

# Mid Devon Local Advisory Committee (LAC)

# Minutes of the meeting held via Microsoft Teams

# Monday, 23 June 2025 at 5 pm

Name	Role/Type of Governor	School	
Joanna (Biddy) Hooper (JH)	Chair – Foundation Governor	Morchard Bishop/across the LAC	Р
Bruce Abbott (BA)	Parent Governor – Vice Chair	Yeoford	Р
Mat Boult (MB)	Parent Governor	Cheriton Bishop	Р
Catherine Cozens (CC)	Parent Governor	Morchard Bishop	Р
Rebecca (Beki) Richards (RR)	Staff Governor	Across the LAC	Р
Tom Woodley (TW)	Parent Governor	Tedburn St Mary	Р
Hannah Bancroft (AH)	Staff (Academy Head) Governor	Across the LAC	Ар
Todd Chenore (TC)	Trustee Appointed Governor (pending confirmation of appt)	Across the LAC	Р
Pam Down (Clerk)	Clerk	Mid Devon LAC	Р
Charlotte Roe (GP)	Governance Professional	Link Academy Trust	Р
Matt Matthew (MM)	Deputy CEO	Link Academy Trust	Р
Chris Martin (CM)	Academy Headteacher	Yeoford Primary School	P (item 10 onwards)

# Present/Apologies/Absent

		ACTION
1	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES	
	JH, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Todd Chenore (Trustee Appointed Governor, subject to recruitment confirmation) and Matt Matthew, Deputy CEO were welcomed to their first meeting and everyone introduced themselves.	
	Apologies were received from Hannah Bancroft due to an unexpected work meeting - approved.	
2	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:</b> As logged on the Register of Business Interests - nothing further to add in relation to this meeting's agenda.	
3	APPROVAL OF THE P1 & P2 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12	
	May 2025	
	The Minutes were <b>approved</b> and will be signed electronically by the Chair. They will be forwarded to HR to be uploaded onto the Trust website.	Chair/Clerk
4	MATTERS ARISING from 12.05.2025 (not covered elsewhere in the Agenda)	
	Governors' review of responses to the questions raised at the previous LAC and to confirm if there are any supplementary questions:  LAC level questions summarised in item 14 – 12.05.25:	
4.1	a) Pre-School on site at Yeoford: MM confirmed there is no area or funding for a new build. He referred to the 'creative thinking' mentioned – this was for the school to consider internal figuration to accommodate a Pre-School, particularly in view of reducing pupil numbers.	
	b) School security at Yeoford: Governors confirmed the perimeter	Action: MM to provide update re

fencing issue had not been resolved, it is flagged red on the Risk Register. MM confirmed it was an action on his list which had not yet been addressed.

c) Tedburn St Mary – playground fence/boundary between the School and the Methodist Church. MM is aware of the issue which has not yet

**SEND / SENDCo (thinly spread) – request for an action plan** JH, Chair, confirmed she had raised this at S&C, reporting on staffing and the high level of SEND and requesting an action plan. Neither the GP nor MM knew of any update. The GP will follow this up.

**Staffing and staff wellbeing (P2 mins 12.05.25)** The GP advised staff wellbeing will be reviewed three times per annum by the Remuneration Committee. LACs will be asked to produce a report at each meeting which will be fed to the Trustees. The Trust is also looking at other ways of gathering the views of staff.

Staff questionnaire produced by governor – the governor reported a good response and honesty regarding negative points. *See item 10 for further information.* It was suggested the questionnaire is shared and used at the other LAC schools. MM stated that Sue Howard, HR Operations Manager, is very keen on supporting staff wellbeing and it would be helpful if she could be copied into communications.

**Minibus** The Chair explained the lack of easy access to a Trust minibus within the Mid Devon LAC had been discussed often. It was now know that originally PTAs had funded the purchase of the minibuses, so ownership/location was understood. Initial conversation had taken place re exploring the possibility of schools joining together to buy a minibus to ease transport costs (much of the Sports Premium funding is spent on transport rather than actual activities). MM was asked who funds the insurance and ongoing maintenance? MM advised insurance, MOT, maintenance and other ongoing costs are paid from individual schools' budgets with a budget line allocated for tracking. A governor asked for more information: would it be plausible? Would it be possible to purchase a second hand minibus? If so, what would rough costings be? MM advised a good second hand minibus would cost in the region of £18 to £20K. He suggested considering a minibus lite (17 seats) in order to avoid the need for a D1 driving licence. MM advised there are currently four minbuses shared within the Trust – unfortunately none within the Mid Devon area. MM agreed the staff governor's request to provide a minibus model/guide to be used to initiate the process and to inform AHs about potential budget lines and costs and any general information connected with purchasing or owning a minibus (including seating/Licence requirements as above). Following this, steps to move exploration forward include:

- Governors to email the Clerk with their PTA Chairs' contact details
- Clerk/Trustee Appointed Governor to contact PTA Chairs to establish if there is interest in considering exploring investing in a shared minibus
- If interest is established, the Trustee Appointed Governor to coordinate on behalf of the LAC (with support from the Clerk/GP as needed)

Yeoford – £4,000 of ICT equipment deemed obsolete: what action plan is in place to bolster ICT hardward and software? The Chair added the situation was similar at Morchard Bishop and perhaps in each school. MM advised there are about 1500 devices across the Trust - more recent investment included MS Surface Pros for Years 5 & 6. There will be a change in the ICT support service provider from September 2025 following which a replacement plan will be drafted and implemented. Unfortunately, there is not a limitless funding pot so expectation will need to be managed. The Chair asked if there could at least be a two letter login or similar for Reception and Year 1 children as so much time is taken just for the login

school security fence at Yeoford

Action: GP to ask S&C for an update re the SEND action plan

Action: Staff questionnaire to be shared across the LAC. Action: HR to be copied into staff wellbeing coms

Action: MM to produce a minibus model/guide detailing info and potential budget lines and costs for AHs to consider

Action: Governors to forward PTA Chairs' contact details to the Clerk – Clerk and Trustee Appointed Gov to seek level of interest re purchase of a Mid Devon minibus

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process.

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MM responded the current Trust policy is for each pupil to have an individual login and password in order to be able to thoroughly monitor use of the network. Going forward, new software may make things easier.

Early Years' Focus/CPD: How can schools release people when there is no money? The difficulty in rural schools getting to training/moderation in a distant location means that it is almost over before staff are able to arrive. MM acknowledged the difficulty compounded by budget constraints. Training would be more accessible if it was available online or recorded for convenient use. MM suggested everyone ask when attending (or being unable to attend), if a recorded version is possible. The GP confirmed recording of internal training would usually be possible. Recording of external training would be subject to the provider.

Action: staff and governors to ask when attending (or unable to attend) training if a recorded version would be available

# 5 CLERK'S UPDATE

### 5.1 Vacancies/appointments:

a) Trustee Appointed Governor: Recruitment checks for the Trustee Appointed Governor role are in action but not yet complete. The GP reminded governors there was not a set Trustee Appointed Governor role description; each LAC could decide their own priorities in line with individual skillsets and need. Often the Trustee Appointed Governor would be the Chair but this is not the case in our LAC as JH had wanted to continue in her role as Foundation Governor. It had been agreed during an initial meeting the Trustee Appointed Governor role would be fluid, including supporting Parent Governors if the need was there (perhaps if they were unable to get into school for a Governor/AH Visit Report or any other request if the Parent Governor was stretched). The potential Trustee Appointed Governor was happy to be a 'floater' and agreed to take on the role of coordinating/exploring PTAs purchasing a shared minibus for Mid Devon schools.

Appointed
Governor to
coordinate
exploring the
purchase of a
minibus for Mid
Devon

**Action: Trustee** 

**b)** Staff Governor Representative: On behalf of all governors, the Clerk thanked RR for her commitment to the role of staff governor over the last two years. RR had been a great contributor, attending all meetings and providing an insight into what it is actually like within schools from the perspective of children and staff. RR had been a good, tactful communicator with staff across the Trust and will be much missed. The role will be advertised across the Mid Devon schools with a start date of September 2025.

Action: Clerk to advertise the Staff Governor vacancy

# 5.2 Training:

- a) In-house session 'Asking pupils questions' by Lizzie Lethbridge, Director of Education had been postponed until September date tbc.
- b) Exclusion Panel training Devon Education Services (DES) on 25 June 2025 at 1 2.30 pm. The GP emphasised the importance of governors trying to attend, particularly due to potential permanent exclusions and being ready to form a governance panel at short notice. Governors were keen to support this but restricted due to work commitments. One governor will try to attend, depending on availability which is unknown until tomorrow. There will be a further session in November. The GP will speak to the provider to ask if twilight/evening sessions could be available. The GP is not aware this session will be recorded.

Action: GP to speak to DES course providers requesting twilight/evening sessions

- c) Risk Register training the GP advised Nicky Dunford is hoping to complete training with AHs before leaving. The Chair advised she had been due to visit Morchard Bishop but as the Internet had been down, this would be rescheduled.
- d) **Monthly in-house safeguarding focus** circulated and received by governors.
- 5.3 | Clerk to Local Board Committee to update the governors on any local or national

#### issues:

- a) Meeting dates for the 2025/26 academic year the GP confirmed there had been no request for changes to the draft dates so it is assumed none will now be made. The Chair and the AH at Morchard Bishop are setting diary dates for all the visit report meetings until July 2026 perhaps something others may consider as diaries get very busy.
- b) <u>Face-to-face/Teams hybrid LAC meeting on Monday, 29 September</u> agreed. Venue to be confirmed.
- c) <u>Standards & Curriculum meeting 08 July 2025</u> JH confirmed she would be able to attend.
- **Significant changes within the Trust including key personnel:** The new CEO will begin her role in September 2025. She has already visited a number of Trust schools; there will be a lot of focus on finance.

#### 6 FOCUS: OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

 Enrichment curriculum and participation in wider opportunities including our SEND children

Feedback from governors re their focus visits invited. Governors were thanked for providing reports from each of the four schools.

The Chair noted detail in this area seemed quite clear. She asked if there was anything to highlight.

A governor asked for clarity about the reference to awareness of being 'a white-mono culture'. The Chair explained the AH wishes to work on broadening the children's cultural understanding and experience. There are plans to buy a lot of multi-cultural books and toys and visit a London mosque with a view of embracing and encouraging diversity. The staff governor added their school is always actively looking for ways to build the cultural capital including thinking about use in text, making it broad and reflective, plus trips. She was sensitive to the need for a fine line between developing cultural capital and a tangible touch to be genuine.

It was noted the SEND opportunities are fully in place. There is a high level of need in all the schools yet a wide range of activities and experiences are available for all children. Barriers were noted as staffing and finance which was a growing concern for all the schools. A governor asked that with so much SEND need, how much attention is given to other areas of focus: how does the balance work and how does this affect the other children? The Chair advised there are legal requirements for children with an EHCP, adding there are other children, some not on the register, who require a level of support. It is a difficult balance and it has been recognised the DES have a massive budget deficit. The staff governor referred to OEIP accessible resources available for all teaching staff. The need for trainee teachers to be trained effectively in SEND was raised. The Chair commented a neurotypical world has neurodiverse needs – this needs addressing in schools and communities. The staff governor noted the Government is encouraging more apprenticeships which she hoped would perhaps spur on finance for less academic pupils.

# 7 FOCUS: REVIEW OF ATTENDANCE FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR

Attendance data compared to Trust and national target

Overall, attendance data is strong with the background of repeat absentee situations being known and addressed. The frustration of how absence is recorded which slews percentages was expressed. A governor believed illness, authorised absence and part time pupils (Annex R) should be recorded differently to achieve a more accurate attendance percentage with a truer reflection. The Chair acknowledged this but added the key thing is that staff within each school are fully

aware about background information connected to absence and have conversations with families to explain and assist in improving attendance (as evidenced in one of the school's visit reports). It was noted by all that every percentage figure is skewed and on paper that often does not look good or reflect an accurate picture.

The GP asked if governors had felt able to drill down, using the attendance questions as support. The Chair had found the document useful and had worked through it with the AH. The effect of children being consistently ten minutes' late was also raised. With this in mind, plans were being considered to alter the timing of the school day with the doors currently opening at 8.50 am for a 9 am start to the doors opening at 8.40 to close at 9 am. MM was asked what the implementation process would involve. MM suggested the school should discuss this with the Director of Education. A significant change may involve a consultation period.

The GP advised a new attendance officer has been appointed within the Trust. MM will check when her role will commence.

Action: Potential chance to school day timings to be discussed with the DoE.

Action: MM to advise when the new attendance officer will begin her role.

#### 8 FOCUS: BEHAVIOUR AND RELATIONAL APPROACH

- Overview of impact of behaviour policy and practice, impact of relational approach, and interventions
- Exclusions and suspensions

# **Relational Approach**

Generally, the relational approach is well embedded yet there is still work to do with new staff. Training will be rolled out again together with the Behaviour Policy. A governor stated that at one school, the older children believed the behaviour system offered no consequence to moving in either direction on the behaviour chart. They were aware Dojo points were rewarded but felt there was no implication and they were 'pointless'. This was being addressed to make it more effective, together with an update to the Behaviour Policy.

The GP was interested to know whether governors had asked if RA was working for staff as well as the children. A governor stated that question had not been asked; it was assumed that would be the case. It was believed by some governors this was not always the case; the focus is on how children are supported but conversation about adults/RA had not taken place.

The staff governor raised a concern about Year 6 transition and the RA not being supported in behavioural terms in the same way in high school. Matt Jones had delivered the RA training which is a really good approach if done well. However, it seems a bridge is needed between Year 6 and secondary education which is very different with so many more pupils making it more difficult to have such a close relationship. It felt like there is a bridging gap missing. MM referred to supporting resources which could be used to help parents. It was agreed to raise the RA transition bridge gap between Y6 and secondary education with the S&C Committee.

Action: to raise the RA transition bridge gap between Y6 & secondary education with the S&C Committee

## **Exclusions and Suspensions**

A governor raised concern and frustration about the national system which does not work to the advantage of the child or anyone else. It seemed children are caught in the trap of having to reach a certain target of exclusions before being permanently excluded. This then triggers external agencies to take action by placing a child in the environment setting to enable them to receive the best schooling

possible. This is not helpful to the child or peers whose learning can be disrupted. The governor asked if there was anything the Trust is able to do to put more pressure on the Authority? The GP advised Nicky Dunford, CEO and MM, DCEO, have had many strong conversations with the DES. Governors commented on the sadness and worry of there being no money which is very frightening. FEEDBACK FROM ETHOS COMMITTEES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

### 9

The Foundation Governor at the CofE School reported she had been unable to attend the last Ethos Committee meeting but the new AH had been present. It had been a positive meeting and the AH will focus on values and collective worship. This is discussed at length in the classroom and school worship. The school values are well embedded. Spiritual development is evidenced in the visit report with the awareness of needing to do lots of work to broaden children's cultural understanding and experience. This has been actioned by the purchase of a wider range of multi-cultural reading material and toys. The AH will be attending SIAMS training next term in readiness for the Inspection. The most recently planned Ethos meeting was cancelled due to illness. Further Ethos Committee meetings will continue in September.

#### 10 **SCHOOL UPDATES**

# (CM joined the meeting during discussion of this agenda item)

Governors to consider and discuss feedback on any issues/successes from their school visits or visit notes completed by the AH.

- PAN (to include pupils joined/left)
- Pupil wellbeing
- Staff wellbeing and workload
- Attendance
- Suspensions and permanent exclusions
- Feedback on any parent forum meetings/parents' evenings/PTFA
- ASIP update
- Risk Assessments/Accident Book
- Pre-school update

The visit reports had covered quite a bit of the above. In addition, the following points were raised:

PAN All of the schools are aware they are under PAN and cohort size is regularly monitored.

# Staff wellbeing and workload

All staff are massively impacted by the high level of SEND combined with the cut in staffing. This does affect wellbeing and the general atmosphere. The staff governor had sent the usual email to school administrators asking for circulation to all staff with any response wishing to be raised to be sent directly to her. It seemed that not all staff in all of the schools had received the email which was disappointing. The general vibe, not unusual for this time in the term, is exhaustion - for children, parents and staff.

The governor who had undertaken the staff questionnaire had gained more detail regarding wellbeing concerns. There were the regular stresses from this busy term, plus Ofsted pressures. Although it is always stated that things are not done especially for Ofsted, the reality is different. Some staff did not feel they were being listened to within the School or the wider Trust. The governor had shared responses with the AH who had acted quickly and had already held some meetings with staff to listen to concerns and support with some quick fixes and work together on other matters. A governor asked if anyone was supporting the AH.

Governor to share the staff questionnaire proforma

Discussions had only taken place on Friday, so there would have been limited opportunity yet. The question was raised about who is supporting the Ofsted journey for all staff. The GP asked MM if there was any mileage in letting the DoSI and the DoE know. It was confirmed they are already aware. The Chair commented how worthwhile the questionnaire had been and it was good the AH was being proactive. The governor undertaking the questionnaire was thanked by the staff governor for giving staff somewhere to reach out. It was acknowledged this would have been difficult for staff and the governor. The Chair reiterated the importance of all schools undertaking a similar questionnaire with staff.

Feedback on parent forum meetings/parents' evenings/PTFA A couple of complaints had been raised at one parent forum meeting which had led to some changes being made. The staff governor also raised the need to look after parents who are very busy – there is a lot for parents to keep up with.

A governor asked how many governors are members of their PTAs? On occasion, the parent governor felt conflicted about 'which hat to wear'. Some governors do attend PTA meetings and agreed it was good to be there to support both AHs and parents.

**ASIP** All clear, some ongoing matters but nothing to suggest any problems.

<u>Risk Register</u> The GP confirmed training is ongoing with further discussion being held by S&C regarding who populates and what constitutes a risk. Training is being delivered with AHs and when this has reached an appropriate point and covered more areas, training will be delivered to governors.

### 11 SUCCESSES AND SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

The GP had added this item to provide an opportunity to consider and celebrate all the good things that were happening across the Trust. MM informed governors there will also be regular newsletters, social media posts and the website updates to share Trust successes. He encouraged sharing of success and good practice; there is so much to celebrate but sometimes things get overlooked or not shared across all the schools.

The governor/AH visit reports detail successes, particularly relating to the number of varied school visits, enrichment and extra-curricular activities and PTFA (some joint meetings between two schools), Parent and Community meetings and events.

Highlights/points raised included:

- Torbay Civic Awards
- Landscore Sustainability Award
- Staff questionnaire which had led to good feedback and action
- Governor/AH visit reports received from each Mid Devon LAC school
- Morchard Bishop business plan for a SEND speech and language/sensory area in the Orchard Room approved by the Trust. To be used regularly by specific children with access to others as needed. A full time TA has been advertised to staff the area, allowing TAs to support other children.
- Tedburn St Mary 'nothing insurmountable with assistance from the top'. MM stated the lack of resources to support and fund everything is frustrating but everyone does their best to prioritise.

# 12 STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM TRUSTEES' MEETING

- Response to draft minutes dated 13.05.2025 (confidential until approved)
  These had not yet been received.
- Feedback on any issues raised from local board Chairs in S&C meeting:

Staffing: The Chair stated she had been quite direct in her feedback regarding

	SEND and staff wellbeing. She had felt she had been heard and appreciated there is	
13	no quick fix but the situation was in hand as far as it can be.  NEXT S&C FOCUS - TBC	Action: GP and Clerk to forward Autumn 1 focus and visit template as soon as the focus is known – Governors and AHs to book meetings now as reports will
1.0	VEV A COULDITA DILLEY OLIFCTIONS.	be due by 25.09.25
14	<ol> <li>KEY ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS:</li> <li>1) Are children safe? Do they feel safe?</li> <li>2) Are children attending? Are the places of education fit for purpose?</li> <li>3) Are children achieving? Are we providing the opportunities and support they need to achieve</li> <li>4) How are our staff feeling?</li> <li>The GP advised she had replaced the 'evaluation of governance impact/assurance v reassurance' item with these key accountability questions.</li> </ol>	
	Most of the questions had been addressed throughout the meeting but the following points were raised:	
	A governor sought clarity on a point in a visit report about making classroom walls clearer and less stimulating. The author of the report explained the AH had felt the walls were too busy (a lot of Twinkl info) and wanted to focus on displaying children's work to instil pride. It had been felt the level of display was not useful, particularly for children who found too much information difficult to process.	
	When speaking with the children, a governor confirmed all felt safe at school yet there was disparity between what some classes and the AH felt about rewards and sanctions. The governor had discussed this with the AH with a view to ensure all are feeling and understanding the same. Another governor referred to a similar situation in their school's visit report. When speaking with children there was disparity about the same issue. This has already been addressed with changes to the behaviour policy. This provided evidence of the purpose and usefulness of governors speaking with children which had enabled these discrepancies to come to light and be addressed.	
15	QUESTIONS TO BE DEALT WITH AT LAC LEVEL (Governance Professional)	
	<ul> <li>Site Security (Yeoford) – (item 4.1 b) MM</li> <li>Boundary fence (Tedburn St Mary) – (item 4.1 c) MM</li> <li>SEND (item 4 – 6) Update requested on the action plan (re staffing and the high level of SEND need) GP to speak with FM</li> <li>Early Years' Focus/CPD: (item 4 - 15) Difficulty of releasing people due to budget constraints/training to be more accessible – available online/recorded? GP to speak with LL</li> <li>Yeoford - £4,000 of ICT equipment deemed obsolete (plus similar in the other Mid Devon LAC schools) (item 4 - 14) When new service providers are in place (Sept 25) a replacement action plan will be drafted and implemented MM</li> <li>Exclusion Panel training (item 5.2 b) – request for evening training session. GP to discuss with FC, DES.</li> <li>Potential changes to timing of the school day (item 7) MM to discuss with the AH when visiting on 07.07.25</li> </ul>	Four points to be raised with MM either before or during the 23.06.25 LAC meeting

	•	Minibus model/guide (item 4 – 11) MM to draft to provide AHs with info	
	•	Schools are looking closely at their budgets: is the Trust reviewing the 'top	
		slice' that comes out of each school budget and how this money is spent? It is	
		so difficult for individual schools to cut back any further. MM confirmed he	
		had taken on board all the comments. He detailed projected deficit figures, to	
		be bridged by reserves, outlining the challenges faced and the fact reserves will	
		not be there indefinitely. The Trust is looking very keenly at central staff. The	
		Trust had hoped the Government Spending Review would offer support but	
		that hope had been distinguished. There will be further changes yet to be	
		decided. A meeting with Academy Headteachers will be held on 26 June 2025.	
		Budget projections and versions are ongoing and will be discussed further with	
		the new CEO who will have difficult decisions to make. The Chair remarked it	
		was good to know the extent of the continued overview. MM confirmed budget	
		deficits are extremely common – he chairs a large group of schools and	
		everyone has either already made changes or is planning to do so. MM will	
		keep everyone updated.	
15	Qι	JESTIONS TO BE ESCALATED TO S&C FOR TRUSTES CONSIDERATION	Action: Chair to
	Re	lational Approach – Year 6 transition to secondary education. A RA bridge is	raise at S&C – need
		ssing and needed.	for a bridge re
		soning and needed.	RA/Y6 transition to
			secondary
			education
	MI	M thanked everyone from his perspective and also from the Trust. He was	
	im	pressed with the quality of discussion and remarked how encouraging it was.	

The meeting closed at 6.35 pm

Signed as approved by the Chair, Joanna Hooper Date: 29	.e: 29 Sept	tember 20	ງ2!
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