

**Biddenham International School & Sports College: Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of the Full Governing Board (EGB) held on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at 7.00pm**

Governor	Position	Attendance 2022/2023	Present
David Bailey	Head Teacher (Ex-Officio)	3/3	David Bailey (DB)
Carole Bell	Co-opted Governor (Chair of Governors)	3/3	Carole Bell (CB)
Abdul Shakoor	Staff Governor	1/3	
Anne Day	LA Governor	2/3	Anne Day (AD)
Sarah Crafter	Co-opted Governor	3/3	Sarah Crafter (SC)
Saqib Hussain	Co-opted Governor	3/3	Saqib Hussain (SH)
Nezma Begum	Co-opted Governor	2/3	
Caron Vacciana	Co-opted Governor	2/3	Caron Vacciana (CV)
Carlene Nisbett	Parent Governor	1/3	
Catherine Walters	Parent Governor	2/3	Catherine Walters (CJW)
Georgina Ainscough	Partnership Governor	2/3	Georgina Ainscough (GA)
Nikhita Saggu	Partnership Governor	2/3	Nikhita Saggu (NS)

Apologies: Abdul Shakoor, Nezma Begum, Carlene Nisbett
Not in attendance:
Also in attendance: Eleanor Grylls (EG) – Head of School Chris Morris (CM) – Acting Chief Officer for Education, SEND and Schools Infrastructure, Bedford Borough Council
Minutes: Sue Newman (SN) - Clerk to Governors

Item No.	Item	Action
1.0	<b>Welcome and apologies</b> The Chair welcomed Chris Morris to the meeting and asked that he provide a further explanation of the Borough’s school places predictions (which had been circulated before the meeting) and the LA’s aspirations for both the Borough and for BISSC. She reminded the meeting that the school had already agreed to increase the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) from 200 to 240. She also commented on the historic fight against closure of the school and the slight irony that the school was now being asked to be part of a solution to provide more school places across the Borough.	
2.0	<b>Declaration of Pecuniary and Other Interests</b> Anne Day wished to declare that she was employed by the Bedford College Academy Trust Ltd, which could potentially be competing with BISSC for additional school places. However, the meeting agreed that this presented no specific conflict at this time.	
3.0	<b>School Growth – The Borough Context</b> Chris Morris explained that the Borough of Bedford was growing rapidly and was actually the fastest growing Borough, within the fastest growing region in the Country. The population had increased by approximately 18% between the last 2 census. The Local Plan also included a quota of 1000 additional new homes per year. The LA had a responsibility to ensure there were sufficient school places to meet the needs of this increased population. Where a new “town” such as Wixams was developed, this need would usually be met by the provision of a new school but where there were smaller pockets of development, the solution was not quite as straight forward. The recent change from 3 tier to 2 tier provision had also led to a greater pressure on secondary school places. Overall, this had led to a “perfect storm” across the Borough, which was now “very tight” for secondary school places. At the current time, there were no Year 10 space available in any school in the Borough and CM said he would have to instruct schools to go over their PAN if any additional children applied for new places. This lack of local capacity had led to the LA developing a plan to increase school places across the Borough and it was hoped that BISSC would be part of the solution. He acknowledged that BISSC had recently increased the PAN by 40 places, but pointed out that there was further housing development occurring around the school and that the school’s catchment was quite considerable in size. If the school was to continue to meet the needs of the catchment, it would need to expand further. Based on what was known about future planned development, the LA had predicted the number of additional places required and where children might want to attend school. In Biddenham, it was predicted that	

*Signed as a true and accurate record*

Chair:..... Date:.....

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there was an immediate need to provide in excess of the current 240 places (as had been evidenced in applications this year). DB added that the school had received 260 applications this year from children in catchment / other reasons and were already in a position of having to turn away catchment children. The LA were currently predicting that BISSC would need 264 places in January 2024, 269 in January 2025, 267 in January 2026, 288 in January 2027, but falling to 277 in January 2028. Having identified this potential shortfall, the LA now needed to consider where these children would be placed. This would usually be the local school, but they accepted that BISSC had already expanded through 2 separate phases. However, there was now a need to establish the maximum capacity of BISSC and to investigate whether it was possible to expand further. CM further explained that the LA had a small pot of funding to expand schools, but the DfE would expect the first step to involve a desk top analysis of the current capacity. Early indications suggested that the BISSC site would accommodate more than 240 students and he questioned whether the school could accommodate 270 students within the current estate. If this was not thought to be possible, he queried what would be needed to accommodate this number of students. To fully understand the local context, a team of people from DfE were looking at all the local school sites and had visited BISSC the previous week. CM stressed that the LA had a responsibility to find school places for all children within the Borough and would be in a difficult position if all the local schools refused to consider being part of the solution. The corridor between Lincroft Academy and BISSC was of particular interest due to the significant level of new building. The LA's Executive Committee would be meeting tomorrow to consider the school situation to the west of Bedford. There had been three applications for new Free Schools in the Borough, but it was not yet known if any of these would be successful. A 4-5 form of entry new school placed to the west of Bedford would be helpful and could potentially reduce BISSC's currently large catchment. CB queried whether such a school would be instead of a potential expansion of BISSC or as well as. CM suggested this would be instead of expansion of BISSC but stressed that the outcome of the bids for funding would not be known until May, and that it could prove difficult to identify suitable land to the west of Bedford (especially a site with land suitable for playing fields). He added that DfE's ideal would be for a new Free School to open from September 2025, but this may not be achievable. However, the lag in a successful bid being delivered could potentially be managed through BISSC agreeing to two "bulge years." CM stressed that he had come to this meeting with no hidden agenda and just wanted to have an open discussion about possible options and to understand what would be needed to expand the school to a PAN of 270. CB pointed out that the school had attempted to serve the local community but changes over the years had resulted in a rather odd catchment which no longer made much sense. She also noted that not all schools had retained a specific catchment area. CM confirmed that as a Foundation school, the Governing Board were free to consult on a change to the catchment area or to remove it completely. It would also be possible to include any logical nodal point from which to measure admissions, to better serve the local community. The Governing Board discussed the impact this might have on other local schools, particularly those located in Kempston. The LA would be happy to offer support if the Governing Board decided this was something they would like to pursue. Governors then queried whether the change to Wootton Upper (to two tier) would have any wider implications and what the timetable for this change was. In response, it was confirmed that this change was scheduled to take place from September 2025, but there would obviously be a 2-year lag before the full effect would be felt. The changes would see the current PAN of 200 (in Years 9, 10 and 11) dropping to 170 in each year group going forward. The changes at Holywell would also have an impact. Governors returned to the question of the desktop space survey and queried whether this was a "black and white" analysis or whether it would take any account of the type of curriculum a school delivered or the number of disadvantaged / SEND students in a school. In response, CM confirmed the analysis would not take into account any special circumstances and would be a straightforward assessment based on BB103 standards (which are used for all new school building). This would be aligned to a set formula, which took into account the need for specialist teaching spaces (for woodwork, food tech etc.) but would consider the size of teaching spaces rather than class sizes. CM also confirmed this analysis would look at teaching space in the broadest of senses eg, it would not factor in adjustments such as whether an ICT room could be used as a general teaching space. However, it would take into account the physical size of a classroom (by square meter) in looking at how many children could fit into the space. Governors queried whether the capacity assessment had been conducted by the LA or DfE and whether it had been shared with the school. In response, it was confirmed that Pick Everard had completed an earlier assessment – before the phase 1 and 2 expansions - in conjunction with the LA's QS team, but the most recent version had been completed by the LA's team. There was also a need for this data to be supplemented with information about the reality in school, eg the flow and use of auxiliary spaces etc.. CM again stressed that he was open to a discussion about what was possible, whether the school could consider expanding to a PAN of 270 and what would be required to support an expansion of this size. In response to a Governor query, it was confirmed that the original capacity assessment had not been shared with the school. However, CM confirmed that the new assessment could be shared. The Governing Board then discussed the school's approach to delivering the curriculum, which included some options that had smaller class sizes. Maths was also delivered in smaller class sizes as staff believed that supported greater progress. This meant that class sizes did not always match up to the size of

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the classrooms that lessons were delivered in. Governors queried whether the capacity assessment would take into account the pedagogy of delivery in school, for example the inclusion of SEND spaces and the Sanctuary. CM confirmed that the assessment would include designated non-teaching SEND space however there would always need to be a balance between what could be maintained when there were additional children who needed a physical teaching space. Having said that, the LA would be open to a discussion about what auxiliary support the school would need to manage a PAN of 270. Their main focus was to ensure there were enough school spaces to meet the need in 2025. CM was also conscious that this need may continue to grow as the number of planned new housing developments was only likely to increase over time. However, he did understand that BISSC wished to continue as a community school that supported the needs of the local community (although he thought this was becoming harder and harder to deliver). DB countered by explaining that the applications received this year had actually come from a rather nice “circle” around the school. The school was now full in just about every year group, which meant that a place could not be offered to any new child who moved into catchment in year. EG queried whether the capacity assessment would take the 6<sup>th</sup> Form into account, and it was confirmed that it would not, and this information would need to be added through discussion. CM confirmed the LA were not in a position to fund any expansion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Form, but it might be possible to provide funding to manage any necessary displacement. Current applications suggested that the 6<sup>th</sup> Form was in a period of growth, and this was likely to increase naturally as the school PAN increased.

Governors then asked for clarification as to why BISSC and Lincroft Academy were being asked to make plans for a possible expansion before the outcome of the Free School bids were known. CM confirmed that the timing of that decision meant that he would need to already have a “plan B” in place, to bring online if the Free School bids were unsuccessful - or to manage the period before a successful bid could be delivered on the ground (which could be at least 2 years from the decision being made). In the meantime, the LA were looking at the feasibility of various options including expansion at BISSC and Lincroft Academy, new primary schools at Sharnbook and Wixams and expanding Wixams Academy. The LA were comfortable with the position for 2024, but wanted to ensure they were well prepared for the increased number of places required for 2025. DB added that there was no guarantee that a Free School bid would be successful for Bedford or if any new school would be in the west of Bedford. In response to a further Governor query, CM confirmed that the LA were considering new Free School options rather than creating an additional site for an existing school as they did not have the funding to consider the later option. DfE – rather than the LA - would fund a new Free School. Furthermore, he did not believe the LA would ever again be in a position to build a new maintained school. Governors then queried whether the LA’s predictions for new housing included any information on the country of origin of families with English as an additional language. CM confirmed that the LA had this information for historic developments but that it was extremely difficult to predict for new developments. The LA had received approximately 1400 in year applications for school placed since September (800 secondary) and most of these were from out of Borough, with a large number new to the country. However, there was little information regarding the EAL breakdown. The predictions were also being skewed by an unusual increase in the number of families with children moving into flats (thought to be driven by the cost-of-living crisis). Governors discussed how accurate the LA’s predictions might be given that new housing developments could change timescales frequently. CM confirmed that the LA were in regular contact with every builder and developer active across the Borough and used these updates – along with planning information - to inform their data. The data usually proved to be fairly accurate, within a tolerance of 10-20 students. The meeting discussed the withdrawal of LA subsidy for the “Grant Palmer” bus from Great Denham to Lincroft Academy, which may increase the cost of this journey. The desire was for children to be able to attend their local school where-ever possible although it was accepted that children of secondary age were more likely to travel to school, as they were old enough to get a bus independently.

Governors queried whether there was a risk that if BISSC agreed to take “bulge years” until a Free School was in place, that future developments might force the PAN to remain at 270 beyond this period. It was acknowledged that this could be a risk. CM added that the Local Plan currently included a large development on the old Charles Wells site and if BISSC did not expand, the LA may need to consider asking the developers to include a new school within this development. This would not be ideal, and CM would prefer to see a new school developed in the area between BISSC and Lincroft Academy. In response to a further Governor query, it was confirmed that BISSC could choose to leave the PAN at 240 and then agree each year to take a number over this. Some other local schools already took this approach. Although CM did not feel this would be a fair or equitable approach in normal circumstances, he accepted it might be reasonable during a time of such flux. This could potentially cause budgetary issues in the future, but CM confirmed the LA would be open to a discussion on growth funding to support this approach in the short term (although this would be a decision for the Schools’ Forum). DB queried whether there was recognition from Members that BISSC had already agreed to increase their PAN from 200 to 240 and CM confirmed they were aware the school had already agreed this significant increase, and this was being put forward during further discussions. CB expressed concern that the LA’s discussions seemed to be focusing on bricks and

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	<p>mortar, and not educational progress. She pointed out that results at BISSC had improved significantly over the years and this had involved considerable work. CM acknowledged this but stressed that the main focus for the LA at present was to ensure there were sufficient school places within the Borough to allow all children to access an education. However, his discussions with schools were not limited to building and funding, but included an understanding of what schools would need in the wider sense to support growth (although there were no guarantees as Members would ultimately have to approve any proposals). The ideal would be to develop a proposal that allowed for growth whilst providing an improved educational experience for children. A Governor queried whether this discussion could include the provision of a youth club and it was confirmed that this could be a possibility and had been done elsewhere. CM explained that there was a local election in May, and he would like to be in a position to submit his proposals for September 2025 to Members in early June. The meeting then discussed the lack of suitable land for a new school building between BISSC and Lincroft Academy but recognised that it would be for the DfE to negotiate with landowners. There was also recognition of the need for any new school to develop a sustainable – and safe - transport strategy. CM accepted this issue could form part of any future discussions, although realistically it would be some way down the list of DfE considerations. This would be helped by schools having a catchment that was centred around their school site. In addition, it was hoped that any future proposals for expansion / new schools could be delivered without impacting unfavourably on any existing schools. Before leaving the meeting, CM stated that he would be happy to share any further information or data that might help the Governing Board to make a decision on this issue. He hoped for an on-going dialogue and offered to return for a further discussion if that would be helpful. CM left the meeting.</p>	
4.0	<p><b>School Growth – Implications for BISSC</b></p> <p>The Governing Board discussed whether the provision of another small Free School would be sufficient to meet the predicted need for additional school places going forward. It was also acknowledged that the LA’s predictions showed BISSC having an intake of 234 this year where-as the school had received 287 applications (27 from outside catchment) and a final intake of over 250. There was currently great demand for the school, which was positive but obviously added additional pressure. In contrast, Lincroft Academy had not reached their PAN of 210 this year (likely intake of 198). It was recognised that the LA predictions were rather inexact and, although they showed a reduction in BISSC numbers from 2028, this was unlikely to be the reality. The Governing Board then discussed the LA’s current predicament and the LA’s obligation to provide the number of additional school places required to meet the predicted future need. CV left the meeting.</p> <p>The Governing Board recognised there would be significant physical issues if the PAN were to be increased further, but also wished to discuss the operational implications of any such expansion. CE explained that curriculum planning had been easier with a PAN of 200 and the increase to 240 had forced an increase to 10 forms of entry (with 24 students per class). If the PAN were to increase to 270-280, this would either require a significant increase in class size, or a move to 12 forms of entry. If the school moved to 12 forms of entry, whilst retaining the 2 band approach, there would be a need for additional core / specialist subject teachers. This would obviously have implications for the budget and could prove difficult at a time when the recruitment of specialist teachers was challenging nationally. CE also noted that the DfE’s square meterage was rarely adequate to accommodate larger teenage boys. Even though some of the classrooms in the new block had been built at slightly more than the standard square meterage, there was still no comparison to the size of the classrooms in the original building. In fact, some of the rooms in the new block were unable to accommodate more than 16 students at a time. The Governing Board recognised that the school had worked hard to accommodate the additional needs of some students and they would not want this support to be negatively impacted. CE suggested that a PAN of 260 could be managed within 10 forms of entry, with 26 students per class and 6 groups in Maths. However, she believed that an increase to 270-280, with 27-28 in a class could begin to have a negative impact, especially as this would also lead to an increase in the number of students with additional needs. She reminded the meeting that class sizes currently averaged at 23 students per class, so even an increase to 26 would be a significant percentage increase in the number of students per class. The Mayor was known to have previously raised comment on the school’s approach of maintaining smaller class sizes. The Governing Board felt very strongly that any agreement to increase the PAN must not impact negatively on the quality of the curriculum or delivery in school (especially as this could lead to loss of reputation and impact on the demand for places in the future). In response to a Governor query, it was confirmed that an increase to the number of forms of entry could be managed more easily than an increase to the number of students in each class. However, this would require additional classroom spaces and additional staff. It was recognised that the school had asked for 8 new classrooms in the new block and had only been allocated 6. This had been tricky to manage and had required the re-rooming of some Departments. In addition, the original proposal to provide temporary classrooms during the building works had proved too expensive. Staff had therefore had to find other ways of accommodating classes during this work – not all of which had proved successful.</p>	

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	<p>The Governing Board then discussed how staff and the local community might feel about a further increase to the PAN. Some Governors were concerned that growing too quickly could impact on the community feel of the school and could potentially affect staff morale. It was recognised that the school had successfully navigated through significant changes during the last few years, both in terms of growth and managing the pandemic.</p> <p>The Governing Board recognised that the decision as to whether to further increase the PAN was a very significant decision, which would have far-reaching implications. They discussed what might be needed to make this viable and what other support the school might find beneficial. It was recognised that the school currently only had one indoor sports space, and this was taken out of use for 8 weeks across the year to accommodate exams. It would therefore be extremely beneficial to have an additional indoor theatre / sports space, with toilets and 4 adjacent classrooms (which could be used as changing rooms during productions). In response to a Governor query, it was confirmed that lunchtime could potentially be managed within the existing facilities as the dining room was already being expanded and staff had already introduced a number of alternative serving points. The LA had been asked for an additional Pod as part of the current phase of expansion, but the funding had not been available. A further Pod in another area of the school would certainly be beneficial if further expansion was agreed.</p> <p>The Governing Board then discussed the implications of agreeing to 2 “bulge years” which might allow greater flexibility in the short term but would not be without difficulties. It was recognised that this might be a way of providing additional places until a new Free School was in place. However, Governors felt there had already been a very steep period of growth in school and a very cautious approach was required, to ensure that any additional provision did not impact on the current quality in school. It was also acknowledged that recruiting specialist staff to accommodate “bulge years” could be tricky as temporary contracts would not be attractive in the current climate. The Governing Board were reminded that any proposal to increase the PAN would need to be subject to a consultation exercise, which would need to be started by Easter one year, for implementation the following year. This timing would allow for ongoing negotiation with the LA and a final decision could be deferred until a potential offer had been agreed. CB acknowledged that any decision would need to consider the impact on staffing numbers (including the SLT), the school facilities and environment and the feeling within school. DB explained that a growth in student numbers allowed for greater economies of scale to be achieved within the budget. However, spending needed to be managed particularly carefully during growth years to ensure the school were not left with an overspend in future years.</p> <p>The Governing Board discussed the possible use of an alternative nodal point within the Admissions Policy and agreed this would benefit from further consideration. The Governing Board also discussed the possible implications of CM’s statement that he would be required to direct schools to go over PAN in year groups where there were no spaces left across the Borough. Whilst it might be possible to provide a place to additional students, it was recognised that the curriculum offer might be very limited where subjects were already full. DB advised the meeting that there had been a relatively high level of movement between schools this year and CM had consequently introduced a new process where the school being left had to provide a comment on the transfer form before an application could be processed. It was hoped this might reduce or at least slow down movement. BISSC currently provided good support to children transferring into school from out of country or with additional needs and would want to continue with this support.</p> <p>In response to a Governor query, it was confirmed that the LA could not force the school to expand if the Governing Board agreed they did not want to accommodate any further growth. However, it was acknowledged that the LA were obviously hoping that every local school would play their part in managing the increased demand for school places. CB pointed out that the last few years of significant change had been managed well in school, without losing anything of what was special about the school. However, she wondered whether there would be a tipping point and if so, where this would be. DB reminded the meeting that the design of the school site, with a number of separate blocks - each with multiple access points - helped maintain a good flow around the school, even with the increased student numbers. It was agreed that consideration should be given to inviting relevant Members, Councillors, James Valentine and / or Henry Vann into school to demonstrate the school strengths and the enormous progress that has been made in recent years.</p>	
5.0	<p><b>Agreement of Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN)</b> Following full discussion, it was agreed to postpone a decision until the next FGB meeting scheduled on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023. In the meantime, <b>it was agreed that DB could provide informal feedback to CM on the FGB’s discussions to date. Further thought should also be given as to who might usefully be invited to visit the school and appropriate timings for such an invitation.</b></p>	DB/CB
6.0	<p><b>Any Other Business</b> There was no other business to discuss.</p>	
7.0	<p><b>Next Meeting</b> The next meeting of the FGB was scheduled for 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023.</p>	

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ACTION POINTS		
Item No.	Item	Action
1	DB to provide informal feedback to CM on the FGB's discussions to date.	DB
2	DB and CB to discuss who might usefully be invited to visit the school and appropriate timings for such an invitation.	DB/CB