

**Directors (ie trustees) meeting
Meeting held on 17th July 2025 at 5 pm,
at Brixington Primary Academy,
Draft Part I Minutes**

Present: in person: P Walker (CEO), A Denner (vice-chair, chaired the meeting in the absence of the chair), M Williams, and C Bromfield
virtually: P Wimsett and R Shaw

In attendance in person: T Winn (Trust safeguarding lead, up to part of item 7), M Platten (DoF), K Powell (DoI), and I Candy (C Sec)
virtually: C Fegan (DSI), A Jenkins (DPD)

Quorum: the meeting was quorate

Circulation: Directors and members (through GovernorHub), Dioceses (EDEN and SDBE via GovernorHub), schools & public (through Trust website)

	Decision		Action due
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	1. Welcome, introductions and apologies		
	Apologies were received from A Walmsley (holiday). C Fegan, R Shaw, R Warwick and A Jenkins were expected to join the meeting late. R Warwick was unable to join the meeting due to work commitments lasting longer than expected.		
	2. Prayer		
	Led by P Wimsett		
	3. Declaration of Conflict of Interests		
	Declarations of conflict of interests were invited by the chair. None was made.		
	4. To receive and discuss the report from the Trust safeguarding lead (T Winn)		
	The Spring and Summer 2025 safeguarding strategic plan reports, March 2025 s175 audit analysis report and school safeguarding RAG ratings summary were circulated ahead of the meeting. The Trust safeguarding lead highlighted that she had wanted to have all schools rated as green by this point, but there were still four schools rated as amber or red in terms of FFT standards, around not having practices and procedures fully in place and embedded. For example, at Mary Dean's, the Trust team had recently still had to action things for the school. The board queried why there was a difference between the Ofsted judgement that safeguarding at these schools was effective, but the Trust had rated them as amber or red. The Ofsted criteria was mostly around the Single Central Record and training but could be "light touch", especially if key elements were confidently presented by staff. The board asked for examples of why the Trust safeguarding lead had rated safeguarding as not being effective in these schools. This was mostly around the management of safeguarding cases and whether they were being acted upon and in an appropriate and timely manner. Whilst Ofsted was a "snapshot" of the safeguarding culture, the Trust looked at a range of information including consistency over time. Also, at Mary Dean's, Ofsted was looking at whether the leadership of safeguarding by both the school and the Trust was effective, whether the Trust was looking at the effectiveness of the school	Appendices 1 - 4	

independently from the Trust. There was a correlation between the schools not being rated green with changes in leadership or the Trust providing additional support to leaders around safeguarding.

The board asked for assurance that children were not at risk in those schools.

The Trust safeguarding lead confirmed that children were not at risk in those schools because the Trust team was stepping in and making sure that risks were assessed appropriately, in a timely way, and the safety of children was not compromised.

[C Fegan joined the meeting at this point.]

The meeting went into Part II to discuss this in more details.

The meeting went back into Part I.

The board asked for assurance that the Trust safeguarding lead had good oversight of all the Trust schools.

She was confident of where the schools were in terms of safeguarding through the team's monitoring of FFT standards as part of school improvement visits and external safeguarding reviews. For example, the good standards in the schools that transferred from Acorn were clear from the external safeguarding reviews. Safeguarding was included in all QA visits and reports.

In response to a question, the Trust safeguarding confirmed that clinical type supervision was now being offered to leaders, either through Education Support (support provided free of charge through the DfE) for leaders which more and more were accessing, or through the Trust safeguarding officer who had done the training and had started to roll out supervision for Family Support Advisors (FSAs). The Trust was planning to roll out the supervision model further.

The Trust safeguarding lead further highlighted that:

- The FSA mentoring was working really well. The investment in mentoring had represented very good value for money, as the mentors were really skilled at inducting new ones and supporting them.
- She was expecting to roll out the pupil 'digital promise', a child friendly version of the pupil acceptable use policy, in September.
- The Trust SCR guidance was nearly ready after extensive work together with the Company Secretary. This had been developed a bit slower than anticipated due to the additional workload linked to Mary Dean's.
- S157 audit actions were all on track to be completed as planned.

The board probed around the school that did not have a 'ready for lockdown' procedure.

This school now had developed its procedure. All schools were due to practise their procedure by the end of the year. Schools were clear that this was needed, especially following the implementation of Martyn's law. The team was talking to pupils as part of visits to check they understood and knew what to do.

It had been helpful to be part of networks to foresee national trends and work on those before they became mandatory where possible, making it easier for schools.

The board asked whether schools pre-warned vulnerable pupils about practicing the procedure.

This was left at the discretion of the schools, as they knew their pupils best (some did, some did not). The procedure needed a lot of thought to develop and implement, especially for heads. So the Trust safeguarding lead had reassured them that schools were doing the best they could but ultimately could not plan for every scenario. The procedure was also dependent on school sites and the alarms available. The aim was to be prepared without frightening the local school community.

A trustee reported that when there had been an incident in Exeter earlier this year, the police had given a lot of information to schools, so having the procedure was useful.

The Trust safeguarding lead explained that some schools had already had to use the procedure to go into partial lockdowns for a number of reasons. The next step was to think about lettings and how to help prepare the people using the school site to keep them secure should the need arise. The Trust safeguarding lead was going to look at a Trust risk assessment for Prevent during the autumn term and

<p>identify any gaps and anything that the Trust can do further. Based on previous experience locally, it was likely that schools would have good support from the police and LA should there be an incident.</p> <p>The board thanked the Trust safeguarding lead for her comprehensive, easy to understand reports.</p>	
<p>5. Minutes of the last meeting</p>	
<p>5.1. To approve the minutes (Part I and Part II) of the last meeting (held on 12 June 2025)</p>	
<p>The draft minutes (Part I and Part II) of the previous meeting were circulated shortly before the meeting.</p> <p>These were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and signed by the chair.</p>	
<p>5.2. To review matters arising not otherwise on the agenda</p>	
<p>The list of matters arising was circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p>The following matters arising were raised and discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of Devon IRP: the CEO confirmed he had asked for a meeting with the relevant officer at Devon LA and would report when the meeting had taking place. There was another local trust that was also moving away from using Devon IRP. • Complaints policy: the C Sec confirmed this would be ready in time for the board to review it at its September meeting. • Information to help monitor attendance trends: the DoI was due to meet with the Trust data analyst the week after this meeting to review what reports could be provided to the board. • HR policy review: The CEO confirmed that this would take place the week after this meeting. • Succession planning for the role of lead ethos and Christian distinctiveness trustee: this was due to be followed up by the Trust chair. • RBI form and skills audit: the forms and information on how to complete the skills audit would be sent over the summer holidays by the C Sec • Directors ID verification process for Companies House: the C Sec was due to follow this up with directors once she had completed the process for herself, so they knew what to do. She would also provide support to trustees on an individual basis as needed. 	<p>Appendix 5</p> <p>P Walker</p> <p>I Candy</p> <p>K Powell</p> <p>P Walker</p> <p>A Walmsley</p> <p>I Candy</p> <p>I Candy</p>
<p>6. To receive the verbal feedback from the committee chairs</p>	
<p><u>Audit & risk committee:</u></p> <p>The chair from the committee reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The committee had reviewed the Summer 2025 internal audit report, followed up on some red rated items and been assured that actions had been taken to prevent reoccurrence. • The external auditor had attended the last meeting to explain the plans for the external audit for the 2024-25 accounts, which were developed after a meeting with key Trust representatives. • The committee had had some concerns around website compliance that had been alleviated by a marked improvement. • The committee had amended the Trust risk register around risk 4, due to departure of the Director of People and Operations and other matters within the Trust central team. <p><u>Strategic & finance committee:</u></p> <p>The meeting chair reported on behalf of the committee chair that most of the points that would be relevant to report would be included in either the CEO or the DOF reports for this meeting for an update and further discussion or decision.</p> <p>[A Jenkins joined the meeting at this point]</p> <p><u>Education committee:</u></p> <p>The chair of the committee reported that the committee had:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed the outcomes of phonics, Early Years, Multiplication Tables Checked and Writing for Y6, which the board would be looking at further during this meeting. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed the Trust strategic priorities linked closely to education across the year. In particular, around inclusion, the impact of the use of the WeSEND programme and the further development of the Personal Learning Plans had received positive feedback from hubs and schools. Around raising standards, the Trust was looking at developing a practical framework for teachers. • Asked to get reports about the quality of teaching from next year, with the Trust Senior Leadership Group being asked to suggest how to best provide that information. • Received positive feedback on internal peer reviews between schools. 	
<p>7. To receive and discuss the CEO report, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisional KS2 outcomes • Recommendation to approve Exeter Road Primary School joining the Trust, subject to due diligence 	
<p>Year 6 Trust wide and individual school unvalidated data was circulated ahead of the meeting and the CEO report was circulated on the day of the meeting.</p> <p><u>Verbal update about premises:</u></p> <p>This was a verbal update, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Rockbeare, the Trust had agreed the project manager to deliver the first stage of installing the agreed additional classroom. The Trust had gone to multiple project managers to get quotes, but these would normally be based on a percentage of the total project costs, and Devon LA wanted a fixed fee for each part of the process. The CEO was confident that Devon and the Trust would want to continue with the project (as there was a need due to the growth of Cranbrook) and the Trust wanted to evaluate the quality of the eservice. Therefore the Trust had decided to go ahead with the project manager that had overseen the replacement previously of the single classroom because they knew the site and its complexities well. The school would have an additional class from September 2025, which would initially be taught in part of the school hall and then hopefully in the new classroom after Christmas. • At Newton Ferrers, the project to replace the roof had started. This was expected to be a complex and expensive process. The Trust was working with a project manager for quotes. • At Gatehouse, there had been complaints regarding the site security, but the trust board had already agreed to upgrade fencing there. The costs to fence the entire perimeter of the school site would be prohibitive because of the large size of the site, therefore only the perimeter of the school would be fenced (to prevent access to the school buildings) and not the field. • At Sidmouth, the start of the building work had been delayed by two weeks due to issues with piling. This was not an issue at this stage as the site was due to open after May half term 2026 but it could become an issue if the project was delayed beyond July 2026. <p>The meeting went into Part II to discuss other premises matters. The meeting went back into Part I.</p> <p><u>Growth:</u> The meeting went into Part II to discuss this agenda item. The meeting went back into Part I.</p> <p><u>Outcomes:</u> The CEO highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The data shared was unvalidated, early indicative outcome data. • It was not clear from the DfE Regional Director which schools would be included in published data. Normally, a matrix was used to increase outcome weighting to reflect how long schools had been part of the Trust. For example, Mary Deans would not feature heavily, and neither would St Andrew's and Thorncombe St Mary because they that had been given as new reference number as they were sponsored. However, it was not clear how this would be approached for the other five schools that had 	<p>Appendices 6 – 8</p>

transferred from Acorn schools and for Chickerell, which had been open for longer than 5 years as academies but only part of the Trust for one year.

- The Trust average figures given were calculated from the school averages, weighted by pupil numbers.
- Some children may be discounted depending on their characteristics as part of data checking. So the figures shared were likely to be lowest possible, and there may be small percentage point increases. In addition, some test papers were due to be remarked.

Early Years Good Level of Development (GLD):

The CEO explained that:

- The 2025 National Average (NA) was not yet available.
- The 2024 comparators were for the 29 schools now in the Trust, and this was lower than the figure shared last year for the 21 schools that were part of the Trust then.

[R Shaw joined the meeting at his point]

- The Trust target was for 76% of EY pupils to attain a GLD, 73% pupils had achieved this, which was above the 2024 NA by 6 percentage points and above the Devon figure of around 69.6%.
- The increase in the Trust figure was higher than the NA increase between 2023-23 and 2023-24, so the CEO was anticipating the Trust figure would remain above the NA this year.
- A key government aim was for 75% of pupils to attain a GLD, therefore the Trust was in a good position, and the board should be pleased about the figure.
- The schools that were below their target were small schools where each pupil represented a large percentage.
- The figure for Portesham which had not been included in the report due to internal reporting issues was 100%.

The board commented that there would be a need to look at certain schools in more detail about this metric because results were mixed. In addition, there were some schools where all outcomes were low.

The board queried whether there were some challenging cohorts for that year group in some schools.

There were some challenging cohorts, therefore the overall figure was pleasing.

Phonics:

The Trust was disappointed with the outcomes as it was a two percentage points decline and 3 percentage points below the 2024 NA. This was caused by some schools where the data tracked was not reliable and it was masking some significant shifts (for example at Brixington, Mary Dean's and Willowbank). This was not linked to a single scheme, but more to do with leadership and how they monitored pupil attainment, pedagogy and the quality of teaching. The education team would need to more robustly challenge schools around this in future.

At Brixington, the Year 1 teacher teaching phonics across all classes was off sick from April onwards. Therefore the last round of formal internal assessment had taken place before her absence. When the pupils did the test which was administered by a different teacher, attainment was lower than predicted. The school had not sufficiently considered the experience of the teacher and preparing children for the actual test. But the Trust overall outcome was clearly not good enough and the education team would follow that up.

Multiplication Tables Check

The Trust data was above the 2024 NA, but the NA may go up. Therefore the CEO anticipated that the Trust figure would be either in line or above the 2025 NA.

Year 6 data:

Reading, Writing and Maths combined (i.e. the percentage of children attaining expected standards in all three subjects):

The CEO highlighted that:

- This had been the biggest challenge for schools, as despite some schools having high attainment percentages in each subject, this had not translated into a high combined percentage. Raising this metric was about teachers

addressing children who are good at English and not Maths, or good at tests but not at writing.

- The Trust average was around 54%, an increase from 48% in 2024 when all 29 schools were taken into account. This was a 6 percentage point increase, which was a higher rate of improvement than the NA, but 8 percentage points below the 2024 NA.
- Both Devon and Dorset figures were below the 2025 NA..
- If the Trust rate of improvement continued, the Trust average should be much closer to the NA in 2026.
- The Trust percentage of pupils attaining Greater Depth for this metric, 8%, was in line with the 2025 NA.

Reading:

The Trust CEO highlighted that:

- The Trust average had improved by only 1 percentage point and was 5 percentage points below the 2025 NA.
- This was disappointing and concerning, as the Trust had done a lot of work on Reading a few years ago and schools needed to be able to focus on all three core subjects.
- The Trust average scale score had increased but remained below the NA and children were not scoring highly enough to achieve the expected standard. Therefore, the education team had asked heads to check if pupils had completed all the tests, if there were specific questions for which pupils had not scored well, and whether these were simple questions or complex question. The analysis of the reasons that pupils were not achieving well was key to inform plans.
- The Trust would also compare its analyses with other primary MATs in the Queen Street Group to see if there were comparable trends.

Writing:

The Trust CEO highlighted that:

- The Trust percentage of pupils having achieved expected standards had improved by 3 percentage points, which was a higher rate of improvement than the NA, and was just below the 2025 (by 2 percentage points).
- The Trust average for children attaining GD had also increased, by 4 percentage points, but remained just below the NA (by 1 percentage point).
- The Trust average was above the Devon and Dorset averages.
- The Trust had been asked, as one of top 5 MATs in Dorset, to help the bottom 5 Dorset MATs

The board queried where the Trust was ranked in Devon.

This was not known.

Maths:

The CEO highlighted that:

- There were some schools that had done a great job and got high results. A number of those were priority schools last year because they had had challenges. The education team would look at understanding the reason for these as well as those that had not done well.
- The Trust percentage of pupils achieving expected standards had increased by 4 percentage points but remained below NA (by 7 percentage points).
- Some schools had outperformed themselves and some had done the reverse. Some schools were aware that this would happen, but for some it was a surprise.
- The education team would be looking at the following:
 - Teachers strategies
 - Impact of the curriculum. For example, the team was aware that the curriculum was not great at Mary Dean's and Salcombe, and therefore it was not a surprise that the impact of the curriculum was also not great at those schools.
 - Pedagogy: were all teachers doing their part? Did they know what they need to do to get great results?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintaining the focus of interventions on SEND and PP pupils ○ Increasing oversight which would be easier using Arbor ○ Looking at assessments systems, including the moderation of assessments ○ Increasing the focus around pupils attaining greater depth ● All schools had been asked to analyse their data, the reasons why it was different from predictions, and whether they felt their targets were wrong. Some schools had had pupil movements which impacted their targets and therefore these may need to be reviewed in year in future. The data analysis would be shared with hub boards. ● Several schools would be invited to discuss their standards as part of the standards panel, with some trustees being invited to attend the meeting. A likely outcome would be to change the focus of SIP around outcomes and school improvement approach, and how that would work in terms of accountability For example, the Challenge Partners review had recommended that Rapid Improvement Plans had tighter KPIs and success criteria. ● Some of these schools had had challenges for more than one year, so the team would need to look at the reasons for sustained underperformance and how individuals' performance linked to this. ● The Trust would be looking at trust leaders and the level of support and scrutiny provided to schools, and whether some things should have been notified sooner, and/or whether actions recommended had not been implemented quickly enough ● Target setting system would be reviewed, particularly around more recent joiners and newer heads, to ensure that a well evidence process had taken place. ● There would also be some targeted intervention programmes for Year 6 teachers, which led to improvements this year, as well as an Early Years programme and some targeted work around phonics for schools where outcomes were low. ● There would also be a Maths programme with G Metcalfe who was an expert in Maths around reasoning and problem solving, running half termly Maths sessions in partnership with FFT. His skills were very well matched around where there were gaps within the trust. ● There would also be a leadership programme to intervene at leadership level as well as at teachers' level, for example around the impact of leadership team in larger schools and their efficiency at implementing recommendations for improvement. This was likely to be linked to more formal processes where need be, based on clear expectations around strong leadership. ● The Trust would also work with the QSG And Challenge Partners, to learn from strongly performing trusts outside the region, because of outcomes were also generally low locally in Devon and Dorset. ● The non pupil day for teachers would focus on Teaching & Learning with external speakers. <p>The board enquired whether teachers, as well as Trust and school leaders, would also be able to go to other schools. They will do, subject to budgets, but the Trust can look at other ways of ensuring teachers see best practice from elsewhere.</p> <p>The board queried what work could be done, beyond the use of Venn diagrams, around combined Reading, Writing and Maths attainment, given that the figure was so much below the figures for individual subjects. Some schools had used Venn diagrams effectively, but schools needed to start doing this from earlier on. In some cases, there were some children who found a particularly subject difficult which could not be improved over just Year 6. Whilst Axminster had a low combined score, they had used Venn diagrams and made high progress in some respects from last year but may not have been able to do more progress. At Mary Deans, data was also very low, but the board was aware of</p>	Trust SLG
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the issues at the school. There were two or three larger cohort schools where the differences had skewed the Trust outcomes.

The board concurred that it looked like there were individual schools, such as Brixington, Westcliff and Willowbank, where tracking and outcomes were poor. However, this needed to be worked on generally. The board recognised that some schools, such as Sidmouth and Axminster, had done well from their starting point.

The board probed whether issues with school leadership were being identified quickly enough and then acted on quickly enough. And also whether where the Trust stepped in to do things, this was masking a problem that was not addressed and therefore the Trust was doing too much.

The CEO felt the board needed to be careful when talking about 'quickly enough' because there were systems that the Trust needed to follow. In both Mary Dean's and Salcombe, there was rapid action in response to challenge. At Salcombe, there had been a specific issue linked to a specific individual. When the Trust provided support, it needed to give it time to see if it had an impact. In addition, the Trust had needed to prioritise safeguarding. The head at Willowbank had been off sick for a period of time, over the year. The board needed to recognise that the combined score had increased significantly although it was still below NA. Brixington was more difficult to understand. Whilst the reason for the phonics outcome was well understood, targets may have been too ambitious, and the combined figure was really low. So it was about being relentless around the expectations of staff using Venn diagrams. The school had also changed its age range from 3 to 11 to 2 to 11 and added a resource base, which may have had an impact. The Trust needed to ensure a complete focus on standards.

The board probed around the fact that if the Trust was only looking at targets, it may be missing other aspects. For example, only 9 out of 29 schools were above NA, and only 7 were on or about at their targets. The board was concerned that some schools were well below their targets. In addition, between March and SATs in May, outcomes for 14 schools had dropped when you would expect an increase. So it may be about whether assessments were accurate. And therefore in future the Trust may want to record both the percentage of pupils already attaining expected standards and a prediction of where they may be at the next data point.

The SI team had had the same conversation. Some heads found it difficult despite being given some standard assessments and definitions. So the team needed to look at systems. It may have been however that these children would never had got to the target.

The board enquired whether schools would test children in the autumn term to see the "conversion rate" by the end of the year, and whether this had been done before. Pupils who had passed the test in the autumn term should definitively do that at the end of the year. For example, the conversion rate could be that any child who had achieved a score of 92 in autumn would have a 100 standard score in the summer. That could help inform improvements, as some trusts did this and it seemed to really help to improve their outcomes.

The DSI explained that she had done some work on this last year but had not looked back yet at whether the score thresholds were the right markers. The Trust would be able to backtrack and look at this, now it was using TestBase. Schools had been asked to do a suite of test at the end of Year 5, from which the team had spoken to heads around which children should definitively achieve expected standards by the end of Year 6. So the team now needed to look at this in more detail. The Trust needed to work with heads around this and install confidence around how children who scored below 100 would be able to attain it by the end of Year 6 with appropriate intervention. For example, the discussion could be that if children got a score of 91 at the end of Year 5, they should get to a score of 103 for SATs. Then KPIs of where they should be at the end of each term could be put in place, which would be reviewed each term each individual child. The Trust was also intending to move to a target score of 103 because so many children had attained 99, just short of the 100 score required to achieve expected standards. In Arbor, the central team would be able to do a baseline and set targets, and to review if there was mobility,

which the previous system had not allowed the team to easily do. So targets would reflect the children on roll at all times.

The board queried whether the non-PP figure would be insightful, given that non-SEND pupils were also not much above NA, and the combined figure for PP was really low.

There were some numbers missing currently which meant the figure was not available. EHCPs had done very well against targets and SEND support pupils as well. The Trust now needed to put as much effort on disadvantaged pupils to achieve the same as it had done on SEND pupils.

The board asked what the key thing that would change things next year was.

It was a collective responsibility across the team to change things. The key thing was around standards and monitoring, which benchmarks monitoring was against, and whether monitoring was consistent and regular enough. It may be that the SI team needed to model this more so that heads monitored standards rigorously, to help ensure that all teaching had an impact, at all times.

The board queried whether, where there was a link for some children between low outcomes and low attendance, attendance needed to be addressed more rapidly.

The Trust could not change the scale of this, this had to be done by empowering all heads, senior leaders and teachers around accountability, pedagogy, common language around accountability and being stronger in addressing underperformance. This was about sharpening heads accountability with their teachers and them knowing what to look for, so there is regular, rigorous monitoring.

The board enquired whether there was any way that the board could help and support in terms of accountability. For example, by articulating expectations for children in the Trust.

The CEO felt that the board needed to be sharper at what it discussed at meetings, to ensure there was no repetition because repeating questions would not change what had already happened. So the board needed to focus on what was being done about things, and whether that had made the difference. It felt like the board was spending more time on the problem than on the remedy/solution. Trustees could also sharpen their remit around specific schools. The Trust was adopting a strategic approach to monitoring schools with Rapid Improvement Plans and Raising Attainment Plans. Trustees should have the same oversight around schools' performance as there was already around finance, spending more time on activities outside formal governance meetings to then feed back to the board and committees. The heads of Brixington, Westcliff and Willowbank would attend three hub meetings next year because of needing greater focus. The board should review how it engaged with the SI team, to ensure efficient workflows, the right information being shared to track the right things, clarity about which executives should attend which meetings and why, so that everyone's time was used effectively and in a more focussed way.

The board asked when it would be starting to see changes in place.

It would be at the first education committee, as the first board meeting was too early to see changes.

[The Trust safeguarding lead left the meeting at this point].

Inspections:

Inspection reports that had not yet been circulate to the board (Ofsted reports for Axminster and Salcombe, SIAMS report for Chudleigh Knighton) were circulated ahead of the meeting.

The CEO highlighted that:

- All schools that were expected to be inspected had had their inspection, with the exception Aveton Gifford. It was not clear why that school had not been inspected this year.
- The new Ofsted framework was due to be effective from November 2025.
- He was due to complete inspection training in October and would then run a training session about the new framework for governance volunteers.
- The Bishop of Exeter had visited Rockbeare to celebrate the outcome of their SIAMS inspection which had been a nice event.

**P Walker / I
Candy**

<p>The board recognised the impact of the high number of inspections on the team and that they had done really well overall despite the high workload caused by this.</p> <p><u>Staffing changes:</u> The meeting went into Part II to discuss this matter. The meeting went back into Part I.</p>	
<p>8. To receive and discuss the DoF report and agree the Trust three-year budget for 2025-26 onwards</p>	
<p>The DoF report, May 2025 forecast, May management accounts, 2025-26 budget, three year budget and an explanation of school funding sources were circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p><u>Budget monitoring for the current year:</u> The DoF highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The May management accounts continued to show a positive trend. This was due to some improved funding but also some delays in RM connectivity and infrastructure implementation, and the gap in DoPO. • The in-year deficit was now predicted to be approximately £80K, which was significantly better than the initial forecast at the start of the year (£344K). The outturn was likely to be, with additional opportunity like moving expenses to capital, a £80K in year deficit which was a marked improvement since the last forecast. • This would have a positive impact on reserves, with the reserves now expected to decrease from £1,359K to £1,279K at the end of the year. This would be approximately 3.6% of income, which was still below the DfE recommended 5% and was due to having more schools. • There would also some level of refinement around income planning, through having more done at central level and through more specialist roles. <p>The board thanked Trust colleagues for the work done to reduce the deficit across the Trust, and recognised the difficult decisions that had to be made around staffing.</p> <p><u>Budget for 2025-26:</u> The DoF reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work done on the budget had meant that there had been an improving picture over time, with the Trust now looking at a smaller in-year deficit of £250K for 2025-26. • This was linked to some income changes, for example the teacher pay grant and the School Capital Allocation being higher than anticipated, but also significant savings in staffing costs. • The “bridge” between the 2024-25 and 2026-25 was summarised in a table to give insight into how the in-year deficit was calculated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Income inflation small at about 0.8% ○ Pupil number decline resulting in an approximate £1M loss in income on a like-for-like basis, ○ One-off income areas such as Devon one-off grants, double requires improvement school grants, transferred reserves from joiner schools, and teacher pay grant, ○ Increased teacher and support staff costs, including increments, balanced by staff reductions, ○ The employer NI grant not fully covering the cost of the increase in NI for Trust employees and not at all for external services, ○ Some contracts with higher costs in the first year, which were one off, and there were some targeted savings in those, ○ The Trust would have less opportunities for savings next year because this year it had not needed recruit TAs but had re-deployed them when new EHCP funding was granted and this had been a fundamental part of savings this year. <p>The committee queried what the highest risk was within the budget. Supply was always a risk. The Trust had tried to maintain the same budget for supply but would need to have more data around this. This would be addressed over the next year, which should then enable the Trust to better be able to mitigate the risk.</p>	<p>Appendices 9 – 14</p>

There were also risks around some cost increases linked to inflation and NI increases for external services. This could be balanced by some targeted savings but that would be over two years. The other risk was around LA funding for high needs and nurseries, as the Trust was aware that two of the LAs in which it operated were in a difficult financial situation. This may have an impact on schools, even if they only made a small change in their funding model.

The DoF further highlighted that the predicted in-year deficit would reduce reserves further by the end of 2025-26, and this could be a trigger point for DfE RD intervention.

The meeting chair reported that the Trust board chair and the DoF had reviewed the proposed budget together and the Trust board chair was supportive of what was being planned. He was also satisfied that the forecast was based on reasonable assumptions.

Budgets for 2026-27 and 2027-28:

The DoF highlighted that:

- The figures were based on anticipated pupil numbers, class changes, procurement activities and inflation; decreasing pupil numbers and therefore decreasing class numbers and staff costs and the end of some one-off expenses, e.g. IT investment.
- Assumptions were highly pupil dependent, and the Trust would be reviewing them based on the October 2024 census.
- The aim was to balance maximum funding going to schools and maintaining a reasonable amount of reserves.
- Some government policies e.g. around SEND may also have an impact in due course.
- A surplus was anticipated for both years, which would start to rebuild reserves to the DfE threshold of 5%, a positive trend.
- The figures were based on no further growth but should growth happen that would improve efficiencies as changes in central team would not be required. Central contribution from schools would also be decreasing.

The board thanked the DoF for his clear reports and the considerable work done.

The three-year budget for 2025-26 to 207-28 was approved by the board unanimously.

Contracts for next year:

The DoF reported that:

- The management of contracts was more complicated than usual currently due to not having a Director of Operations (DoO) in post.
- The Trust had historically have used Devon Education Services for a number of services such as payroll, safe reviews.
- He was aware that many schools continued to use their LA payroll because it was easier for LGPS pension contributions.
- Devon has quoted for 6.5% increase for payroll based on the number of pay slips. Whilst there was some work to be done in terms of costs in future, there were benefits in staying with Devon payroll.
- The Trust was also subscribing to Devon Health & Safety, whose costs were increasing by 2% but represented good value for money.
- The same applied to safeguarding where there were more potential suppliers and DES was being good value.
- The Trust would be able to review this in time when the new business team structure was in place and would need to test the market in future.

This approach was supported by board.

The CEO reported that the job description for the role of DoO was ready, and the role would be advertised the week after this meeting, with a view to interview short listed candidates in late Aug. Trustees would be invited to be part of the interview process.

P Walker

[M Williams left the meeting at this point because he was unwell]

9. To receive and discuss the Church schools overview

The 2025-26 Church school overview report together with templates for monitoring key SIAMS aspects were circulated ahead of the meeting.

Appendix 15

<p>The DSI highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was a comprehensive overview from R Earley (Trust Church schools improvement officer), setting out church schools' entitlement over the SIAMS cycle. • It was helpful to see the school visions laid out in one document. • It had been a really positive year for SIAMS. • There were two inspections due to take place next year, one being secure, one needing more work. <p>The board asked for their thanks to be passed onto the Trust Church schools improvement officer. They agreed that it would also be a helpful document for schools and would help deepen their understanding around theological underpinning.</p> <p>The lead Ethos and Church trustee concurred about the quality of the overview and the work done by the Church schools improvement officer, with a view to embed this further next year.</p>	
<p>10. Governance matters</p>	
<p>10.1. To receive an update on governance appointments and vacancies</p>	
<p>The summary of current governance appointments and vacancies was circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p>The Company Secretary highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the change in articles, there would be two Salisbury DBE foundation vacancies once the lead Ethos and Church schools trustee left. It would be key to identify the skills needed to fill those vacancies, particularly within the diocesan criteria. A skills audit would be undertaken. • Two candidates for the role of West Hub chair, identified by Governors for Schools, were due to be interviewed. • The deployment of foundation representatives needed some further planning, as their number across hubs differ, to ensure workload is spread evenly. 	<p>Appendix 16</p> <p>Board / I Candy</p>
<p>10.2. To agree the governance meeting calendar for 2025-26</p>	
<p>The proposed governance meeting calendar for 2025-26 was circulated ahead of the meeting. This includes one less education committee meeting, and more frequent (half-termly rather than termly) chairs group meetings, based on the feedback from this year. It was envisaged that dates for a foundation representative network would be added.</p> <p>The governance meeting calendar was agreed by the board.</p>	<p>Appendix 17</p> <p>I Candy</p>
<p>11. To receive and discuss KPIs for complaints and suspensions</p>	
<p>The formal complaint report, Trust wide suspension dashboard and dashboards for schools where suspensions had taken place were circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p><u>Complaints:</u></p> <p>The board discussed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of formal complaints was really low but the impact on the Trust central team was complex and recognised by the board. • There were also more complaints dealt with at school level. • The Trust would be working around how complaints were handled and the use of a resolution hub. • Feedback would be shared around what could have been done differently. <p>[P Wimsett left the meeting at this stage]</p> <p><u>Suspensions:</u></p> <p>The board discussed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was positive to see that the number of suspensions had decreased over the year and compared to the previous year too. • The number of suspensions was very low (29 suspensions for 4,500 pupils during the summer term to date) • It was the large amount of work done around inclusion which had led to the low level of suspensions. 	<p>Appendices 18 - 19</p>
<p>12. Policies and compliance, to include a review of the risk register</p>	

<p>The policy and compliance report, summary of changes for the 2025 KCSiE guidance, briefings about the 2025 academy trust governance guide and academy trust handbook, the proposed Brixington 2025-26 nursery admissions policy, 2025-26 safeguarding policy template for schools and special category data policy were circulated ahead of the meeting, as was the latest version of the Trust risk register.</p> <p>Policies: Brixington 2025-26 nursery admissions policy (updated to reflect the change in age range and increase in places), 2025-26 safeguarding policy template for schools (updated to reflect the 2025 KCSiE guidance) and special category data policy (updated to reflect the latest template from the DPO) were approved by the board.</p> <p>The Company Secretary highlighted that the governance and compliance assistant should be thanked for the work she had done supporting schools to update nursery policies.</p> <p>Trust risk register: The board agreed that no changes were required to the Trust risk register.</p>	Appendices 20 - 24
<p>Thanks The meeting chair thanked all present for all the hard work they had done this year, their reports to the board and the time they had spent engaging with trustees.</p>	

Meeting start: 5 pm; meeting close: 7.40 pm

Date of the next meetings: see 2025-26 governance calendar

These minutes are agreed by those present as being a true record.

Signed:.....
Chair of Directors

Date:.....