

**Directors (ie trustees) meeting  
Meeting held on 18 July 2024 at 5 pm,  
at Brixington Primary Academy,  
Draft Part I Minutes**

**Present:** In person: A Walmsley (chair), A Denner, P Walker (CEO), C Bromfield, and M Williams

Virtually: P Wimsett and R Shaw

**In attendance** In person: I Candy (C Sec), T Winn (up to item 7),

Virtually: A Gavin (DoPO), M Platten (DoF), A Jenkins (DPD) and C Fegan (SIO)

**Quorum:** the meeting is quorate.

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

	Decision		Action due
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	<b>1. Welcome and apologies</b>		
	Apologies were received from A Gosling (work commitments) and R Shaw (expected late)		
	<b>2. Prayer</b>		
	Led by P Wimsett.		
	<b>3. Declaration of Conflict of Interests</b>		
	Declarations of conflict of interests were invited by the chair. None was made..		
	<b>4. To receive and discuss the report from the Trust safeguarding lead (T Winn)</b>		
	The Trust safeguarding lead report, strategic plan update, school safeguarding RAG ratings and contextual safeguarding summary were circulated ahead of the meeting.		<b>Appendices 1 - 4</b>
	<u>Support for schools to meet the Trust safeguarding standards:</u> T Winn highlighted that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 90% target for schools to meet the required FFT safeguarding standards seemed ambitious in Spring term but has been achieved.</li> <li>• The two schools that need further support are Mary Dean's and Salcombe.</li> <li>• Portesham has shown some very good engagement. It is really pleasing that they are actively following systems and delivering training independently.</li> <li>• At Charmouth, there were issues around site security and fencing has improved this. There were also concerns around CPOMS and physical handling, and the temporary leadership has helped with this. The new school leader knows FFT systems well and therefore T Winn is confident that they will do well.</li> <li>• Colyton and Rockbeare both had their safeguarding reviews this term and did really well, so their heads should be able to support more schools.</li> </ul>		
	A trustee pointed out an inaccuracy in the report around a member of staff role. <b>This will be amended by T Winn and the report re-issued.</b>		<b>T Winn</b>
	<b>The board queried the reasons for the amount of time spent to support Mary Dean's and the level of support needing to continue. They wanted to know</b>		

**whether it was the amount of things that needed to be done or because of people's ability.**

The amount of work was needed to train the leadership team to the right level of leading on safeguarding. In addition, the school still used a paper based safeguarding system. When reading through logs, it became clear that many actions had not taken place, so T Winn and H Davies had to go back and ensure these were followed up. There was a need to clarify the data available, as well as tools for assessing issues and the information that needed to be identified and tracked, in order to establish a reliable baseline. Some of the support was holding the risks for these children, and ensuring information available for children no longer in school was identified and transferred to their next school retrospectively. Staff are engaging and willing to learn but that requires time, therefore there is work to support and also caseload work. There is a high level of needs which means there is a lot to manage at the same time as upskilling staff. Weekly support was given to ensure that decisions were made and followed up, modelling what the DSL duties are. The new SENDCo in place has helped to strengthen the expertise available at the school. That weekly case management will need to continue over the autumn half term to ensure that children are being kept safe, alongside leadership training and coaching around decision making and cultural change. T Winn was confident that Mary Dean's would achieve the right standard within 12 months.

There were also some complaints as a result of actions having been undertaken later than they should have done. Two emergency meetings have taken place as a result of escalating issues.

Feedback has been shared with Plymouth because the issues were ongoing from before academisation. This may be because most Plymouth schools are in trusts and there are very few maintained schools left. There were also some barriers to information sharing. T Winn has begun forging links with LAs to help reach mutual understanding and be able to work in partnership. This has been working really well with Dorset, where there is a DLS network, and Plymouth LA have responded to concerns raised by the Trust. H Davies will be able to focus on Plymouth schools.

Policies:

T Winn reported that:

- Ready for anything lockdown procedures are in place except in one school.
- Mary Dean's had to put that in place in response to a stabbing locally.
- Musbury has not done theirs yet and this is due to be actioned by the end of the term, based on what has been done in other small schools.
- S175 audits are LA audits used to inform training. Dorset, Devon and Plymouth do theirs at different times. **The Dorset audit will be done and information shared with trustees.**
- The Pupil E-safety Policy is overdue due to lack of capacity.

Filtering and monitoring:

T Winn highlighted that:

- All schools have completed termly tests. Some follow-up is taking place around anomalies. The tests used are being recommended by LAs and this is something that needs to be investigated further.
- DSLs/DDSLs get notifications about inappropriate things being searched, for example, sadness/self-harming, guns.  
The Trust IT lead joined the safeguarding network meeting to discuss this, which was helpful

Team capacity:

T Winn reported that:

- H Davies is very experienced from her role as Westcliff and working as a Family Support Worker plus having had clinical supervision training. She has provided valuable support and additional capacity. She will be more operational and working to support Salcombe and Mary Dean's, whilst T Winn will do leadership coaching.

T Winn

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family Support Advisors have been supported. They have been very keen to engage and have undertaken some qualifications. Some have mentored new ones funded through TCAF, and that has provided value for both mentors and mentees. T Winn hopes this will continue next year and will link with inclusion priorities e.g. attendance and bespoke/alternative provision.</li> <li>Workload has been intense and therefore T Winn has had to reprioritise tasks. However, the impact is right, and she can see collective working and improving practice, therefore that is a highlight as well as a challenge. In addition, good links have been made with external agencies.</li> </ul> <p><b>The board asked why staffing at Salcombe was a barrier to improving safeguarding standards.</b></p> <p>All staff this year have been temporary due to maternity leave, therefore there has been limited support capacity for the head as DSL and therefore a barrier to improvement. This will improve once substantive staff are back in post from January 2025.</p> <p>The board noted the pressure due to the support needed at Mary Dean's and thanked T Winn for the work. It will be useful for the board to get a follow up report to understand how this evolving.</p>	
<p><b>5. Minutes of the last meetings</b></p>	
<p><b>5.1. To approve the minutes of the last meeting (held on 23 April 2024)</b></p>	
<p>The draft minutes of the previous meetings, Part I and Part II, were circulated ahead of the meeting. <b>These were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and signed by the chair.</b></p>	
<p><b>5.2. To review matters arising not otherwise on the agenda</b></p>	
<p>The matters arising summary was circulated ahead of the meeting. The following matters arising were raised and discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Management partnership with Exeter Road: the final agreement is due to be signed by their chair and joint management partnership committee meetings will need to be arranged from September 2024.</b></li> <li><b>Report from safeguarding trustee following her last meeting with the Trust safeguarding lead: this is still outstanding. R Shaw to share with I Candy for circulation.</b></li> <li><b>New trustee: P Walker to share the email address of the new potential trustee so that A Walmsley can approach her.</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Appendix 5</b></p> <p><b>P Walker</b></p> <p><b>R Shaw</b></p> <p><b>P Walker</b></p>
<p><b>6. To receive the verbal feedback from the committee chairs (verbal)</b></p>	
<p><u>Strategic &amp; finance committee:</u> A Walmsley reported that the 2024-25 budget had been the key item of the last meeting of the committee.</p> <p><u>Audit &amp; risk committee:</u> In the absence of the committee chair, A Walmsley reported that the key aspect of the last meeting had been the preparation for the external audit. The next meeting will be around audit outcomes, and also to meet with the internal auditors.</p> <p><u>Education committee:</u> A Denner reported that the committee had received reports from the DSI, DPD and Dol. The focus of the report from the DS was on SEND, in particular the We SEND programme that all schools will be involved with, starting with self-evaluation, the Trust having its own bespoke alternative provision and how that might feed into accessing alternative provision and minimising costs. The meeting also reviewed pupil attendance where the Trust is in line with national average but above national average for authorised absences The report from the DPD covered the development of SI peer reviews, with a group of schools having done a pilot. The broad outcome is due to be shared with the committee. The meeting also looked at church schools' leadership. The committee looked at test outcomes that had only just become available and discussed how to change systems next year, including potentially governance systems. The committee would like to explore what can be done differently next year, what the board needs to know and to see,</p>	

<p>and focus on Year 6 to make clear that Year 6 outcomes are important. It was suggested that a meeting involving a group of trustees is arranged to discuss what will be done differently with relevant Trust leaders.</p>	<p><b>A Walmsley / A Denner</b></p>
<p><b>7. To receive and discuss the CEO report, including the draft strategic plan for 2024-27</b></p>	
<p>The CEO report, ImpactEd project, updated 2024 draft outcomes report, 2024 staff survey, July 2024 school rankings, 2024-25 trust structure, draft 2024-27 strategic plan and July 2024 Acorn project overview were circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p>P Walker congratulated the chair for being awarded an MBE for services to education linked to his role as chair for the Trust and trustee for the Ted Wragg Trust. P Walker thanked R Caunter for all her work for the Trust over the years and welcomed C Fegan to the role of DSI. The SIO vacancy to replace C Fegan will be advertised in September. The SI team will use some heads to provide capacity during the autumn term and give them experience in that area.</p> <p><u>ImpactEd project:</u> P Walker highlighted that this is about developing a data management reporting system to provide a dashboard of information, based on the Trust strategic plan and KPIs.</p> <p><b>The board asked why a bespoke system is needed when you would expect there to be a standard one that can be used by the sector.</b></p> <p>There is nothing existing for schools but it is based on a fixed framework using the appropriate RAG ratings for the Trust.</p> <p><b>The board agreed the proposal to join this project and work to have a Trust dashboard set up for the end of the autumn term.</b></p> <p><u>Growth and school support:</u> P Walker reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project is believed to be on track for the Acorn schools to transfer on 1 September 2024. However, currently, due to the recent general election and change of government, decision making is being paused and this is a risk because plans are in place for Acorn schools to operate as part of the FFT from September.</li> <li>• PHP will monitor whether August transfers and conversions take place and let the Trust know, as they feel that this will give a good indication of whether this type of decisions is taking place.</li> <li>• The TUPE consultation has now been completed.</li> </ul> <p>The meeting went into Part II to discuss this further. The meeting went back into Part I.</p> <p>P Walker reported that Acorn board was due to meet earlier on the day of this meeting to confirm the decisions for the schools to transfer and ensuing from the TUPE consultation and no update had been received from them.</p> <p>A Walmsley reported that A Denner, I Candy, and he had met with Acorn trustees and LGB members to answer questions from them about the FFT governance structure and systems. The meetings were felt to be positive, especially as there was a number of misconceptions.</p> <p>P Walker further reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chickerell is also on track to transfer on 1 September 2024.</li> <li>• Exeter Road management partnership is continuing for another 12 months.</li> <li>• He is due to present to three schools about academisation in general terms.</li> </ul> <p><b>The board queried what the risks for the FFT are if the Acorn schools do not transfer.</b></p> <p>It is about when the schools transfer rather than if they transfer. The risks are mostly for Acorn around operational matters and not having systems/contracts in place because of the expected date of transfer. There are limited risks to the FFT.</p> <p>Acorn heads have attended the FFT leadership events and engaged with actions. The FFT will have to be involved with audit and close down, working with appropriate current staff under an agreement.</p> <p><u>Data report:</u> P Walker and A Jenkins highlighted that:</p>	<p>Appendices 5 – 12</p>



on each theme. They will need to start reporting by exception because of growth and therefore pick up on anomalies / outliers.

- The draft strategic plan will be reviewed over the summer and finalised, with an electronic version being available in September. Then printed copies will be made available.

The board agreed with the principle to wait to publish the strategic plan until Acorn schools have transferred.

**The board queried how the aim to raise standards is balanced with reducing capacity given budget restrictions and decreasing pupil numbers, in particular around staff feeling under pressure.**

Trust and school leaders will seek to understand the reasons for poor outcomes and whether that includes funding. It should be noted that staffing is being reduced in proportion to the pupil population reducing. The Trust needs to look at doing things differently due to budget pressures. For example, using the We SEND programme and making sure that there is clarity about the section F of EHCPs which sets out the provision needed for children rather than what has historically been the usual provision of adult support. The Ordinarily Available Provision will be key in this, as will be training and upskilling staff in order to put the right provision in place earlier to stop gaps from appearing.

P Walker further shared that the Trust SLT will work differently next year. There will be fortnightly meetings of the five executive directors plus P Walker and I Candy. There will also be monthly panels for different areas:

- finance (red flags for expenditure/schools linked to management accounts, with heads being asked to attend if necessary)
- capital (led by condition surveys and budgets to help construct the programme and additional priorities that need to take precedent)
- alternative provision/behaviour (in order to pick up behaviour issues at an earlier stage with a view to learn from any patterns and prevent long unplanned placements and also commissioning some places so that they are available when necessary).
- standards. These will include R Shaw and executive educational directors plus the new trustee if possible. This will help heads to better understand accountability and take actions quicker. This will link to improvement plans and a revised QA process.

A Walmsley suggested that A Denner be invited to the standards panels if she is able to attend.

- The team will report by exception every fortnight in each area, to capture schools that are causing concerns in a number of areas and act accordingly, in terms of both support and challenge.

#### Staff survey:

P Walker highlighted that:

- This was undertaken in March, which is reflected in the outcome for some schools.
- Were some schools had particularly low percentages, these have been investigated and followed up. The issues at Mary Dean's have already been discussed. Blackpool were in a state of flux. Westcliff have had a number of challenges around behaviours and were aiming not to suspend. Brixington results were very odd: some staff only partially completed the survey and were aware of the resource base coming but not understanding how it would work.
- The shift in terms of SEMH and behaviours are reflected in the survey. Themes around what staff are finding hard are being reflected in the strategic plan.

#### School rankings:

P Walker pointed out that:

- This sets out the date and grade of the last Ofsted inspection and when the next Ofsted inspection is expected for the Trust schools and new joiners. There are about 12 – 13 inspections expected next year.

P Walker

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The phase is a new aspect which reflects how long schools have been in the trust. There will be four D schools next year: Axminster based on intelligence from Acorn, Mary Dean's because of significant challenges there starting with safeguarding, Portesham, and Salcombe where there are a number of issues being identified by a range of leaders.</li> </ul> <p><b>The board queried whether this may need to be reviewed for the Acorn schools once Trust leaders get to know them better.</b></p> <p>The ratings are based on the intelligence from the work done with Acorn schools already.</p> <p><u>Other documents:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The slides from the Acorn project board were circulated for information.</li> <li>The structures document will be updated now that the TUPE consultation has been completed.</li> </ul> <p>P Walker thanked all present for a busy and challenging year with some changes in expected joiners, issues with Exeter Diocese and Devon linked to this, success in supporting Exeter Road, the Acorn project, C Chapman retiring and M Platten / A Gavin joining and having to contribute quickly.</p> <p>The board reflected that they had wondered at time whether the time taken by the Acorn project was detrimental to existing schools.</p> <p>[T Winn left the meeting at this point].</p>	<p>P Walker</p>
<p><b>8. To receive and discuss the DoF report and agree the Trust three-year budget for 2024-25 onwards</b></p>	
<p>The DoF report including 3 appendices and the June 2024 SCA capital summary were circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p><u>Performance in year:</u></p> <p>M Platten highlighted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The May management accounts show a - £150K deterioration since April but this was expected. Tracking of the in-year deficit shows that the Trust is where expected and therefore the change is not alarming.</li> <li>They also showed the impact of joiner schools and the financial challenges for those. Mary Dean's represents £250K of the deficit in year to date. The situation at Blackpool and the impact of the support that was needed also had a financial impact, which should improve now the school has been stabilised.</li> </ul> <p><u>2024-25 budget:</u></p> <p>M Platten highlighted the main assumptions made in the budget circulated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The budget includes the current FFT schools and staff, not Acorn or Chickerell, but it includes some funding and costs related to the transfer, based on the current understanding of finances of those organisations and reserves which should be reliable.</li> <li>DfE funding for the Acorn schools that have been rated requires improvement twice to help the Trust to meet the challenges for those schools, using assumptions based on discussions with the DfE as part of the project.</li> <li>Some of the TCAF funding bid for, both in cost and income. £400K of the £750K bid for is included in the budget due to expected costs linked to the transfer.</li> <li>The NJC pay award as it has already been agreed. It is a high percentage increase for most staff on that scale.</li> <li>The teacher pay increase is not known; the assumption made was that further funding will be available to meet any costs above the communicated affordable level for schools, as has previously been the case.</li> <li></li> <li>Staff progressing on their pay scale as expected.</li> <li>some costs either increased or decreased based on current trends</li> <li>The aim was to be as realistic as possible.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Appendices 13 - 14</b></p>

These assumptions resulted in a budget showing a £490K in-year deficit for 2023-24. With reserves expected to be £1.2M by the end of 2024-25, this will mean the Trust having reserves of £700K by the end of 2024-25, which is well below the 5% of income target strongly recommended by the DfE. However the Trust should be able to achieve a more sustainable budget in future years given the introduction of Acorn and Chickerell.

A Walmsley commented that this was not uncommon in the sector and that the FFT is tracking closely other trusts.

M Platten explained that the appendix 3 document highlights key movements between the 2023-24 in-year deficit and the projected in-year deficit for 2024-25 as follows:

- The first box is the removal of one-off income for this year: inherited reserves for Mary Dean's and Charmouth, TCAF funding, and recovery premium/tutoring grants ending this year.
- The second box is key movements in year:
  - the Brixington resource base opening next year, which will generate income offset by staff costs
  - the pupil number reduction based on census information (3% reduction) and then per pupil funding increase that materially offset the drop in pupil funding due to falling roll
  - increases in PP funding and some additional nursery income
  - grant to pay for teachers pay increase.
  - costs of teachers' pay scale increase, teachers moving up the pay scale and average teachers cost (with temporary teachers typically paid on a lower part of the pay scale)
  - support staff pay increase and pension contribution increase, and changes in support costs.
  - non staffing costs, including opportunities in energy use due to lower costs and saving plans. These will need to be analysed further with the aim to help identify savings and fund-raising opportunities.
- The third and final box is one-off income for 2024-25: inherited reserves, support grants linked to Acorn double requires improvement schools transferring and TCAF.

**The board queried whether there would be any redundancy costs associated with staff reduction.**

Costs should be minimal as redundancies are expected to be mostly linked to staff being employed by the Trust for less than 2 years. M Platten is working with A Gavin around this for individual schools.

2025-26 budget:

As shown in the summary table in the DoF report, the following is being projected:

- a small surplus based on one-off income
- further pupil number decline affecting income, offset by expecting GAG inflation to be above cost inflation based on the acknowledgement of underfunding in the sector, and some class savings (-14 classes generating average teacher and TA savings)
- efficiencies based on being a larger trust (£300K)
- some further assumptions around opportunities (TCAF, sponsored schools, alternative provision savings and potentially offering the Trust own alternative provision to generate income, and additional resource bases).

A Walmsley shared that the preparation of the budget had been a thorough piece of work, which aligned with others in the sector in terms of assumptions. Because of the date of the budget return and Acorn school transfer, the Trust will have to file a budget separately from Acorn. The recommendation from the strategic & finance committee was to approve the proposed budget.

**The board approved the proposed three-year budget for 2024-27.**

Capital:

M Platten reported that:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Trust utilises all the capital funding that it received and is projected to continue to do so</li> <li>the current SCA grant is £490K. This will increase once Acorn and Chickerell have joined, and the following year should be about £650K. There is also a small count of DFC. In total capital funding is limited and therefore completing the necessary capital works is a challenge. There will be some onboarding work for the new schools e.g. around IT which will have cost implications.</li> <li>The approved projects have already been highlighted to the strategic &amp; finance committee</li> <li>the Trust will also have a new process for applying for capital work to help prioritise applications more transparently, as part of the regular panel mentioned by P Walker in his report.</li> </ul> <p>The board thanked M Platten and A Gavin for the work done and the useful reports.</p> <p><u>PE grant:</u> M Platten reported that he had met with the Head at Portesham following concerns being raised and explained how costs can be allocated to the grant. M Platten confirmed that all the Trust schools had the full PE grant within their budget but did not necessarily have a separate dedicated line in the cost budget specifically for the grant. Effectively the cost budget for the grant are within various general lines and it is up to the schools to determine how best to utilise these budgets, including staffing, as long as they meet the conditions of grant. The board acknowledged that this area can be ambiguous and mis-understood for Directors as well as Trust staff. The board discussed how the Trust ensures heads have a sound understanding of their budget and the PE grant conditions in order for them to complete and publish the statutory report on how the PE grant is being spent. The statutory report for the PP funding is being supported by H Slater working with the business team as necessary. The Trust also worked with schools where they have needed support around using the PE grant, providing models and examples for schools to use.</p> <p><u>Bank mandates:</u> M Platten explained that currently C Chapman is still on the Trust bank account mandate and this needs to be altered to reflect the staff changes. <b>The board approved removing C Chapman and adding M Platten to the Trust bank account mandate.</b></p> <p><u>Financial scheme of delegation:</u> Following the transfer of the Acorn schools, there will be an interim period where Acorn and FFT systems are different, to allow for relevant staff to be trained and systems to be updated and aligned. <b>It was proposed and agreed that, until titles are changed, the estates manager and business &amp; operations manager from Acorn will have the same level of delegation as TBMs, as a bridging agreement.</b></p>	
<p><b>9. To receive and discuss the Church school reports</b></p>	
<p>The July 2024 Church schools report was circulated ahead of the meeting. The following points were raised and discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R Earley will be useful to reflect on the SIAMS inspection at Salcombe. It was disappointing that the school vision was picked upon when it was worked on with the diocese.</li> <li>R Caunter will share learnings from the Church schools flourishing programme around noticing and sharing areas of development in Christian distinctiveness with C Fegan. These will be shared more widely at the start of the autumn term to explain how that will work from September 2024.</li> <li>The team will continue to want the Ethos minutes to come to hub boards but will also add additional information from a wider range of people so there is more evidence available in terms of governance.</li> </ul> <p>P Wimsett (lead foundation trustee) thanked R Caunter for all her contributions to the trust and church schools in particular. The board joined him in wishing her all the best for the future.</p>	<p><b>Appendix 15</b></p>



<p>The following points were raised and discussed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In many schools, suspensions have reduced.</li> <li>• Where there are peaks in certain schools, best practice is shared. The Ordinarily Available Provision will help to prevent escalation.</li> <li>• The number of suspended pupils is very small. Analysis shows that suspended pupils are mostly boys, with SEND / PP and in upper KS2.</li> <li>• The Trust is working with schools to ensure they are clear on the threshold on reasonable adjustments and where the line is in terms of suspensions, what is taught and expected behaviours.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>12. Policies and compliance</b></p>	
<p>The policies and compliance summary, proposed child protection and safeguarding policy and the June 2024 Trust risk register were circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p><b>Child protection and safeguarding policy:</b> This is based on the Devon model one and is a template for schools to adapt. This was adopted by the board.</p> <p>The board noted the policies that are being finalised (finance policy, pupil attendance policy and record retention &amp; deletion policy) - and the suggestion that they are approved outside meetings by written resolution. This will require narrative and clear indication of changes.</p> <p><u>Trust risk register:</u> The board agreed not to make changes to the Trust risk register. <b>The register will need to be reviewed based on the new strategic aims, and Acorn schools when risks related to those are better known.</b></p>	<p><b>Appendices 21 – 22</b></p> <p><b>Audit &amp; risk committee</b></p>
<p><b>13. Miscellaneous</b></p>	
<p>A Walmsley thanked all present for a busy year where a lot has been achieved despite pupil outcomes not improving as desired.</p>	

Meeting start: 6 pm; meeting close: 7.20 pm

Date of the next meetings: TBC

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

**Signed:**.....  
Chair of Directors

**Date:**.....

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