
- New behaviour policy is working effectively; staff report feeling more empowered.
- A previously concerning year group has settled well.
- Four bullying investigations this year have been upheld and followed through.
- Prejudice-based incidents have been resolved appropriately.
- **Governor: Have these events been resolved and are these numbers higher than previous years?**

**Response:** AG reported that these are similar to previous trends and that the incidents have been resolved.

## 3. Attainment and Curriculum

- Year 6 are performing well with strong attitudes to learning. Prefect system and role-model system is working well. Writing is particularly strong and we are on track to be 10% above national in headline measures.
- Year 1 Phonics:
  - Mock screening shows 45% already meeting the expected standard, which is strong for this point in the year.
  - Target remains 90%+, with focused work on the lowest-attaining 20%.
  - Despite reduced staffing for interventions compared with last year, leaders are confident outcomes will be well above national.
- Reception (EYFS):
  - Last year's GLD was 86.8%, the highest in the city.
  - This year's cohort started from a lower baseline, but have already made strong gains.
  - The school is aiming for around 80% GLD, which would remain significantly above national (68%) and local authority averages (70%).
  - The reception team is working effectively to secure continued progress.
- Cohort variation: Leaders note that differences in starting points are likely due to cohort makeup rather than nursery practice, though this will continue to be monitored.
- Disadvantaged Pupils are still a focus and this is a pattern across the school. The gap is closing, with pupils showing accelerated progress.
- **Governor: Is this due to intervention?**  
**Response:** Progress is driven mainly by strong teacher knowledge of pupils, daily check-ins, and high-quality marking rather than intensive intervention alone.
- The new writing lead is proactive and working closely with the reading lead. AG emphasised that "quality first teaching" remains the key driver of progress.
- **Governor: How are we preventing regression in Years 5 & 6 and supporting consistency across year groups?**

**Response:** There is strong progress across Years 5 and 6. The change in Year 4 leadership has brought a sharper focus, particularly around maths and the times tables check. The Year 4 ECT is progressing well with appropriate support. Year 3 has also seen significant change. The new year 3 leader is performing strongly, despite staff movement. Year 2 has experienced some challenges following staffing changes, but support is in place. Reception and Year 1 remain stable and performing well.

- **Governor proposal:** About a year ago, Governors discussed staffing with AG, who explained how he was allocating teachers to address priorities, such as strengthening Year 5. The improvements since then suggest this approach worked. It was suggested we revisit this in the summer so AG can share his staffing plan and the reasoning behind it. While final decisions remain with AG, this would give governors a chance to support and constructively test thinking.

**Response:** Session scheduled for first FGB in the summer term.

#### **4. Staffing**

- Leadership model is now 1 Headteacher, 1 Deputy, 1 Assistant Head 1 Inclusion Lead the structure AG would have to move to if required to restructure is possibly 1 Headteacher, 1 Deputy, 1 Inclusion Lead Teaching Staff:
  - Music teacher currently deployed in class (22.8 FTE for 23 classes)
  - HLTAs covering one day a week, along with PPA time being taught by HLTAs, raises questions about long-term sustainability. This is something governors and the leadership team need to consider carefully.
  - A four-day teacher currently handling all parental engagement and report writing
- **Governor: We also need to monitor and evaluate the progress of pupils in classes with four-day teaching compared with those with full five-day teacher presence?**
- Support Staff: No structural changes yet, but ongoing work to ensure support is targeted at the most vulnerable pupils
- Recruitment freeze remains but three new MMS have joined
- Exploring how to cover a teacher resignation; one HLTA (an ECT) may be able to step in

#### **5. School Improvement Plan**

- SIP RAG-rating ongoing; SEF review underway
- SLT planning next steps, with a focus on achieving strong standards and improving outcomes for specific groups

#### **6. Partnerships including TTSA**

- PEEL Group continues to be active:
- COGS Group focusing on writing and Queens Park conducting a writing audit for the school
- TTSA - partnership now supported by a new Partnerships Operations Officer (fundraising background). CPD and coaching programmes highly positive. Collaboration with other schools showing strong benefits (e.g., phone ambassadors and shared parent presentations)
- Opportunities & Events

- The Ogden Trust is a charitable trust that exists to promote the teaching and learning of physics. They offer free CPD which two staff members have attended.
- FAB fundraising has been very successful making a £6,900 profit
- Christmas shows very well attended
- Violin concert well received
- Reception meetings with 20–25 families per session
- In Sports achievements the Year 5 girls won the cross-country and the chess team won Brighton heats and are now in the Sussex championships

## **7. Premises**

- Only emergency maintenance is now possible. The school has a £90k rolling 7-year programme but this has now had to be reduced to a 12k emergency-only budget.

## **8. Policies and Procedures for approval**

### **Disciplinary Policy – APPROVED (Further work required)**

- Governors noted some editing issues. The policy is unclear about who holds responsibility at each stage of the process. The table outlining each stage (at the end of the document) lacks clarity and makes the procedure difficult to follow.
- **Action:** Seek clarification from the Local Authority.

### **Pupil Premium Strategy – APPROVED (With comments)**

- Approved in principle. Governors commented that information about spending and the outcomes achieved is not clearly presented. Only financial figures appear in Annex B; the main body should more clearly explain the impact of spending and the context behind decisions.

### **Expenses Policy – APPROVED**

### **Curriculum Rationale – APPROVED (With recommendations)**

- Governors suggested explicitly referencing safeguarding and pupil safety, noting that it may be a missed opportunity not to include it.
- Recommended ensuring that the language aligns with the most recent Ofsted guidance.

## **9. Governor Activities**

- LA Governor Vacancy - The school still has an unfilled Local Authority governor position.
- Governors discussed whether any current governors might consider changing their role to become the LA representative. Some parent governors have substantial finance experience and may be suitable.
- Adam was suggested as a potential candidate; RL will approach him.
- Another governor proposed that Shirley may also be a possible option.

## **10. Monitoring Visits & Training**

- RL attended the first part of the inset sessions and commented that staff professionalism and enthusiasm were excellent and very impressive.
- Governors were reminded to keep their mandatory and recommended training up to date.
- Once training is completed, governors should notify CS, who will record it.
- The LA will also send a summary sheet confirming completed training.

### **Actions**

<b>Action</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Status</b>
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 their impact, and bring specific proposals to governors. The full committee will likely be asked to provide feedback, and the item will return to the next meeting	KB	
Adam was suggested as a potential candidate for LA Governor; RL will approach him. SB to also consider the role.	RL	
Review the safeguarding meetings and look at the possibility of procuring some clinical supervision.	AG	
A deep dive into staffing session scheduled for first FGB in the summer term.	All	

### **Agenda item for next / future meeting**

- Vision and values
- Implications for the FGB and school regarding the new OFSTED framework.
- Deep dive into staffing and hotspots

### **AOB**

- Newsletter to be developed with a section from AG and one from chair of governors RL. Two-pronged approach to families.
- Noted that many emails are going to junk folders. Question raised about whether any of the new emails will replace Windoc, as Windoc currently combines quite a lot of information.
- January Meeting - proposal to move the January meeting next year closer to half-term (Feb).
- Apologies - Shirley sends apologies for the next meeting.

**Date of next meeting: 19th March 2026 at 5:30pm; Time closed: 07:16pm**

Agreed as a true record and approved for circulation

Signed:

(Chair of Governors)

Dated: