

Excel Learning Trust

Trust Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 2nd December 2024 1pm held at Knavesmire Primary School

Present:	Donna Smith Martyn Sibley Natalie Wong	Trustee & Vice Chair 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 In the absence of the Chair the Vice Chair chaired and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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 Ian Wiggins and Frankie Haynes. Gemma Lowe was not present. It was noted that Pat Boyle had resigned as a trustee effective 27th November 2024.

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 ANNUAL ACCOUNTS (previously issued)

- 3.1 The Vice Chair explained that BHP had presented the annual account report and audit findings to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on the 26th November 2024 and were recommending the accounts reports for approval.
- 3.2 The CFO had included a short report with a high-level account overview. The CFO reported that the audit took place over October 2024 and the auditors fed back on a smooth and

efficient process. The in-year deficit of £284k reported at the October Trust Board had not changed as a result of the audit.

- 3.3 In reference to the audit findings the CFO explained that the auditors reviewed internal controls, one issue was identified around prepayments linked to one school totalling £1k and was not considered material to the results. The prior year internal control issues were checked and found all were resolved and had not reoccurred.
- 3.4 In reference to the Regularity Insurance Report the auditors identified two issues. A trustee had not declared an interest on their register of interest and the importance of register of interest declarations would continue to be emphasised. GIAS had not been updated and it was accepted to be a timing issue and had been corrected. The prior year's issues had been cleared.
- 3.5 The auditors presented the data analytics report, and no issues were reported.
- 3.6 The Vice Chair informed trustees that the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee had spent time scrutinising the accounts, accounts report and audit report and noted that the auditors were very complimentary about the process and outcome. Trustees recorded thanks to the CFO and his team.
- 3.7 It was noted that the auditors agreed with the trustee view of the Trust as a going concern.
- 3.8 The CFO noted that the accounts report would need to be updated to reflect the resignation of Pat Boyle as a trustee.
- 3.9 **A Trustee asked if there was an internal audit report.** The CFO confirmed that it was presented to, and scrutinised by, the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.
- 3.10 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the report and authorised the Chair of Trustees to sign the annual accounts report.

4 EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT (previously issued)

- 4.1 Addressed as part of agenda item 3.

5 CEO UPDATE (previously issued)

- 5.1 The CEO informed trustees that the centralised trust data team had started (2nd December 2024) which would add capacity particularly to primary schools who currently had no data support.
- 5.2 The CEO highlighted the attendance data noting that a sickness bug was particularly impacting Carr Junior attendance. Attendance remained a particular focus in the secondary schools but was tracking higher year on year.
- 5.3 **A Trustee asked for an explanation of 'laser like assessment'.** The CEO explained it was a term for assessing precise pieces of knowledge or information a child should have and addressing gaps with intervention.

- 5.4 **A Trustee asked what feedback the conference day had received.** The Director of Trust Services reported that the feedback was overwhelmingly positive with a 95% positive (useful or very useful) response rate. Suggestions for further CPD had been built into the February 2026 conference. The Director of HR added that all teachers and pupil facing support staff did the same training which ensured consistent messaging. Martyn Sibley had attended the morning session and reported that the emotion coaching session was received positively. The CEO explained that it was a cross phase approach being used across the Trust.
- 5.5 **A Trustee asked how the extended October half term had been received.** The CEO reported that it was received positively and would apply from 2025.
- 5.6 **A Trustee asked how many non-teachers were running a deep project.** The Director of HR confirmed there were five non teachers leading a project. The CEO had provided links to report what was included under each deep area.
- 5.7 The CEO informed trustees that the press had asked the Trust to comment on the high levels of suspensions across the city. A comment was provided, and the Trust had issued a press release about the promise to vulnerable children and families.
- 5.8 A Trustee asked for an update on Progress Teaching. The CEO explained that Progress Teaching had taken the decision to focus on systems for CPD and lesson observations and would be ceasing the data offer. The Trust would move away from Progress Teaching at the end of the academic year and the capabilities of MIS would be reviewed before taking a decision on next steps. The CEO noted that the Director of School Improvement had attended a city curriculum lead meeting, and early indications were positive on Arbor as a system. The Trust were aligning contract end dates of current MIS systems which were now all due to end in March 2026.
- 5.9 A Trustee asked if it would be appropriate for a trustee to attend a Vulnerable Promise steering group meeting. The CEO confirmed trustees would be welcome to attend. *Post meeting note: The Director of Trust Services shared the dates with trustees.*

6 SEND AND SAFEGUARDING REPORT

Safeguarding (previously issued)

- 6.1 **A Trustee asked for an explanation of MARAC.** The Director of Trust Services explained that it was a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference where representatives would share information and plans to protect victims of domestic abuse. These would happen on an ad hoc basis when triggers were met.
- 6.2 **A Trustee asked if the increase in reported safeguarding items was a reflection of staff being more aware, and if so, how assured the CEO was that was the case.** The CEO confirmed it was. All information was reported on the Pulse reports and the Directors of HR and SEND and Safeguarding reviewed the data and questioned at school level on a weekly basis.
- 6.3 The Director of HR clarified for trustees that PANTS was an NSPCC safeguarding resource.

6.4 A Trustee noted that support services were stretched and asked if the Trust were broadly meeting the needs of the children. The CEO confirmed he was assured through the Director of SEND and Safeguarding's work that the Trust was meeting statutory obligations and more. There was lots of discussion around Education Health Care Plans including recommendations, what could and was happening in school and funding. The CEO noted that funding would always be a limiting factor. The CEO reported that the Director of SEND and Safeguarding supports CYC one day per fortnight as they had not been able to appoint an SEN Manager.

SEND (previously issued)

6.5 **A Trustee asked how the SEND percentages compared locally.** The Director of Trust Services reported that the Director of SEND and Safeguarding had confirmed that ELT tracked lower than the local average for three of the four areas of need with cognition and learning being above the local average.

6.6 Trustees recorded thanks to the Director of SEND and Safeguarding for the effective reporting to trustees.

6.7 Trustees adjourned the meeting at 1.40pm and received a tour of the school from Year 6 students. The meeting reconvened at 2.05pm.

7 INSPIRE (previously issued)

7.1 The CEO highlighted that attendance at 79% was tracking close to the secondary level and above the national for alternative provision and the number of fixed term suspensions was low.

7.2 There had been some change in support staff and one Teaching Assistant had been recruited and one member of staff from York High School was having a trial period to see if that role was something they wanted to progress.

7.3 **A Trustee asked why the Teaching Assistants had left.** The Director of HR confirmed that one had changed role and one had left for personal reasons.

7.4 The CEO reported that the provision was more settled this year and he and the Director of School Improvement had scrutinised work and confirmed it matched broadly what students would be doing in mainstream.

7.5 The CEO reported that CYC had bought one KS3 place, were trialling another and looking at a possible third place at which point another teacher would be appointed which would enable the release of the provision leader.

7.6 **A Trustee asked if the provision was where the CEO had expected at this point in time.** The CEO confirmed it was in terms of the offer to students, but he had thought it would have been registered. The hope was to be registered in January 2025.

8 HR UPDATE (previously issued)

8.1 **A Trustee asked if LGBs had a role around Single Central Record monitoring.** The Director of HR confirmed not and informed trustees that she undertook termly monitoring.

8.2 **A Trustee asked for the expectations on Safer Recruitment training.** The Director of HR confirmed that there was more than one person in each school trained and there would always be one trained person on a panel. The Director of HR was delivering training in March 2025 and would inform the local authority and local settings of spaces that could be bought.

Pay Progression Report (previously issued)

8.3 **A Trustee asked what the process was for UPS progression.** The Director of HR confirmed that there was an application process. The Director of HR confirmed that Headteacher progression was subject to performance management and the process was managed by the CEO and where applicable the Executive Principal to ensure consistency.

8.4 **A Trustee asked if the ISR of all schools was aligned.** The Director of HR confirmed that they were working towards them being aligned.

Sexual Harassment Prevention Plan and Risk Assessment (previously issued)

8.5 The Director of HR explained the new statutory duty on organisations to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment.

8.6 **A Trustee asked if there were any training implications.** The Director of HR explained that there may potentially be some training to access through TES Develop who had a module on harassment which may be suitable, and that this was currently being reviewed.

8.7 The Director of HR reported that there was no significant risk and since being in post had had no complaints but there was a need to raise awareness.

9 ESTATES AND HEALTH AND SAFETY (previously issued)

9.1 Reviewed at FAR Committee.

SCA Overview (previously issued)

9.2 Reviewed at FAR Committee.

9.3 **A Trustee queried that the Inspire project came in under budget but was rated the same colour.** The CFO explained that the overall spend was £56k less than the approved level of expenditure which had rolled over into the remaining balance. In line with policy an element of SCA was retained to cover any emergency works.

Estates Self-Assessment (previously issued)

9.4 Reviewed at FAR Committee.

9.5 **A Trustee questioned why the 'board challenge and monitor estates' was recorded as 'in part' and asked what else the board should do.** It was agreed there was a comprehensive review as part of the FAR Committee. It was agreed to recommend to the Director of Estates to amend b6 to 'in full' once the Director of Estates had presented the Estates Strategy to trustees.

iAM Score Cards (previously issued)

9.6 Reviewed at FAR Committee.

9.7 The CFO reported that the aim was for a 90% compliance rate as an internal benchmark. The CEO recognised the progress needed on compliance and the Trust would be advertising for a Trust Compliance Officer to support the Director of Estates.

10 FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

10.1 The Vice Chair reported that the committee met on the 26th November 2024 and included focus on; annual accounts and audit, budget monitoring, financial risks, review of the risk register, internal audit and estates.

10.2 The Vice Chair noted that the internal audit focused on the census and sustainability and diversity of income generation. A need for consistency of census process was identified and a guide would be produced. There were some comments on high staff costs for a trust of this size but overall identified good practice of diversity of income.

11 FINANCE UPDATE

Monitoring (previously issued)

11.1 The CFO reported that schools had been targeted to deliver their start budget position.

11.2 Supply staff spend was identified as an area of risk and the Director of HR had developed a supply staff tracker for weekly monitoring which was reviewed weekly by the executive team for more immediate monitoring.

11.3 Alternative provision was also identified as a risk and a similar monitoring system had been implemented.

11.4 The CEO had met with Carr Junior around setting a staffing structure from September 2025 as a two-form entry junior school. The Executive Principal would lead the restructure process. The Director of HR explained that the plan was to start the process early to support staff impacted.

Risk Register (previously issued)

11.5 Provided for information.

12 SCHEME OF DELEGATION REVIEW (previously issued)

12.1 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the Scheme of Delegation.

13 TRUSTEE BUSINESS

Trustee Recruitment

13.1 Trustees recorded thanks to Pat Boyle for her support of the trust on her resignation.

13.2 Trustees had identified; finance / accountancy, marketing and PR, HR, education and estates expertise as areas of need for trustee recruitment. The Director of HR confirmed the recruitment process would begin in the new year.

14 LGB BUSINESS

Matters from LGBs

14.1 There were no items raised.

LGB Appointments and Resignations (previously issued)

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

15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (previously issued)

15.1 **Resolution:** The minutes of the 21st October 2024 meeting were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and approved.

15.2 **Resolution:** The confidential minutes of the 21st October 2024 meeting were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and approved.

15.3 The Director of Trust Services provided an update on the safeguarding item from the confidential minutes.

Matters Arising and Action Plan

15.4 There were no matters arising.

15.5 The action plan was updated and completed items closed.

15.6 The CEO reported that the executive and central team have meetings scheduled to review progress against objectives and the promise to vulnerable, this would then be reported to Trust Board.

16 POLICIES

16.1 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the below policies:

Admissions Policy & Consultation (previously issued)

- The Director of Trust Services explained that the policy went out to consultation with the process run by CYC. There was no response directly to the Trust and no PANs were reduced as part of this policy but included an amendment to criteria for staff members which came out of the people strategy feedback.

Whistleblowing Policy (previously issued)

- The Director of HR reported that the Chair and Vice Chair of Trust Board were named as nominated people for concerns to be reported to, clarified how concerns are reported and included extra organisations for support.

Health and Safety Policy (previously issued)

- Reviewed at FAR Committee.

17 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

17.1 There were no items for AOB.

18 FUTURE MEETING DATES

Education and Standards Committee – 14th January 9.30am.

Trust Board – 27th January 9.30am

The meeting closed at 3pm.

Meeting Decisions	
Trustees approved the annual report and authorised the Chair of Trustees to sign the annual accounts report.	
Trustees approved the Scheme of Delegation.	
Trustees agreed the governor appointments subject to safeguarding checks.	
Trustees approved the 21 st October 2024 Minutes and associated confidential minutes	
Trustees approved the below policies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admissions Policy & Consultation - Whistleblowing Policy - Health and Safety Policy 	

Actions:

20 th 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

2 nd December 2024			
Item	By	Action	Date
		There were no actions to record.	

Approved at Trust Board on 7th February 2025.

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Trust Board Approval