



Standards and Curriculum Committee
Meeting minutes
Tuesday 3rd February 2026
At 5pm
Held on Microsoft TEAMS

Invited: Kate Evans (Chair for this meeting)
 Rachael Sharpe (CEO)
 Cheryl Mathieson (CM)

Max Thomas (MT)
 Joanna Hooper (JH) – Mid Devon LB Representative
 Oliver Heathman (OH) - Moorland Hub LB Representative

In attendance: Lizzie Lethbridge (LL) – Director of Education
 Charlotte Roe (Governance Professional)
 Andy Keay (DOSI) **for item 8. Analysis and evaluation of pupil outcomes**
 Kelly Yeo (KY) - Curriculum Lead **for item 7 - EYFS**
 Pete Halford- DOSI (PH)- **for item 9. -Mid-year Attendance Overview**

Minutes: Nicol Bush- Clerk to the Trust

No	Item	ACTION
1.	Welcome and apologies The Chair for this meeting opened the meeting with a welcome to Trustees and Directors, apologies were received and accepted from CC and CT.	
2.	Reflection – Vision and Values <i>“Flourishing schools for all at the heart of our communities”</i> <i>The Chair reminded the meeting of the Vision and Values</i>	
3.	Declarations of interest There were no new declarations of interest brought to the meeting.	
3.	Any other business There was no other business brought to the meeting.	
4.	Approval of last meeting minutes For approval: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The part I minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2025 were approved as a true record by the Trustees and were signed accordingly. • The Part II minutes circulated via email, to those who attended the meeting, were approved as a true record and were signed accordingly. 	
5.	Matters arising from minutes of 9th December 2025 (not on the agenda) There were no matter arising.	
6.	Trust Risk Register <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A question was raised around the ongoing technical issues at Morchard Bishop.</i> 	

	<p>The CEO highlighted that digital risks, including issues with school servers, pupil devices and staff laptops, were captured within the finance and operations risk register and reviewed by the finance and general purposes committee. These risks did not sit on the education standards risk register, which was why they did not appear there.</p> <p>She added that, following questions from LACs, the Trust had decided to remove individual school risk registers for the time being. A single trust wide register was being used instead, giving a clearer strategic overview. She would provide training for schools in September on how risks link to their school improvement plans, with Trust leaders holding overall responsibility.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that the committee would review the amber rated risks Before beginning the EYFS item, she asked who validated the green ratings in the EYFS report and how moderation was carried out related to safeguarding, education standards, achievement and EYFS as part of the meeting.</p> <p>KY explained that the green ratings had been agreed with LL (Director of Education) based on discussions through the hubs and recent training. The items marked amber were still in progress, and the single red item remained outstanding and required further work.</p>	
7.	<p>Curriculum Subject Focus: EYFS (report circulated before the meeting)</p> <p>KY gave an overview of the EYFS report and invited any questions from the Trustees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What was the purpose of a revisit?</i> <p>KY said they intended to revisit certain schools to assess whether the training delivered so far had made an impact. Those schools had been identified as needing additional support, and audits at a few schools had highlighted areas requiring follow up. The plan was to return and evaluate whether improvements had been made since the training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Chair highlighted that she had attended the inset session in September and felt the speaker was excellent, particularly in raising the importance of high-quality continuous provision that enabled learning to continue even without an adult present. She asked KY whether this was something she was now beginning to see during her visits to schools. Where would we see that best provision at the moment? Which schools?</i> <p>KY said she was beginning to see improvements. Schools were increasingly ensuring that high quality provision was in place so that children could continue their learning independently without an adult. She reported seeing more purposeful provision since the initial audits and expected to see further progress during her revisits. She added that the hub meetings and the sharing of best practice were also contributing to this positive impact. KY added that the strong practice was evident in several trust schools, in particular at Ilington, Widecombe and Bearnas, who were all demonstrating excellent examples of continuous provision, and this was why she had selected teachers from those schools to contribute to the hub work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>CM asked, under the new Ofsted framework, which schools in the Trust were of concern and potentially at risk of receiving a judgement of required improvement?</i> <p>KY responded that she was not aware of any schools currently at risk under the new Ofsted framework. The schools she had supported most heavily last spring and summer had required improvement in their early years' provision, and she had spent several days working with them.</p> <p>KW added, as part of her planned revisits, she expected to be back in those schools in late February or early March to review progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When you do your visits and where in that pro forma do you talk to leaders, the EYFS lead?</i> <p>KY explained that the early years' revisits would focus on reviewing outcomes and predictions and in that visit, would be checking whether children were on track across all prime areas, as well as in the specific areas of English and</p>	

	<p>mathematics, to ensure they were progressing towards achieving a good level of development. These elements would all form part of the revisit process. The Chair thanked KY for her report and attendance at the meeting.</p> <p>7.1 Update on focus visit from Local Advisory Committees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>A LAC Chair asked how declining pupil numbers might affect early years provision and what this could mean for the future structure of the lower years in schools. He noted that falling rolls had been raised as a concern by several schools during the recent hub meeting and wondered whether this linked to the EYFS discussion.</i> <p>The CEO said that declining pupil numbers were very much on the Trust's radar. They were closely monitoring preschool places and reception intakes, and many schools were currently showing positive trends following strong efforts to promote and market their settings. A small number of schools had also received grants to extend their preschool provision and support increased capacity. She added that the DCEO was continuing to work on this area. The CEO said LL had created a user-friendly spreadsheet for head teachers to calculate appropriate ratios based on the numbers of two- and three-year-olds, which would support their planning. Senior leaders remained available to advise schools, and the issue continued to be an ongoing topic of discussion. CM added that falling pupil numbers were also routinely monitored through the finance and general purposes committee. The issue was regularly raised there in relation to school finances and future budget planning.</p>	
8.	<p>Data and Pupil outcomes (See appendix 1)</p> <p>The following supplementary questions were raised.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Chair noted that maths predictions were lower than the previous year. She asked why the trust had set a lower target.</i> <p>AK explained that this had been addressed during target setting with Head teachers. The original proposed maths target had been even lower, and the Trust had pushed back to raise it as close as possible to last year's outcome. He added that the team were optimistic that schools would exceed the target in maths.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Chair raised that, with outcomes far below the national average, the issue did not point to a need for further targeted interventions or one to one support. Instead, she said it showed the need to review the curriculum and teaching practice, as these were likely influencing pupil progress the most.</i> <p>AK said that he agreed and explained that Claire Appleby (CA) had been doing significant work on rebuilding strong foundations in the early years. He noted that when many pupils left key stage one without being secure in essential skills, they carried a series of accumulated gaps into later stages. He said that both the DoE and CA had been concentrating on strengthening the basics in writing across schools. At the recent English hub meeting, which he and PH attended, CA highlighted the importance of securing sentence structure, basic punctuation and handwriting, as these were vital for pupils moving beyond key stage one.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>A LAC chair asked a question on the usefulness of the data. She said that the committee had previously discussed how the results of a small number of schools could distort the overall Trust picture. She questioned how valuable it was to look at Link Academy data as a single set without understanding the performance of individual schools. She asked whether most schools were in line with national averages, and the overall outcomes were being pulled down by a few, or whether a larger number of schools were actually performing below national expectations.</i> <p>The CEO explained that when Trust wide data was reported, it was because the Trust was judged on that collective performance. She said that the Regions team reviewed the good quality descriptors and formed a view of how well the Trust was performing overall based on trust wide outcomes. She noted that while the S&C committee and the full Board received Trust wide analysis, the Education Improvement Team could view the data broken down by each school. She recommended that LAC members speak directly with head teachers during school visits to discuss each school's data in detail. This would allow LAC governors to challenge and support head teachers effectively in understanding their individual data.</p>	

The CEO highlighted the importance of each school achieving strong individual outcomes, particularly as Ofsted now expected schools to maintain their own attainment in line with national standards. If a school did not do so, it was unlikely to meet expected standards, which then affected trust level data and informed how the Regions team evaluated the Trust.

- *CM said that writing had been a focus for some time yet progress still appeared limited. She queried whether the current approach was definitely the right one. While she understood the emphasis on strengthening foundations, she asked whether the system in use was effective, whether leaders were confident in it, and whether improvement simply required more time or if there was something fundamentally wrong with the current practice.*

AK said that time was an important factor in improving writing outcomes. He explained that writing was the hardest area in which to close gaps because pupils often moved through the curriculum without first securing the essential basics. He gave the example that pupils in years 3 and 4 might be taught to use speech marks when some were still not confident with full stops and capital letters, which widened gaps further.

AK said he believed the current focus on rebuilding strong foundations was the right direction, but the impact would take time to show. He noted that phonics and reading had improved quickly, but writing progress was slower.

When asked whether the Trust was confident in the current approach, AK said the issue was not the system itself but the amount of content in programmes such as book rich and talk for writing. He said it was important to scale this back and focus on teaching the essential knowledge securely so pupils could embed it.

- *CM asked whether the Trust looked at what other Trusts were doing in writing. She raised, if other Trusts had stronger writing outcomes, whether leaders understood what those Trusts were doing differently and whether there was anything that Link Academy might need to adopt or consider.*

The CEO explained that it had historically been rare for Trusts to work collaboratively, as trusts were often positioned in a competitive rather than cooperative way. However, she said this was beginning to change, with a stronger focus on civic leadership and working beyond individual Trust boundaries.

She said that one of the tasks on her list was to connect the Trust with another multi academy Trust to support areas such as quality assurance. The CEO added that she was actively exploring partnerships beyond the Southwest. She explained that she wanted to link with a Trust that shared a similar context, preferably rural, and noted that there were many such Trusts across the UK. She added that Southwest outcomes were generally lower than those in other regions, so looking beyond the area would allow them to learn from trusts performing more strongly.

- *The Chair referred to the earlier point that most preparation for the test format took place in the spring term. She asked whether, across key stage two, the Trust used any standardised tests or test-based structures similar to SATs so that pupils became familiar with timed conditions and the format they would eventually encounter. She also asked whether pupils who required special arrangements were able to practice within those arrangements throughout the year, rather than only in year six.*

AK said that assessment took place throughout the year, not only in the spring term. He explained that many schools carried out tests in December, and some also used tests early in September as a benchmark to identify key areas for focus.

He added that several schools operated mixed year 5 and 6 classes, and when he had worked in such a setting, year 5 pupils completed the same style of assessments. This meant that pupils were prepared well in advance for the type of material they would later encounter.

AK said that the spring term tended to include additional booster classes, which schools offered to give pupils extra opportunities to strengthen their performance.

In response to KE's point about standardised tests, AK confirmed that the Trust did not use standardised assessments such as PIRA or PUMA across all

	<p>schools. A small number of schools used them, but he explained that they were expensive, and the cost had prevented wider adoption.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Chair highlighted that waiting until the spring term to introduce test preparation seemed far too late. She said that preparing pupils for the test environment did not mean teaching to the test, but ensuring that they were familiar with timed conditions, question formats and mark allocations. She added that aspects such as knowing which questions carried two or three marks did not need to be left until year six.</i> <p>AK responded by Christmas; they usually knew that most pupils were already on track to meet expected standards, because preparation for year six had begun much earlier. He said that this earlier start allowed pupils to become familiar with working under timed conditions and with the expectations of test situations.</p> <p>He added that there were many small strategies that made a difference, such as teaching pupils to ask for a question to be read aloud when appropriate. He said these practical approaches were regularly shared with academy heads to ensure all pupils were given the best possible chance, even during the test itself.</p> <p>The Chair thanked AK for his attendance and Q&A at the meeting and suggested that next time, alongside analysis, leaders should provide an evaluation outlining what they had learned from the data and where gaps remained if outcomes were still not on target.</p> <p>ACTION- DoSI to provide, alongside the next analysis, an evaluation that outlines what has been learned from the data and identifies any remaining gaps if outcomes are still not on target. Clerk to add to the next Spring 2 S&C agenda.</p>	AK/Clerk
9.	<p>Focus: Mid-year Attendance Overview (report circulated before the meeting via email) (see appendix 1)</p> <p>PH gave an overview of the Mid-year attendance report and invited any questions from the Trustees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>CM asked how many pupils were involved in the schools where attendance was below the national average, and whether there were any common themes behind the low attendance.</i> <p>PH said that the Trust was beginning to collect all attendance tools centrally, with schools submitting them to the attendance lead and to him. This would allow leaders to understand the reasons behind attendance issues, identify effective practice and see what was happening in specific schools so support could be targeted and good practice shared. He said this would be a twofold process, with the Trust holding the information rather than individual schools. He explained that the Trust already held attendance data on Power BI, which helped to identify both strong performance and areas of concern. Three schools had been identified as needing support, and they were likely to be put forward for the Rise attendance support offer.</p> <p>PH said he was currently checking the criteria and any associated costs, noting that Rise provided both regional and bespoke support. He added that the same hub also offered behaviour support. He concluded that the Trust would be accessing external training to support these needs.</p> <p>The Chair thanked PH for his attendance at the meeting and detailed report.</p>	
10	<p>ETHOS minutes</p> <p>A LAC Chair shared that ethos meetings had been very well coordinated by Sharon Lord, who had produced a comprehensive termly plan outlining what needed to be covered and reviewed, particularly in relation to SIAMS visits. She said that at Morchard Bishop school they felt very well informed.</p> <p>Another LAC chair said that their hub had only two schools with a Church of England designation. Ilington had recently undergone its SIAMS inspection, and Sharon Lord had provided strong support throughout the process.</p> <p>Wolborough, now had a foundation governor in post. He said the new governor was getting up to speed quickly and had provided very helpful foundation focused notes for the term, which had been positive.</p> <p>The GP said that trustees were welcome to raise questions. She explained that at LAC level they were already providing governance with suggested questions to help begin discussions, as everyone shared responsibility for maintaining Christian distinctiveness in the Trust's Church of England schools. She said they hoped to appoint a foundation liaison governor who would take on oversight of the ethos committees and, in future meetings, lead on posing further questions and exploring the detail more fully.</p>	

	<p>PH noted the successful SIAMS outcomes achieved across the year and said that much of this was due to the work led by Sharon Lord and the implementation of the ethos groups. He highlighted that Branscombe and Broadhembury had both received very positive SIAMS results, which was encouraging and worth sharing as a success.</p> <p>The CEO said that she wanted to acknowledge Sharon Lord's contribution to the Trust. She explained that while having an expert to guide consistency in processes was valuable, it was equally important to develop wider leadership through planned succession. She noted that the Trust's involvement in the Exeter Flourishing Partnership had helped staff across different levels build expertise in Christian distinctiveness. She outlined that the GP was completing governance level training, HROM and PH were developing people strategies linked to the Trust's values, and RE and worship leads were working closely with Sharon to deepen their understanding. The CEO said it was encouraging to see new experts emerging in schools, creating opportunities for collaboration and shared leadership.</p>	
11	<p>Local Advisory Committee meeting minutes (Minutes circulated prior to the meeting)</p> <p>A LAC Chair reported that several LACs had raised concerns about staff wellbeing and uncertainty following recent letters about redundancies, restructuring and the future shape of the Trust. She added that questions about finances had also been raised, including transparency around budgets and how schools could be certain about their allocated funding. She noted that she had already discussed some of these issues with the CEO, and that the GP was due to take elements of this to the Finance and Resources and Remuneration and People Committee.</p> <p>The CEO added that she had already met with CM and the GP to discuss the concerns raised about staff wellbeing, uncertainty and finances. She explained that she could not go into detail about the proposed plans in the meeting, as staff were present, but assured the group that all feedback was being taken seriously and that measures were being put in place to support staff. She added that greater financial transparency would follow once the current process had been completed, which would help head teachers understand the situation more clearly.</p> <p>CM added that the matter would also be raised at the upcoming board meeting so that all trustees were fully aware of the concerns.</p>	
12	<p>ATSIP/TEF</p> <p>In response to a question on the sheet (see appendix 1), the CEO said that when she joined in September, LL and her colleagues had already written the ATSIP plan and it was ready to use. She agreed with the priorities within it and the work taking place across the Trust. She explained that newer action plans for finance, people and wellbeing, and governance followed a different style, and from September it would be beneficial to align the school improvement plan with these, including clear metrics alongside narrative and operational detail. She said the ATSIP would remain unchanged for now to avoid creating additional workload for the DoE. The CEO added that progress against the actions this year would be measured through pupil outcomes.</p>	
13	<p>Action plans Part II was taken</p>	
14	<p>Safeguarding</p> <p>The CEO reported that the full safeguarding report and data would be presented to the full board the following week. Recent work had focused on reviewing the relationships and sex education policy and curriculum to ensure pupils understood safe relationships. Head teachers had worked with the director of safeguarding on this, and the next step was for Sharon Lord to consider how Christian distinctiveness should be reflected, including whether Church of England schools required an additional policy. Further safeguarding actions would be shared at the upcoming board meeting.</p>	
15	<p>Strategic Plan - School Improvement and Safeguarding</p> <p>The CEO said that the Trust had evaluated its TEF using the good quality descriptors and the Department for Education metrics, which resulted in a mix of amber and green RAG ratings. She explained that the Trust then used this evaluation to write the Link Strategy. The strategy set out key priority areas such as quality of education, inclusion and school improvement, each with overarching success criteria, for example meeting or exceeding national averages and providing a broad and balanced curriculum.</p>	

	<p>She said that the detailed action plans beneath these priorities would support the Trust in meeting its strategic aims. At present this was reflected in the ATSIP, but from September the plan would be aligned with the format used across the other strategy areas.</p> <p>The Chair confirmed that this agenda item could be removed from future meetings, as it was now fully covered through the TEF and the ATSIP.</p>	
16	<p>Policies</p> <p>The Chair said that several policies had been reviewed and some adjustments were suggested. She noted that she had been asking for some time for the Trust's vision and values to appear as the front cover statements on all policies. She said it was encouraging to see this beginning to happen, although it was not yet consistent across all documents.</p> <p>The GP said that the vision and values were not yet appearing consistently on policy front covers because the template had only been issued in December, while many policies had entered the review cycle earlier in November. She explained that the newly approved policies would have the updated front cover added before being published on the website.</p> <p>The Chair suggested that, where large numbers of policies accumulated, Trustees should review them remotely between meetings. She said Academy Heads needed to understand that this required Trustees to give additional time and therefore it was important that policy deadlines were followed in future. The committee agreed to this approach. The CEO said she would speak with Academy Heads and the EIT to understand the barriers that were preventing some policies from being returned on time, and to identify how best to support those reviewing them.</p> <p>16.1 Final Anti Bullying with Child-on-Child Abuse 16.2 Equality and Diversity Policy 2025 16.3 First aid in school policy- 16.4 Missing Pupil Policy and Procedure 2026 16.5 Online Safety policy 16.6 Parent code of conduct policy</p> <p>These policies were sent to Trustees via email for approval and were approved at the B.O.T meeting on 9th February 2026.</p> <p>ACTION- CEO to speak with AHs around policy review deadlines.</p>	CEO
17	<p>Risk Register RAG review</p> <p>The meeting discussed the RAG ratings following the meetings discussions and agreed to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding- rated green- the mitigations in place meant the likelihood of a safeguarding incident was unlikely, and therefore the expected impact would be minimal. • Data accuracy- rated amber- The CEO that although teachers entered data correctly, errors sometimes occurred when information was pulled through the system. She added that the Trust had agreed to move to a new MIS from September because the current system was inefficient. 	
18	<p>Self-Evaluation of Governance Impact</p> <p>The CEO shared that, based on earlier points about open dialogue and supportive challenge, the meeting had demonstrated strong collaboration and curiosity. The Chair said that the discussion had aligned well with the Trust's vision of supporting individuals and communities to flourish. She noted that, despite the detailed focus on data, attendance and outcomes, the group had consistently centred the conversation on pupils and their experiences.</p>	

The meeting ended at 6.50pm

Signed by the Chair of the Committee.....on 24th March 2026.

Appendix 1 Question sheet circulated to Trustees and Directors before the S&C meeting.

Agenda item	Question	Answer
11.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework strategies across the Trust: is there alignment in this/discussion of best practice? 	Deferred to the next S&C meeting

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update on review of chargeback and impact at individual school level 	GP to raise with DCEO and email the answer.
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions were raised ahead of the meeting regarding targets, specifically Y2 Phonics, MTC and Maths, as well as PP data including SEND (or not). These appear not to have been addressed in the meeting. Is the question sheet format prior to the meeting working, or would EIT prefer 'live' questions in the meeting? 	Targets have been set for Y2 phonics, MTC and Maths at the beginning of the year. PP targets were all in report.
12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have any of our schools received an inspection so far this term? If so, how did schools respond to the new framework, and what was the outcome? 	Discussed under Part II
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targets are low, and yet outcomes are not progressing confidently towards them. There is a particularly long way to travel for Writing (targeting lower than '25 national average, yet still a long way behind – although has narrowest PP Gap). What are the limiting factors / challenges for Writing? 	There is a long way to travel for writing, and this usually improves much more across the Spring term. Last year in Autumn term we were at 54% for writing and saw this improve through targeted support and interventions across all schools. This is in place again for those pivotal children who are currently working at 5S/5D. There has been a key focus this year on strong foundation, identifying gaps in children's writing and working to improve these. When we track this cohort back to KS1 – only 16 schools, writing was 62%. All schools prepare children much more for SATS across the Spring term - booster groups, SAT clubs, ongoing use of questions.
9.	<p>A detailed and easy to access report – thank you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is attendance at Link schools lower than that in Devon? Is there scope for a survey of factors limiting attendance across the Trust in order to deploy support more sharply, and share best practice? Which schools' attendance is below national and what are the reasons for absence? What is meant by 'variation across schools'? How far are school implementing RISE – and what early evidence of impact have we seen? 	<p>The Attendance Leads will be collating all Attendance Trawls to identify trends and share best practice starting this term.</p> <p>Some schools vary considerably due the nature of their size and demographic of children.</p> <p>RISE information – more to follow. The EEF has excellent guidance focusing on area to improve to support better attendance.</p>
12.	<p>This is still a very operational plan, with very few success criteria around improving pupil outcomes, and no alignment with targets. (eg Improve EYFS provision: no measurable impact on improving outcomes expected), nor quality of provision, staff retention, reputation, pupil numbers. (there are expectations to improve exclusion, SEND outcomes and attendance). Identifying limiting factors in pupils' writing it not planned until summer '26 –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> why did this not happen in summer '25, to inform curriculum review and CPD? 	Discussed under Part II
16.	It is good to see some policies now have V&V statements as a front cover – although not yet consistent.	The front V & V covers are not consistent yet as the change was made in December when some of the policies

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anti bullying Should behaviours include marginalisation / exclusion? <p>P3 final para 'understanding'</p> <p>P4 links to other policies seems to be in an odd place in the policy – at beginning or end?</p> <p>P4 remove unused bullet point</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Missing Pupils P5 second bullet 'prevents' should read 'presents'• Logo needs changing to "flourishing schools" <p>E&D I think we should use the phrase 'children with disabilities' rather than 'disabled children' – it is correct for adults (staff) but not for pupils.</p> <p>4.1 bullet 1: should this include 'other known disadvantage' or 'social barrier' alongside protected characteristic?</p> <p>6.2 should the curriculum promote and advocate equality and reflect the reality of life in modern Britain?</p>	<p>had already been sent out for review. They will be changed before sent to HR to be uploaded to website - Charlotte</p>
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