

# Excel Learning Trust

## Trust Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2025 1pm held at Trust Office – Woodthorpe Primary School

Present:	Ian Wiggins Donna Smith Martyn Sibley Natalie Wong	Chair of trustees Trustee & Vice Chair Trustee Trustee
In attendance:	Mark Hassack Michael Gidley Katie Dent Sophie Triffitt	CEO Chief Finance Officer Director of HR Clerk to the Board of Trustees

### 1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 1.2 The Chair recorded sadness at the death of Pat Boyle noting the exemplary commitment and dedication Pat gave to the role of Trustee and that she always put students and staff first.

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

#### Absence

- 2.1 Apologies were received and accepted for Frankie Haynes.

#### Declarations of Interest

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

### 3 CEO UPDATE (previously issued)

#### Artificial Intelligence

- 3.1 A Trustee asked how AI was being used in school and what the AI culture for the Trust was. The CEO explained that Teach Mate AI was dominant in the marketplace and a working group had been established to define AI policy and risk assessments would be undertaken. Staff training and development would take place if / when adopted. In response to a Trustee the CEO explained that the practical application could support lesson plans, development

of resources and change the reading age of a document. There were a range of opportunities and applications but would want to implement with caution and ensure sophistication of how it was used to support pedagogy in the classroom.

- 3.2 A Trustee asked if there was a growing trend of student use of AI for homework. The CEO explained that AI was part of the computing curriculum but there had been no widespread instances of students using it to create homework reported by schools.
- 3.3 The CFO confirmed Teach Mate AI charges £25.20 per user and expected the overall cost to be circa £7k per annum.
- 3.4 A Trustee asked if any other providers were being explored. The CFO confirmed they would be and OLEX AI was an alternative option. Trustees supported a cautious exploration of the use of AI in the Trust, and asked that schools ensured content produced by AI systems was reviewed by staff before being used in the classroom.

#### Staffing Model

- 3.5 A Trustee asked how the current trust staffing model compared to the ideal staffing model. The CEO explained that financially there was a need for schools to be within these models but there was work to do. The CFO had prepared a pre-start budget and this had been reviewed line by line for risks and opportunities. The staff model that was developed was benchmarked against the staffing cost benchmark and both aligned. The Trust model was a starting point for discussion with Principals and there had been discussions about plans to work towards the ideal model.
- 3.6 The CEO reported that a restructure of teaching staff had started at Carr Junior, Scarcroft had some refinements to make, Woodthorpe would require a review and there was some work to do at Knavesmire. The CEO explained that the aim was for a financially viable structure that provides excellent education.
- 3.7 The restructure at Carr Junior had commenced earlier because of the move from a three to two form entry junior, and the staff were aware this was coming, but the restructure plans had required further changes than was expected at school level including for one class to be taught four days per week by the Vice Principal. In response to a Trustee the Director of HR confirmed there had been no significant feedback from Unions on the day the restructure was communicated and all questions asked were what would have been expected. The CEO explained that there had been a need to set a long-term structure, and the Principal was being supported as much as possible.
- 3.8 A Trustee asked about the risks around the restructure work. The CEO noted that all other schools and Trusts were in the same position and Carr Junior needed a structure to reflect a two-form entry junior school. There was a risk from potential costs from redundancies. The CFO confirmed they would be fed into the forecast.

#### Promise Vulnerable Pupils

- 3.9 It was noted that the Promise to Vulnerable Pupils was reviewed in detail at Education and Standards Committee. The CEO informed trustees that the link provided was to a live document that trustees could access at any point. A Trustee noted that the RAG ratings reflected the stage of the strategy.

### Strategy

- 3.10 A Trustee noted that some lines had multiple owners and suggested a named lead to be identified for accountability. The CEO confirmed the first name was the accountable person.
- 3.11 A Trustee noted lots of activity and delivered outcomes.
- 3.12 The CEO highlighted the items for investigation such as teaching status and reported that a meeting was scheduled with the National Institute of Teaching.

### Consultation on Change of School Day

- 3.13 The Chair reported positive engagement from the consultation and noted that there had also been some questions raised. Whilst it was a school level decision the Chair encouraged schools to take a broad view of feedback.
- 3.14 The CEO explained that the enrichment offer would be planned into staff directed time and that feedback from staff and children had been overwhelmingly positive. The consultations had received some constructive and negative feedback from parents which had been valuable. The CEO acknowledged that there would be some work to do on encouraging children to stay until 3.25pm as much as possible. The CEO noted that directed time for teaching staff still comes in at 30 hours fewer than the maximum 1265 hours.
- 3.15 A Trustee questioned how the proposal aligned with the 32.5 hours per week of education. The CEO explained that the 32.5 hours was guidance and not a legal minimum and if a student attended 2 enrichments per week they would be above that guidance. The CEO confirmed there would be no loss of learning time and there would be the same number of teaching hours in the week.
- 3.16 A Trustee asked if there had been any feedback from other Trusts. The CEO confirmed not.
- 3.17 The CEO explained there were no plans to implement the proposal at primary schools.
- 3.18 A Trustee asked if the consultation process had met requirements. The CEO confirmed that the consultation had gone well above statutory requirements and had given a wide range of stakeholders a voice in the process.
- 3.19 A Trustee noted that the proposal provided a more mature approach of expectations from teaching staff in terms of intervention and enrichment. The CEO added that enrichment could be led by pupil voice and whilst the holistic approach tries to cover as much as possible he accepted it may not please everyone.

### Central Team

- 3.20 The Chair of Trustees took the opportunity to note the CFO's retirement plans and record thanks to the CFO.
- 3.21 The Chair of Trustees congratulated Katie Dent on appointment as Chief Operating Officer.
- 3.22 The CEO noted that the Director of HR had put the CEO job description into the same format as the other Executive Team roles, and this would be circulated.

## **4 SEND AND SAFEGUARDING REPORT**

SEND (previously issued)

- 4.1 A Trustee recorded thanks and congratulations on the work done to support SEND across the city.
- 4.2 A Trustee asked for examples of provision in section F of support not being provided by school due to it being a Local Authority responsibility. The CEO explained that it was mainly around having 'velcro' adult support as described in Education Health Care Plans due to the funding not meeting the cost. The trust had sought legal advice to ensure the position was correct and where recommended support was not funded properly it would be challenged.
- 4.3 A Trustee asked if communication to parents reflects that the Trust / school was doing as much as they can and want to work in partnership. The CEO explained that the Director of SEND and Safeguarding was working directly with SENCOs and parents where a case had reached that stage. The CEO added that communication with SEND parents was in a good position and there was good attendance at SEND events.
- 4.4 The CFO noted that SEND provision and support was a challenge for councils nationally.
- 4.5 A Trustee noted that it was positive to see the additional funding secured from challenge to CYC.
- 4.6 Trustees reflected that funding for SEND nationally was a concern. The CEO noted that the priority was SEND in mainstream as no additional funding from government was expected.

Safeguarding (previously issued)

- 4.7 Trustees noted concern and surprise at the Elective Home Education (EHE) position and appreciated the proactive approach from the Trust.
- 4.8 A Trustee noted the ten children in ELT who have moved to EHE and asked if these were in response to behaviour and attendance expectations. The CEO explained that families didn't tend to choose EHE due to regular contact from school. The CEO confirmed there was agreed language to respond to requests for EHE as legally they were not able to refuse but would express the view that they feel school was the best place for the child.
- 4.9 Trustees recorded thanks to the Director of SEND and Safeguarding for the informative reports.

**5 INSPIRE** (previously issued)

- 5.1 The CEO reported that the Inspire Academy registration was due to be completed before 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025.
- 5.2 It was noted that the Inspire offer was reviewed in detail at Education and Standards Committee and the committee had reflected on the positive anonymous case studies.
- 5.3 It was agreed for the Finance Audit and Risk Committee to review value for money of the Inspire provision.

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

- 6.1 The Director of HR reported that the first session of the workload focus group was scheduled for 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025. The Workload Survey received more responses than the previous survey and the results were provided with the comparison. Principals had received individual school data.
- 6.2 The Director of HR noted that the Knavesmire behaviour management question had significantly decreased since the last survey but actions were already in place and the Excel Reviews across the Trust were focusing on behaviour and attitudes and attendance.
- 6.3 A Trustee noted that there had been a higher response rate with N/A for curriculum planning which suggested a higher response rate from support staff and asked why. The Director of HR explained that it may be due to how staff interpreted the question but suggested including staff category in the next set of results.
- 6.4 The Director of HR informed trustees that the Pay Awards for 2025/26 had not yet been confirmed. The CFO noted that the forecast had assumed 2.8% for teachers and support staff. The CEO added that the budget position was tight which mirrored the local and national position, and some Trusts had taken an action to not have pupil facing support staff above Year 3.
- 6.5 The Director of HR confirmed the staff awards evening was scheduled for Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2025.

## **7 EDUCATION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE REPORT**

- 7.1 The Committee Chair reported that there was a focus on the careers review at York High School and the committee received the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) data.
- 7.2 A Trustee asked if the review focused on careers delivery or pathways. The CEO explained that the focus was how the school delivers careers advice and guidance, and the review identified clear areas of development.
- 7.3 It was noted that the committee received assurance that the trust was meeting provider access legislation.
- 7.4 Trustees noted that it had been beneficial to have Mrs Huws-Jones, Knavesmire governor, join the committee.

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

- 8.1 There were no questions on the circulated update.

### **iAM Scorecards (previously issued)**

- 8.2 A Trustee questioned the red ratings at Scarcroft Primary School. The CFO reported that the Director of Estates was supporting the Site Manager and Business Manager, and the newly appointed Compliance Officer would also support across the Trust in the longer term.

- 8.3 Trustees requested assurance at the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee meeting that Scarcroft were back in an acceptable position.

## **9 FINANCE UPDATE**

### Monitoring (previously issued)

- 9.1 The CFO reported that the finances were running broadly in line with budget, the reported positive budget position was largely due to an early payment of the core schools budget grant. The greatest financial risk was supply staff costs but there were systems in place for monitoring.

### Financial regulations (previously issued)

- 9.2 It was confirmed that the Financial Regulations were reviewed at Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and the committee recommended for approval.
- 9.3 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the Financial Regulations.
- 9.4 The CFO shared the Academies Benchmark Report 2025 with trustees.

### Risk Register

- 9.5 The CFO reported that the executive team had done work to restructure the risk register and would present to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

## **10 TRUSTEE BUSINESS**

### Training

- 10.1 The Chair of Trustees asked trustees to ensure they were up to date on required training.

### Recruitment

- 10.2 The Chair of Trustees reported that there had been good interest in the Trustee vacancies and some applications had already been submitted.
- 10.3 The Chair of Trustees informed trustees that an application was submitted from a former Scarcroft governor. Trustees discussed the balance between appropriate challenge and ensuring an effective working relationship with the executive team. Trustees agreed not to progress the application.

## **11 LGB BUSINESS**

### Matters from LGBs

- 11.1 There were no items raised.

### LGB Appointments and Resignations (previously issued)

- 11.2 **Resolution:** Trustees agreed the governor appointments subject to safeguarding checks and noted the resignations.

## **12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING** (previously issued)

- 12.1 **Resolution:** The minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024 meeting were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and approved.
- 12.2 **Resolution:** The confidential minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024 meeting were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and approved.

### Matters Arising and Action Plan

- 12.3 There were no matters arising.
- 12.4 Trustees agreed to close the action subject to a wider conversation about governance.
- 12.5 The action plan was updated and completed items closed.

## **13 POLICIES**

- 13.1 There were no policies for review / approval.

The Clerk left the meeting at 2.33pm.

## **14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### CYC Governance SLA

- 14.1 A paper had been circulated to Trustees in advance of the meeting regarding the CYC governance SLA, which is due to end in August 2025. The paper outlined various options, including extending the SLA or bringing governance in-house.
- 14.2 A number of questions were raised by Trustees in relation to the various options outlined in the paper. Following discussion, it was agreed by Trustees that the Trust should explore bringing the governance service in-house.
- 14.3 It was confirmed that the Director of HR would liaise with the CYC Governance Manager/CYC Human Resources regarding the question of whether TUPE would apply, and next steps would be taken from there; whether it be a TUPE transfer or a recruitment process.

## **15 FUTURE MEETING DATES**

Trust Board Monday 24th March 2025 1pm  
 Education and Standards Committee Tuesday 6th May 2025 9.30am  
 Trust Board Monday 19th May 2025 9.30am

The meeting closed at 2.33pm.

**Meeting Decisions**

Trustees approved the Financial Regulations

Trustees agreed the governor appointments subject to safeguarding checks.

Trustees approved the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024 Minutes and associated confidential minutes

**Actions:**

7<sup>th</sup> February 2025

Item	By	Action	Date
		There were no actions.	

***Approved by Trustees on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025.***

.....  
**Trust Board Approval**