Directors (ie trustees) meeting
Meeting held on 23rd April 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 Shaw
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

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies	
Apologies were received from R Warwick (illness).	
2. Prayer	
Led by Paul Wimsett.	
3. Declaration of Conflict of Interests	
Declarations of conflict of interests were invited by the chair. None was made.	
4. Minutes of the last meeting	
4.1. To approve the minutes of the 29 January 2026 meeting	
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.	
4.2. To review matters arising not otherwise on the agenda	
The list of matters arising was circulated ahead of the meeting. The following matters arising were raised and discussed: • Staff/parent voice before the start of formal board meeting: this was still due to be organised by the CEO. • The safeguarding visit report circulated by the lead safeguarding trustee had been circulated for information. As the lead safeguarding trustee had to take an important phone call at this point of the meeting, a question about the report was asked under item 6 (CEO report).	**Appendix 1** **CEO**
5. To receive the verbal feedback from committee chairs	
<u>Education committee</u>: The chair of the education committee reported that the last meeting of the committee had covered: • The Ofsted inspection at Gatehouse. • The RAG rated schools' dashboard. • Discussing priority schools, including a detailed discussion about Brixington and Charmouth. • Autumn data and how that was being used for next steps and raising standards, looking at individual children.	

• The work done in Early Years around assessments to support staff. • Having more focus on Pupil Premium (PP) in hubs and having a barrier PP dashboard for hubs. Hubs were due to look at the PP strategy for their schools at the next meeting and the visit template for Spring 1 for the parent council members included a focus on PP pupils. <u>Audit & risk committee:</u> The chair of the audit & risk committee reported that the last meeting of the committee had covered: • Cybersecurity and processes to review the current Trust position, starting with a small number of schools followed by a further assessment. • The latest internal audit report which included no significant issues. • H&S reviews, which had not highlighted anything significant. • Website compliance, which had improved significantly and therefore could be removed from the Trust risk register. • Data protection where the data lead had highlighted a number of issues but those were all under control. • The need to add critical issues to the Trust risk register, i.e. catastrophic events which are unlikely but have a significant impact, for the Trust to be prepared and ensure business continuity in these situations. <u>Strategic & finance committee:</u> The chair of the strategic & finance committee reported that the last meeting of the committee had covered: • A finance report showing that the Trust was currently anticipated a £169K surplus by the end of year vs a budgeted in-year deficit of £169K. • Early budget planning for 2026-27. • An operations report setting out the various operational strategic decisions to be made, which had provided reassurance to the committee because it evidenced the developing strategic approach for this area. • The project to replace Newton Ferrers roof, whose tender award was on the agenda for this meeting. The chair of the strategic & finance committee meeting highlighted that the February 2026 management accounts and one-page summary from the DoF about budget setting (circulated ahead of the meeting) continued to show that the Trust financial was ahead of the approved budget for 2025-26. These matters were not discussed further as they showed no significant change from the position discussed by the strategic & finance committee.	 **Appendices 2-3**
6. To receive and discuss the CEO report	
The CEO report and the Ofsted report for the recent inspection at Aveton Gifford were circulated ahead of the meeting. <u>Budget:</u> The CEO highlighted that: • He had begun to work on the next budget, starting with staffing structures. • The Trust was looking at reducing the number of classes due to falling pupil numbers. This would in turn mean reducing staffing to match the funding received for the Trust schools. For example, when a pupil with an ECHP leaves a school, the funding follows them and does not remain in the school, and this has an influence on staffing. • There were some unknown budget parameters such as staff pay scale increases and the long-term impact of current world events including the impact on supply chains. However, he was hoping to share a draft budget at the next meeting of the strategic & finance committee. ***The board queried whether pupil numbers for 2026-27 were known for all the Trust schools.*** The Trust had indicative pupil numbers. Whilst parents were informed by the LA of where their child had been allocated a reception place the week before this meeting, there would be parents who had not applied. There would also be parents who would change their mind when they did not get their first school choice. Whilst at most schools pupil numbers were decreasing, some schools such as Rockbeare were seeing an increase. There was also growth in the Dawlish area	**Appendix 4**

which would generate growth funding to help maintain class numbers. The Trust was also expecting growth at Willowbank. There would be some schools where context would warrant more classes than would be the case based solely on pupil numbers. Staffing was being planned accordingly. <u>Significant staff changes:</u> The CEO reported the following changes in school leadership: • Sam Weir (now head at Hawkchurch) and Chris Threlfall (now assistant head at Sidmouth) had exchanged leadership roles and that had worked well. • Natasha Brooks had resigned from St Budeaux having secured an executive head role outside the Trust. • Hannah Jay has started her maternity leave and the Willowbank head role was being covered by Sarah Bomby. <u>Inspections:</u> The CEO reported that: • The draft report for Gatehouse inspection had been made available to school the week of this meeting. • Ofsted reports were taking longer to go through the QA stage because of the higher level of external scrutiny due to the change in framework. The meeting went into Part II to discuss the Ofsted inspection at Brixington which had taken place the week of this meeting and other inspection related matters. The meeting went back into Part I. <u>Other matters:</u> ***The board enquired about the likely impact of some of the current government approaches, for example, around expectations that suspensions being mostly internal.*** Currently these were only proposals and consultation was due to take place around this before the proposals were formalised. The board discussed that they could see why this was proposed at secondary level when children would otherwise not be kept safe. However, the issue may be that parents would not appreciate the severity of internal suspensions and therefore they may not have as much impact. ***The board probed around the changes that the Trust needed to make in response to the new statutory restrictive intervention guidance.*** The DoI pointed out the policy that had been developed and was due for approval at this meeting. She would then follow through with heads around documentation, information and training, to ensure these were consistent, met the statutory requirements and were of high standards. The policy was developed working with other trusts. Templates to inform parents would be shared with schools. The DOI would continue to work with other trusts to continue to develop the approach. <u>Report from the lead safeguarding trustee:</u> ***The board asked why it had been suggested to have internal safeguarding reviews in addition to the current external ones***. Currently external reviews take place approximately every four years. The suggestion was to have an internal review in between. This would be developed to be put in place next year. It would be positive to work with other trusts to develop this.	**CEO / trust board**
7. To agree the proposal to award the tender for Newton Ferrers roof	
A recommendation from the DoO, including a tender analysis table and roof images, was circulated ahead of the meeting. The DoO highlighted that: • Quotes had been receiving following the latest tender for the roof replacement • She was recommending using the company called ABC, and with the "top hat" and ICB specification to protect the school building from adverse weather during the work and therefore help to keep within the anticipated timeframe. • The Trust had worked with the company before and were pleased with their work.	**Appendix 5**

• The company supporting the tender and specification had done detailed due diligence which had then been quality assured by the DoO. The proposal from the DoO was approved unanimously by the board.	
8. To receive and discuss the Church schools report	
The DSI who had supported the Ofsted inspection at Brixington reported verbally on this item. A written report would be circulated to support the verbal reporting following the meeting. The DSI reported that: • The SIAMS inspection at Mrs Ethelston's had been extremely positive. • The only other Trust school that was due to have a SIAMS inspection this year was Portesham and the school has embraced this over time. • The list for SIAMS inspection next year included Hawkchurch and Loders. At both schools, the vision had been relaunched. • Thanks to the strategic approach based on the cycle developed by R Earley (Trust church schools improvement officer), the Trust was working more closely with schools that were due to be inspected after that. • R Earley had met with representatives from Bath & Wells to explain the Trust systems and structures. They were pleased by the Trust approach. • The Trust was part of a pilot around Christianity as a global faith, which has been a point for improvement in the Trust schools and was also a known improvement point following SIAMS inspections generally. • The Trust was working on school websites better reflecting the Christian nature of church schools, as well as sign posting to appropriate local community matters. ***The board queried about the progress made at Salcombe and when the school was likely to have its SIAMS inspection.*** Exeter Diocese was due to undertake one more visit to sign off the work done by the school as part of the action plan following the last inspection. They had been positive about the work done during their last visit. The inspection would then follow within the next 18 months. The board asked the DSI to thank R Earley for her work and strategic approach and for the level of support she had given to schools. The DSI also reminded trustees that a range of Trust leaders were also involved in the Exeter Diocese church school flourishing programme in their respective roles.	**DSI**
9. To discuss governance matters	
9.1. To note current appointments, vacancies, forthcoming vacancies and plans to fill vacancies	
A summary of governance volunteers' appointments and vacancies was circulated ahead of the meeting. The chair of the Trust board reported that: • At trust board level, there was already a Salisbury foundation vacancy. • M Williams' term of office would end in July (after the last audit & risk committee meeting). He would not apply to be reappointed for health reasons. This would result in a second Salisbury foundation vacancy due to the change in articles. (M Williams had been appointed by EDEN). • P Wimsett had also indicated he wanted to step down after a very long period of being a governor then a trustee. • This was why the board had set up a trustee recruitment and succession planning committee. • This committee had met twice and was aware that the current board was partly inherited from an earlier time in the Trust. The committee would therefore be looking at a number of factors around recruitment and succession planning. Because of the options being discussed, this would also include reviewing local governance. • The departure from M Williams would also create a vacancy for the role of chair of the audit & risk committee which needed to be filled by the start of the next academic year. Therefore the committee was recommending this vcancy be advertised soon and externally. This was agreed by the board.	**Appendix 6**

• The committee was looking at balancing the needs of the Trust, current roles undertaken by trustees and how that affected recruitment. • Progress on these matters would be regularly reported to the board. As this was his last board meeting, M Williams was thanked for his contribution. His expertise would be missed by the board.	
9.2. To agree to commission an External Review of Governance and to delegate to the Trustee Succession Planning & Recruitment Committee (TRSP) the next steps to progress this	
A briefing highlighting the reasons to commission an external review of governance and recommending the Trust explores four potential providers was circulated ahead of the meeting. Key reasons were: existing and forthcoming trustee vacancies, the increase in size of the Trust, the three-year trend for pupil outcomes, the change in Ofsted framework, ongoing discussions around hub governance, financial pressures linked to falling rolls, as well as the date of the last external review. The Trust board chair suggested that this be progressed by the TRSP committee because that would be meeting monthly. He highlighted that the reported had recommended exploring four providers as follows: • CST because they are the sector organisation for academy trusts, • ImpactEd because the Trust has worked with them and they are known to offer high quality, • Browne Jacobson and Stone Kings, both solicitors who support the education sector and do external reviews of governance, and may help inform the approach regardless of the final decision. In particular, Browne Jacobson did a really good webinar on external reviews of governance as part of their recent education conference and have clearly done a high number of them. The board discussed: • How the external review of governance would have an impact on the other work done by TRSP committee: it could influence the approach, but the board would not be able to wait until new appointments are made because that would take place over time and wait until then would take too long • Their experience of different providers and the impact they had had. • The need to look at hub structures and hub board membership in order to widen the expertise on hubs. The board agreed to delegate next steps around commissioning an external review of governance (approaching the four above providers and evaluating their offer) to the TRSP committee.	**Appendix 7** **LGP**
10. To ensure effective communication between the trust board and the hub boards To include: • **Consider and reply to the key points raised by hub boards** • **Consider and agree matters that the trust board would like the hub boards to follow up, e.g. around schools causing concern**	
Please see attached reply from the board meeting to the hub board meetings.	
11. To receive and discuss KPIs for complaints, attendance and suspensions	
Reports about attendance data, suspensions data and complaints as of April 2026 were circulated ahead of the meeting. Attendance: The DSI highlighted that: • Year 6 had the lowest attendance of all year groups. • Interviews for the role of Trust attendance officer were due to take place the week after this meeting, and it would be helpful to have a fresh perspective, although the previous post holder was very effective. • In some schools, parents do not support tests in Year 6 and may be less worried about what the school says about the child not being in school as it is their last year in school. • It may also be because parents are less worried about leaving a Year 6 pupil on their own when they are not feeling well because of their age. And	**Appendices 8 - 10**

possibly because some of those children are going to school on their own without parental supervision. ***The board queried what was being done about attendance at Charmouth which was very low.*** The DSI and Trust School Improvement Officer had been going through attendance during visits and looking at individual children. The school had been working hard to address this and the parental community had not always been supportive of the approach. The DoI further highlighted that: • The Trust had been working on its systemic approach and had developed good systems and approaches. • Work on pupils having a sense of belonging in schools would continue. It was pointed out that attendance at Brixington had been a point of discussion during their Ofsted inspection and it was higher than the figure for Charmouth. Therefore, attendance was likely to be an area causing concern during Charmouth inspection. Complaints: The board reflected that, for the size of the Trust, the number of complaints reaching the formal panel stage was very low. They also recognised the workload related to complaints for the Trust central team. The LGP pointed out that: • The Trust was looking at progressing two complaints from stage 2 (complaint to heard at school level) directly to the panel stage because this would be the most efficient way to address those. • A complainant had submitted a SEND discrimination claim to the SEND tribunal for which the Trust board is the responsible body. This complainant was known to the Trust and there was communication with them within the scope of the unreasonable complainant policy and advice continued to be taken from the Trust solicitors. Suspensions: The DoI highlighted that the higher number of suspensions compared to the previous year was due to the recent increase at Brixington due to a behaviour reset at the school and to a few individual children who had more complex needs. The figure would otherwise have been in line with last year. The board discussed that it would be useful to have figures by schools in order to have better oversight and understanding of the pattern of suspensions within the Trust. For example, they were aware that some schools who had not suspended before had suspended some children last term. The DoI explained that in some cases these suspensions had occurred because of schools not having received support from external agencies despite their engagement with them. There were also some positive trends in schools that had suspended previously and were suspended less such as Axminster, Mary Dean's and Westcliff.	 DPD / LGP
12. Policies and compliance (to include a review of the Trust risk register)	
The policies and compliance report was circulated ahead of the meeting as were the proposed policies, with the exception of the complaints policy which had accidentally not been uploaded. Complaints policy: A draft version setting out the structure and approach had previously been circulated to the board. It was agreed that the final draft would be circulated following the meeting for approval by written resolution. Unreasonable and vexatious communication policy: ***A trustee recommended that where the policy mentions criteria for applying this policy it consistently refers to unreasonable as well as vexatious so either criterion can be applied***. The policy was approved subject to this amendment. Restrictive intervention policy: ***A trustee queried whether the policy should include the possibility of the police being called to intervene in school should the school intervention not be successful and therefore the policy should set out a threshold for this***.	**Appendix 11**

The DoI and CEO explained that they were not aware of any instance when this would have happened, but if was the case the police would be acting in accordance with their own policy. Schools would have implemented their lockdown policy before they made the call to the police and that would be something out of the ordinary. They would also call the central team, as they would do so when considering suspensions for children not responding to interventions. The point of the restrictive intervention policy was to ensure that staff who use restrictive force were trained, the reasons why restrictive intervention took place were documented, and the parents were informed it had been used. The DoI would need to work with staff around seclusion and to ensure interventions are reported by heads. This would be monitored by the Trust to have an oversight of this in a systemic way The policy was approved by the board. Children in Care policy: This policy was approved by the board. RE policy, Collective worship policy template and Spirituality policy: These policies were developed using the model from Exeter Diocese and working with the diocese. These policies were approved by the board. Debt recovery policy This policy was approved by the board Medication and children with medical needs policy: The DoI explained that the DfE was consulting on Benedict's law around allergy. As a result, the Trust would be required to have a separate policy from September. Therefore, the recommendation was to keep current policy and review it once the guidance became available. The board agreed to retain the existing policy and delay its review until September. Finance policy: ***A trustee asked why there were different thresholds for approval in different areas of the policy.*** The DoF explained that he had amended the policy because it was currently ambiguous around approval when fewer quotes than the expenditure amount would not normally warrant could be obtained. So the threshold in this case was set below the approval threshold when the required number of quotes was obtained. This was relevant mostly for premises matters and caused delay in work. The team would be able to evidence the work done to obtain quotes. This policy was approved by the board. School resource management self-assessment checklist: The checklist had been completed by the DoF, DoO and LGP, and had been shared with the chair of the Trust board before it was submitted. The board noted that this had been submitted by the deadline and was evidencing compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook. Trust risk register The chair of the audit & risk committee suggested that risk number 13 relating to website compliance be removed from the Trust risk register because of the work done and systems implemented to improve website compliance. The board agreed to remove risk 13 from the Trust risk register. Allergies may need to be added to the Trust risk register in due course. The board noted that the DfE was due to issue a model policy and new guidance (expected on 1st May 2026). The DoI would work with DoO and wider team to ensure the guidance was implemented in time for the deadline.	**LGP**

Meeting start: 5 pm; meeting close: 7.30 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:………………………………………… **Date:………………..**

Chair of Directors

-