Excel Learning Trust

Trust Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 9 February 2026 at 9.30am held at York High School

Present:	Ian Wiggins	Chair of Trustees
	Donna Smith	Trustee & Vice Chair
	Martyn Sibley	Trustee
	Fay Andrews Hodgson	Trustee
	Emad Elkhashen	Trustee
In attendance:	Mark Hassack	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
	Michael Clark	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.

1.2 Apologies were received and accepted for Sam Cuthbert.

1.3 The Chair recorded that Nat Wong had resigned as a trustee. Trustees recorded thanks to Nat Wong for her hard work and contribution to the Board.

1.4 The Chair noted that two new members of SLT (Senior Leadership Team) at York High would be joining the meeting to introduce themselves and provide an update on their roles.

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

2.1 Trustees were reminded to maintain their business interest submissions throughout the year.

3 CEO UPDATE

CEO Report (previously issued)

3.1 The CEO presented the report and highlighted that secondary attendance remained a challenge. Whilst the challenge reflected the local and national picture work was ongoing to drive improvements and embed the ongoing work around a sense of belonging. York High School had made a 0.8% gain in the last five weeks which was a notable gain in attendance data.

3.2 Primary attendance reported broadly in line with national.

3.3 **A Trustee asked what had driven the higher attendance at Knavesmire.** The CEO explained that they had established the attendance framework which was having an impact.

3.4 **Trustees discussed the use of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) and asked if a collective response with other York based MATS to the Local Authority (LA) in respect of progressing FPN would be helpful.** The CEO felt that the FPN should be a tool available to schools after a process of support but that there was currently no desire from the MAT group to make representation to the LA.

3.5 **A Trustee asked if there was any data from other LAs that were proactive with FPN as part of the attendance process to evidence impact.** The CEO explained that there was anecdotal evidence from other authorities in difficult communities where issuing FPN does make a difference to some families with severely absent children.

3.6 **A Trustee asked if there was motivation for strong attendance over short periods through rewards and recognition.** The CEO explained that York High uses a range of small and large rewards including spin the wheel prizes and half term reward events for good or improved attendance over a period of time. The Trust had also planned training days strategically to address days either side of holidays when attendance tended to dip.

3.7 **A Trustee noted that the Persistent Absence data at Knavesmire was small compared to other schools and asked what factors or best practice drove that difference.** The CEO confirmed that the same data, framework and actions were applied and explained that the levels of attendance correlated to levels of disadvantage and Knavesmire was the least disadvantaged school in the Trust.

Nicki Taberner, Vice Principal Deep Experience, and Louise Scaum, Vice Principal Deep Support, joined the meeting at 9.48am.

3.8 **A Trustee noted that it was clear there were lots of actions to support attendance and asked if there was a correlation between York trending below national and the LA not progressing FPN.** The CEO explained that historically there had not been a rigorous focus on attendance in the city which was changing and for a lot of families in the city there was a level of apathy towards attendance.

3.9 The Chair of Trustees welcomed Mrs Taberner and Miss Scaum to the meeting and introductions were made. The Chair asked the Vice Principals for their reflections on York High from their first few weeks in role.

3.10 Mrs Taberner referred to the discussion on attendance and noted that from experience working in different authorities she had found the LA in York to be less reactive to progressing processes around attendance and were not inclined to issue any enforcements.

3.11 Mrs Taberner reported that she had found York High School a wonderful school, had enjoyed the fast pace of work, both staff and governors had been very open to reflections and actions and middle leaders were onboard. The wider trust had been supportive and she was looking forward to the trust conference to develop links with Millthorpe staff.

3.12 Miss Scaum explained that she had been a pastoral leader for nine years in York and that she had experienced the slower approach to attendance enforcement and noted that there was limited capacity within the team in York. The LA had recently established a secondary working partnership to address attendance. Miss Scaum and a colleague from Joseph Rowntree School were representing the secondary schools, and CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services), Social Services and the Police were also represented. The first session had focused on the presentation of data and the LA had committed that the next meeting would be focused on actions. Miss Scaum noted that Excel had strong processes and data in place including communication with parents.

3.13 Miss Scaum noted that the LA had decided to incorporate an Early Help Assessment, which families needed to agree to, as part of the attendance panel process which would extend the attendance process.

3.14 Mrs Taberner explained that there was a sense of apathy towards attendance and a lack of awareness from parents on the impact on attendance of days off. The level of communication had been increased to raise the profile of attendance and the attendance gap to the previous year had closed by 0.2% in one week. Young people with needs would be supported but there was a priority of getting them in school and then into lessons. Mrs Taberner noted confidence in moving attendance in the right direction.

3.15 Miss Scaum reported the identification of some clear easy wins around behaviour such as introducing relational behaviour strategies, reducing punitive sanctions, ensuring children understand why a sanction was issued and collaboration with parents. This had brought practice in line with most recent evidence and best practice, aligned with the Trust Policy and was the right thing for the young people. Miss Scaum was confident the system in place was fair and proportionate and resulted in more children being in lessons. The next step was to deliver CPD on behaviour strategies in the classroom. The CEO reported that W/C 2nd February 2026 was a record low for suspensions at 11. Miss Scaum added that she was working collaboratively with the SENCO to focus on recidivism.

3.16 **A Trustee asked how the Vice Principals had found the culture of the Trust.** The Vice Principals responded that the Trust staff had been very welcoming and open and the governing board had been very supportive.

3.17 Trustees recorded thanks to the Vice Principals for the professional assessment.

3.18 The CEO thanked the Vice Principals for the significant impact they had in a short half term.

Miss Scaum and Mrs Taberner left the meeting at 10.06am.

3.19 **A Trustee asked if York High had the poorest attendance in the city.** The CEO confirmed it was and that it was the lowest of the statistically similar 21 schools nationally.

3.20 **A Trustee asked if the Board should make an approach to the LA to emphasise the need for FPN to be an option as a tool to address attendance.** The CEO confirmed a letter expressing the thoughts of the Board could be issued but did not expect it to change the approach. The CEO noted that he was confident that the new leaders at York High would drive improvements.

3.21 **A Trustee noted that there was a finite level of energy and capacity and that schools were already doing so much to address attendance.** The CEO referred to the Ofsted attendance gradings and explained that if schools do not follow the full process despite knowing the FPN would not be issued by the LA that they would not be able to evidence that leaders are making use of all tools available. For Expected Standard the school would need to meet all the criteria and have overall attendance broadly in line with national average, which neither secondary was, or demonstrate an improving trend over time.

3.22 **Action:** Chair to issue a letter to ask CYC to be part of the attendance solution by having a FPN as an option to the attendance process.

3.23 **Action:** CEO to raise attendance and use of FPN at the City CEO Network W/C 23rd February 2026.

3.24 **A Trustee was pleased to see the programme for the all staff conference and how it aligned to the Vulnerable Pupil work, and thanked the LA for enabling Carr Infant staff to join.**

3.25 **A Trustee thanked the CEO for the Strategy and Promise to Vulnerable Pupils update and asked why the support from wider communities and governors had changed from green to amber.** The CEO reported that the item was now rated green again and explained that they robustly reviewed the RAG ratings and maintained an ongoing view. Following the recent changes at Knavesmire they were now seeing positive feedback.

3.26 **A Trustee noted the Inspire expansion and recorded thanks to the Inspire Head of School for his and his team's work.**

3.27 **A Trustee asked for an update on the Knavesmire two year old provision staffing.** The CEO reported that the COO was working with the Head of School to review staffing and explained that when the Trust applied the staffing model last year there was a level of overstaffing in Knavesmire that was agreed to avoid redundancies and have established staff ready for the two year old provision. It is likely they will need to recruit as the provision grows. The Chair reported a calm and engaged environment on a visit to Knavesmire this half term. The CEO reported that a Behaviour and Attendance Excel Review had taken place and the verbal feedback reported improvements.

3.28 Item recorded as a separate confidential minute.

Emad Elkhashen left the meeting at 10.30am.

4 INSPIRE

4.1 It was recorded that the Inspire Academy governance function would be picked up by the Academy Committee that had been established with their first meeting scheduled for 27th February 2026.

5 SEND AND SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding Report (previously issued)

5.1 It was noted that the Trust had engaged Ms Wight for three hours per week to retain Safeguarding oversight until Easter, when the new Assistant Director of School Improvement (Inclusive Education) was due to commence in post.

Yorkshire Mentoring Report (previously issued)

5.2 **In response to a Trustee the CEO confirmed the increase in identification was due to better practices.**

5.3 **A Trustee asked how many children were accessing the mentoring.** The CEO confirmed that staff had been trained and would start to deliver the offer in schools. Details on the numbers accessing the mentoring would be tracked through the year as the offer was embedded.

6 HR (previously issued)

6.1 **A Trustee asked how much of the teacher pay rise was expected to be funded.** The COO confirmed that currently none was expected to be funded as the government had stated 6.5% over three years was affordable. The support staff pay rise was a separate process, as it included other employers apart from schools, such as local authorities, and was generally unfunded.

6.2 The CFO explained that the budget had modelled an increase per year which cumulatively delivered 6.2% but it would depend on the phasing of the increment on income. An additional 1% equated to £120k and the surplus this year was forecast at £300k and all projections were modelled on best estimates.

6.3 **A Trustee asked if there was a risk of teacher strike action.** The COO confirmed that was a possibility.

6.4 Item recorded as a separate confidential minute.

7 ESTATES, HEALTH AND SAFETY AND IT

Operational Infrastructure Report (previously issued)
Compliance Overview Report (previously issued)

7.1 **A Trustee recorded thanks to the Director of Estates for the useful format and tone of the report.**

7.2 **A Trustee asked for a reflection on the insourcing of IT at a future Trust Board or Finance, Audit and Risk Committee meeting.** The CEO reported that feedback from staff and schools was overwhelmingly positive. The CFO noted that there had been an additional £20k of additional cost which was currently being absorbed in the MAT but service was significantly better and there was increased rigour from the IT Manager around challenging costs of third party providers.

8 FINANCE REPORT (previously issued)

Monitoring Report and Risk Register

8.1 The CFO reported that the current year forecast was projecting on track to deliver a £340k reserve (circa 5%). Pay assumptions were uncertain but the change in government pension contributions provided some financial protection. The cash balance was reporting well.

8.2 The CFO explained that the Risk Register had been reviewed and items consolidated so that it now reported strategic and operational risks.

8.3 **A Trustee noted thanks for the active management of the Risk Register.**

8.4 **A Trustee asked if there was a surplus investment policy.** The CFO explained that there was cash to actively manage, historically a small amount of investment was held in 32 day notice accounts. The DfE were encouraging MATs to maximise investment opportunities and recommended Insignis as an investment management platform but there was a need for it to be actively managed. The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee discussed a Treasury Policy which allowed for this but plans were to actively manage to maximise returns to circa 3%. The CFO had spoken with a Manager at Insignis and a report would be presented to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

8.5 **A Trustee asked if there was an ethical investment policy.** The CFO explained that there was protection for up to £120k in any one package. The platform does not do due diligence on ethical investment but does include banking risk ratings.

8.6 **Action:** A Trustee asked the CFO to investigate any other trusts who had taken a view on ESG policy.

8.7 Trustees recorded thanks to the CFO and the finance team.

9 CARR INFANT PROGRESS REPORT

9.1 The Chair noted that the Ofsted inspection had progressed the Carr Infant decision.

9.2 The CEO explained that they were inspected on the new framework. The CEO, Executive Principal and Interim Head of School had self evaluated the school and the reflections aligned with the key priorities Ofsted identified. The impact the Trust and Interim Head of School had in the first few weeks was recognised but it was noted that leaders had an overreliance on external support. The Interim Head of School and Executive Principal represented themselves and the Trust exceptionally and it was clear how well they know every member of staff, the pupils and areas of school.

9.3 The CEO referred to the plan in the CEO Report and explained that the Behaviour Policy had been launched and implemented and they were seeing an impact around school. Staff were starting to use the Behaviour Policy effectively in class so they had the environment to teach. Areas of CPD for staff had been identified and there was work to do on continuous provision in Early Years to support learning whilst playing. There were strong models in place at Woodthorpe to share best practice and school staff were generally onboard.

9.4 The CEO reported that governors were pleased with the progress, had seen the impact of the work and were grateful for the support. The academisation consultation had ended and an application to convert had been submitted.

9.5 **Trustees took a walk around York High School with pupil guides and on their return recorded thanks to the guides.**

9.6 **A Trustee asked what the expected timescale for conversion was.** The CEO expected a 1st September 2026 or 1st October 2026 conversion. The application would be considered by the DfE and put on an Advisory Board agenda, if agreed notification would be made of the conversion timeframe.

9.7 The CEO noted that the LA wanted to monitor the work of the CEO at Carr Infant and expected another Ofsted visit in the summer or autumn term. The CEO explained that on academisation the Trust could retain the current URN which carries the current Ofsted categorisation or could opt to close and reopen with a new URN and start fresh with Ofsted. It was agreed that Carr Infants would remain a standing agenda item.

10 TRUSTEE BUSINESS

Education and Standards Committee Report

10.1 The committee meeting had been rescheduled.

Remuneration Committee Report

10.2 The committee meeting had been rescheduled.

LGB Remit and Name / Committee Remit Strategic Guide (previously issued)

10.3 **A Trustee asked if there had been feedback from Chairs.** The CEO confirmed that Heads had discussed with Chairs and the CEO had a further discussion with the Knavesmire Chair. The CEO noted that the round table approach had closed a loop on questions raised around two way strategic communication.

10.4 **A Trustee asked how trustees could hear from committees.** The CEO explained that the round tables would support that connection. The Chair noted that the Chairs meetings connected the Trust Board and governors and other trustees were welcome to join.

10.5 **Resolution:** Triustees approved the LGB name change proposal.

10.6 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the Committee Remit Strategic Guide.

10.7 **Action:** Chair to draft a communication to Chairs on the LGB name change and remit strategic guide at the start of the spring 2 half term issue a communication to all governors.

Training

10.8 **The Chair of Trustees noted feedback from Chairs of LGB on the training requirements and asked for the 'why' to be added to the training requirements.**

10.9 **Action:** Governance Advisor to add the 'why' to the training requirements list.

10.10 **Action:** Trustees to complete any required outstanding training.

SEND Link Trustee

10.11 It was confirmed that Sam Cuthbert was SEND link along with Safeguarding.

11 LGB BUSINESS

Membership, Appointments and Resignations (previously issued)

11.1 **Resolution:** Trustees noted the resignations and approved the governor appointments subject to safeguarding checks.

11.2 The Chair reported that the Chairs meeting was helpful and there was sharing of best practice including how joint boards could operate.

11.3 It was agreed to review Carr Infant governance as part of the academisation if approved.

11.4 Trustees reflected on feedback from the Scarcroft and Woodthorpe Joint LGB. The Chair noted that some governors had provided the Chair with a proposal to separate the board. The LGB Chair's view was that the joint board was working effectively and the Executive Principal was confident that reasons citing the split could be addressed through how the joint board works. Trustees appreciated the feedback and suggested reflecting at the end of the academic year about how those changes had worked in practice.

Governor Panels (previously issued)

11.5 Noted for information.

12 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS (previously issued)

12.1 **Resolution:** The minutes of the 1st December 2025 meeting were approved.

12.2 **Resolution:** The confidential minutes of the 1st December 2025 meeting were approved.

12.3 **Resolution:** The confidential minutes of the 18th December 2025 meeting were approved.

Matters Arising and Action Plan

12.4 There were no matters arising.

12.5 The actions were included on the agenda or confirmed complete.

13 POLICIES (summary of policy changes previously issued)

13.1 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the below policies.

- Admissions Policy 2027-28 (associated consultation paper was considered) (previously issued)
- Staff Code of Conduct (previously issued)

13.2 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the below Inspire policies.

- Admissions Policy (previously issued)

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

14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

14.1 Trustees agreed to schedule an extraordinary Trust Board meeting early in the spring 2 half term.

15 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

15.1 Items were recorded as a separate confidential minute.

16 FUTURE MEETING DATES

Education & Standards Committee - Monday 23rd February 11.15am

Members: Thursday 26th February 2026 5.30pm

Remuneration Committee - Tuesday 3rd March 9.30am

Finance, Audit & Risk Committee: Tuesday 17th March 2026 9.30am

Education & Standards Committee: Tuesday 21st April 2026 9.30am

Trust Board: Monday 27th April 2026 9.30am

The meeting closed at 12.30pm.

Meeting Decisions
Trustees approved the LGB name change proposal.
Trustees approved the Committee Remit Strategic Guide.
Trustees approved the governor appointments
Trustees approved the 1st December 2025 minutes and associated confidential minutes
Trustees approved the 18th December 2026 confidential minutes.
Trustees approved the below policies: - Admissions Policy 2027-28 - Staff Code of Conduct Inspire policies: - Admissions Policy - Anti-bullying Policy - Behaviour Policy - Curriculum Policy - Literacy Policy - First Aid Policy

1st December 2025			
Item	**By**	**Action**	**Date**
9.5	Exec Team / Committee Chair	Review the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee terms of reference in the summer term.	June 2026

9th February 2026			
Item	**By**	**Action**	**Date**
3.22	Chair	Issue a letter to CYC on the use of attendance Fixed Penalty Notices.	Feb 2026
3.23	CEO	Raise attendance and use of FPN at the City CEO Network.	Feb 2026
8.6	CFO	CFO to investigate Sustainable ESG policy for investments.	Mar 2026
10.7	Chair	Draft a communication to Chairs on the LGB name change and remit strategic guide and at the start of the spring 2 half term issue a communication to all governors.	Feb 2026
10.9	GA	Add the ‘why’ to the training requirements list.	Complete
10.10	Trustees	Complete any outstanding required training.	Mar 2026

Approved by Trustees at Trust Board on 27th April 2026.

…………………………………………………………………….

Trust Board Approval