

**Moorland  
Local Advisory Committee (LAC)  
Meeting minutes  
Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2026**



Held online via Microsoft 'Teams'

**Attended:**

**Chair-** Oliver Heathman

**Parent Governors-** Charlotte Vicary-Ward (Bearnese)

Anne- Marie Lewis (Wolborough)

Kate Bairstow (Widecombe-in-the-Moor)

Rosie Stamp (Illesington)

**Foundation Governor-** Richard Nutbeam (Wolborough)

**Academy Headteacher-** Kat Williams (Illesington)

**In attendance:**

**CEO-** Rachael Sharpe (**Attended for the item 3.**)

**Governance Professional-** Charlotte Roe

**Minutes: Clerk to the Totnes and Moorland Hub-** Nicol Bush

No	Item	Action
1.	<p><b><u>Welcome and apologies</u></b> The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome, and apologies were received from LC.</p>	
2.	<p><b><u>Declarations of interest</u></b> <i>There were no new declarations brought to the meeting.</i></p>	
3.	<p><b>CEO update- Strategy plan (Circulated to Governors by email before the meeting)</b> The CEO explained that the strategy had been formed following a Trust wide review. She reported that this review had included staff surveys, school visits, individual meetings with head teachers, discussions with administrators, and meetings with various groups, including the Education Improvement Team. She also met with the central team and subsequently with the Board. Each priority had an action plan owned by senior leaders, and the Board monitored progress. The CEO noted that the three-year plan would continue to be reviewed and updated as needed. She invited questions on the document. <i>A governor asked how progress against the strategic priorities would be monitored and whether individual senior leaders were responsible for driving and measuring performance within their assigned areas.</i> The CEO explained that she oversaw the people and culture priority alongside the HR lead. The Director of Education oversaw high quality inclusive education and school improvement, the DCEO led on finance, and governance would, in time, be overseen by the GP. Each priority had an action plan with key success criteria and quantitative measures. Progress was monitored through data such as pupil outcomes, exclusion rates, staff absence, turnover, retention and recruitment. Information was triangulated across these sources. The Board held the CEO and senior leadership team to account for progress and determined whether improvement was sufficient. The CEO reported that a consultation process had begun regarding proposed reductions to some central roles, following feedback gathered during the Trust wide review. Meetings were being held with affected staff, and the wider consultation would be opened to the whole Trust the following week. Following the consultation, responses would be considered before final proposals were confirmed. The aim of the review was to ensure that central services were appropriately structured and that resources were directed to support schools effectively. <i>A governor asked whether the consultation would gather feedback from schools on which central services they valued and whether the proposals had been shaped by Academy Head input.</i> The CEO confirmed that detailed discussions had already taken place with Academy Heads and that their feedback had</p>	

	<p>informed the proposals. She added that the consultation would now be opened to all Trust staff, providing an opportunity to comment on the proposed redundancies and to suggest alternative views.</p> <p><i>A governor asked whether, following the review of the central team, the Trust intended to examine leadership structures within schools to identify potential cost savings, or whether the current focus was solely on central functions.</i></p> <p>The CEO explained that the initial focus of the review had been on the central team to minimise disruption to schools and maintain focus on pupils. The proposed central changes would reduce the Trust deficit but would not remove it entirely. She noted that, once the impact of those changes was known, schools that remained in deficit would be reviewed individually. She and the DCEO would meet with the relevant head teachers to consider whether school level restructuring might be required. She highlighted that head teachers would lead any such considerations, given their knowledge of their schools, with support and guidance from the central team.</p> <p><i>A governor asked whether the review of the central team included any proposed changes to the way central charges were allocated to schools, noting that this had been raised previously by some Academy Heads.</i></p> <p>The CEO explained that several Academy Heads had raised questions about the basis and fairness of central charges. She had therefore asked the DCEO to provide an overall average percentage contribution for each school, enabling benchmarking against national figures for typical multi academy trust top slicing and comparisons with local authority top slicing for maintained schools. She reported that this analysis had informed the proposed central restructuring, as the intention was to reduce the level of central recharge.</p>	
4.	<p><b><u>Approval of meeting minutes from 26<sup>th</sup> November 2025</u></b>  <b>For approval:</b> The minutes were <b>approved</b> as a true record and were signed accordingly.</p>	
5.	<p><b><u>Matters arising from 26<sup>th</sup> November 2025 (not on the agenda)</u></b>  <b>5.1 Governors to review the responses to the Questions raised at the previous LAC and confirm if any supplementary questions-</b> The Governors reviewed the questions raised at the last S&amp;C meeting and no comments were made.</p>	
6.	<p><b><u>Clerk Update</u></b>  <b>6.1 Appointments/nominations-</b>  The Clerk advised the meeting of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Vacancy for a Foundation Governor at Ilsington was ongoing, with support from SL.</li> <li>• The Staff Governor vacancy had now been filled with a nomination from a Bearnese/Wolborough teacher.</li> <li>• Daisy Stewart had filled the parent governor role at Moretonhampstead, with DBS checks etc underway.</li> <li>• The Clerk reminded Governors that the LAC still required a Sustainability Governor, the Clerk invited the GP to explain the role in more detail and circulated the job description to all governors via email.</li> </ul> <p><b>6.2 Training - Update on training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clerk advised the meeting on the Introduction to Governance training which was for new Governors but extended the invite to all governors, which would be online on the following dates:  <b>26 Feb 2026 17:00-19:00</b>  <b>18 Mar 2026 10:00-12:00</b></li> <li>• The Clerk highlighted the upcoming training with the CEO around how to support our Academy Heads, which would be held on <b>24th February 2026 at 6.00 pm- online</b></li> </ul> <p><b>6.3 Significant changes within the Trust including key personnel-</b> The Clerk advised the Governors, as shared in a recently circulated email to Governors, LL (Director of Education) would be leaving the Trust after Easter to undertake a new role as an Ofsted inspector.</p> <p><b>6.4- Governors Audit-</b> (Circulated to Governors on 21.01.26) The Clerk asked Governor's to fill in the form and return it no later than <b>23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2026</b>.</p>	
7.	<p><b>Focus: Mid-year overview of Attendance</b></p>	

**Widcombe** - Attendance on 21 November was 94.19% and on 19 December was 92.59%

Letters on lateness and absence had been sent as needed, with parent and teacher meetings arranged where appropriate. Covid had affected Widcombe before Christmas, causing high staff and student absence, and scarlet fever was also circulating. Improving attendance had remained difficult due to several pupils on part time timetables, SEND attendance was a particular concern, and staff continued working to improve engagement.

The attendance improvement officer had provided six hours of support at Widcombe.

**Isington**- The whole school attendance stood at 93.2 per cent, several factors had contributed to this change. The winter term had seen a significant amount of flu across the school, which had affected pupil attendance. A number of new starters were attending on part time timetables, which had also influenced the overall figure. The Governor wished to ensure that the S&C Committee understood the reasons why the data had been affected during this period.

(See agenda item .14) The AH had also attended the Devon EBSA course to strengthen the support available for pupils experiencing emotionally based school avoidance.

**Hennock**- Hennock continued to have a strong attendance record, with whole school attendance at 96%, in line with other schools and above DCC figures. The school monitored data fortnightly and identified families with lateness or persistent absence, escalating communication as needed. The AH noted the value of Trust support and the impact of illness and part time timetables on small school data.

**Wolborough**- The Governor reported that her visit had been extensive and that the matters discussed had been considered in great detail. She stated that she had asked the AH (Academy Headteacher) a wide range of questions, including approaching the same points in several different ways. She noted that clear and robust answers had been provided throughout, which she considered to be a positive assurance.

*A question was raised regarding whether the proportion of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium had been lower than the school average.*

The Governor confirmed that it had not been lower and stated that it was significantly higher. She explained that she would cover this in more detail and proceeded to report that, excluding the nursery, the school had approximately one hundred and seventy pupils, of whom around eighty were eligible for Pupil Premium. She noted that this was considerably higher than the national and local averages.

The meeting discussed the proportion and engagement of Pupil Premium pupils. Questions were raised about attendance data for this group, and it was confirmed that challenges remained in accessing detailed and filtered information due to limitations in current data systems. The GP highlighted that Trustees continued to seek clear performance and attendance information for Pupil Premium and other disadvantaged groups. (See agenda item 14.)

The Committee discussed the possibility of a Trust wide parental survey. The Governance Professional noted that the topic had been raised on several previous occasions and that it had also been mentioned at a recent LAC meeting. She advised that gathering parental feedback would be beneficial for both internal understanding and inspection evidence. The GP confirmed that she would be discussing the matter with the CEO later in the month and would update the Committee once further information was available.

## **Part II was taken**

### **Parent and Community Engagement**

**Widcombe**- Parent and teacher meetings had taken place when needed, with teachers available on the school gate or through the school administrator.

Parents had been invited to several autumn term events. The PTFA had been very active, completing improvements such as repainting a room and supporting developments in the EYFS area and other parts of the school. A formal parent survey was due to be issued.

GP

Staff had continued to support harder to reach families through phone calls and emails, offering early help where needed and aiming to be supportive rather than intrusive.

**Ilington**- Parental engagement was strong. The AH communicated through the Eschools app, email, Facebook and daily presence at the school gate, with meetings arranged promptly. Vulnerable families were approachable and supported through tailored communication and practical help such as uniform, food deliveries and assistance from the Church. *A question was raised about whether a Trust wide survey was still planned (See agenda item 14.)* The GP said she would check this with the CEO.

Community engagement was also strong across local groups.

**Wolborough**- Staff engaged with parents daily at drop off and pick up, and all staff knew every pupil by name. Facebook was used well and generated positive engagement. There was no PTA, but plans were in place to restart one, aiming first to secure charity status to access grants, recognising that fundraising was challenging for many families. Community links with the museum, library and church were strong, and recent events such as the Christmas raffle, sing along and the make someone smile day had been well attended. A new anonymous parent survey was being prepared. Staff understood the barriers for harder to reach families and maintained regular follow up through phone calls when face to face contact was difficult.

**Hennock**- Staff were available on the gate each day and could be contacted through the school administrator, supported by a fortnightly news bulletin. Christmas events, including nativities and a joint choir performance at South Dartmoor, helped strengthen community links, with further performances planned. Parents were invited to meetings and information sessions, and the PTFA remained very active. Parental voice was gathered through conversations and the Trust survey, with AA following up school specific issues. The mood in the community remained slightly fragile.

#### **Curriculum Subject Focus – EYFS**

**Widcombe**- Staff meetings had been held to clarify what EYFS should look like and what the team was working towards, ensuring that both teachers and teaching assistants had a shared understanding. The seven key areas were being used to shape provision, which changed according to need and the time of year, although this remained challenging at times.

Needs were identified early, with SEND support put in place where required.

**Ilington**- EYFS provision was doing well under reception Teacher Nicole Willis and Nursery Manager Christine Cacchione (CC). Staff were being upskilled through Early Career Teacher development, SEND training, Hub meetings and courses. Collaboration within the Trust was strong, with four schools recently visiting the setting. Governors and KW felt very positive about Ilington's EYFS offer. Technology continued to limit outcomes, and data was easily skewed by the small cohort. The Trust's improved tracking from preschool to Year 1 was viewed very positively. CC secured additional SEND funding through Nursery Plus, with strong support from Becky Humphreys (SENDCO). Governors planned an EYFS focused visit this half term.

#### **Wolborough**-

Staff were eagerly awaiting the new nursery, due to open after February half term. There was currently a divide between nursery and reception, with high levels of need diverting staff attention. Several children required one to one support, but most did not have EHCPs, leaving no additional funding and limited staffing. The new nursery would provide space for an SEN area, which staff felt would help. Writing remained a key development area. Trust wide CPD and an audit had supported improvements. There was already a waiting list, and staff were very excited.

**Hennock**- EYFS remained a key priority across all SIPs, with Isabel Parsons leading at Hennock and working with the Widcombe lead to deliver training to staff and TAs. Phonics was the main focus, supported by the Ilsham Hub and Claire Appleby, with positive feedback on progress. Continuous provision was being developed to ensure progression, though implementation could be slowed by resourcing or environmental changes. Staff were also adapting practice to support learning through play. Support for vulnerable children included early screening, Early Help and speech and language interventions, with efforts to ensure families saw this support as positive.

	<b><u>ACTION- GP to discuss the Parent survey with the CEO and update the committee at the next meeting.</u></b>	
8.	<p><b>Feedback from Ethos Committees and Community Groups (LEG minutes circulated to Governors before the meeting)</b></p> <p><b><u>Wolborough</u></b></p> <p>The Foundation Governor noted that the committee remained small, comprising the vicar, the head teacher and himself, and discussions were taking place about increasing community representation. He confirmed that he had visited the school, attended collective worship and toured the site, with the focus on how welcoming the school felt. He stated that the environment had been warm and positive, pupils were friendly and engaged, and collective worship demonstrated respectful behaviour and celebration of one another. He also discussed elements of the curriculum, including aspects related to inclusion, religious education and personal development. The FG noted that the school appeared well equipped to support families during difficult times, with trained staff, bereavement counsellors, pastoral support and one to one provision where needed. He also reflected on a discussion regarding the extent to which the school, as a Church of England setting, offered spiritual support and how this might be developed further. <b>Part II was taken</b></p> <p><b><u>Illington</u></b></p> <p>Illington continued to have a strong Ethos Team who met last term and have a date in the diary to meet before February half term. Sharon Lord took part in Illington staff inset day to discuss the weaving of spirituality into the curriculum. Governor was happy that Ethos Team was working well despite no Foundation Governor.</p>	
9.	<p><b>Successes and Sharing of Good Practice</b></p> <p>Governors shared positive feedback about support from several Trust staff. Particularly Sue Howard (HR) and Claire Appleby were mentioned for the help they had provided, and Lizzie Lethbridge (DoE) was also recognised for her support.</p> <p>Christine Cacchione (Nursery manager at Illington) was praised for her hard work in securing additional special educational needs funding through Nursery Plus, which involved a lot of paperwork and time. The Committee also noted that their schools had been well supported by Becky Humphreys (SENDCO)</p>	
10.	<p><b>School Updates</b></p> <p>The Committee received an update on the ongoing technology issues at Illington. It was reported that staff and pupil devices were in very poor condition, with some equipment unusable. One teacher had been without a functioning laptop since the previous April and was relying on a broken supply device, leaving the school with no spare laptops available for cover staff. These issues had been raised repeatedly. The AH noted that a parent with access to IT equipment had offered to donate approximately thirty working devices, and support from Bay Tech would be needed to progress this. (<b>See agenda item 14.</b>)</p> <p>A governor raised concerns about staff wellbeing and the projected pupil numbers for next year at Bearnas, noting that the school expected to lose eighteen pupils from Y6 while only gaining nine new starters. She highlighted that, alongside the existing deficit and staffing pressures, this created uncertainty about the school's position next year. It was noted that similar concerns had been raised at Hennock regarding the financial impact of falling pupil numbers. The Committee agreed that further clarity was needed on how quickly reduced numbers would affect school budgets, including whether there was any grace period or averaging process in place. (<b>See agenda item 14.</b>)</p> <p><b>PAN (to include pupils joined/left)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Widcombe-</b> 96 (2 moved to home ed)</li> <li>• <b>Illington-</b> 76 with an additional 16/17 in preschool</li> <li>• <b>Hennock-</b> 44 including pre-school</li> <li>• <b>Wolborough-</b> 189 (including nursery)</li> </ul> <p><b>Pupil wellbeing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wolborough-</b> Pupils generally appear happy and supported by the teachers and teaching staff as a whole</li> </ul> <p><b>Staff workload and wellbeing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hennock-</b> Please refer to visit notes for further information.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wolborough-</b> Please refer to visit notes for further information.</li> <li>• <b>Hennock-</b> Please refer to visit notes for further information.</li> <li>• <b>Ilington-</b> Please refer to visit notes for further information.</li> </ul> <p><b>ASIP update</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wolborough-</b> Areas of development were Writing, Oracy and Early Years.</li> </ul> <p><b>Risk Register</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wolborough-</b> RR up to date, <i>questions over who looks at it – and was it for other than data collection. AH would like some more support on this. (See agenda item 14.)</i></li> <li>• <b>Hennock-</b> The risk register process is under review, and Governors need clarity around our role within it. Hennock’s biggest risk is pupil numbers. This is compounded by a relatively high SEND need.</li> </ul> <p><b>Sustainability Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wolborough-</b> A generic sustainability action plan has been completed. Children have made posters about turning lights off etc and these are being displayed around the school.</li> </ul>	
11.	<p><b>Standards and Curriculum Trustees Meeting</b> The minutes were circulated to the Governors before the meeting; there were no questions raised.</p>	
12.	<p><b>Next S&amp;C Focus:</b> <b>The Chair reported that the next Spring 2 focus would be:</b> Provision and impact for SEND Provision for PPG &amp; LAC Safeguarding Audit with a LEARNING WALK</p>	
13.	<p><b>Evaluation of governance impact</b> Governors agreed the meeting had been effective and there had been many useful discussions and questions raised for the S&amp;C committee.</p>	
14.	<p><b>Questions to be escalated at LAC level</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Risk register training and further clarification needed.</i></li> <li>• <i>Is there a plan for a Trust-wide Parent Survey?</i></li> </ul>	GP
15.	<p><b>Questions to be escalated to S&amp;C</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Low attendance figures at schools across the Trust currently skewed due to SEND/illness. (See Ilington visit notes for further information)</i></li> <li>• <i>Tech issues at Ilington continues to be a barrier (See Ilington visit notes for further information)</i></li> <li>• <i>At what point do reductions in pupil numbers begin to impact a school’s funding allocation, and is there any form of transitional protection or averaging applied before the budget is adjusted?</i></li> <li>• <i>Homework strategies across the Trust: is there alignment in this/discussion of best practice?</i></li> <li>• <i>Update on review of chargeback and impact at individual school level</i></li> </ul>	

The meeting ended at 7.15pm

Signed by the Chair of the Committee.....on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2026