

Annual Trustees Report 23-24 - Members AGM - December 2024

I again find myself writing this report on the back of another busy but progressive year. The demand seen locally is unsurprisingly no different to the factors we see at a national level, including **retention and recruitment of staff**, an increase in the volume and complexity of **SEND** (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) requests with less resources and financial support, rising **attendance** concerns, and complex student **behaviours** that reflect universal issues within the local communities, and which often fall to the school to manage via both internal and external multi-agency mechanisms. All of which demand considerable time, effort, and focus from the school to ensure a balanced response that meets the needs of the individual students, staff welfare and wellbeing, and maintains a positive school learning environment. Braunton Academy is a comparatively small secondary school, and resilience is often challenged during moments when these elements collide. On the back of this, results 23/24 have seen a dip (more than anticipated). Greater detail of which is present in this report.

Despite these challenges, the board of trustees remain confident and reassured by the strong inclusive and ethical leadership demonstrated by our principal and key SLT. This is reinforced with proactive and consistent responses, in line with the wider school values and Academy ethos. The School Improvement Plan (SIP) contains clear details of the strategies we are implementing in response to these significant factors.

I would like to take this opportunity to share some of the business activity the board of trustees have delivered this past year.

We continue to replicate the Ofsted framework, with Committees established to oversee:

- Leadership & Management (Including Risk management)
- Behaviours & Attitudes (including Safeguarding)
- Quality of Education
- Finance, Estate & Audit (Including and additional Budget meeting)

Having selected their own lead, the committees meet regularly throughout the school year. The full board also meet regularly on a set schedule. All committees follow an annual cycle of business with clear terms of reference to ensure statutory matters are covered and ratified accordingly. Meetings are set a year in advance, to ensure trustees have plenty of preparation time.

FTB meetings bring together the work of the committees, offering accountability to the individual roles and responsibilities therein.

Minutes are documented and retained for all meetings, providing evidence of the robust and supportive challenge offered by the trustees and committees.

The introduction of a new Governance Professional has offered increased rigor to these processes and the associated record keeping.

New Governance Professional (clerk)

Following the previous role holder stepping down due to excessive workload, this new appointment has proved significant. The new appointment is external to the school and thus offers an additional layer of impartiality and scrutiny. With a background in governance, they have been invaluable in delivering against several actions, which have assisted to review and refresh systems and processes, offering greater standardisation and compliance with statutory requirements. In so doing, this has achieved a more streamline approach to the governance framework.

Reviewed and Refreshed key statutory elements

I have worked closely with the Governance Professional to review compliance and several statutory documents within the governance framework of delivery. Including but not exclusively, the trustee handbook, the annual calendar of business, and terms of reference (ToR) for all committees.

They have also proactively supported a review of the sequencing and frequency of those meetings, with consideration given to the well-being and workloads of our trustees (as per national research completed around volunteer roles). The 2024/25 trustees meeting calendar has been refreshed and was again published well in advance to allow trustees maximum planning time.

The Policy cycle is an ongoing work in progress, as is the review of our Articles of Association (information to follow).

Trustee Recruitment Process & Induction.

In the 2023/24 academic year, we experienced changes in the core of the trustee board, with some trustees leaving at the end of tenure, and others leaving for personal and domestic reasons. As alluded to previously, this reflects the national trend of volunteers feeling the pressure of community roles. However, our trustees continue to show a strong commitment to the school, contributing significant effort and time, with an impressive attendance record which can be viewed [here](#) on the school website. Trustees also actively support CPD events, contributing to the professional development of both trustees and staff.

Considering the increased demands within the governance landscape placed on trustees, both in terms of committee attendance and leadership roles, the need for succession planning has become clear. This has prompted a review of the resilience of our trustee board and led to a proposal to update the Articles of Association,

allowing for greater capacity within the board (see accompanying recommendation paper).

Additionally, following conversations with the principal, we have successfully secured **staff representation** within the trustee committee schedule, further strengthening professional relationships between staff and trustees.

Trustees continue to perform school visits and attend engagement events.

Trustee CPD Sessions

In line with our commitment to professional development, trustees participated in several CPD sessions throughout the year:

Academisation (Oct 2023) – In the spirit of the White Paper we continue to be sighted of ongoing developments at local, regional and national level. With much activity competing for the principal's time, we collaborated with colleagues in the Braunton Learning Cooperative Trust (BLCT) and organised a familiarisation event for trustees and governors. We invited six prospective academy CEOs to share their focus, followed by open Q&A. This saved time and gave direction to future work.

Ofsted (Jan 2024) – A session facilitated by key personnel from ESW (Management partnership) helped trustees familiarise themselves with Ofsted inspection standards, and procedures, and served to increase confidence for those who had not experienced an inspection. We will be revisiting this in the first half of 2025, with the aim to upskill new trustees, and refresh on any Ofsted updates.

Succession planning Future proofing (April 2024) – A facilitated session to review our skills audit and ensure we are adequately planning for future trustee leadership, including smooth transition when the deputy chair and chair step away. We intend to repeat this process in early 2025, considering our new trustees.

Skills Audit (Nov 23) – This exercise was completed as part of the annual cycle of business and offered reassurance that the trustees bring breadth and depth of experience and skills, with diverse thinking which contributes to the supportive robust challenge offered. Independent feedback following the April CPD session endorsed this with the facilitator observing a very strong baseline within our Trustee board.

The trustees continue to be involved in several key areas of the school strategy, seeing progress and delivery in the following examples –

The Newbuild – designed to accommodate the uplift in student population. This has been a significant success and a source of pride for the principal.

The SLT restructure - to reflect the increasing demand as seen at both national and local levels around safeguarding, behaviour, SEND and attendance.

This has been well managed in terms of consultation and delivery, and supported by the staff assoc.

The Staff Survey – Conducted for the first time since 2015, this piece of work was intended to gauge feelings around the national impact factors such as recruitment, retention, mental health and wellbeing, pay and workload. It was Important we got a relevant baseline for future activity. Given the amount and significance of change during the past couple of years, the results are strong and positive and give firm mandate for the Principal to lead.

School Improvement Plan (SIP) 2023/24 and performance against KPIs.

The Principal has again had a successful performance and development review (endorsed Sept 2024). The trustees offer supportive challenge and focus to the strategic direction of the school by jointly reviewing and refreshing the 2024/25 SIP, with the SLT. It is worthy of note that SEND, is a key area of focus for both Trustees and the SLT, recognising a collective drive for continuous improvement, strategically and with practical application.

Climate Action Plan, Braunton is demonstrating a leading approach to sustainability with the support of one of the trustees, who has a credible background in this arena.

Academisation – Trustees continue to monitor developments in the academisation landscape since election. We continue building and developing key partnerships and have retained the Partnership Agreement with ESW. This has brought invaluable benefits and support. As part of due diligence, we revisit the SWOT analysis. Independent critical friends from surrounding education community.

Permanent Exclusion Panels - Following difficult scenarios with two separate students, both with complex needs, the trustees have been involved in two permanent exclusion panels. Both cases were well evidenced and presented, and both were well supported by local authority representatives. Trustees continue to monitor and review suspensions and exclusions via the Behaviours, Attitudes & Safeguarding Committee. We review series and trends and ensure the legitimacy and proportionality of applications. To date, when I have been required to consider representations from parents/carers as to the implementation of suspensions, I have found consistent evidence of ethical and inclusive decision making, and a receptive attitude to feedback.

We continue to ensure that safeguarding is a critical part of delivery and reflections. This is seen with the provision of an annual independent safeguarding audit, we strive to be the best we can be at protecting and supporting students, without complacency.

Management partnership with Education Southwest (ESW) - This arrangement has been monitored and reviewed through the Leadership and Management committee and has proven to be an invaluable contribution to the continuous development of the school. Several subject audits and reviews have been undertaken, the most significant being SEND. ESW continue to support the Principal and SLT to deliver on the response plan necessary to ensure our practices and delivery are the best they can be and should be ethically and legitimately. This remains a key area of focus going forward. The partnership has been embraced by the SLT and heads of department who have been involved in several supportive measures initiated by the partnership. I feel sure there was initial reticence, but this has been replaced by recognition of a genuine professional peer relationship that affords resilience for a small secondary school within a geographically challenged location.

Despite 2023/24 being another busy year, the trustees continue to perform effectively. The **SEF** shows clear evidence of progress for the Trustee board, demonstrating breadth and depth of skill, experience, performance and delivery, showing consistence and improvement within the SEF assessment, which has resulted in a shift from RI to a good (strong).

We are keen to maintain the momentum with the Trustee CPD and will be revisiting further sessions in 2025. To ensure additional robust scrutiny to what we do and how we do it, we will commission a governance audit in 2025. This will offer an independent assessment of effectiveness and legitimacy.

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