Excel Learning Trust

Trust Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 13th October 2025 at 9.30am held at Trust Office – Woodthorpe Primary School

Present:	Ian Wiggins	Chair of Trustees
	Donna Smith	Trustee & Vice Chair
	Fay Andrews Hodgson	Trustee
	Emad Elkhashen	Trustee
In attendance:	Mark Hassack	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
	Michael Gidley	Chief Finance Officer (CFO)
	Katie Dent	Chief Operating Officer (COO)
	Zoe French	Director of Trust Services
	Sophie Triffitt	Clerk to the Board of Trustees

1 WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

1.2 Apologies were received and accepted for Natalie Wong, Martyn Sibley and Sam Cuthbert.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND CHANGES TO BUSINESS INTEREST FORMS *(PREVIOUSLY ISSUED)*

2.1 Trustees were reminded to complete the business interest form and to keep their business interest submissions up to date throughout the year.

2.2 Trustees were reminded to read Keeping Children Safe in Education and complete the confirmation form.

2.3 Trustees were reminded to complete the Companies House identity verification.

3 CEO UPDATE

<u>CEO Report</u> (previously issued)

3.1 The CEO reported that attendance remained a priority. York High School had added 1% onto their attendance in the last three weeks which suggested it was an improving trend. York High had done a significant amount of work on uniforms and standards which in some cases impacted decisions to attend. The first two weeks of the year reported a 2.1% absence rate which was not a normal start to the year.

3.2 The CEO explained that it had been difficult to get a notice to improve or a fixed penalty notice issued by the City of York Council at the end of a robust support process as a last resort. CYC had implemented a panel phase and the schools had started to build case studies of where they think fixed penalty notices would have been a useful tool as a last measure in the process. The CEO explained the use of data for focused attendance intervention and support.

3.3 The CEO explained the Making School Unmissable Framework which would be RAG rated on a termly basis to generate conversations in Heads meetings.

3.4 **A Trustee asked how much the framework would be discussed at LGB meetings.** The CEO explained that it was left to Heads and Chairs to agree but would be a regular agenda item as it linked well with the remit of LGBs.

3.5 The CEO informed trustees that he was attending Ofsted Inspector training which would inform the self evaluation requirement.

3.6 Trustees were provided with access to the CPD offer. The COO informed trustees that there had been a lower level of interest in the Aspiring Principal programme this year which was expected given there had been 13 on the programme last year, so that offer may run in alternate years.

3.7 The CEO informed trustees that the final appointments were being made for the Deep developmental roles which provided staff with the opportunity to lead a whole school project.

3.8 **A Trustee asked for an update on the Deeps model.** The CEO explained that the model was based on the Hargreaves Deeps model of support, learning, leadership and experience. The structure provided leadership and development opportunities and experiences for staff.

3.9 **A Trustee asked how the organisational framework crossed over with the values.** The CEO explained that the model facilitates collaboration, that performance management was based on Deeps and local governors were linking with the Deep areas. The Deeps was a thread running throughout the trust.

<u>Capped Admission Number</u> (previously issued)

3.10 The CEO explained the Pupil Admission Number, which at Millthorpe was 210, and how the staffing structure was based on that PAN. Year 7 had a 184 intake and implementing a CAN would put a temporary cap on admissions for that cohort to reduce the financial risk of in-year admissions that would require change in staffing and form structure.

3.11 A Trustee asked if it would restrict spaces if a family moved into the area. The CEO confirmed it would and explained that there was an appeal process that would consider appeal circumstances.

3.12 **A Trustee asked how many in year applications there had been in 2024/25.** The CEO confirmed there had been very few but that historically the school had been full to the PAN, it was just currently just the Year 7 cohort that would operate with one less form.

3.13 **A Trustee asked what the risks were of implementing the CAN.** The CEO explained that it was removing places out of the system but that there were surplus places in other schools in the city. The CEO explained that the issue was acute for Millthorpe as they needed to take decisions on operating a six or seven form entry structure and taking any more students would require an additional form which brought a financial risk.

3.14 **A Trustee asked why the cap was set at 180 and not a couple of places either side.** The CEO explained that 180 was divisible by 30 which was the ideal maximum class size, setting a CAN above that suggested that having a class size of more than 30 was an unacceptable precedent. **A Trustee noted that there were already four classes of more than 30.** The CEO explained that if any students left their space would not become available and setting a CAN at 180 would protect the classes already in place.

3.15 **A Trustee asked why there was a lower intake this year.** The CEO explained that it was a mix of falling population and also parental choice due to messages in the community.

3.16 **A Trustee asked what the Local Authority's response was to the proposal.** The CEO explained that they would be notified once trustees had made a decision.

3.17 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the proposal to implement a Capped Admission Number of 180 for the Millthorpe current (2025/26) Year 7 cohort with effect from 1st September 2025 and endorsed the associated notification paper for release.

3.18 At 10.15am Trustees were taken on a walk around school by the Woodthorpe Year 6 Ambassadors.

3.19 The meeting reconvened at 10.37am.

Trustees recorded their thanks to the Woodthorpe Ambassadors for their fantastic tour of the school.

Attendance (previously issued)

3.20 An attendance update was provided as part of the CEO Report. Trustees had no questions on the attendance report.

Behaviour (previously issued)

3.21 The CEO explained that the Behaviour Policy had been in place and was well embedded at Woodthorpe. As the Executive Principal had started working across all the primary schools the policy had been implemented across the trust. The CEO explained that the rationale over the behaviour approach was grounded in research and DfE guidance and sets a school wide approach.

3.22 Trustees noted the positive feedback from children at Woodthorpe on the behaviour approach.

3.23 **A Trustee noted that there had been some commentry from the Knavesmire community around the behaviour approach. A Trustee added that a number of changes at Knavesmire had generated discussion in the community.**

3.24 The CEO informed Trustees that the Trust had received a letter signed by parents at Knavesmire seeking assurance around curriculum changes and the Behaviour Policy. The CEO explained that it was not common practice for parents to be involved in setting the curriculum and Behaviour Policy and the Knavesmire LGB Chair and Head of School would respond to parents.

3.25 **A Trustee asked if there was any reflection on the delivery of changes to the school communities.** The CEO explained that the communication of changes was identified as an area for review. The CEO explained that there had been no response from other schools around curriculum and Behaviour Policy changes. The CEO assured trustees that he had seen the positive impact of the Behaviour Policy on a recent visit to Knavesmire.

3.26 **A Trustee asked if the change of curriculum at Knavesmire had helped to reduce teacher workload.** The CEO confirmed it had. Teachers were provided with the curriculum, resources, planning and staff training videos. The change also supported having the same core knowledge taught across the Trust but allowed for individuality of delivery which supported sharing of good practice and development of expertise.

4 COO UPDATE

4.1 The Chair noted that there were confidential items that would be recorded as a separate confidential minute.

Articles of Association (previously issued)

4.2 In response to a Trustee the COO confirmed no date had yet been set for an AGM.

4.3 **A Trustee asked if there were other trusts where the CEO was appointed as a Trustee.** The CEO explained that nationally it was an even split.

4.4 **Resolution:** The Trustees approved the recommendation of the proposed Articles of Association for Member approval.

SCR Data Breach (previously issued)

4.5 Trustees had received notification when the breach occurred. The COO informed trustees that the investigation was ongoing and trustees would be updated when the outcome of the investigation into the data breach was available. The COO noted that it was not a Trust data breach but a breach from a third party provider used by the online Single Central Record provider who were subject to a cyber attack and held information on their systems they shouldn't have.

4.6 The COO recorded thanks to the Director of Trust Services for the excellent job in notifying everyone impacted.

4.7 **A Trustee asked if there was a material risk to the Trust of breached information of key personnel.** The COO confirmed not noting that it was personal level risk.

4.8 **A Trustee asked if anyone impacted had reported any fraudulent activity.** The COO confirmed not. There had been some requests for credit monitoring services but there was a need to await the outcome of the investigation.

4.9 **A Trustee asked if there would be financial compensation for individuals.** The COO explained that there had been a query on a passport renewal and compensation was a question raised by unions.

4.10 **A Trustee noted that it was a sector wide issue and it was important to see what the sector approach was.**

4.11 The CEO recognised it was an alarming circumstance for individuals but that it was very early in the investigation. If the Trust paid for Experian membership for those impacted it would be at a cost of circa £8k. The CFO noted there were parameters with which the Trust could spend public funding and if any payment were to be made it would need DfE approval.

4.12 A Trustee asked if the Trust was seeking compensation from the organisation that was the source of the breach. The COO explained that if there were a case against the provider it would take time and would be part of a larger sector claim. As the cyber attack was not on trust systems it was not covered through trust insurance.

4.13 Confidential Item - recorded as a separate confidential minute (previously issued)

Safeguarding

4.14 The Chair informed trustees that the Director of SEND and Safeguarding had secured a promotion at another trust.

Catering (previously issued)

4.15 The Chair noted the difficulties with the roll out from the new provider.

4.16 The COO explained that the change of provider was not well received within the Scarcroft community as the School Chef and in house service were loved, so Aspens were asked to prioritise the offer at Scarcroft to ensure they got it right, but that was not delivered on.

4.17 The COO confirmed that no child had been made ill but there had been a risk with allergies. Issues with the service also included inconsistent staffing and portion size.

4.18 The COO explained that the change had gone smoother in the secondary schools and Millthorpe school meal take up had increased.

4.19 The COO explained that moving providers within the academic year would cause disruption and risk but a notice for year end with close monitoring could be issued.

4.20 **A Trustee asked how long the procurement process for another provider would take.** The Director of Trust Services confirmed it would be three to four months at a fast pace.

4.21 **A Trustee asked if there was a cost of using Tenet again for the procurement process.** The Director of Trust Services confirmed there would be.

4.22 **A Trustee noted that feedback from current users of Aspens was positive and asked why there was a difference between that feedback and Excel's experience.** The COO explained that Aspens had won a lot of new contracts at the start of the academic year which might have meant challenges in taking on lots of new schools at one time.

4.23 **A Trustee asked if there was a breach of contract risk and if the contract was specific in relation to portion size.** The Director of Trust Services confirmed that portion size was not specific but the contract included delivering to a set specification in line with government guidance. The CEO noted that Aspens had agreed that what was delivered was below standard. The CFO added that given the weight of evidence there would be minimal financial risk given the acknowledgement of the below expected standard service. The CEO explained that if improvements were delivered that would be considered in any decision.

4.24 **A Trustee asked if there were issues with the previous provider that promoted a change.** The COO explained that the contract ended, they did retender and were invited to present but they declined.

4.25 **A Trustee asked if there were vacancies from staff TUPE'd over who had left.** The COO confirmed that staff from Dolce and in house staff TUPE'd over to Aspens, some had left and some were long term sick. The COO noted that there were a number of new processes to learn.

4.26 Additional minutes recorded as a separate confidential minute.

4.27 A Trustee recorded thanks for the report and the response of the team.

4.28 Trustees noted the update.

Teacher Pay Progression (previously issued)

4.29 The COO presented the progression paper.

4.30 Additional minutes recorded as a separate confidential minute.

4.31 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the pay recommendations.

5 STRATEGIC PLAN

5.1 There was no update to record.

6 INSPIRE *(previously issued)*

6.1 There were no questions on the Inspire Report.

7 SEND AND SAFEGUARDING (previously issued)

The Director of SEND and Safeguarding joined the meeting at 11.36am.

7.1 The Chair congratulated the Director of SEND and Safeguarding on her new appointment and thanked her for all her excellent work for the Trust.

7.2 Trustees recorded thanks for the assurance on safeguarding.

7.3 The Director of SEND and Safeguarding reported that:

- The report included an update on CYC funding.
- Provision Map was in place to track and monitor the impact of interventions.
- Inclusion Quality Mark process was going well, all schools assessed had gained Centre of Excellence status. Inspire's assessment was scheduled for 5th December 2025 and Carr Junior in March 2026.

- SEN priorities included IQM for Inspire, IQM for Carr Junior, Inspire's first Ofsted, responding to the Government White Paper on SEN when released, tenders from CYC regarding teaching contracts and outreach work and ongoing CPD.

7.4 A Trustee noted that it had been useful to have the CYC update. The Director of SEND and Safeguarding explained that more schools had been challenging CYC to deliver what was expected within law.

7.5 **A Trustee asked if there were any risks expected with the SEN White Paper.** The Director of SEND and Safeguarding expected the potential of different plans split by relevant need which may indicate different funding streams.

7.6 The Director of SEND and Safeguarding explained that Adaptive Teaching was in place for teachers to be able to deliver lessons to everyone in class and an Adaptive Teaching learning walk proforma had been introduced.

7.7 The Director of SEND and Safeguarding informed trustees that the details in the Safeguarding Report are areas covered in termly reviews. The Designated Safeguarding Lead forums had been successful and included external services to deliver updates. Team Teach was in place and statutory training was compliant.

7.8 A Trustee noted that feedback from Inspire was reassuring.

7.9 The Director of SEND and Safeguarding left the meeting at 11.50pm.

8 HR

8.1 There was no update to report in addition to the COO Update.

9 ESTATES, HEALTH AND SAFETY AND IT (previously issued)

9.1 There were no questions on the circulated paper.

10 FINANCE REPORT (previously issued)

Monitoring Report / Risk Record

10.1 There were no questions on the circulated report.

11 TRUSTEE BUSINESS (previously issued)

11.1 **Resolution:** Trustees agreed the committee membership:

Education and Standards Committee	Finance, Audit and Risk Committee	Remuneration Committee
Martyn Sibley Ian Wiggins	Donna Smith Emad Elkhashen	Ian Wiggins Martyn Sibley

Fay Andrews-Hodgson Sam Cuthbert Vanessa Huws-Jonest	Nat Wong Ian Savage	

11.2 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the below Committee Terms of Reference:
- Education and Standards Committee (previously issued)
- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (previously issued)
- Remuneration Committee (previously issued)

11.3 The CEO noted that it would be a useful exercise for the remuneration committee to look at benchmarking.

11.4 **Action:** Remuneration Committee meeting to be scheduled for January 2026.

11.5 Trustees noted the Trustee training requirements.

12 LGB BUSINESS

Appointments and Resignations (previously issued)

12.1 **Resolution:** Trustees noted the resignations and approved the governor appointments and Chair and Vice Chair recommendations.

13 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (previously issued)

13.1 **Resolution:** The minutes of the 30th June 2025 meeting were approved.

13.2 **Resolution:** The minutes of the 4th July 2025 meeting were approved.

13.3 **Resolution:** The confidential minutes of the 4th July 2025 were approved.

Matters Arising and Action Plan

13.4 There were no matters arising.

13.5 A virtual Trust Board meeting took place on the 4th July 2025.

14 POLICIES (summary of policy changes previously issued)

14.1 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the below policies.
- Pay Policy (previously issued)
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (previously issued)
- Low Level Safeguarding Concerns Policy (previously issued)
- SEND Policy and SEND Report (previously issued

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

15.1 There were no items for discussion under AOB.

The CFO, COO and Director of Trust Services left the meeting at 11.55pm.

16 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

16.1 Recorded as a separate confidential minute.

17 FUTURE MEETING DATES

Education & Standards Committee: Tuesday 11th November 2025 9.30am

Finance, Audit & Risk Committee: Tuesday 25th November 2025 9.30am

Trust Board: Monday 1st December 2025 9.30am

The meeting closed at 12.08pm.

Meeting Decisions
Trustees approved the proposal to implement a Capped Admission Number of 180 for the Millthorpe current (2025/26) Year 7 cohort with effect from 1st September 2025 and endorsed the associated notification paper for release.
Trustees approved the recommendation of the proposed Articles of Association for Member approval.
Trustees approved the pay recommendations.
Trustees agreed the committee membership:
Trustees approved the below Committee Terms of Reference: - Education and Standards Committee (previously issued) - Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (previously issued) - Remuneration Committee (previously issued)
Trustees approved the governor appointments and Chair and Vice Chair recommendations.
Trustees approved the below minutes: - 30th June 2025. - 4th July 2025. - confidential minutes of the 4th July 2025.
Trustees approved the below policies: - Pay Policy - Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy - Low Level Safeguarding Concerns Policy - SEND Policy and SEND Report

Actions:

13th October 2025			
Item	**By**	**Action**	**Date**
11.4	Clerk	Schedule a remuneration committee for January 2026.	Nov 2025

Approved by trustees at Trust Board on 1st December 2025

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Trust Board Approval