



**Directors (ie trustees) meeting**  
**Meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2026 at 5 pm,**  
**via Teams,**  
**Draft Part I Minutes**

**Present:** P Walker (CEO), A Walmsley (chair), A Denner, C Bromfield, Mike Williams, P Wimsett and R Warwick

**In attendance** C Fegan (Director of School Improvement – DSI), A Jenkins (Director of Performance & Development – DPD), K Powell (Director of Inclusion – DoI), M Platten (Director of Finance – DoF), H Warren (Director of Operations – DoO) and I Candy (Lead Governance Professional – LGP)

**Quorum:** the meeting was quorate

**Circulation:** Directors and Members (through GovernorHub), Dioceses (BWDBE, EDEN and SDBE through GovernorHub), schools & public (through Trust website)

	Decision		Action due
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<b>1. Welcome, introductions and apologies</b>	
Apologies were received from R Shaw (work commitment).	
<b>2. Prayer</b>	
Led by Paul Wimsett. R Warwick joined the meeting at this point.	
<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 reports (Aut 2025 safeguarding strategic plan and Dec 2025 safeguarding RAG rating document) from the Trust safeguarding lead (TSL) were circulated ahead of the meeting. <b>The board felt reassured by the amount of green ratings, the progress made and how that progress was being made generally. They asked about the progress at Mary Dean's.</b> The TSL reported that good progress had been made generally with schools that had had new leadership. At Mary Dean's specifically, the pace of improvement was good. She had met with the DSI (who was the link director for the school) to map out what should be achieved by the school by Dec 2025, and this had been achieved. The school was now moving onto the next milestones, and the TSL was confident that these would be achieved. The improvements were set out on page 2 of the strategic plan: case review, focus on safeguarding nursery knowledge (to make sure that reports were made where needed) and also harmful sexual behaviour which was a theme at the school and in Plymouth generally. There were challenges with some families and behaviours were a challenge, however the school was making good progress on safeguarding expectations. <b>The board asked about the recent announcements around pupils not having access to mobile phones during school time and around schools having to consider not sending suspended pupils home.</b> The mobile phones agenda did not overly apply to primary schools because schools did not allow pupils to use them in school anyway. Some of the Trust	
	<b>Appendix 1</b>

schools asked pupils to have their mobile phone switched off in their bag, so the change would be about considering having the phones in a specific place in the school and having a consistent policy across the schools.

Around suspended pupils going or not going home, this was already something that the Trust considered. If schools were really concerned about safeguarding in the home, they should follow the appropriate procedures to make this known and ensure social services acted so that the child would no longer be in the home generally. There would however be some challenges around keeping children in school who were suspended for violent behaviour, in particular in small schools where there was not necessarily a space where children suspended for violent behaviour could be kept apart from their peers. Trust schools already used internal suspension when possible. There were times when it was not appropriate to have the child in school, because both the child and the staff needed to have break. The Trust would carefully consider any updated guidance when it was published.

**The board asked about Ofsted having announced that they would be looking at schools' mobile phone policies as part of inspections and whether the Trust had a policy in place.**

Ofsted was not yet looking at mobile phone policies. The Trust did not yet have a policy and would consult with staff and parents around this to develop the right policy. Whilst the guidance from the DfE around this was not statutory, all parties agreed that it would be useful to have a policy.

[Post meeting note: the DfE guidance states that '*the DfE expects schools to implement a policy whereby pupils do not have access to their mobile phone throughout the school day including during lessons, the time between lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime. A school's policy on prohibiting the use of mobile phones can be included within the school's behaviour policy or be its own standalone document. There are a number of ways in which schools can ensure that they are mobile phone-free, and it is for headteachers to decide how best to achieve this within their own unique contexts.*' The DfE also announced that 'on every school inspection from 1 April, inspectors will:

- discuss with leaders what their policy is on mobile phones and how this is communicated to parents and to pupils
- evaluate whether staff and pupils understand the expectations around mobile phones
- determine how consistently the school's mobile phone policy is being followed and its impact on pupils' learning, behaviour and wellbeing'].

**The committee probed around schools that had been RAG rated amber and were due to be inspected by Ofsted.**

Brixington had been rated amber solely on the Single Central Record, this had been rectified promptly, and it was ready for inspection. The others (Salcombe and Mary Dean's) were more likely to be inspected in the next academic year. The TSL had prioritised schools having safe reviews before Ofsted, so they had time to address any issues.

The committee thanked the TSL for her clear reports and her work to keep children safe. The TSL explained that she was always happy to receive feedback, had aligned the dashboard with the new Ofsted framework and there was good alignment between the approach from the FFT and from Ofsted around safeguarding. The committee noted that safeguarding had been rated as 'met' during the recent inspection at Aveton Gifford.

**The board enquired about the impact of dealing with difficult situations on staff wellbeing and whether the TSL was confident about colleagues being supported around this.**

The TSL explained that the Trust had been looking at this for the past 18 months. The DfE provided free supervision for heads, which was a free service of six weeks with a clinical supervisor, which any heads and leaders could sign up for. The Trust safeguarding officer was offering supervision to staff too, in particular Family Support Advisors, and also heads who had had to deal with difficult cases. In addition, the Trust safeguarding network was used to talk about cases and share

tricky ones. Some heads and Family Support Advisors were interested in having supervision training themselves, which the TSL was looking into. The Trust was determined to look after staff because the needs of children and families could be really challenging. The board found this useful to know as some trustees who had taken part in panel meetings were aware of some difficult situations.	
<b>5. Minutes of the September meeting</b>	
<b>5.1. To approve the minutes of the 18 Dec 2025 meeting</b>	
The draft minutes of the previous meeting were circulated before the meeting. These were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and signed by the chair.	
<b>5.2. To review matters arising not otherwise on the agenda</b>	
The list of matters arising was circulated ahead of the meeting. <u>DfE letter about low performing schools:</u> The chair had asked the LGP to share the letter very recently received from the DfE Regions Group lead around low performing schools. This was sent to any schools that were in the lowest 25% for attainment nationally. This was to encourage these schools to engage with the RISE programme. Letters were also sent by the DfE to celebrate schools with high attainment. The board noted that there were five schools within the Trust that were in the bottom 25% nationally for attainment, and executive leaders were not aware of any being sent a letter for being in the top 25%. The DSI has provided a report at short notice which summarised the engagement of the Trust with RISE (which had been circulated on the day of the meeting). <u>Other matters arising not otherwise on the agenda:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foundation representative network meetings: dates still needed to be set for those.</li> <li>• Hub board attendance follow up: this has been undertaken initially by the clerks to the hub, and the LGP was doing a follow up to find out the reasons for non attendance (so they could be mitigated where possible) and to remind hub board members of expectations in terms of meetings.</li> <li>• IDSR training: a date for this still needed to be set for the CEO to deliver the training.</li> </ul> The TSL left the meeting at this point.	<p><b>Appendix 2</b></p> <p><b>LGP</b></p> <p><b>LGP</b></p> <p><b>LGP / CEO</b></p>
<b>6. To receive and discuss the CEO report</b>	
The CEO report, anticipated pupil numbers for 2026-27 and the SIAMS inspection report for Mrs Ethelston's were circulated ahead of the meeting. <u>Flooding due to high rainfall:</u> The CEO highlighted that all schools in East Devon and in Dorset had been significantly affected by flooding, including Rockbeare which had not been affected before. Most schools were closed at the start of the day. More heavy rain was being predicted and therefore the situation may reoccur the day after this meeting. In many cases, schools were shut because staff were not able to get to school rather than because parents were not able to bring children. <u>RISE:</u> The CEO reported that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Trust was pleased that Exeter Road's plan has been awarded.</li> <li>• The CEO and DSI had taken part in a DfE meeting about the RISE support and had fed back about the timelines to write the support plan and other elements that had not been helpful. The Trust had been able to complete the required information at very short notice because it already knew the school.</li> <li>• Dorset had also put in a bid and had been allocated funding to be spent by the end of March to raise standards, which was a really short timeframe. One FFT school would be able to access coaching as part of the grant. The FFT was in a cluster with the White Horse Federation and Salisbury Diocesan MAT. DSIs from the three MATs were due to get together to work on a joint training programme.</li> <li>• All trusts had received their letters with details of the RISE programme.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Appendices 3 - 5</b></p>

- The key thing for the board to note was that little of the RISE offer was new as many existing systems had been 'rebranded' as RISE. There was no funding attached to the universal offer and there were not many resources available on the website yet.

The DSI explained that the RISE regional offer was around attendance and behaviour, Year 6 attainment and reception year quality, plus the Dorset offer. The Trust was already using a lot of the offer which was used to offer training and CPD. The Trust had also already signposted schools to relevant sources of support. For example, Brixington was working with Cornerstone English Hub. Other regions seemed to have a stronger offer which the DSI has started to look at to see whether they could be helpful for the Trust schools.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- The letter was sent in Feb about data that dated back to July. Therefore, trustees were already aware of the data and which schools needed to improve, and the schools listed in the letter were not a surprise.
- It was likely that the letter had been sent to the Trust chair to ensure boards were aware of the RISE offer as a way to make sure that trusts engaged with RISE. The DfE regions group was likely to scrutinise the Trust engagement with the RISE offer during its next meeting with the CEO and chair. It was therefore useful for the board to have confirmation that the Trust was already engaging with the RISE offer.
- There were schools for which RISE was not the right support. The Trust was pointing schools to the right support for them.
- The RISE offer was variable in quality. For example, the Early Years conference had been really useful. The offer was likely to expand and more resources become available.
- The South West was a vast region geographically which did not help at times. For example, some regional offers were in person and done in locations further away from the Trust which was not helpful or easy to access
- It was not clear why Devon was not a priority area when it was one of the lowest attaining LAs in the South West.
- It seemed unhelpful that the RISE offer was regional when it was known that Devon was not performing well. An offer based on regions attaining better may have been more impactful.
- Schools that had received letters about high performance were encouraged to help others.
- The FFT was already a supporting organisation within RISE (providing part of the support for Exeter Road).

#### SIAMS inspections:

- The report for the recent SIAMS inspection at Mrs Ethelston's had been very positive (which reflected the very positive feedback at the end of the inspection, with the inspector saying he had identified great practice he would use in future).
- Salcombe would be reinspected in 2027, a year earlier than the usual cycle, because of the previous judgement. This should allow the school to develop its SIAMS approach well.
- Portesham was also expected to be inspected this year.

#### Ofsted inspections:

The meeting went into Part II to discuss the inspection that had taken place at Aveton Gifford the week of this meeting.

The meeting went back into Part I.

#### Pupil numbers and class structures:

The CEO reported that:

- The Trust was anticipating decreasing pupil numbers as expected and was looking at matching these to appropriate class structures and building restrictions.
- There were more temporary teachers than the number of classes that the Trust was expecting to have to reduce.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CEO was currently looking at the Trust potentially 'losing' 10 classes overall. There were also some schools where the number of classes may need to increase. For example, at Gatehouse, due to housing developments within the catchment of the school.</li> <li>• The Trust was concerned about pupil numbers at St Budeaux. Following the consultation and the school becoming a primary school from a junior school, the school has significantly lost pupils. The Trust was looking at repurposing part of the school site and alternative uses for it.</li> </ul> <p><b>The board queried whether it was sensible to keep a school like St Budeaux open when there were two other schools very close to it geographically, although the Trust did not want to close schools.</b></p> <p>The CEO pointed out that some schools within the Trust had similar pupil numbers and the school provided an alternative to bigger schools and an alternative as a church school, in terms of parental choice. The key was to be able to deliver education well with the smaller pupil numbers. There was an opportunity to offer something different on the school site, like SEND provision.</p> <p><b>The board asked whether the Trust schools kept in touch with other local schools and compared pupil numbers.</b></p> <p>The CEO explained that he met with both Devon and Dorset regularly to compare applications vs cohort size locally. The Trust was also able to see where pupils in catchment had gone to if they had not chosen to go to the local Trust school. The Trust had been aware that 2026-27 would be a particularly low year in terms of pupil numbers. The Trust had also been made aware that in some areas some parents had not yet applied for a primary school place and therefore reception numbers may grow.</p> <p><b>The board enquired whether it would be a relatively straight forward process to reduce classes where this was needed. For example, did the location of temporary teachers match the location where a class reduction was needed?</b></p> <p>The CEO confirmed that the process had generally been straight forward, although the pool of temporary teachers was getting smaller. The Trust offered any vacancies to temporary teachers first and generally unions had been supportive. Sometimes temporary staff had already found an alternative job. Therefore, the Trust had generally been able to retain temporary staff who wanted to stay, even if it was at short notice, for example to cover a maternity leave.</p> <p><b>In response to a question from the board,</b> the CEO confirmed he was not expecting any school redundancies, which was positive.</p> <p>The meeting went into Part II to discuss matters linked to the Trust central team. The meeting went back into Part I.</p>	
<p><b>7. To discuss governance matters</b></p>	
<p><b>7.1. To feed back on the data report produced for trustees by the Director of Performance &amp; Development at the request of the board chair</b></p>	
<p>The data report showing three-year trends for attainment was circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p>The chair explained he had requested this report because Ofsted were looking at three-year trends as set out in the new IDSR format. It was explained that the bottom two graphs showed the FFT position with regards to Year 6 outcomes historically, how this compared with national and regional data, and why it was being scrutinised closely at education committee. The five schools mentioned in the DfE letter were a large part of the data.</p> <p>The chair further commented that the report would be used in future mostly for the education committee, but he had wanted to share it with the full board for context.</p>	<p><b>Appendix 6</b></p>
<p><b>7.2. To discuss and agree the terms of reference for the board succession planning and recruitment committee</b></p>	
<p>The proposed terms of reference for the board succession planning and recruitment committee were circulated ahead of the meeting.</p> <p>The chair reminded the board that it had agreed to discuss succession planning and a committee was the best way to progress this.</p> <p>The following points were raised and discussed:</p>	<p><b>Appendix 7</b></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were two trustees who were wanting to step down over the medium term, both EDEN appointed foundation trustees (P Wimsett and M Williams).</li> <li>• The board would be happy to have support from CEO and also PHP around this.</li> <li>• The terms of reference had been drafted by the LGP based on suitable examples in the education and charity sectors.</li> <li>• Such committees were often called nomination committees, which the LGP had become aware of, and this terminology had been used to find suitable examples.</li> <li>• The committee would work around identifying people with the right skills who would also meet the criteria to be appointed as foundation trustees (in particular SDBE criteria which were stricter than EDEN and BWDBE).</li> <li>• The board may be able to recruit through hubs.</li> <li>• A potential date for the first meeting of the committee had been pencilled in.</li> </ul> <p><b>The board agreed to adopt the proposed terms of reference.</b></p>	
<p><b>8. Policies and compliance (to include a review of the Trust risk register)</b></p>	
<p>The policies and compliance report was circulated ahead of the meeting as were the proposed policies.</p> <p><u>SEND policy:</u> The DoI confirmed that the policy had had a minor update, ahead of the White Paper publication by the government which was likely to require more substantial changes.</p> <p><b>The board approved the updated SEND policy.</b></p> <p><u>Intimate care policy:</u> The DoI highlighted that her team had worked together to coproduce this with a number of stakeholders and different networks pulled together by Trust safeguarding lead.</p> <p><b>The board approved the updated Intimate Care policy.</b></p> <p><u>Nurse admissions and charging policies (Admissions to Charmouth, Loders, and Rockbeare nurseries and charging for Bere Alston, Charmouth, Loders, Rockbeare and Salcombe):</u> The LGP highlighted that these followed the same templates as the policies approved the previous term and this would conclude the update to match the current child care entitlement and school practice.</p> <p><b>The board approved the updated nursery and admissions policies for the above schools.</b></p> <p><u>Complaints policy:</u> The LGP highlighted that this was still being finalised and the draft had been shared for the board to provide feedback. The LGP also explained that a PHP team member had offered to provide training around conflict resolution approaches as he had been a trained mediator in a previous role and had also offered to share resources that would be helpful to help ensure the policy was robust.</p> <p><b>Trustees were invited to share feedback directly with the LGP after the meeting.</b></p>	<p><b>Appendix 8</b></p> <p><b>Trustees</b></p>

Meeting start: 5 pm; meeting close: 6.30 pm

Date of the next meetings: Directors / S&F committee: 29 Jan 2026, Education committee: 26 Feb 2026, S&F / A &R committee: 19 Mar 2026, Directors: 23 Apr 2026, all at 5 pm

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

Signed:.....  
Chair of Directors

Date:.....

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