Excel Learning Trust

Trust Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 30th June at 1pm held at Trust Office – Woodthorpe Primary School

Present:	Ian Wiggins Donna Smith	Chair of Trustees Trustee & Vice Chair
In attendance:	Mark Hassack Michael Gidley Katie Dent Zoe French Sophie Triffitt	CEO Chief Finance Officer Chief Operating Officer Director of Trust Services Clerk to the Board of Trustees

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1.2 The Chair noted the meeting was not quorate and a virtual meeting would be arranged to ratify the meeting decisions.

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 Natalie Wong and Martyn Sibley.

2.2 No apologies were received from or accepted for Frankie Haynes. Trustees noted concern that there had been no contact and would refer the matter to Members.

Declarations of Interest

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

3 CEO UPDATE (previously issued)

3.1 The CEO noted that a high-level update would be provided following GCSE results day.

3.2 **A Trustee asked what was driving the lower attendance at Knavesmire.** The CEO confirmed that the disadvantaged cohort was impacting the lower attendance at Knavesmire, but new processes should deliver improvements. Overall, there was a positive picture with attendance.

3.3 **A Trustee questioned appointing an additional Assistant Principal at Knavesmire given the staff cost metric.** The CEO explained that it would be an internal appointment with an upgrade so no additional staff member. The school were working towards the metrics and a third senior leader at Assistant Principal level and SENCO was reasonable for the size of school and would mirror the structure at Woodthorpe.

3.4 **A Trustee asked for an update on the pupil facing support staff metric at Knavesmire.** The CEO explained that the school was in a strong enough position financially to delay changes to retain strong staff that would support the expansion to two-year old provision. As staff have left, they have not been replaced. The CEO assured trustees Knavesmire were in a good position using a range of metrics.

3.5 The CEO reported that the DfE had asked questions about the risk to trust reserves of the expansion for Knavesmire to two-year-old provision which the CFO responded to and the DfE feedback was that the request was not a controversial change for the school so did not need to go to Advisory Board on 5th July 2025 and they would try to deliver a response before that date.

3.6 The CEO reported a positive pre-registration Ofsted inspection for Inspire and awaited the official report.

3.7 **A Trustee asked for an update on governance for Inspire.** Trustees agreed to approach a potential Chair, and the COO had drafted advertisement wording for governor recruitment.

Draft Behaviour Policy – Secondary Phase (previously issued)

3.8 Included for information.

3.9 The CEO reported that the two secondary Principals had worked in collaboration to develop the policy with appendices allowing for the individuality of schools.

3.10 The CEO noted that the biggest change would be for York High with a move away from the Rodillian model and pyramid approach, which was needed at the time the school was in special measures, but the school was now in a different place.

3.11 **A Trustee asked if the uniform policies were compliant with DfE requirements.** The CEO confirmed they were and had three items of branded clothing plus a tie.

3.12 **A Trustee suggested including job titles.**

3.13 The CEO reported that the primary school policies were in the process of being harmonised.

3.14 The CEO noted that two Vice Principal appointments had been made at York High from a very strong field of applicants.

Scarcroft Primary IQM Report (previously issued)
York High IQM Report (previously issued)

3.15 A Trustee recorded congratulations on the IQM Reports particularly highlighting the ‘teacher of children not subjects’ comment.

4 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES REVIEW

4.1 **A Trustee questioned the move from green to amber for the SEN offer / parental engagement.** The CEO explained that the team were confident the provision was in place but wanted to increase parental engagement so the amber highlighted that as an area for attention.

4.2 **A Trustee noted that there were several evidence-based outcomes and impact that reflected lots of good work and asked if there were any areas for wider impact assessment.** The CEO gave the example of international experience for all pupils and explained that tracking of the offer was in the development stage and needed to consider quality assurance of what was tracked including impact. Careers would also be an area of focus for next academic year.

4.3 **A Trustee asked if there were any areas of risk around the careers offer.** The CEO confirmed not, and the schools were compliant with the Baker Clause but there was a need to evidence how that was met.

4.4 The CEO referred to the adaptive teaching priority and explained that training had taken place, and expectations were set so the item was rated green but there was ongoing monitoring for effectiveness as part of excel reviews.

4.5 **A Trustee asked about impact for the Vulnerable Pupils Promise.** The CEO explained that improved attendance was evidence of impact. Outcomes for disadvantaged children were not moving at the rate they would want but the Trust was embarking on a poverty proofing project through Children Northeast which CYC had bought into as disadvantaged outcomes were a focus across the city. The Trust would put forward York High as the first school for focus. The CEO noted that there had been a culture shift and change of mindset across the Trust to prioritise disadvantaged children.

5 INSPIRE (previously issued)

5.1 **A Trustee asked what the overall number of places would be for 2025-26.** The CEO explained that generally the model would be 24 (8 KS3 / 8 Year 10 / 8 Year 11), there was potential to take more young people, but it was dependent on the needs of those in provision. The CEO confirmed that four places across the three classes had been bought by CYC.

5.2 **A Trustee asked what the areas of development were.** The CEO reported that attendance, particularly in Year 11, needed to improve and would be a focus next academic year. The CEO informed trustees that an advert was out for a Business Coordinator and a large part of that role would be attendance. Inspire received the same reports from the Attendance Partner as other school and having a Business Coordinator would be a support.

5.3 **A Trustee asked what the timescale was for establishing the Academy Committee.** The CEO informed trustees that the registration request was to officially open on 1st

September 2025 and the committee would be established as soon as possible. The first inspection was expected September 2026.

6 SEND AND SAFEGUARDING REPORT

Safeguarding (previously issued)

6.1 **A Trustee asked if there was a comparison of safeguarding data year on year and a within sector comparison.** The CEO confirmed there was no sector comparisons as schools / trusts record differently. The Director of SEND and Safeguarding reported through the CEO that Millthorpe tends to report higher for self-harm incidents and there were 125 incidents logged in 2023/24 compared to 172 this academic year. Emotional concerns were high across Trust schools due to the high level of reporting and the identification process. There were also higher waiting lists for services, such as CAMHS, so staff were trying to manage the increase in mental health needs, which was a national issue. Overall, the numbers were in line with the previous year and the Director of SEND and Safeguarding tracks each school three times a year which includes comparisons to previous year and identification of trends to address. Domestic Violence had been identified as a key area across Trust schools, so IDAS (Independent Domestic Abuse Services) were delivering training next term.

6.2 **A Trustee asked if the level of work was the status quo or linked to new projects.** The CEO confirmed it was ongoing work with the Director of SEND and Safeguarding undertaking continuous monitoring, supporting with interventions and auditing.

6.3 **Trustees discussed the need to have a link trustee for SEND and Safeguarding.**

6.4 The CEO highlighted a potential risk area of the Designated Safeguarding Lead at Millthorpe leaving to take up a role with CYC, but interviews were scheduled for Thursday 3rd July 2025 and there had been a strong field of applicants.

6.5 The York High School Vice Principal had moved to the post of Assistant Principal including the SENCO remit.

6.6 The Director of SEND and Safeguarding would support staff through the transition.

SEND (previously issued)

6.7 **A Trustee asked for the reason why Millthorpe and Carr Junior numbers had reduced.** The CEO explained that it was due to cohorts transitioning out.

6.8 **A Trustee asked for an update on the traded offer.** The Director of Trust Services reported that there had been the first approach for Adaptive Teaching and the COO had delivered Safer Recruitment training.

7 HR UPDATE (previously issued)

7.1 The COO highlighted that the numbers of vacancies had decreased and the Trust had still had a strong field for vacancies despite moving away from TES. When the recruitment analysis was next undertaken it would include success of targeted advertisement.

7.2 **A Trustee noted that the pool of candidates had seemed to be high quality candidates and asked if they were coming from the local area.** The COO noted that there had been recent appointments from York, Leeds and London. Support staff vacancies tend to be York based. The COO suggested including geographically area to the recruitment analysis report.

<u>Job Evaluation</u>

7.3 The COO reported that a meeting took place with Unison and GMB WC 23rd June 2025 and they asked to pause the process until September 2025 which was agreed to. The unions asked the Trust to consider using CYC to undertake job evaluation, to support additional facility time to deal with queries and undertake an equality impact assessment. The COO confirmed that CYC use a different scheme, but the factors were very similar.

7.4 The COO confirmed that staff had been written to, to confirm the process would be picked up from September 2025.

7.5 The COO informed trustees that NEU and NASUWT were not recognised support staff trade unions for negotiations around pay and conditions and following the nationally agreed process would not be part of the collective consultation and negotiation but had been kept informed.

8 ESTATES AND IT (previously issued)

8.1 **A Trustee noted the significant amount of work for the IT Manager to undertake.** The CEO explained that the Vital service had been opted out of which would release budget and fund internal IT provision. There would be an additional in year financial impact of £7k to buy servers but future years would deliver a saving.

<u>School Estates Management Self-Assessment</u> (previously issued)

8.2 There were no questions on the self-assessment.

<u>Health and Safety</u> (previously issued)

8.3 There were no questions on the Health and Safety update.

<u>York High School Classroom Display Screens</u> (previously issued)

8.4 The CFO explained that classroom displays at York High School would be upgraded to touch screen devices and all screens replaced through a government approved DfE framework for leasing.

8.5 **A Trustee asked if the cost had been included in the budget and forward plan.** The CFO confirmed it had.

8.6 **A Trustee asked if leasing was a new approved route for schools.** The CFO explained that the new accounting framework allowed for finance leases for certain equipment including IT.

8.7 **A Trustee asked if the screens would be insured.** The CFO confirmed insurance would be covered under the RPA (Risk Protection Arrangement).

8.8 **A Trustee asked if there were any longer or wider term agreements that would be a risk.** The CFO confirmed not and would be entering an ICT contract which was locked down to ensure DfE approval. The length of the contract would be well within the average life of the screen.

8.9 **For approval:** The approval of the York High School Classroom Display Screen Equipment would be proposed for agreement.

9 FINANCE UPDATE

Finance and Audit Committee Report

9.1 The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Chair reported that a robust discussion on the budget and forward plan had taken place at committee level.

9.2 It was noted that Trustees had been provided with links to the updated Academy Trust Handbook, Financial support and oversight for academy trusts guidance, and Managing conflicts of interests, related party relationships and related party transactions: good practice guide.

Monitoring (previously issued)

9.3 There were no questions on the monitoring report.

Budget and Forward Plan (previously issued)

9.4 **For approval:** The approval of the budget and forward plan would be proposed for agreement.

Committee Minutes 1st April 2025 and 26th November 2024 (previously issued)

9.5 **For approval:** The approval of the minutes would be proposed for agreement.

Risk Register

9.6 Provided for information.

10 TRUSTEE BUSINESS

10.1 Trustees were reminded of their invitation to the York High School Year 9 graduation event on 9th July 2025.

11 LGB BUSINESS

Matters from LGBs

11.1 There were no items raised.

LGB Appointments and Resignations (previously issued)

11.2 Trustees noted the resignations.

12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (previously issued)

12.1 **For approval:** The minutes of the 19th May 2025 meeting would be proposed for approval.

12.2 **For approval:** The confidential minutes of the 19th May 2025 would be proposed for approval.

Matters Arising and Action Plan

12.3 There were no matters arising.

12.4 There were no actions to update.

13 POLICIES

Reserves Policy (previously issued)

13.1 The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Chair reported that the committee had scrutinised the policy and were recommending for approval.

13.2 **For approval:** The Reserves Policy would be proposed for approval.

Student Enablement Funding (previously issued)

13.3 It was confirmed that the Student Enablement Funding Policy had been adopted at executive level.

13.4 The CFO confirmed it was a new policy which formalised the hardship funding framework and guidance.

13.5 A Trustee asked if there was a risk of more applications than budgeted for. The CEO assured trustees that no child would be disadvantaged, and a higher need would have to be absorbed by the budget.

14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

14.1 There were no items for discussion under AOB.

14.2 **For approval:** Donna Smith to be appointed to the Education and Standards Committee on an interim basis.

14.3 **Action:** Trustees to meet virtually on Friday 4th July to ratify approvals.

15 FUTURE MEETING DATES

Education and Standards Committee – 17th July 2025 9.30am
Member – 11th July 2025 10am

The meeting closed at 2.40pm.

Meeting Decisions – to be ratified at a meeting on 4th July 2025.
Approval of the York High School Classroom Display Screen Equipment proposal.
Approval of the budget and forward plan.
Approval of Finance, Audit and Risk Minutes from 1st April 2025 and 26th November 2024.
Approval of 19th May 2025 Trust Board Minutes and associated confidential minutes.
Approval of the Reserves Policy.
Donna Smith appointed to the Education and Standards Committee on an interim basis.

Actions:

19th May 2025			
Item	**By**	**Action**	**Date**
14	Trustees	Trustees to meet virtually on Friday 4th July to ratify approvals.	04/07/2025

Approved by Trustees at Trust Board on 13th October 2025.

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Trust Board Approval

Excel Learning Trust, Company Number 10067116,

Registered Office: Woodthorpe Primary School, Summerfield Road, Woodthorpe, York, YO24 2RU