Excel Learning Trust

Trust Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 27 April 2026 at 9.30am held at Scarcroft Primary School

Present:	Ian Wiggins	Chair of Trustees
	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
	Gemma Shaw	Assistant Director School Improvement
	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 and Donna Smith.

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 SEND AND SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding Report (previously issued)

3.1 The Assistant Director of School Improvement reported that in the first two weeks in role she had visited all Trust schools and noted a welcoming environment and a strong collective drive for improvement. The Assistant Director of School Improvement acknowledged the work of the previous lead for SEND and Safeguarding for establishing robust systems. Next steps involved tightening these procedures and enhancing the sharing of best practice. The Assistant Director of School Improvement had completed

Team Teach tutor training to lead and train staff on appropriate restrictive intervention strategies across the Trust.

3.2 There had been a recorded increase in CPOMS entries during the last term which was attributed to increased staff confidence and a culture of 'erring on the side of caution' regarding documentation. The Trust was implementing new auditing processes for safeguarding to move beyond compliance and build a culture of reflection. The Assistant Director of School Improvement highlighted a vulnerability regarding school confidence in challenging Local Authority decisions (specifically Section 17 and 47 thresholds) and would provide central support to schools for these escalations.

3.3 The Assistant Director of School Improvement reported that there were new SENCOs this academic year with varying levels of experience and the frequency of SEND Forum meetings would increase to foster collaboration. A trial was underway regarding Sensory Passports for SEMH (Social, Emotional, and Mental Health) needs. Results would be shared at the May forum to determine a Trust-wide rollout. Some pupils were currently accessing alternative provision and the Trust was reviewing how to validate the quality of this provision. The priority remained high-quality mainstream inclusion, ensuring part-time timetables were limited and aimed at a return to full-time education. The Assistant Director of School Improvement informed trustees that York was currently behind in the funding uplift for EHCPs (Education Health Care Plan) and the Assistant Director of School Improvement would use her experience with various LAs to navigate these regional disparities.

3.4 **A Trustee asked about support for primary-to-secondary and infant-to-junior transitions.** The Assistant Director of School Improvement explained that the Trust was looking at implementing successful models from in the Trust more widely to ensure settled transitions for vulnerable learners. The Assistant Director of School Improvement noted that the close geographical proximity of the Trust schools was a powerful asset for efficient collaboration.

3.5 The Assistant Director of School Improvement noted concern that the LA were sometimes not including schools in strategy meetings and had been proactive in updating agencies to ensure the Trust remained a key stakeholder in multi-agency discussions.

3.6 **A Trustee asked what training was provided for the new SENCOs.** The Assistant Director of School Improvement explained that historically, this was a University-led Masters qualification but was now delivered via the NPQ (National Professional Qualification) which offered a more practical, school-based approach. The Assistant

Excel Learning Trust, Company Number 10067116,

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

Director of School Improvement was also providing support and mentoring and had established more frequent forum meetings for SENCOs across the Trust.

3.7 **A Trustee asked what the biggest current vulnerability/risk was.** The Assistant Director of School Improvement confirmed that in the short-term it was the confidence in challenging the LA and the limited capacity of the LA itself. The Assistant Director of School Improvement was monitoring this via CPOMS and Provision Maps.

3.8 **A Trustee asked what the status of the SEND Green/White Papers was.** The Assistant Director of School Improvement explained that they were currently in the consultation stage and the Trust would submit a consultation response. While the proposals were positive on paper, the focus was on how they would practically translate into school delivery.

3.9 Trustees thanked the Assistant Director of School Improvement for the update, noting the importance of these insights in maintaining oversight of the Trust's most vulnerable learners. The Board looked forward to the update on the Sensory Passport trial.

3.10 The Assistant Director of School Improvement left the meeting at 9.48am.

4 CEO UPDATE

CEO Report (previously issued)

4.1 The CEO reported a significant improvement in attendance at York High School reaching 86.03% which represented a three-year upward trend for all key groups. The DfE had responded positively to the school's current actions and requested that these strategies be shared across the Trust. The Trust had opted into the DfE RISE programme. While the specific outcomes of the upcoming visit were yet to be determined, the team were doing a great job and focus remained on ensuring documentation reflected the improvements already gained through existing internal actions. A review of Laurel Academy, who reported a 92% attendance rate, was planned to identify potential new learning, as the closest comparable hub. The CEO made Trustees aware that when severely absent students, whom research suggests were the hardest to impact, were removed from the data, attendance sits at 91%.

4.2 The CEO confirmed there was no financial interest regarding the Trust's partnership with Challenge Partners. The partnership provided Senior Leaders with training as school reviewers and facilitated external assurance through peer collaboration. Every school in the Trust would receive a review conducted by a Lead Reviewer and four external reviewers to ensure objective feedback.

4.3 **A Trustee asked why the strategic objective for Safeguarding had moved to Red status.** The CEO clarified this was a temporary administrative measure due to the

Assistant Director of School Improvement being new to the post. A trustee commented that it was heartening to see that the RAG ratings are fluid and used honestly by the executive team, showing that they hold themselves to account robustly.

4.4 The CEO reported that the formal confirmation letter for the Inspire expansion would be issued subject to full council approval. It was noted that while Inspire was financially independent (with ringfenced fees/funding), its specialist offer would indirectly benefit Trust schools.

4.5 The Chair of Trustees reflected on the new round table format involving Chairs of Academy Committees and Principals / Heads of School, as well as members of the Central Team. The feedback was positive and the process highlighted the value of sharing the essence of conversations and ensuring the action / impact was captured.

4.6 The Chair of Trustees proposed a half-day strategy session to be held in early Autumn Term.

4.7 **Action:** Schedule an autumn term trustee strategy day.

4.8 An item of business was discussed and a separate confidential minute was recorded.

Millthorpe Capped Admission Number (previously issued)

4.9 The paper was noted for information. The CEO explained that the Local Authority had requested implementation from September.

4.10 The COO, CFO and Director of Trust Services left the meeting at 10.15am.

Staffing Structure (previously issued)

4.11 Recorded as a separate confidential minute.

4.12 The CEO left the meeting at 10.37am.

4.13 Further discussion recorded as a separate confidential minute.

4.14 Emad Elkhashen left the meeting at 10.45am.

4.15 The CEO, COO, CFO and Director of Trust Services returned to the meeting at 10.45am.

ITEMS TAKEN OUT OF AGENDA ORDER

Scheme of Delegation (previously issued)

4.16 It was noted that the updates reflected change to committees and new DfE financial limits.

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

Cleaning Contract Proposal (previously issued)

4.18 The CFO explained that the Trust was honouring an increase in costs to the cleaning contract to meet the Real Living Wage but the contract reflected minimum wage. The CFO proposed the approval of an addendum to the contract to align with the Real Living Wage.

4.19 A Trustee noted that the principle of a real living wage was important to the Trust.

4.20 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the contract addendum to align annual contract uplifts for cleaning services with the Foundation (Real) Living Wage.

4.21 A Trustee asked for an update on the Aspens contract. The CFO reported that the service had improved and the relationship with Aspens was acceptable. As part of the compensation for poor service Aspens were contributing £10,000 capital towards a new oven in Woodthorpe and this was scheduled to be installed before September 2026.

Committee Membership (previously issued)

4.22 **Resolution:** Trustees noted the resignations and approved the below committee member appointments / re-appointments subject to safeguarding checks:
Jackie Gray - Knavesmire
Kay Roantree - Knavesmire
Bethan Cotter - Woodthorpe
Andy Pope - York High
Andrew Waller - York High
Kate Smithson - York High
Laura Backhouse - York High

School Resources Self Assessment and Report (previously issued)

4.23 The CFO reported that the submission was completed and included a summary of governance and financial position.

4.24 **Resolution:** Trustees noted the submission of the School Resources Self Assessment and approved the report.

Minutes of Previous Meetings (previously issued)

4.25 **Resolution:** The minutes of the 9th February 2026 meeting were approved.

4.26 **Resolution:** The confidential minutes of the 9th February 2026 meeting were approved.

4.27 **Resolution:** The confidential minutes of the 3rd March 2026 meeting were approved.

Policies (previously issued)

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

- Complaints Policy (previously issued)
- Anti-fraud Bribery Corruption Policy (previously issued)
- Hospitality Policy (previously issued)
- Reserves Policy (previously issued)
- Governance Code of Conduct (previously issued)

- Executive Pay Policy (previously issued)

Terms of Reference (previously issued)

4.29 **Resolution:** Trustees approved the Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference.

5 HR (previously issued)

Gender Pay Gap Report (previously issued)

5.1 The COO confirmed that the report had been presented to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and highlighted that the mean pay gap had reduced and was slightly lower than the national average for education but higher than overall national. The COO noted that the inclusion of term-time staff distorted the data due to the calculation methodology.

5.2 The COO reported that there had been a slight increase in male employees with the gender profile of 25.8% males to 74.2% female which reflected the female dominated sector. There was a good proportion of female senior staff.

5.3 The COO confirmed the data was submitted to the government and reported on the website.

5.4 **A Trustee asked if the reason for the reduction was having more females in higher paid roles.** The COO explained that was a potential reason and noted that the data did not take into account the term time element so the hourly rate was artificially lower and the majority of term time staff were female. Another Trust was taking advice on how the data is calculated.

5.5 The COO noted that there were questions from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee around promoting flexible working and family friendly policies so the marketing material for recruitment was being reviewed.

6 ESTATES, HEALTH AND SAFETY AND IT

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

6.1 The CFO reported that there were no major areas of risk to report and operationally compliance procedures were effective.

7 FINANCE REPORT *(PREVIOUSLY ISSUED)*

7.1 The CFO reported that there were no concerns with the Year to Date reporting and and monthly meetings with each school did not indicate any issues

7.2 The CFO referred to the end of year position and explained that the major variable was pay increment for support staff. An uplift of 6.5% was assumed which mirrored the opposite entry on pensions and maintained a balance in the budget. If the support pay deal landed at 3.3% then the budget position would be estimated at circa £65,000 ahead of the projected £300,000.

7.3 **A Trustee asked why 6.5% was assumed when unions were requesting 10%.** The COO explained that 10% was unlikely given the NJC's full and final offer of 3.3% and the decision was taken for the assumption for support staff pay increase to offset the pension provision. The COO confirmed that any agreement would be back dated to 1st April 2026.

7.4 The CFO reported that revenue surplus meetings took place at the same time as the round table meetings. All schools were tasked to deliver a break even plus 1% reserve position each year as agreed with the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. The CFO explained that years one and two were projecting well but year three was a challenge. By year three the current pension valuation term would have ended, it was anticipated that it would increase to 15%, and additional 0.3% teacher salary costs were assumed, but the GAG funding assumption was expected to reduce from 2% to 1.6%.

7.5 The CFO informed trustees that he was meeting with schools with a focus on year three planning and expected all schools to deliver between 0.5% and 1%. Millthorpe were currently £200,000 adrift due to a large year group having transitioned out of school by year three and there was a need to consider how they deliver the curriculum.

7.6 The CEO explained that there were a number of variables that could positively impact year three but there was a need to plan to deliver the budget if nothing changed. The CFO emphasised that he recognised the challenges but if the assumptions were valid there needed to be plans in place for the next financial planning round commencing January 2027.

7.7 The CFO recorded thanks to the school leaders for their collaborative approach.

7.8 The CFO noted that an equitable funding model was being explored.

7.9 **A Trustee asked if a change in funding model was likely to be contentious.** The CFO expected not, given the way the Trust works with the leaders. There was a lean central offer and the schools saw the benefit of work brought centrally such as the IT offer. The CEO confirmed that Heads were aware it may happen and were positive about getting a budget allocation they have control of. The CFO confirmed that anything directly attributed to that school or a child would go to that school. **A Trustee asked if there was**

a timeframe for a proposed change. The CFO explained that he expected to be able to share a proposal at the July 2026 meeting

Risk Report and Period 6 Management Accounts (previously issued)

7.10 The report and accounts were noted as received.

School Resources Self Assessment and Report (previously issued)

7.11 Taken earlier in the meeting.

Finance Policy Revisions (previously issued)

7.12 Noted for information.

Cleaning Contract Proposal (previously issued)

7.13 Taken earlier in the meeting.

8 CARR INFANT PROGRESS REPORT

8.1 The CEO reported that Excel Learning Trust was named as the preferred sponsor for approval at the May 2026 DfE Region's Group.

8.2 The CEO informed trustees that there was a positive atmosphere in school, behaviour was good and where needed support plans were in place with response levels monitored giving input, support and time to meet expectations. There was a weekly CPD offer.

8.3 The CEO explained that a school in special measures was subject to Ofsted monitoring until they academise. The first phone call had taken place and the response to the Head of School's update was positive. A site visit was expected before the end of term and they would look at improvements made since the last visit and provide a report. If there was any significant movement they would instruct another inspection.

8.4 The CEO confirmed that he was confident in the progress being made.

9 SCHEME OF DELEGATION *(PREVIOUSLY ISSUED)*

9.1 Taken earlier in the meeting.

10 INSPIRE

Accounting and Auditing

10.1 The CFO reported that there was a need for defined lines between the treatment of an independent school and DfE funded schools. Work done had been quality assured with auditors. The CFO explained that places paid for by trust schools need to be at cost and any costs for operating Inspire cannot be covered by York High School so there was a need for a licence for facilities.

Committee

10.2 It was confirmed that the Inspire Committee had met and had a second meeting scheduled. The minutes were available for Trustees on request.

11 TRUSTEE BUSINESS

Education and Standards Committee Report

11.1 The committee met on the 23rd February 2026 and were scheduled to meet on the 30th April 2026.

Remuneration Committee Report
Terms of Reference (previously issued)
CEO Recommendation (previously issued)

11.2 The committee met on the 3rd March 2026 and items from the meeting were covered previously in the meeting.

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Report

11.3 The committee met on the 17th March 2026.

Capital Projects

11.4 The CFO reported that the School Condition Allocation funding was slightly lower than projected but was manageable accounting for the timings of projects.

External Review of Governance

11.5 The COO reported that an external review of governance was scheduled for 19th June 2026.

Training (previously issued)

11.6 Trustees were reminded to complete any outstanding training.

12 COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Membership, Appointments and Resignations (previously issued)

12.1 Taken earlier in the meeting.

Governor Panels (previously issued)

12.2 Noted for information.

13 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS (previously issued)

13.1 Taken earlier in the meeting.

Matters Arising and Action Plan

13.2 There were no matters arising.

13.3 The CEO noted that the actions in relation to attendance Fixed Penalty Notices should be carried forward to the next meeting as there was ongoing work on attendance with the DfE.

13.4 The actions to communicate name change to committees and to update the training requirements were confirmed as complete.

13.5 In reference to the action to investigate Sustainable ESG policy for investments the CFO explained that the Trust had moved to a new platform (Insignis) for investments that was supported by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. The platform does not look at ethical or sustainability factors but the policy for the Trust was to only invest in higher rated banks. The CFO noted there was a need to consider sustainability of the estate.

14 POLICIES (previously issued)

14.1 Taken earlier in the meeting.

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

15.1 **A Trustee asked for an update on the primary Vice Principal recruitment.** The CEO confirmed that four candidates were taken to interview on day two and two successful candidates had been appointed to Knavesmire and Scarcroft from September 2026.

15.2 **A Trustee asked if resilience planning was being undertaken and noted that there was a national emergency briefing on 9th May 2026 in York that the Trust may want to attend.** The CEO suggested sharing the information with the Director of Estates and the Compliance Officer as the sustainability lead. The COO added that the Director of Estates had been successful in securing energy deals and ensuring resilience over the longer term.

16 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

16.1 Items were recorded as a separate confidential minute.

17 FUTURE MEETING DATES

Finance, Audit & Risk Committee: Tuesday 30th June 2026 9.30am

Trust Board: Monday 6th July 2026 9.30am (Millthorpe)

Member Meeting: Monday 13th July 2026 5.30pm

Education & Standards Committee: Tuesday 14th July 9.30am

Remuneration Committee: July TBC

Governance Evening: Monday 6th July 2026 5.30pm-7.30pm

Arts Fest: Thursday 25th June 2026

Staff Awards: Thursday 2nd July 2026

The meeting closed at 11.57pm.

Meeting Decisions
Trustees approved the Scheme of Delegation
Trustees approved the contract addendum to align annual contract uplifts for cleaning services with the Foundation (Real) Living Wage.
Trustees approved the committee member appointments and re-appointments.
Trustees noted the submission of the School Resources Self Assessment and approved the report.
Trustees approved the 9th February 2026 minutes and associated confidential minutes
Trustees approved the 3rd March 2026 confidential minutes.
Trustees approved the below policies: - Complaints Policy - Anti-fraud Bribery Corruption Policy - Hospitality Policy - Reserves Policy - Governance Code of Conduct - Executive Pay Policy
Trustees approved the Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference

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.	July 2026
3.23	CEO	Raise attendance and use of FPN at the City CEO Network.	July 2026
10.10	Trustees	Complete any outstanding required training.	Mar 2026

27th April 2026			
Item	**By**	**Action**	**Date**
4.8	Chair of Trustees	Schedule an autumn term trustee strategy day.	Autumn 2026

Approved by Trustees on 6th July 2026.

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Trust Board Approval

Excel Learning Trust, Company Number 10067116,

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