

# Excel Learning Trust

## Trust Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2024 5.30pm held virtually

Present:	Ian Wiggins Natalie Wong Donna Smith Pat Boyle Martyn Sibley Frankie Haynes	Chair of Trustees Trustee Trustee Trustee Trustee Trustee
In attendance:	Mark Hassack Michael Gidley Zoe French Katie Dent Sophie Triffitt	CEO Chief Finance Officer Director of Trust Services & EA Director of HR Clerk to the Board of Trustees

### 1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2 It was noted that Donna Smith had confirmed she would join the meeting late.

### 2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND CHANGES TO BUSINESS INTEREST FORMS (PREVIOUSLY ISSUED)

#### Absence

- 2.1 Gemma Lowe was not present.

#### Declarations of Interest

- 2.2 Trustees were reminded to complete their annual business interest return and to keep their business interest submissions up to date throughout the year.

### 3 CEO UPDATE (previously issued)

- 3.1 The CEO highlighted the promise for vulnerable children and their families.
- 3.2 Trustees acknowledged the Ofsted ratings across the schools.
- 3.3 The CEO noted that there were two new Principals in the secondary schools and the CEO was providing support. The new leadership had brought reinvigorated focus and the

CEO provided a snapshot of the recent staff survey which reported an upward trajectory.  
**Trustees asked the CEO to feedback thanks to the Principals on behalf of Trustees.**

- 3.4 **A Trustee asked what the reason was for the Executive Principal working more closely with Carr Junior.** The CEO explained that the Executive Principal was appointed initially to work with Woodthorpe and Scarcroft, but the plan was for that role to work across the primary phase, and it was a natural progression to provide the additional capacity for the Principal as the Carr Junior Deputy moves to cover the Head of School maternity leave at Woodthorpe.
- 3.5 **A Trustee noted the significant increase on staff response to behaviour but that a smaller number attributed that to any impact of SLT.**
- 3.6 The CEO reported that the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024 Trust Conference programme was shared for information and noted that there was a strong group of 14 members of staff on the aspiring Principals CPD programme with four from Millthorpe.
- 3.7 The CEO explained that the structure was in place for Deeps in the secondary schools, 30 staff were interested in the developmental roles and the roles had been appointed to. The primary schools were developing what the structure would look like in the primary phase including more precision on expectations for UPS teachers and the Executive Principal was leading the primaries on this work.
- 3.8 **A Trustee asked for examples of Deep Experience and Deep Support.** The CEO explained that Deep Learning covered everything Teaching and Learning including the classroom and Trust learning model. Deep Support covered pastoral and support for pupils. Deep Experience included events, graduation, student council, pupil voice.
- 3.9 **Trustees recorded thanks to the Principals and their teams noting that the Ofsted outcomes reflected the journey of the Trust over the last two years.**  
Strategic Plan (previously issued)
- 3.10 The CEO explained that the plan was developed in collaboration with Principals.
- 3.11 **A Trustee noted that the people strand was an integral part of the strategic plan.**  
Frankie Haynes joined the meeting at 5.53pm.
- 3.12 **A Trustee asked if exploring opportunities for growth included growing the number of schools in the Trust.** The CEO explained not but would be open to conversations if there was the right fit.
- 3.13 **A Trustee questioned why there was a three-year outlook and not a five year plan.** The Chair explained that there was potentially so much change for the sector that a three-year approach felt appropriate in terms of planning. The CEO added that the education sector tended to run three-year plans and it sat well with the amount of change expected and that it may need to be revisited earlier. **A Trustee noted that there could be a longer-term plan with regular review points.**
- 3.14 **A Trustee asked if there was a review plan and if the CEO was fully accountable or if there was a responsible person for each pillar.** The CEO explained that various people would own the pillars and threads would appear in the School Development Plans with

Principals and local governors owning their parts. **The Chair suggested that the accountability element was an area of the plan to be mapped.**

- 3.15 **A Trustee suggested that the plan should create a structure for trustee meetings and that there was a need for a paced review plan to be mapped across the three years with review points.**
- 3.16 **The Chair noted that how the Trust uses the plan as a tool and reflection was important to define and confirmed that the plan would be launched with governors at the governance evening.**
- 3.17 **Action:** CEO, Chair, Vice Chair, Clerk to map strategic plan review across the governance calendar.
- 3.18 **Resolution:** Trustees agreed and endorsed the Strategic Plan.

#### **4 SEND AND SAFEGUARDING REPORT (previously issued)**

SEND Report 2023-24 (previously issued)

- 4.1 **A Trustee asked if there was any benchmark or national comparison for SEND provision.** The CEO explained that there was no national benchmark, but the Trust used the Inclusion Quality Mark to assess and benchmark schools. All schools assessed so far had achieved the highest rating.
- 4.2 The CEO noted that there had been recognition from other trusts and the Local Authority of the level of SEND expertise in the Trust and representatives from other trusts were joining the session the Director of SEND and Safeguarding had set up regarding SEND law. The Director of SEND and Safeguarding was also supporting the Local Authority with one day per fortnight to contribute to SEND across the city in the absence of a CYC SEND Lead.
- 4.3 **A Trustee noted that it was positive that the report reflected impact and was set against the values.**
- 4.4 **A Trustee recorded recognition of the significant contribution from the Director of SEND and Safeguarding, the support in place for staff and cohesive practice.**

Safeguarding Report 2023-24 (previously issued)

- 4.5 The CEO noted that there was strong expertise in safeguarding across all levels in the Trust and there was a strong culture of safeguarding in the Trust.

#### **5 HR UPDATE (previously issued)**

- 5.1 The Director of HR reported that the People Strategy would be launched on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024 as part of the staff conference and a staff recognition and appreciation programme was being developed which would incorporate kindness which was identified as a theme from the staff survey.
- 5.2 The Director of HR had met with the Principals to review the workload survey and developed a 'you said, we did' document to share with staff in each school. The survey

results were summarised in Appendix 1. The Director of HR confirmed that a quarter of staff responded to the survey and Principals would be working to encourage a higher response rate.

- 5.3 The Director of HR reported that Unison did not get the turnout threshold for strike action on the support staff pay award.
- 5.4 **A Trustee noted that the workload survey provided a small sample, asked how often it would be run and what the threshold would be for taking significant decisions.** The Director of HR confirmed that it would be run at three points in the academic year and bigger decisions would be informed by a full year data set to identify spikes or common themes or when there was a more representative data set.
- 5.5 **A Trustee noted concern at the positive response rate on two questions:**
  - **20% didn't think the environment was safe.**
  - **24% said workload hadn't improved.**
- 5.6 The Director of HR explained that these themes would be monitored when there were more sets of results and if there was not an improving trend then this would be explored.
- 5.7 **A Trustee noted the risk of survey fatigue with staff asked to complete the workload survey three times per year and would want to maximise responses to the main staff survey which provided comparable data.**
- 5.8 **A Trustee suggested that the greatest incentive was to take tangible action to encourage engagement.**
- 5.9 **A Trustee suggested that it would be helpful to get a benchmark of what a good participation rate was noting that the corporate response rate would be between 80% to 90%.**
- 5.10 **A Trustee asked if the workload survey results would be shared with all staff.** The Director of HR confirmed there were only plans to share the 'you said, we did' document. **A Trustee suggested also sharing the results to provide context and encourage buy in by emphasising why it was important to participate.**
- 5.11 The Director of HR noted that there were plans to establish a workload working group.
- 5.12 **A Trustee suggested running cross -trust staff surveys as opposed to them being run at school level.**
- 5.13 **A Trustee asked why 'excessive' was used within each category.** The Director of HR explained that the questions came from the DfE's workload exemplar survey which was part of their workload reduction toolkit and provided the link for further information.

## **6 EDUCATION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE REPORT – 24/09/24**

- 6.1 The Committee Chair reported that the committee looked at early Pulse reports, results, impact of attendance and vulnerable attendance on GCSE outcomes, the vulnerable promise and Inspire.

- 6.2 The Chair noted the need for trustees to respond to the request for details from the Director of Trust Services in order to progress the Inspire registration.

## **7 ESTATES AND HEALTH AND SAFETY** (previously issued)

- 7.1 **A Trustee asked if there was anything to highlight in the compliance report.** The CFO explained that the Director of Estates was working with schools with 80% compliance, he has regular compliance meetings with Business Managers and was supporting where needed. The Director of Estates was refining the process of tasks, checks and jobs.
- 7.2 **A Trustee asked if there was LED lighting in all the schools.** The CFO confirmed there were still some schools / areas to action including Scarcroft.
- 7.3 **A Trustee noted that the compliance report would be a useful metric to assess compliance activities when schools were sharing a Business Manager.** The CFO added that a Compliance Officer Role was being investigated to support the Director of Estates.
- 7.4 SCA Projects Overview (previously issued)
- 7.5 **A Trustee asked if there was a level of comfort with jobs not committed to through the robust prioritisation process.** The CEO confirmed that he was comfortable with the approach as there were a number of checks and schools submitted prioritised projects and these were reviewed in line with need and schools have the opportunity to challenge. The offer would look different next year due to the work needed on perimeter lines at Millthorpe and Carr Junior to ensure the sites are as secure as possible. The Director of Estates was looking to chunk work together to maximise economy of scale, but the project would use a significant amount of SCA funding.

Donna Smith joined the meeting at 6.54pm.

Nat Wong left the meeting at 6.54pm.

## **8 FINANCE UPDATE** (previously issued)

### Monitoring

- 8.1 The CFO reported a £284k deficit for 2023/24, which was a worse position than anticipated with teacher supply, energy costs, termination costs and support staff needs being major factors.
- 8.2 **A Trustee asked how significant school level overspend would be mitigated without requiring more control.** The CFO explained that measures to help identify deficits earlier in the process were being investigated including the new budgeting forecasting system and a new monitoring system for supply staff.
- 8.3 **A Trustee noted the last minute and unexpected shift from the forecast to the final outturn and asked the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee to monitor.**



- 8.4 In response to a Trustee the CFO confirmed the brackets in the report were positives not negatives. **A Trustee noted the importance of consistency in reporting to ensure accurate oversight.**
- 8.5 **A Trustee asked how the Trust can get to a place where the final outcome would not be unexpected.** The CFO agreed there was a need to investigate and understand if it should have been expected or if it was within forecasting.
- 8.6 **A Trustee asked if it was factored into this year's budget.** The CFO confirmed it was and noted that energy contracts had been retendered and measures were taken on supply costs. It would support budget planning to have the support staff pay agreement earlier, but the assumption was increased from the previous year.
- 8.7 **A Trustee asked if the supply costs were related to illness or staff release time not fully budgeted for.** The CFO explained that it was a combination of the two, there was some absence, although the overall absence level was lower than the previous years, but there was higher than expected maternity and parental leave and increased high level pupil need.
- 8.8 **A Trustee asked when a return would be seen from the energy efficiency investment.** The CFO explained that some would be seen this year, and ongoing projects would feed into longer term savings.
- 8.9 The CEO added that authorising of supply had not always gone through the Principal but protocols have been implemented for supply to be authorised by the Principal. The CEO was confident that the change of personnel at Millthorpe and Knavesmire alongside additional controls and monitoring put in place centrally would deliver changes.
- 8.10 The CEO reported on city wide discussions of a 0.5% top slice across all local school budgets to pay for Local Authority high needs support, if implemented that would equate to £100k from the ELT budget and may be a trigger point for investigating GAG Pooling to mitigate the impact. The CFO added that the minimum funding per pupil may be disapplied and would significantly impact two schools in the trust.
- 8.11 **A Trustee asked if there were vulnerabilities on pupil numbers.** The CFO explained that pupil numbers had ongoing monitoring:
- Carr Junior Pupil Admission Number was reduced with the move to two form entry.
  - York High School PAN was reduced and numbers were stable.
  - It was expected that Millthorpe numbers would remain level.
  - Knavesmire numbers remained strong.
  - Scarcroft intake into Reception was low at 36.
  - Woodthorpe intake to Reception at 49 was lower than the 60 in previous years.
- 8.12 **It was agreed for financial risks to be monitored at the FAR Committee.**
- Risk Register (previously issued)
- 8.13 The CFO confirmed that there were no changes to note.

## 9 TRUSTEE BUSINESS

### Committee Terms of reference

#### Finance, Audit and Risk (previously issued)

- 9.1 A trustee asked if there was a definition of 'financial experience'. The Chair confirmed that it was a level of competence to understand school finances.
- 9.2 It was agreed to remove point 6.4 and for Frankie Haynes and Gemma Lowe to sit on the committee.
- 9.3 **Resolution:** Subject to the above amends trustees approved the terms of reference.

#### Education and Standards (previously issued)

- 9.4 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the terms of reference.

#### Remuneration (previously issued)

- 9.5 **Resolution:** Subject to the removal of 5.4 trustees approved the terms of reference.
- 9.6 It was confirmed that Frankie Haynes and Martyn Sibley would sit on the committee.

#### Trustee Training (previously issued)

- 9.7 The Chair encouraged trustees to complete training to address any gaps and to consider a wider point of trustee development.

#### Trustee Recruitment

- 9.8 Trustees had completed a skills audit, the process identified financial expertise, educational experience, HR and marketing, media and PR as skills / expertise to appoint to. The Chair and Director of HR would undertake targeted recruitment and the Chair invited trustees to support an interview panel in the spring term.

## 10 LGB BUSINESS

### Matters from LGBs

- 10.1 The Chair reported that a governor of the Woodthorpe / Scarcroft board had flagged the level of compliance of two factor authentication on Trust IT systems. The Chair noted that the Trust were progressing cyber security risk mitigations and were advertising for a Trust IT Manager.

#### LGB Appointments and Resignations (previously issued)

- 10.2 **Resolution:** Trustees agreed the governor appointments subject to safeguarding checks and Chair / Vice Chair appointments and noted the resignations.
- 10.3 It was noted that Vanessa Huws Jones (Knavesmire LGB) would be joining the Education and Standards Committee.

## 11 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (previously issued)

11.1 **Resolution:** The minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 meeting were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and approved.

11.2 **Resolution:** The confidential minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 meeting were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and approved.

Matters Arising and Action Plan

11.3 There were no matters arising.

11.4 The action plan was updated and completed items closed.

11.5 The Chair and Vice Chair were agreed as the trustees for staff to report whistleblowing concerns to.

11.6 Trustees agreed to close the action for a review paper based on the general election and reflect after the outcome of the budget.

11.7 The CFO confirmed that the action related to budget against actual cashflow forecast had been addressed through the inclusion of a budget cash flow table as reported in appendix 2 which was split by capital, revenue and total cash balance.

## 12 POLICIES

12.1 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the below policies:  
 Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (previously issued)  
 Low Level Concerns Policy (previously issued)  
 SEND Policy (previously issued)  
 SEND report 2024/25 (previously issued)  
 Pay Policy (previously issued)

Inspire Policies

Admissions Policy (previously issued)  
 Anti-bullying Policy (previously issued)  
 Behaviour Policy (previously issued)  
 Curriculum Policy (previously issued)  
 First Aid Policy (previously issued)

12.2 **A Trustee questioned the Pay Policy appendix 1 pay ranges for unqualified teachers as the minimum pay range for this financial year was below the minimum wage.** The Director of HR explained that they were nationally set pay ranges in the School Teacher Pay and Conditions Document and confirmed that there were no staff employed as unqualified teachers. There was a requirement when advertising for a teaching post that the candidates have a teaching qualification but would ensure the pay ranges were accurately reflected.

12.3 **A Trustee asked if the Trust has the freedom to set its own pay ranges in line with the people strategy.** The Chair noted that the schools were funded by the government based on the national pay scales.



- 12.4 **A Trustee suggested that it would be helpful to have a general overview of where staff were on the pay scales.**
- 12.5 **A Trustee requested tracked changes on policy reviews or to include an update summary.**
- 12.6 **A Trustee asked if the Inspire policies were consistent with the other schools.** The CEO confirmed they were with some minor changes to meet independent school standards.
- 12.7 It was agreed that the Whistleblowing Policy (previously issued) would be brought to the December meeting.

### 13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 13.1 The CFO reported that the Annual Report had been shared with the Chair and Vice Chair.
- 13.2 Confidential items were recorded as a separate confidential minute.

### 14 FUTURE MEETING DATES

FAR Cttee - 26th November 9.30am  
Trust Board - 2nd December 1pm

The meeting closed at 8.15pm.

Meeting Decisions
Trustees agreed and endorsed the Strategic Plan.
Trustees approved the Terms of Reference for the below committees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finance, Audit and Risk</li> <li>- Education and Standards</li> <li>- Remuneration</li> </ul>
Trustees agreed the governor appointments and Chair / Vice Chair positions.
Trustees approved the 1 <sup>st</sup> July Minutes and associated confidential minutes
Trustees approved the below policies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (previously issued)</li> <li>- Low Level Concerns Policy (previously issued)</li> <li>- SEND Policy (previously issued)</li> <li>- SEND report 2024/25 (previously issued)</li> <li>- Pay Policy (previously issued)</li> </ul> <u>Inspire Policies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Admissions Policy (previously issued)</li> <li>- Anti-bullying Policy (previously issued)</li> <li>- Behaviour Policy (previously issued)</li> <li>- Curriculum Policy (previously issued)</li> <li>- First Aid Policy (previously issued)</li> </ul>

20 <sup>th</sup> May 2024			
Item	By	Action	Date
3.15	Chair	Discuss potentially changing governor / LGB titles with LGB Chairs. <i>21.10.24: to be followed up after the governance evening.</i>	Autumn 2024

21 <sup>st</sup> October 2024			
Item	By	Action	Date
3.19	CEO, Chair, Vice Chair, Clerk	Map strategic plan review across the governance calendar.	Dec 2024

***Approved at Trust Board on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024***

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**Trust Board Approval**