

Present: Anthony Abrahams (AA) (Chair), Paul Clarkson (PC), Mark Kiteley (MK), Jasmin Masih (JM), Christine O'Reilly (CO'R), Ian Pryce CBE (IP)

Apologies:

In attendance: Anne Day (Trust Accountant)
Alan Evans (Interim CEO and AO)
Mary Langley (Head –teacher Wixams Tree Primary (WTP))
Rachel Nicol (RN) (Company Secretary) (minutes)
Dave Roffey (CFO via SLA with Bedford College)
Paul Spyropoulos (Principal – Wixams Academy (WA))

No.	Item
BCAT/63/21	There were no apologies for absence
BCAT/64/21	<p>Declaration of interest Ian Pryce, Rachel Nicol and Dave Roffey are employed by Bedford College.</p> <p>Mark Kiteley is a non-executive director and Chair at BCS Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bedford College.</p>
BCAT/65/21	<p>Minutes of meeting 08.10.21</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting on 8 October 2021 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Action taken in respect of changes to the performance dashboard, to include reference to FFT20 in target setting and benchmarking as previously agreed was noted. The Board was updated on the current position regarding the groundworks at WTP.</p>
BCAT/66/21	<p>Matters arising</p> <p>Strategy day. The following decisions were noted:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That a two school trust was unlikely to be viable in the medium to long term. 2. As a consequence, BCAT should look at expanding. Following debate, it was considered that organic expansion rather than merger with a larger trust should be the way forward

	<p>3. As a further consequence BCAT would need to develop infrastructure. Now looking at tactical elements and day to day operations</p> <p>It was reported that since the last meeting both Lesley Glover and Gill Scobie had confirmed their resignations.</p> <p>Gill Scobie had been a director since October 2015 and Lesley Glover since November 2017. More recently Lesley had served as the Vice Chair and provided a link between the Trust Board and Wixams Academy LAB.</p> <p>The Board formally recorded thanks to both Lesley and Gill for their significant contribution to BCAT.</p>
<p>BCAT/67/21</p>	<p>Head-teachers report – Wixams Tree Primary</p> <p>Pupils. Covid impact. 15 children have now tested positive. Cases are understood not to be school based transmission with 3 being the maximum in any one class. Parents have been very supportive.</p> <p>The catch-up plan is operational and available on the website. Catch up funding is being used effectively to get the children back on track, including use of own teachers after school, looking at shorter sessions.</p> <p>New safety surfacing and play equipment is planned.</p> <p>The SEND report was highlighted.</p> <p>The Board discussed the safeguarding report and CPOMs report and was provided with assurance from the Head-teacher that the training is having the planned impact.</p> <p>The Board considered that the attendance levels are positive, particularly given Covid and incidents of a sickness bug and seasonal colds. The national position was noted to be significantly worse.</p> <p>The Board sought assurance on pupil progress and work being done to utilise new DfE resources. The Board noted the progress being made to implemented a new reading programme.</p> <p>Staff. The level of professional development was highlighted with stakeholder and community work being a strong feature.</p> <p>Estate. A report has been received from the surveyor on the condition of the school field. Quotations are being obtained to be able to rectify the position. The Board was updated on the paper and options regarding seeding and turfing, balancing the costs with the need for use of the field, particularly given the planned building works.</p> <p>The recommendation was that the Board support the plan to re turf the area with the BCAT procurement process being followed.</p>

	<p>The Board discussed the legal implications of the planned actions. Assurance was given that the contractor had been given at least two opportunities to rectify the position since August and had not done so. The reseeded opportunity in September 2021 has therefore been lost. It was reiterated that the school now needs to prioritise the children’s access to the playing field with legal action then being pursued as appropriate to recover costs.</p> <p>The Board supported the proposal that the school should proceed with re-turfing and carry out procurement on this basis.</p> <p>A meeting has taken place between the Head-teacher, CEO, Chief Education Officer and contractors regarding expansion plans. There is outstanding design work to do but with internal works planned to proceed more quickly with a handover planned for May 2023.</p> <p>The Local Authority are looking at whether they can support an additional temporary space to tackle space shortage in the short term.</p> <p>Disruption and impact were discussed. The internal work will be carried out during the summer break but with the need for staff to set spaces up before September. Site entrance and traffic plans were raised. The potential for additional routes for construction traffic is being explored and communication is being considered to ensure the community is kept informed.</p> <p>Joint communication between BCAT and the Local Authority is being reviewed. A stakeholder meeting “New Build Communication Strategy Meeting” is planned on Thursday 20 January at 3.30pm. The Board reiterated that whilst communications are a matter for the Executive team they need to be consistent with Board discussions and the board kept informed.</p> <p>It was considered that there may be some opportunity for shared facilities between schools in due course.</p> <p>Stakeholders and community. The school had been engaged in a number of projects with charity work being a strong feature.</p> <p>The update was noted</p>
<p>BCAT/68/21</p>	<p>Principal’s report – Wixams Academy</p> <p>The dashboard was highlighted.</p> <p>Pupils. New data on year 11 mocks will be available this week. A meeting is planned in January to look at the data in detail and this will be available to the Board in their February meeting. The data presented related to the summer tests and included predicted data which was noted to be promising, in particular in relation to the predicted progress 8 scores.</p>

Predicted percentages was explained in the context of the Sixth form entry criteria. The Board considered they had agreed the entry criteria was grade 4 for English and maths which will result in higher numbers of eligible pupils than reported. It was confirmed that published material is accurate.

Normal exams are currently contemplated with adjustments to content to be announced in February.

The CEO will hold a support and challenge meeting in mid-January with an independent Chair and with an intention for both Ian and a member of the LAB to attend. The focus will be the recent mock performance for year 11 and planned actions but will extend to plans for the 6th form and behaviour issues.

Current position regarding potential inspection was raised. Preparatory independent reviews of behaviours, quality of learning evaluations and deep dives continue to take place.

Behaviour was discussed, including TikTok incidents impacting on staff, pupils and the community. Malicious allegations resulted in one permanent exclusion and two pupils leaving the school with one staff resignation being at least in part attributed to the incidents. Assurance was given by the Principal that the picture is improving and on call data (where other members of staff are called to assist) highlighted. Assurance was sought and provided in respect of clarity of the behaviour policy around teaching and learning where pupils are removed from classrooms.

The Board questioned the target pupil numbers in the dashboard (690) and those included in the financial reports. The Trust Accountant confirmed that the figure used in the Financial Report (727) came from the Revenue Forecast Data Collection based on the Principal's estimate

Further discussion took place on the overall self -evaluation position, disadvantaged profile and changing position on behaviour. Assurance was provided that all independent reviews prior to September had considered behaviour to be good or better. The growth in school was highlighted as a potential reason for the change. The Board considered the need for independence and objectivity in reviews and scrutiny to provide additional assurance. The CEO has identified potential support from another Trust. The CEO will also oversee the impact of policies and how this is reported and managed.

The relationship between behaviour and SEND and disadvantaged pupils was raised and it was explained that these pupils do feature more highly. More detailed data is available and being scrutinised at school level.

Safeguarding. The Principal confirmed the setup is strong and CPOMs is well used. A practical issue of double recording on CPOMs and SIMs is being carefully monitored.

6th form. The target is for 112 pupils in 2022 with eligible numbers and external recruits was outlined. The need to increase application numbers and planned activity was set out. No closing date has been set and this is under review. The bus subsidy and communication with parents was raised with no subsidy planned from next year. The Board sought and was given assurance that the year 11 pupils are being given appropriate advice and guidance on all options.

Challenges on securing numbers and contingency planning was discussed.

It was agreed that a full report will be presented at the meeting at the beginning of February with actual numbers, mock results and the modelling (PS)

Staff. The Board raised the issue of lack of data on staff absence within the dashboard. Staff absences were noted to be high and it was acknowledged that levels of supply teachers and consistency is being monitored. Reasons for absence, results of a wellbeing survey and actions planned were set out including reduction of work load. Assurance was given that supportive team activities take place. ***The CEO will take this forward as an HR issue***

The Board discussed the position and impact on leave of the Queen's jubilee at length. **The Board supported the decision to take the additional day's leave advised by the DfE at the end of the summer term.**

The Board urged the Executive team to monitor staff wellbeing if teacher assessed grades "TAG" are reinstated, due to the additional work loads.

Challenges with recruitment and retention were outlined, including reference to a "quit culture" and career changes. Some positions have been advertised on a number of occasions and advertised through multiple media channels. The impact on pupils was outlined. The Board discussed the use of agency staff. ***The Board noted the concerns raised and would like further information on the actions being taken.***

Estate. Creation of additional space for the 6th form and modifications required were discussed. Works are being planned to take place over the summer holidays.

Dining space was noted to be limited. The assembly hall has been opened up. A marquee is being rented at significant cost. There was a discussion over concerns, not only on costs but also in respect of the legal position in terms of licences and planning permission implications. There may be some potential for works to be carried out at the same time as the current expansion works. Discussions during the planning meetings for site expansion include the potential to enclose the dining area.

	<p>The local political position and current potential concerns over year 7 places in relation to 6th form places and local demand at Wixams was discussed. Discussions around accommodating 6th form numbers with the ESFA had led to the current position where Year 7 pupil numbers will be based on PAN of 120 and therefore lower than in previous years .</p> <p>The costs currently outlined for the covered area were noted to be considerably higher than those budgeted for.</p> <p>The Board raised a concern that the nature of the Principal and Head-teacher updates should not be to include items for decision and these should be managed through separate papers.</p> <p>The LAB Chair report was highlighted.</p> <p><i>It was agreed that a full paper will be presented in February on dining space</i></p> <p>The Board agreed that the LAB will be asked to review 3 issues: staff, pupil behaviour and proportionality of SEND and disadvantaged pupils in terms of behaviour.</p> <p>The Board acknowledged their responsibility but were keen to work more closely with the LABs on the detailed scrutiny.</p> <p>The report was noted</p> <p><i>PS and ML left the meeting</i></p> <p>The WTP LAB meeting report was highlighted.</p>
	<p>TRUST MATTERS</p>
<p>BCAT/69/21</p>	<p>CEO report</p> <p>The Board confirmed the report had been read. The CEO highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Progress on schools' improvement in both WTP and WA and future plans for independent reviews around support, challenge and leadership. -Work around the Trust central team and outline of the proposed way forward. It was noted that an interim finance individual has joined the team. HR support, particularly at a strategic level, is being examined. The view was expressed that the issues outlined within the schools necessitate this being a priority. <p>The CEO identified the potential for external support.</p> <p>The Board supported the procurement of external HR support to increase confidence that issues are being dealt with.</p> <p>Progress has been made on IT with some services still being provided under the SLA and others by consultants.</p>

The College Marketing team has provided strong support and links well with the sponsorship arrangements.

It was understood the Trust had already agreed to move to appoint a governance professional outside the SLA with Bedford College.

Recruitment of a Governance professional to support the Trust will commence immediately.

It was requested by the CEO that Trust central reserves could be used to fund the reorganisation of support services. ***A more detailed proposal will be presented at the February meeting.***

-The ESFA audit and whistleblowing allegation resolution was explained. It was noted that the retrospective consent for the related party transaction has been applied for although previous assurances had been received from the ESFA due to the current agreement formalising pre-April 2019 arrangements.

The Board thanked all those involved in managing these matters for the additional work involved.

-ESFA funding and governance review had commended the quality of the finance manuals. The focus of the report was on issues the team are already aware of. No further action has arisen from the review and the CEO will take forward any recommendations. ***A proposal was made and accepted to source an external governance review to focus on the terms of reference for LABs and outstanding matters (AE).***

-Remuneration Committee. It was confirmed that the terms of reference were only ever in draft. They had never been agreed by the Board and the Committee never constituted due to the timing of the reviews and changes in membership. ***The CEO recommended much narrower terms of reference for the Remuneration Committee and these will be taken forward in the external governance review.*** It was advised that given the time frame of the current review it would be timely for the Board to receive the report in early February.

The current position on reviews of executive staff pay was outlined.

The recommendations in the report were approved including:

- **Procurement of external HR support**
- **Recruitment of a Governance professional to the Trust**
- **Envelope of additional costs to develop central infrastructure in the proposals of circa £80K**

The Chair updated the Board on the appointment of external consultants to support the recruitment of the permanent CEO. The panel was discussed and **it was agreed that IP and CO'R would join Anthony on the panel.** A meeting is planned at 5.30pm on Wednesday with a further meeting in January. A robust process was outlined. It was confirmed that

	<p>a recommendation will be made to the Board for endorsement in due course.</p> <p>The report was noted</p>
BCAT/70/21	<p>Review of Pay Policy</p> <p>The CEO outlined the current process, but also gaps in expectations and perceptions.</p> <p>The need for structured development and pathways within a comprehensive suite of policies was set out.</p> <p>The differences between the Upper Pay Scale (UPS) and Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs) were outlined and the Trust Board accepted the need to clarify how they will be awarded within the Trust.</p> <p>The Board discussed the amount of alignment with the schools' model and relationship to initial strategic aims, in particular the low ratio of management to teaching staff. Assurance was given that UPSs are respected but TLRs will not be supported to increase salaries without the appropriate allocation of responsibilities. Assurance was given that careful consideration will be given to how additional payments can be withdrawn in appropriate circumstances.</p> <p><i>DR left the meeting</i></p> <p>The Board confirmed they supported the CEO in developing the policies to move toward reflected a closer alignment with General Teachers Pay and Conditions, but this needed to be done within the principles reflected in the BCAT Way.</p> <p>The Board raised the issue of the need to appoint the Head of Sixth Form. <i>The CEO will take forward the appointment of a Head of Sixth Form.</i></p>
BCAT/71/21	<p>HR policies – family leave</p> <p>The paper had been provided by the HR Manager and highlighted changes discussed previously.</p> <p>The Board confirmed their approval of the recommendation.</p>
BCAT/72/21	<p>Approval of 2020-2021 Financial Statements</p> <p>The Trust Accountant presented the report, financial statements and the management letter. The deadline for submission to the ESFA is noted to be 24 December 2021.</p> <p>The Financial Statements Management letter and audit findings was referenced. No significant issues had been identified.</p>

	<p>One adjustment was made to the financial information provided by the Trust and the Chair of Audit confirmed this related to the pensions adjustment. The Audit Committee had scrutinised the impact of the annual pensions adjustments based on information provided by the LGPS Actuary.</p> <p>The readjustment of the reserves and allocation between centre and the two academies was explained. <i>A future report will look at the utilisation of the central reserves.</i></p> <p>The Chair of the Audit Committee summarised the work that formed the Internal Audit Scrutiny report and outlined the assurance received from the internal auditors. In addition, the audit report provided by the IT External Consultant had outlined the scale of the unresolved IT issues and how they were being resolved. The new IT support team were working closely with the College IT team to resolve issues.</p> <p>Progress on the Internal Audit Plan for 2021-2022 and work to develop the plan for 2022-2023 was noted.</p> <p>The Board thanked the Audit Committee Chair, the Committee and the Trust Accountant for their work in this area.</p> <p>Assurance was given that all returns in respect of executive salaries had been made.</p> <p>The Board confirmed their approval of the Financial Statements 2020-2021 and authorised the Chair and Accounting Officer to sign these on their behalf.</p> <p>The Board formally noted the Financial Statements Management letter and Audit Findings</p> <p>The Board noted the Internal Scrutiny annual report and approved the plan for 2021-2022</p>
BCAT/73/21	<p>Financial update 2021 -2022</p> <p>The Management accounts were presented. Since the report was uploaded a number of changes had been made and these were highlighted to the Board including: cash balance, the reduction in WA budget due to over estimation of pupil numbers (revenue £53k shortfall) <i>Inconsistencies between information on school visit and Principal's report will be reviewed (AE, AD)</i> Assurance was given that all new salary requests have to go through the Trust Accountant to assist budget management.</p> <p>The capital budget was discussed, in particular the works due to be done to increase space for the Sixth form. The original estimate was £170k. The Principal had advised the current estimate is £270k. Assurance was given that there is no current commitment and this will be reviewed.</p>

	<p><i>The CEO will review the Academy Budget in detail and report back in early February (AE).</i></p> <p>WTP budget forecast surplus is slightly lower than anticipated. This related to special needs pupils not being fully funded but the Board had been notified at an early stage and additional staff authorised.</p> <p>The Board noted the update.</p>
BCAT/74/21	<p>Budgets 2022-2023</p> <p>The WA budget remains static with no additional funding for pre 16s</p> <p>The Local Authority are keen for additional classes to be established at WTP but no funding has been received. AD is pushing this hard with the Chief Education Officer.</p> <p>The Board approved the indicative revenue budget for 2022-2023</p> <p>The update was noted</p>
BCAT/75/21	<p>Risk Management policy and Risk register</p> <p>The Chair of Audit confirmed that the Audit Committee had reviewed the policy and register and had taken this into account in recommending the Internal Scrutiny Plan for the current year.</p> <p>The CEO updated the Board on changes since the Audit Committee meeting based on their feedback.</p> <p>Assurance was provided that the Audit Committee will monitor the impact of the planned actions and movement in risk and advise the Board accordingly at future meetings.</p> <p>The Board confirmed the Risk Policy was approved</p> <p>The Board noted the Risk Register</p>
BCAT/76/21	<p>Policies for approval</p> <p>The Board confirmed approval of the Admissions Policy as presented. <i>CEO to organise publication</i></p> <p>The Policy had been amended to include the 6th form. Entry grades and aspirations were raised, both in relation to generic criteria and English and maths grades, the requirement for GCSE qualifications as against other L2 qualifications and how this aligns with academic provision and</p>

	<p>the strategy. Concern was raised that the acceptance of the majority of vocational qualifications could undermine the agreed strategy. Other issues discussed included the appropriate subject choices and impact of curtailing these and the potential for tension between general entry criteria and subject specific entry criteria.</p> <p><i>The wording in the prospectus, on the website and need for consistency with the admissions policy was reiterated and will be monitored.</i></p> <p>The Board confirmed that the preference for proximity as an oversubscription criterion remains.</p> <p>The Board confirmed approval of the Admissions policy and asked for a check to be undertaken to ensure that other published material (the prospectus and website and oversubscription criteria) were consistent.</p> <p><i>CEO to inform schools and organise publication</i></p> <p>The Data Protection Policy had been updated.</p> <p>The issue of confidential information as well as personal data was raised, in particular the need for Board members, LAB members, management and staff to have a greater awareness of confidential information. <i>The CEO will also explore training availability in respect of management of confidential information. The HR function will be asked to review relevant policies to ensure appropriate wording.</i></p> <p>The Board confirmed approval of the Data Protection Policy</p> <p><i>CEO to inform the Business Manager to arrange publication</i></p>
<p>BCAT/77/21</p>	<p>Any other business</p> <p>Consideration will be given to meeting structure to ensure Trust matters are given proportionate time at future meetings.</p>