

**Standards and Curriculum Committee
Minutes**

Tuesday 4th February 2025

At 5pm

Held online via Microsoft TEAMS

Attended: Christine Cottle (Chair)
Kate Evans (Vice Chair)
Nicky Dunford (CEO)
Cheryl Mathieson (CM)
Joanna Hooper (JH) – Mid Devon LB Representative
Oliver Heathman (OH) - Moorland Hub LB Representative
Lizzie Lethbridge (LL) – Director of Education

In attendance:

Sue Howard (Human Resources Operations Manager)- Item 6.
Claire Appleby- English Curriculum Lead- Item 9.
Sarah Clarke- (Director of School Improvement)- Item 9.
Alex Waterman- (Director of Safeguarding) -Item 7.
Peter Halford- (Director of School Improvement) - Item 6.

Minutes: Nicol Bush- Clerk to the Trust

No	Item	Action
1.	Welcome and apologies The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome and apologies were accepted from Cat Radford, Charlotte Roe, Max Thomas and Corrinne Trigg.	
2.	Declarations of interest The CEO is a trustee of the Bearnas Education Foundation. Kate Evans is Director for Education of the Good Shepherd Trust, Diocese of Guildford.	
3.	Any other business There was no other business brought to the meeting.	
4.	Approval of last meeting minutes- 10th December 2024. The Trustees requested the Clerk make a few tweaks around context to the previous minutes (Item 4.) Following those amendments, the Trustees approved the minutes as a true record, and they were signed electronically by the Chair of the Committee.	CLERK
5.	Matters arising from minutes of 10th December 2024 (not on the agenda) 5.1 Confirmation from the Trustees that the questions raised from the reports of the previous meeting but not addressed in the meeting (Appendix 1 of the Minutes dated 10th December 2024) have been adequately answered. The Trustees agreed the new question sheet process had been effective. LL reminded Trustees that they could edit the live link, which would save on duplicate documents going forward. 5.5.1 Update on the outcome of the data tracking investigation including PP gap information. The CEO said she had worked with Andy Keay on the report, which addressed the above matter and would circulate the paper before the next meeting for Trustees to review and for the report to be discussed at the next S&C meeting. 5.7 Update on discussion with Academy Heads on how the Trust share good practice around pupil wellbeing.	CEO/CLERK

	<p>The Chair noted that this had been covered already.</p> <p>5.9 Update on engaging more parents onto Ethos Committees</p> <p>The Chair explained that, following a conversation with the GP today, two letters had been sent out—one to the parents of the schools and one to the church community—encouraging people outside of the schools to join the Ethos committee.</p> <p>5.10 Update on wrap-around care across the Trust</p> <p>The CEO informed the meeting that wrap-around care varied across the Trust, depending on the size and needs of the schools. She confirmed that many schools currently used a HLTA (Higher level teaching assistant) or Teaching Assistant (TA) for breakfast clubs and sourced materials from the Kellogg's scheme, which kept expenditure minimal.</p> <p>The CEO mentioned that after-school provision was different, as it was managed through staff-run voluntary clubs. While this approach had its challenges, the CEO emphasised that it was a much-needed facility.</p>	
6.	<p>Focus: Staff Wellbeing (report circulated to Trustees via email before the meeting)</p> <p>The HROM responded to a question from the question sheet (see appendix 1) regarding staff attendance and stated that, based on the last full year, staff absence was 4.19%, resulting in a 95.81% attendance rate. The pupil attendance report showed a 95.61% attendance rate, which was similar.</p> <p><i>The Chair asked whether the Trust was losing more staff than anticipated?</i> The HROM responded that it was not a concern, noting that the situation had been worse during Covid in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 when the Trust lost a significant number of staff. However, the situation has since stabilised. The HROM said the Trust was strong in this area.</p> <p><i>The Trustees asked whether the Trust analysed responses according to role type to identify themes across different roles.</i> The CEO confirmed that this analysis was currently being conducted.</p> <p>The CEO added that questions regarding hybrid working had been raised, and a policy was currently under review. This policy would include expectations around working from home, uniform, and other related matters, and would be designed to avoid creating issues.</p>	
7.	<p>Focus: Safeguarding Audit (report circulated via email before the meeting)</p> <p>The DoS stated that safeguarding across the Trust was strong, with a focus on refining best practices. No significant weaknesses had been identified, and Safeguarding was judged as strong in OfSTED inspections. She added that she had collaborated with AHs (Academy Headteachers) on a document that clearly outlined all areas of safeguarding.</p> <p>The Trustees asked about one school that had a high level of minor safeguarding events, questioning whether this was due to inconsistent staff reporting or if the school was experiencing difficulties. The DoS explained that there had been variations in the systems used, but now all categories were standardised on CPOMS. This adjustment changed the way issues were reported, categorising some as welfare rather than all being reported as safeguarding.</p> <p>The DoS mentioned that she had been exploring ways for schools to capture early help more informally, outside of CPOMS.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the DoS for the comprehensive safeguarding report and added it helped the Trustees understand the flavour of what was happening in the schools.</p> <p>Focus: Attendance (report circulated via email to Trustees before the meeting)</p> <p>PH invited the Trustees to ask questions about the attendance report. The following questions were raised:</p> <p><i>School Refusers: The Trustees asked if the number of school refusers was increasing or decreasing.</i> PH noted it was a recurring theme due to unmet needs, but schools were working hard to support these pupils and manage parents' expectations. Admins and AHs had a good system to monitor attendance. While attendance figures were good for the Trust's small schools, there was still much work to be done.</p>	

	<p><i>Persistent Absences: The Trustees inquired about the nature of persistent absences, whether due to long-term serious illnesses or repeated short-term illnesses, and if more could be done.</i> PH explained due to short term illness that the Trust was supporting parents with guidance on when to keep children off school and encouraging them to trust the schools' judgement on pupil illness and when to send them home.</p> <p><i>There were some pupils on annex R that were on a part time timetable, which were impacting attendance rates, what was coded when the pupils were not expected to attend? Why was that impacting the overall attendance?</i> PH explained that the national guidance was clear in how schools should be coding to get the consistency across and added Annex R was a useful tool but could have an impact on overall attendance. He added that he would check the coding.</p> <p><i>Does the Trust fine for Term-time holidays and how much was the fine?</i> PH confirmed that the Trust was improving in this area, and fines were being issued however it was inconsistent. PH added that AHs had been given clear instructions on the process to follow, and the Trust aimed to be consistent in their approach going forward.</p> <p>PH emphasised the importance of children attending sessions during term time. He mentioned that fining rates had increased, but the school only handled the paperwork, and Devon County Council (DCC) issued the fines.</p> <p><i>The Trustees asked if the attendance improvement officers were provided by the Local authority.</i> PH responded that the Trust had invested in a service to monitor attendance. This service highlighted the need for the Trust to improve its escalation procedure, which PH was working on and would be implemented soon.</p>	
8.	<p>Parent and Community Engagement (report circulated to Trustees via email before the meeting)</p> <p>The DoE responded to the questions that were raised (see appendix 1) and highlighted the following comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Regarding AHs seeing each other's data, LL mentioned that the Directors took the data to the AHs, who would then see the comparisons. LL added that the context around the data was important and often where the strongest Ethos groups were, had the most positive outcomes. <p><i>The Trustees suggested it might be useful for schools to conduct either termly or annual parent view checks and asked whether schools conducted parent questionnaires beyond the standard ones?</i> LL said there was work being done by Sharon Lord with the Ethos groups in the Christian schools but added that more work needed to be done in the community schools that do not have the Ethos groups, to ensure the pupil groups they have were well developed and suitable for their context.</p>	
9.	<p>Curriculum subject focus- English (open meeting with presentation)</p> <p>SC provided a brief explanation of the Trust's strategic plan, noting that progress was slow but steadily in a grounded fashion. The following points were highlighted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ SC mentioned that the ATSIP was nearing the end of its three-year trend, and that phonics practice was now well rooted. ▫ Writing was at the initial stage of the plan, and SC/CA had analysed the current writing practices within schools. From this analysis, they developed a CPD package and a Trust-wide plan. ▫ The DoSI team was able to identify issues from hubs and relay them to the Improvement team, making the cycle feel robust. <p>CA (Curriculum Lead) presented the areas of focus PowerPoint during the meeting, which included data comparisons and outlined the next steps.</p> <p><i>The Trustees requested the target and data for the whole of Y2, rather than the percentage of children who did not pass the Y1 check, what percentage by the end of Y2 will have achieved the standard / passed the PSC?</i></p> <p>CA responded that it might be possible for Andy Keay to compile something, but context would need to be provided. Often, children who do not pass are SEND</p>	

	<p>and require a slower progression, which was why tracking and interventions were in place. Therefore, while the data was useful, it needed to be accompanied by context regarding those pupils.</p> <p><i>The Trustees noted that the report highlighted the most positive changes occurred where AHs were knowledgeable, particularly in phonics and writing, and could drive improvement forward. However, the impact was less effective in schools that had further to go or where the AHs knowledge was lacking. They expressed concern that, given the Trust's small schools, AHs would likely teach regularly in those schools, making it worrying that some AHs were not driving improvement due to weak curriculum knowledge.</i></p> <p>CA responded that primarily AHs had so many different priorities that they were pushing forward.</p> <p>LL mentioned that she had discussed this issue with CA, who, along with SC, had compiled training that was incorporated into the AH meetings. The AHs had benefitted from this training.</p> <p>LL also noted that new schools and their leaders joining the Trust had not received the correct CPD or approach prior to joining the Trust.</p> <p><i>The Trustees inquired about what aspects of the Trust evaluation were limiting the Trust's outcomes in writing, questioning whether it was the curriculum.</i> This issue was also mentioned in the Totnes LAC minutes, where there was confusion about whether the writing curriculum was based on BookWrites, Talk for Writing, or writing sequences, and whether there was any clarity on this.</p> <p>CA responded that writing is a broad area, making it difficult to pinpoint a single cause. CA added that the purpose of the audits was to identify areas in writing that needed to be stripped back and restarted. CA added that once the curriculum was embedded, tightened, and well-planned, the schools would begin to see the positive impact of those changes.</p> <p>The Trustees suggested that a model of best practice had been to release the expert teacher to co-plan, co-teach and co-assess with another new teacher.</p> <p>CA said that this was already in place at another school within the Trust.</p> <p><i>The Chair asked if removing PP/SEND pupils from the percentages would show that the remaining pupils were performing at the expected level.</i></p> <p>CA responded that the Trust was effective in supporting pupils with OAIP but emphasized the importance of examining the standalone data for disadvantaged pupils to understand their impact. She added that she would collaborate with Andy Keay to create this data.</p>	AK/CA
10.	<p>Local board reports (Minutes were circulated to Trustees via email prior to the meeting) 10.1 Committee to note any additional updates from local board Chairs and from LAC Minutes and Ethos Minutes</p> <p>The Trustees agreed that the question sheet made a lot of sense and was a good process.</p> <p>A LAC Chair mentioned that it was valuable to have the transparency of other LACs' questions.</p> <p><i>The Trustees highlighted the question on appendix 1 around the training and induction process for new schools joining the Link Academy Trust and asked if there was any learning about adjusting the Trust's induction for the new schools joining?</i> LL clarified her answer on the question sheet to this question and said she had meant that the biggest challenge that admin faced were the number of systems to learn, but were well supported by the Senior admin. The Trustees had a robust discussion about the Trust offering clinical supervision. The CEO mentioned that staff often used the wellbeing information provided by the HROM and that the Trust had invested in MAST, which offered supervision when needed. Additionally, there was an external service available for staff to call for support</p>	
11.	<p>Receive External Reports and review action plans Part II was taken. External reports – 11.1- Ofsted- Harbertonford 11.2- Ofsted- Bearnes 11.3 Action plans from previous term to be presented to Trustees to include progression</p>	

	The Trustees reminded the EIT that the updated action plans needed to be circulated to every S&C meeting as this was a core responsibility of S&C and part of the ToR for the committee.	
12.	<p>Trust Risk Register – Trustees to consider report on the following risk categories: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding • Education Standards and Achievement <p>The Trustees discussed the Risk Register at length and decided to prioritise it by moving it towards the top of the agenda. It was noted that during another Committee meeting, it was suggested that discussions from the meetings should be informed by the Risk Register hence the need for this item to be moved.</p> <p>Part II was taken</p> <p>The CEO stated she would meet with the DCEO to discuss the Risk Register and the next steps. Following that, a meeting would be scheduled for some of the Trustees to discuss the Risk Register further.</p>	
13.	<p>Strategic Plan - School Improvement and Safeguarding</p> <p>Trustees to update on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Improvement <p>The meeting agreed to move this item up the agenda for future meetings. The Trustees noted that the Strategic Plan should be reviewed at the next meeting, as it would be halfway through the year. This review would ensure that the Trust is on track to meet the success criteria that was agreed last year.</p>	CLERK
14.	<p>Policies</p> <p>14.1 First Aid Policy 2025 14.2 Attendance 14.3 Missing Child 14.4 Curriculum 14.5 Teaching and Learning</p> <p>The meeting reviewed and approved all of the above policies. First Aid, Missing Pupil and Curriculum were sent to Board of Trustees for final approval.</p>	
15.	<p>Self-Evaluation of Governance Impact</p> <p>The Trustees highlighted that the question sheet was effective, and it was pleasing to hear that LACs enjoyed the flow of the questions and answers.</p> <p>The Chair noted that the Harbertonford Ofsted report had been delightful to read and thanked those involved in the Ofsted inspection.</p> <p>The CEO emphasised the importance of recognising the new AH for Harbertonford, who had been in position for three months and had positively impacted the school.</p>	

The meeting ended at 7pm.

Signed by the Chair of the Committee..... on 25th March 2025

Appendix 1

Questions from Trustees/Governors for S&C meeting 04/02/2025

(A number of questions were raised by LAC Governors that were directed to, and addressed by the relevant staff via the Governance Professional)

Report/Attachment	Question	Answer
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Attendance	It's good to see that Link compares favourably with national averages, but why is our unauthorised absence high? Is there a pattern across schools / reasons for these?	We have a number of children who are school refusers, so this impacts the data.
	What are the main reasons for persistent absence?	Illness is the main reason for PA.
	What are the attendance rates for PPG, SEND and CIC – are their attendance rates improving and narrowing the gap with their peers?	SEND – 92.4 % (93%) Unauthorised absence – 1.41% Authorised – 6.1% PP – 93.5% Unauthorised absence – 1.3% Authorised – 6.1%
	The action that escalation for absence response needs to be swifter arose from 4 focus schools. Will this action be included in the Attendance Policy and apply to all schools?	Yes.
Safeguarding	From the 8 audits, what were the main actions arising? Are there actions / themes that could be required pro-actively of all schools?	
	In a locality of reduced and inadequate LA services, what more could the MAT do to support schools and families to protect children?	
	As a MAT of 23 schools, could the Link have a more assertive stance with LA regarding improving services?	
Parent view	Diptford had low scores for a number of themes (Safeguarding, sharing information on progress, support for SEND, and whether parents would recommend the school). What is the thinking as to why this was / is? What can be pro-actively done to address it?	Yes agreed. This is also a school with strong ethos group and PTFA, so not fitting the trend. DoSIs are following up through their school review: DoSI School Review blank.docx The IiH are also aware (through our EIT communications) that their inclusion audit will look into this. Cultural issues are the hardest to shift quickly.
	Have all the Academy Heads (or those surveyed for inspection) seen these outcomes? What are their thoughts when comparing schools of different context? What learning could come from this information and insight?	AH have picked over their own results but not seen the comparison – this is going to the Directors to lead as part of their school review. Key learning is around the strength of parent voice in a school, in particular through parent groups. The key factor when considering context is the way in which parents are brought in – parent groups will look different, e.g. in Bearnes than Broadhempston.

Staff Wellbeing	Staff Attendance: how do these figures compare as percentages to pupil attendance? Is there an analysis by role type, and any lessons to learn / actions arising?	
English Report	(is it correct that the presentation shows '23 data rather than '24?). That said, it would be helpful to know for the PSC the %age of Y2 that have achieved the standard overall. From the data (because it is usually lower in Y2 than in Y1, I am assuming that the Y2 data is a %age of those pupils that didn't achieve the standard in Y1)	<p>Yes 23 is a comparison (GLD in 23 leads into year 1 phonics in 24)</p> <p>Data is aspirational data from the end of AUT 24.</p> <p>Past data is available from AK.</p> <p>This is fed into actions and monitoring for DoSIs to monitor in Hubs (Added to English PowerPoint report).</p> <p>The year 2 data is aspirational data for the children who will re-sit the Phonic Check in 25 as they didn't meet the standard in 24.</p> <p>All year 2 children who did not reach standard will have a planned, targeted and time limited intervention plan. All year 1 children who are not on track will receive the same.</p> <p>Any children going up into KS2 still not secure due to SEND or other will have a plan linked to provision maps to plot their route through to the end of the alphabetic code. Often children who are year 2 re sits will continue to need support in KS2.</p>
	With such low phonic outcomes in some schools, how will you ensure 'increasing awareness' in KS2 is robust enough to raise outcomes for Reading and Writing by the end of Y6?	<p>The data is aspirational and may change with robust interventions.</p> <p>Previous data gives a picture, not the whole picture. Following the PSC last year context was provided around the children who did not pass so actions could be/continue to be taken.</p> <p>KS2 – KS 2 teachers and staff have been part of the initial SSP training, but this is an area that still needs significant input. This has been carried out in some schools on an individual basis. Rapid Phonics is being offered to allocated schools and training will be offered in its use as a KS2 resource.</p>
	Writing: What is your overall Trust evaluation of the quality of	I would need more specifics around these questions as they are too

	<p>provision for English? Where is the best practice, what characterises that practice and how it could be shared to support other schools.</p> <p>What, in your evaluation, is limiting our outcomes in Writing.</p>	<p>broad. English is a vast subject and varies enormously school by school.</p> <p>Best practice in one area may not be reflected in another area of English.</p> <p>We have identified good practice through audits in Phonics and we use some schools for observations. We direct schools to other schools in their locality where support can be offered. The plan is for me to film and collate videos of the stages of phonics in some schools to form a bank of resources that all schools can access.</p> <p>The work we are doing has led to more timely and effective identification of the issues in individual schools. Having increased I.T. hours this year means that, along with the EIT we have more agency over change. In particular, the most positive changes have been where AHs are knowledgeable and can drive improvement forward once the EIT/IT leave the school. Where the impact is less effective is where schools have further to go or where AH knowledge is poor - here positive steps forward include the identification of hub training needs.</p> <p>DoSIs have more agency to direct the I.T to where the need is; this is much more purposeful than how we were operating last academic year.</p> <p>For example, the East DoSI and I ,have identified specific training that other schools may not need. Also, in the South we are working with specific schools with our 3-part writing package.</p>
LAC Governor questions	<p>What are the timescales for training for new schools joining the LINK in systems and processes they haven't previously used?</p>	<p>DoSIs able to support this under new structure – adjust diaries accordingly. Admins face the biggest challenge, supported by Senior admins.</p> <p>AHs in AH meetings and induction immediately.</p>
	<p>Did the Trust have a clinical supervision? Could the Trust firstly embed this as good practice, to encourage easier uptake among staff?</p>	<p>The IIH provides supervision as a response to difficulties. If the AH is not the first port of call, SH is wellbeing champion and should be contacted beyond the school. If not,</p>

		<p>Directors are the line of leadership beyond AHs.</p> <p>Could look into this, perhaps at what other trusts do, moving forward.</p>
	<p>In light of the 2025 PP focused visits coming up in Spring 2, can S&C confirm if any further action has been taken on possible review of how PP Strategy Plans are drafted since it was raised by LAC governors in April 2024 monitoring? (S&C discussion in response to question minuted 14th May 2024).</p> <p>Focused visits undertaken in January 2025 have again flagged desire of LAC Governors and Academy Heads to fully understand how the grant is allocated (centrally) in order to ensure accountability to needs of pupil premium children locally (i.e in individual school settings).</p>	<p>PP strategy plans are now created trust-wide.</p> <p>Trust PP strategy blank</p> <p>E/AH update all the parts highlighted in yellow, then delete the highlighting as needed. This should be on school websites now.</p> <p>AHs have had inputs and discussion through AH meetings for clarity; the trust PP strategy sets out how funds are broadly distributed.</p> <p>The smaller amount that schools receive, often subsidise trips, visits and experiences. Sometimes resources such as uniform, depending on the school needs, determined by the AH.</p>