

MEETING OF THE TRUST BOARD

**Thursday 11 September 2025
6:00pm – 7:30pm**

HOSTED BY CHESTNUT GROVE ACADEMY

PART I MINUTES

Attendance:		
Trustees:	Sian Mathias	Chair of Trustees
	Kate Burns	Trustee
	Jehangir Byramji	Trustee
	Charles Hotham	Trustee
	Jill Newey	Co-Vice Chair
	Courtenay Norbury	Trustee
	Sarah Marshall	Co-Vice Chair
	Emma Simmons <i>(joined remotely)</i>	Trustee
	David Watson <i>(joined remotely)</i>	Trustee
Executives:	Christian Kingsley	Co-CEO (Co-Chief Executive Officer) and Accounting Officer
	Mark Siswick	Co-CEO (Co-Chief Executive Officer)
Also in attendance:	Andrea Arbiter	Head of Governance
	Deanna Hallett <i>(withdrew for item 8)</i>	Observer, prospective trustee
	Rajbir Hazelwood <i>(joined remotely)</i> <i>(withdrew for item 8)</i>	Observer, prospective trustee
	Chelsea Maffia <i>(withdrew for item 8)</i>	Observer, prospective trustee

Papers issued for review:

Minutes of previous meetings and status of actions
Governance report to the board including:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Annual declaration of interest form – Related parties form – Budget Forecast Return – briefing paper – 2025/26 Governance Planner – Governance succession plan – Executive Report: Annual self-evaluation of governance 2025 – Executive Report: Diversity in Governance 2025 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – WLT Governance Code of Conduct – WLT Conflict of Interests Policy – WLT Governance Charter with Committee Terms of Reference – WLT Handbook for Local Governance with link role descriptions – Briefing notes: updates to Academy Trust Handbook and Academy Trust Governance Guide |
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1. BUSINESS		ACTION
i.	Welcome, introductions, and apologies. Trustees and executives were welcomed to the meeting. The Chief Financial Operating Officer (CFOO) was unable to attend the meeting as planned. With prior agreement from the Chair, several attendees joined the meeting via video conference as outlined above. The Chair welcomed prospective trustees Deanna Hallett, Rajbir Hazelwood and Chelsea Maffia. Prospective trustee, Alan Chambers, gave notification prior that he would be unable to attend the meeting. A briefing paper was shared in advance which detailed the background, skills, and special interests of each candidate, to be discussed in more detail under Part II of the meeting. The Chair initiated introductions from those who were in attendance. The Chair noted a strong start to the term for the Trust, including the onboarding of four new schools – Grovelands Primary School, Hellingly Primary School, Kensington Avenue Primary School, and Norbury High School for Girls - and a recent outstanding judgement from Ofsted following inspection at Thomson House School. Thanks were extended to the co-CEOs and the central team for their collaborative work in successfully onboarding the new schools, especially acknowledging the challenges involved.	

1. BUSINESS		ACTION
ii.	Conflicts of interest for the meeting, annual declaration of interests, and related parties' information When asked by the Chair, trustees confirmed there were no new pecuniary nor non-pecuniary interests declared in the period since the previous meeting nor were there any raised specifically in relation to the meeting. Trustees and executive officers were reminded to complete the annual declaration of interests form and they understood this information would be published in the Trust's Governance Register of Interests. Trustees and executive officers were reminded to complete the related parties' information form, and they understood this information would be made available to the Trust's external auditors on request.	
iii.	Minutes of the previous meetings and status of actions The minutes of the previous meeting held 14 July 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record of discussion. The Chair talked through the status of actions from the last meeting noting that these were completed.	
iv.	Trustee reappointments Further to recommendation by the board at the last meeting, the reappointments of Sian Mathias, Sarah Marshall, and Jill Newey had been endorsed by the Members (by Ordinary Resolution) for a subsequent four-year term of office.	

2. STRATEGY		ACTION
i.	Transfer of Swaffield Primary School The Chair moved to strategic matters, beginning with an update on the due diligence process for Swaffield Primary School. She recapped that Swaffield Primary was a two-form entry school in Wandsworth and approval was secured from the DfE for the school to join the Trust on 1 November 2025. The Chair reported that she and the Head of Governance had recently visited the school to meet with the Chair and the Head Teacher to discuss the plans to transition governance from the maintained model to the Trust's model of local governance. The Chair and Head of Governance were pleased to share that governance practice at Swaffield Primary seemed strong and was aligned with Trust values. Trustees were informed that the former deputy head teacher at Paxton Academy was currently in post as co-Head Teacher at Swaffield Primary; she was recognised for her longstanding contribution to the Trust.	

2. STRATEGY	ACTION
ii. 2025 pupil outcomes The co-CEOs gave a presentation on the 2025 pupil outcomes across the Trust. Data presented excluded the four schools that joined at the start of the academic year, whose results were shown for context but not included in overall averages. Trustees were pleased to learn that the Trust's schools continued to perform strongly across all statutory areas, with notable achievements in the Year 1 phonics screening and the Year 4 multiplication checks. The co-CEO (MS) pointed out that Chesterton Primary School (CPS), Ravenstone Primary School (RPS), and Paxton Academy (PAX) showed a consistent pattern of high performance, with RPS showing a significant improvement in comparison to the previous years. Trustees reviewed the Trust-wide performance in the Year 4 multiplication check, noting strong outcomes across schools, with an average score of 23 out of 25 compared to the national average of 20.6. Particular praise was given to PAX, which continued to lead in this area. It was noted that PAX was the highest-performing school in last year's multiplication check as well and continued to excel. A trustee specifically asked Q: What is Paxton doing to achieve such strong results in multiplication and how is practice being shared with our other schools? <i>R: (MS) no major differences in approach are identified compared to our other schools, however, the head teacher is confident that the quality of teaching in her school is particularly strong. The data reinforces the need for further development in maths teaching and pedagogy at THS and FPS.</i> Trustees commented on the shift in historical performance patterns across the Trust and noted that as schools within the Trust had improved year-on-year, outcomes were broadly in line with the consistent high performance at CPS. Trustees praised the impressive progress made by RPS. The co-CEO (MS) flagged the data at GPS and HPS, particularly in relation to maths outcomes and pupil cohorts. He highlighted GPS as needing targeted support in maths. Trustees were informed about the broader contextual challenges and were told that both GPS and HCP served significantly different pupil cohorts compared to the Trust's London schools, including a high proportion of white British pupils and a notable number of children with SEND. The co-CEO (MS) said that these demographic factors were recognised as contributing to the performance gaps. He emphasised the importance of maintaining high expectations and was clear in his view that success was achievable even in challenging contexts, referencing the Trust's track record in London schools. Trustees were assured that visits to GCP and HCP were planned to begin unpicking the specific issues and to deliver targeted support.	AA

2. STRATEGY	ACTION
Trustees were encouraged to learn that Swaffield Primary School (SPS), due to join the Trust later in the autumn term, had shown sound results and a positive trajectory following the school-to-school support already provided by the Trust. The co-CEO (CK) presented the comparative data for Chestnut Grove Academy (CGA) and Norbury High School for Girls (NHSG). Trustees were reminded that the cohort was in Year 6 at the time of the Pandemic and as a consequence, there would not be a Progress 8 score. The co-CEO (CK) explained that Chestnut Grove showed consistent, high attainment across all subjects, with strong English and maths outcomes and an Attainment 8 score of 55; NHSG presented more variability, with an Attainment 8 score of 46, and lower outcomes in Maths with only fifteen percent of entrants achieving grade 7 or above. From the data presented, trustees learned that both schools exceeded national EBacc entry averages, but outcomes at NHSG suggested there was scope to improve performance relative to cohort ability. The co-CEO (CK) flagged that the sixth form provision at NHSG was a key area of concern. He reported that student retention was low (approx. 26% of Year 11 students), and small class sizes and low outcomes meant that the curriculum offer was limited and there were associated financial pressures. It was agreed that deeper scrutiny of the NHSG budget was needed by the Finance and Resources Committee to better understand the viability of the school's sixth form provision. Trustees were pleased to hear about the strong performance of KS5 students at CGA, with five students securing places at Oxbridge, two students pursuing medicine, and many others gaining places to Russell Group universities. The co-CEO (CK) advised that BTEC subjects (e.g. health and social care, IT) had performed well, demonstrating that a range of appropriate pathways were in place to meet the needs of all learners. Trustees acknowledged the solid performance across Trust schools and commented on the Trust's ability to maintain consistency in meeting the needs of all learners. Trustees praised this as a key strength of the Trust and saw it as a scalable offer. The co-CEOs praised the continued collaboration among head teachers which had contributed to the positive trajectory of improved outcomes. The co-CEO (MS) believed that GPS and HPS would benefit quickly from the support offered by the Trust. The co-CEO (CK) gave a view that the school improvement strategy for NHSG required further development through a robust programme of self-evaluation.	

2. STRATEGY	ACTION
iii. Capacity and scaling for growth Ahead of the meeting, trustees had asked Q: What is the early thinking around expanding the secondary school improvement strategy? The Chair invited the co-CEO (CK) to share initial thoughts regarding the development of school improvement capacity for the secondary phase, and the way in which cross-school collaboration would be used to support this. At the meeting, trustees raised several thoughtful questions and reflections regarding school improvement planning and leadership capacity across the Trust. Q: How might we approach strengthening the working relationship with NHSG in order to optimise school improvement strategies? <i>R: (CK) the current NHSG school improvement plan would benefit from greater focus and clarity and a strengthened approach to self-evaluation. We will support this with the introduction of a new tracking tool adapted from our primary settings. We have planned a series of meetings to support leaders with refining priorities and aligning improvement planning with the needs of the school.</i> Q: Will staff from CGA be given the opportunity to learn from the areas of good practice which we know are happening at NHSG? <i>R: (CK) yes, once gaps are identified and relationships are built, reciprocal visits will take place. These will involve learning walks, work scrutiny, and departmental collaboration to share best practice.</i> A trustee probed further on areas for development in the newly joined schools. Q: How confident are we that there is sufficient leadership capacity in our new schools to deliver rapid and sustained improvement? <i>R: (MS) leadership capacity varies across. At KAPS, whilst support may currently be required to lead sustained improvement, the leadership team is engaged and responsive. Early signs of progress are emerging following recent targeted support.</i> Trustees acknowledged that engagement from staff was essential, especially in schools where transition processes were more challenging. The co-CEOs talked about the Trust Joint Professional Development day planned for November which would bring subject leaders from all schools together to share best practice, identify strengths and areas for development, and build relationships in subject areas. Trustees observed there were differences between each school's community and culture, for example, the all-girls environment at NHSG. A trustee was interested to understand how secondary expertise from the Trust would be shared. Q: With the appointment of a Head of School at Chestnut Grove Academy, will the co-CEO (CK) now lead improvements at the new secondary school? Is there a plan to build secondary school improvement infrastructure? <i>R: (CK) yes, I (CK) will have increased capacity to support the secondary improvement strategy. However, we are being cautious in our approach</i>	

2. STRATEGY	ACTION
<i>to growing the central education team; growth will be incremental and targeted according to need, similar to the way in which the primary school improvement offer was developed.</i> The co-CEOs were confident in their view there was a clear model and vision for the growth of the central team which aligned with a steady pace of expansion. They noted that with five new schools joining in quick succession, funding was now in place to begin scaling support according to need. A trustee sought further assurance regarding capacity within the business structure. Q: Are we confident in our capacity to effectively onboard the four schools whilst retaining a high-quality service to all of our schools? <i>R: (CK/MS) yes. Capacity is strengthened not only by resourcing the central team but also by the skills and expertise which comes to us as new schools join. For example, there is an experienced school business manager at GPS who is already contributing beyond the scope of their role.</i> Trustees were informed that the CFOO had resigned and would leave her post at the end of the autumn term. The co-CEOs said that recruitment was underway to appoint to separate roles: a Chief Financial Officer and a Chief Operating Officer. Trustees were assured that a contingency plan was in place should the recruitment programme be delayed, and timing of transition and handover had been carefully managed to mean no disruption to the external financial audit, due diligence processes and financial reporting. Trustees commended the strategic planning by the co-CEOs to ensure a smooth handover. The trustee linked to safeguarding raised a question about capacity in the Trust's safeguarding team following the onboarding of new schools. In response, the co-CEO (MS) said that the Trust's Designated Safeguarding & Inclusion Lead had already worked with the new schools to build relationships and enable strong safeguarding practices. Trustees agreed to revisit the topic of "capacity" at the next meeting and asked the co-CEOs to <u>(ACTION:) provide more granularity on pressure points and resourcing of growth.</u> Trustees were excited about the Trust's growth, and they acknowledged the importance of strategic workforce planning so that sustainable improvement could be delivered. iv. Five-year strategic plan: <i>Wandle 2030</i> Trustees received an update on the development and launch of <i>Wandle 2030</i>, the Trust's five-year strategic plan. The co-CEOs explained that the document was structured in two parts: an overview underpinned by a detailed action plan which was currently being refined with the central team to include first- and second-year priorities and key performance indicators (KPIs).	MS & CK

2. STRATEGY		ACTION
	Trustees were told that Wandle 2030 would be formally launched at the Trust's Joint Professional Day (TJPD) to be held at CGA in November, when 892 staff members were expected to attend. On behalf of the Board, the Chair requested that, given there was no board meeting scheduled before the TJPD, the co-CEOs (ACTION:) share with trustees the final version of Wandle 2030 in advance of the launch. The Head of Governance gave a reminder that a "mini" strategy catch-up with trustees was scheduled for the Friday (14 November) following the TJPD, where further discussion would take place.	MS & CK

3. COMMITTEE REPORTING		ACTION
	Governance & Nominations Committee Members of the board welcomed the report from the Head of Governance which updated on compliance areas and highlighted approvals from the Governance and Nominations Committee. i. Committee structure, membership, and appointment of committee chairs The Chair thanked those trustees who she had met with to talk about their intentions for the year ahead. She noted that link trustee roles were assigned and there were several changes to committee membership to make best use of trustees' skills and experience and to better distribute roles and responsibilities across the board. The Chair said that conversations were ongoing with some trustees to confirm their interests and commitments. She was pleased that new trustees joining the board would bring additional expertise and so roles might be adjusted accordingly during the year. Trustees acknowledged the significant expertise and commitment which was secured across the Trust Board. The Chair talked through the Governance Report and advised that the Governance & Nominations Committee had appointed local chairs on recommendation from their Academy Committees.	

3. COMMITTEE REPORTING		ACTION
ii.	2025 Self-evaluation of governance and development objectives Trustees briefly discussed the findings of the 2025 governance self-evaluation exercise which, overall, reflected a strong and compliant Trust Board. The Chair invited trustees to comment on the proposed objectives, which were informed by the feedback provided through the self-evaluation process. It was noted that the board's development objectives aimed to reflect the collective input of respondents. Appreciation was expressed to the Head of Governance for compiling the report and coordinating the self-evaluation process. The volume of governance-related reporting at this time of year was acknowledged.	
iii.	2025 Governance Diversity Monitoring The Governance & Nominations Committee had reviewed the findings from the annual governance diversity monitoring. The executive report was shared with the board and trustees noted the outcomes which demonstrated that the Trust's governance community continued to operate with greater diversity than national averages. Trustees were curious to understand the reason for the decline in survey participation in comparison to the previous year, and they discussed strategies which might improve future response rates to provide a more accurate representation. Concerns around anonymity were acknowledged alongside the importance of clear communication regarding the way in which action was taken by the board in response to the findings of the diversity monitoring. Information provided to the Governance & Nominations Committee showed that newer academy committees and recent appointees showed higher engagement and participation in governance activity overall. The board agreed that while completion of self-evaluation should not be mandatory, continued encouragement and two-way communication was key to engagement of local governance.	

4. SAFEGUARDING		ACTION
i.	Update from trustee linked to safeguarding The trustee linked to safeguarding gave a summary of the recent Governance Safeguarding Forum held on Monday 8 September. The Safeguarding Trustee reported that representatives from seven schools attended, including two local chairs, and she noted this as a positive step for engagement.	

4. SAFEGUARDING		ACTION
	Trustees were informed that the Trust's DS&IL had shared her strategic safeguarding priorities for 2025–26, and these had been well received by the local links. The Safeguarding Trustee believed that the Forum fostered a strong sense of collaboration for local governance. The Safeguarding Trustee asked the Head of Governance to <u>(ACTION:) share the PowerPoint from the Governance Safeguarding Forum which outlined the key safeguarding focus for the year ahead.</u> Trustees expressed continued confidence in safeguarding practices across the Trust, acknowledging the significant progress made in recent years ii. Governance training: the role of governance in Safeguarding and updates to Keeping Children Safe in Education Trustees were reminded of the upcoming online safeguarding training session, which would be led by the Trust's DS&IL on Thursday 18 September to outline the 2025 updates to KCSIE and to set out the Trust's responses to these changes. The Safeguarding Trustee emphasised that the training was mandatory for all those governing in the Trust, and those unable to attend the session should notify the Head of Governance and would be provided with a recording. Trustees were advised that the Trust DS&IL would follow-up with a post-training questionnaire and would contact individuals directly if any gaps in understanding were identified.	AA

5. POLICIES UPDATE		ACTION
i.	WLT Governance Charter with Committee Terms of Reference Trustees were informed that the Trust's Governance Charter had been revised and streamlined and now incorporated the Terms of Reference for the Local Academy Committees. The Head of Governance gave assurance that the terms of reference were cross-checked with the latest updates to the Academy Trust Handbook and the Academy Trust Governance Guide, ensuring alignment with current regulatory expectations. The Governance Charter and Terms of Reference were endorsed by the board as recommended by the Governance & Nominations Committee. The Head of Governance took an <u>ACTION: to publish the Governance Charter and alert key stakeholders.</u>	AA

5. POLICIES UPDATE		ACTION
ii. WLT Governance Code of Conduct	As recommended by the Governance & Nominations Committee, members of the board received the Governance Code of Conduct, which remained unchanged from the previous year. The Head of Governance took an <u>ACTION: to publish the Governance Code of Conduct and alert key stakeholders.</u>	AA
iii. WLT Conflict of Interest Policy	As recommended by the Governance & Nominations Committee, members of the board received the Conflict of Interests Policy, which remained unchanged from the previous year. The Head of Governance took an <u>ACTION: to publish the Conflict of Interest Policy and alert key stakeholders.</u>	AA

6. REPORTS TO NOTE		ACTION
i. WLT Handbook for Local Governance	The updated Handbook for Local Governance had been reviewed by the Governance & Nominations Committee and aimed to provide all essential information for academy committee members and those involved in local governance. Trustees were informed that the new Handbook reflected the “reimagined” model of local governance and also responded to issues raised by Academy Committees in their recent self-evaluations of governance. Trustees agreed the Handbook was a well-informed resource.	
ii. 2025/26 Governance Plan of Work	Trustees received and approved the annual plan of work. The Head of Governance explained that the Plan aligned with the committee terms of reference, and reflected the statutory requirements set out in the Academy Trust Handbook and the Academy Trust Governance Guide.	

6. REPORTS TO NOTE	ACTION
iii. Budget Forecast Return (BFR) In advance of the meeting, trustees were provided with a briefing on the BFR which had been signed by the Chair of Trustees and submitted to the DfE on 29 August 2025. The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee introduced the BFR and said the exercise illustrated the financial risks of not managing costs and pupil numbers effectively. She pointed out that several of the newly joined schools had submitted deficit budgets, despite having reserves, which raised concerns about sustainability and future financial pressures. The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee told trustees that financial action plans were being developed to address deficits in some of the Trust's schools, and it was possible that recovery strategies would need to span several years. The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee described the BFR as an academic and indicative exercise, not prescriptive, in that it crudely modelled the scale of changes needed to return to a balanced budget and did not dictate specific decisions, for example, staffing. Trustees raised questions to probe deeper. Q: What steps will be taken to bring deficit budgets under control, and how do these relate to school improvement strategies? <i>R: (MS) causes of deficits vary by school. For example, THS has already made significant savings, while schools which have just joined us have a history of using reserves to balance budgets. Budget reviews are ongoing, and monthly meetings between co-CEOs and the Head of Finance will monitor management accounts closely. We are continually exploring sharing of resources and staff redeployment across schools to improve flexibility and efficiency.</i> The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee reiterated that the BFR was an exercise which showed the scale of financial changes which would be needed to achieve balanced budgets in the outer years and was not reflective of actual decisions about staffing or curriculum adjustments; the modelling would not disrupt school improvement programmes. A trustee commented that it was important to understand where financial decisions supported improvement and where others hindered progress towards school improvement goals, especially when schools were under pressure to achieve rapid improvement. Trustees agreed that the relationship between financial decisions and educational outcomes was complex and must be carefully managed. A trustee was interested to understand how head teachers were consulted on designing and implementing financial recovery. Q: What role do headteachers play in implementing budget recovery plans? <i>R: (MS) our head teachers take an essential role in identifying areas where savings can be made in their schools.</i>	

6. REPORTS TO NOTE		ACTION
	<i>The Trust provides oversight and strategic support, especially in schools where deficit budgets have been permitted by the board.</i> Several trustees sought assurance regarding communications to new head teachers regarding management of reserves. Q: What arrangements are in place with new schools with regards to retention of reserves post-transfer? Has the Trust's Reserves Policy been clearly communicated and understood? <i>R: (SMar) we have a Reserves Policy in place. Requests to spend reserves must be brought to the Finance and Resources Committee, along with any plans to bring budgets back in line. (MS) operational decisions are made centrally in collaboration with head teachers.</i> Trustees talked about the potential risk of a negative perception when schools joined the Trust and experienced financial changes, for example, management of reserves. The co-CEOs recognised that concerns could arise regarding reserves management, however, they clarified that immediate budget adjustments were not enforced when a school joined the Trust. The co-CEOs confirmed that financial responsibility remained with head teachers for their schools, and support or intervention was only provided if a school was unable to set a balanced budget. Assurance was given that, in response to those challenges previously identified, systems and procedures would continue to be strengthened to ensure greater transparency and targeted financial support. Trustees agreed that each school should determine the provision required to meet the specific needs of their pupils and their communities; financial planning must be sensitive to these differences and not driven solely by cost savings.	
7. OTHER BUSINESS		ACTION
i.	Little Wandle The Head of Governance was asked to <u>(ACTION:) convene a meeting of the Little Wandle Committee in the first week of October.</u> The Chair updated that the co-CEO (MS) had undertaken significant work over the summer to support the next phase of the Little Wandle project, including operational planning and structural considerations. Trustees were informed that a consultant had worked with the co-CEO (MS) and the co-founder of the project, and the output of this work would be shared at the meeting of the Little Wandle Committee. Trustees would be asked to review proposals and consider how best to support the project's development and long-term sustainability.	

7. OTHER BUSINESS		ACTION
ii.	Trustee visits to new schools Trustees were keen to visit schools within the Trust, particularly those they had not yet had the opportunity to see and gain a fuller understanding of their contexts. It was suggested that the co-CEOs <u>(ACTION:) arrange a programme of trustee visits to newly joined schools during the coming academic year.</u>	MS & CK

8. PART II		ACTION
	Trustee recruitment and appointments See separate confidential minute.	

Dates of next meetings	Finance & Resources	6:00pm Wednesday 17 September
	Audit & Risk	8:30am Tuesday 30 September (TEAMS)
	Chairs' Group	6:00pm Wednesday 15 October

Summary of Actions: TRUST BOARD MEETING 11/09/25

[Board action tracker](#)