

MEETING OF THE TRUST BOARD

**Monday 14 July 2025
6:00pm – 7:30pm**

HOSTED BY CHESTNUT GROVE ACADEMY

PART I MINUTES

Attendance:		
Trustees:	Sian Mathias	Chair of Trustees
	Kate Burns <i>(joined remotely)</i>	Trustee
	Jehangir Byramji	Trustee
	Charles Hotham	Trustee
	Jill Newey <i>(joined remotely)</i>	Co-Vice Chair
	Courtenay Norbury	Trustee
	Ella Norden	Trustee
	Sarah Marshall	Co-Vice Chair
	Emma Simmons <i>(joined remotely)</i>	Trustee
	David Watson	Trustee
Executives:	Christian Kingsley	Co-CEO (Co-Chief Executive Officer) and Accounting Officer
	Mark Siswick	Co-CEO (Co-Chief Executive Officer)
	Esther Johnson	CFOO (Chief Financial Operating Officer)
Also in attendance:	Andrea Arbiter	Head of Governance
	Alan Chambers	Observer, prospective trustee
	Rajbir Hazelwood	Observer, prospective trustee
Apologies:	Courtenay Norbury	
	David Watson	
	Mark Siswick	

Papers issued for review:

Minutes of previous meetings and status of actions

Co-CEOs' report to the board including:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2025/26 WLT Safeguarding Policy WLT Safeguarding Bulletins (SU25) – Presentation on Inclusion strategy – Wandle 2030 – Five-year Strategic Plan – 2025/26 Final Budgets – Trustee reappointment statements – Chair / Vice Chairs nomination statements – Letter to Accounting Officers (Jun25) – Academy Trust Handbook with 2025 updates – Academy Trust Governance Guide with 2025 updates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2024/25 Board Development Plan – Jul25 – 2025 governance self-evaluation tools – Governance Allowances Policy – Health & Safety Policy – Complaints Procedure – Board Committee Dashboard – SU25 – Local Governance Dashboard – SU25 – Governance links and committee summaries – Summary of the Reimagined Local Governance model |
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1. BUSINESS		ACTION
i.	Welcome and apologies. Trustees and executives were welcomed to the meeting. Apologies were received in advance and accepted as outlined above. With prior agreement from the Chair, several trustees attended the meeting via video conference as outlined above. The Chair introduced the meeting, welcoming prospective trustees Rajbir Hazelwood and Alan Chambers. She explained the process of their potential appointment and initiated introductions from those who were in attendance.	
ii.	Conflicts of interest for the meeting 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 raised specifically in relation to the meeting. It was noted that Alan Chambers, observing the meeting as a prospective trustee, was currently the Chair of The Manor Trust whose schools were scheduled to transfer to WLT on 1 August 2025.	

1. BUSINESS		ACTION
iii.	Minutes of the previous meetings and status of actions The minutes of the previous meeting held 24 March 2025 were confirmed as an accurate reflection of discussion. The Chair talked through the status of actions from the last meeting noting that these were completed, including circulating the budget for Fircroft Primary School, safeguarding updates, and preparing an overview of the Reimagined Local Governance model which would be implemented from September 2025.	
iv.	Trustee reappointments and resignations On behalf of the Board, the Chair expressed gratitude to Ella Norden for her six years of service as a trustee, highlighting her contributions to the Stakeholder Link Trustee role. Statements for reappointments of Sian Mathias, Sarah Marshall, and Jill Newey had been shared in advance. The Board considered these and made a recommendation to the Members that these trustees be reappointed by Ordinary Resolution for subsequent four-year terms of office from September 2025.	
v.	Appointment of the Chair and co-Vice Chairs Nomination statements for the roles of Chair and co-Vice Chairs were shared in advance in which the incumbent post-holders reflected on the previous year and set out their vision for 2025/26 and the longer-term. Nominees offered to leave the meeting to enable discussion to take place, but this was deemed unnecessary as there were no other candidates for these roles. Trustees were unanimous in confirming Sian Mathias as Chair and Sarah Marshall and Jill Newey as co-Vice Chairs for the academic year 2025/26.	

2. TRANSFER OF GROVELANDS & HELLINGLY COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOLS		ACTION
	On behalf of the Board, the Chair praised the quality of information which was provided by the Executive in the due diligence report. Trustees had received this report in advance to help inform decision making with regards to the transfer of Grovelands (GCPS) and Hellingly Community Primary Schools (HCPS) on 1 September 2025. The co-CEOs were pleased to announce that GCPS was recently inspected by Ofsted confirming it as a good school. Trustees discussed the findings of the due diligence procedure, in particular, financial details and the condition of the school buildings.	

2. TRANSFER OF GROVELANDS & HELLINGLY COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOLS	ACTION
A trustee raised questions about the funding calculations for the schools, particularly the differences in maintained schools' financial year (April to March) and that of academies (September to August). The CFOO explained that the exact amount of GAG (General Annual Grant) funding would not be known until after the schools joined the Trust, and they would work with the schools to extend and align their budgets with the Trust's financial year. A trustee noted that GCPS was currently operating with a significant surplus which implied that any variance to budget would need to be materially substantial for the surplus to be affected. Trustees agreed there was a general sense of confidence regarding financial stability. A trustee expressed concerns about the lack of information provided with regards to the condition of the school buildings, particularly the older building at HCPS. When asked by a trustee, the CFOO confirmed that no independent surveys had been commissioned by the Trust to date, however, East Sussex County Council was expected to conduct a programme of surveys across schools in 2025, but the specific timeline remained unknown. The CFOO said there was uncertainty as to whether the local authority would proceed with the surveys once the schools joined the Trust and whether it would impose a fee for access to the results of a survey. The CFOO explained that should the local authority not provide the survey data or impose a fee, the Trust planned to commission its own comprehensive building survey post-transfer. She said this approach mirrored that taken with Fircroft Primary School and Thompson House School, where risks were accepted and monitored post-transfer. A trustee was concerned that the current approach opened the Trust to risk, and she sought assurance with regards mitigating action. Q: Given that our due diligence often lacks information related to the condition of buildings and, therefore, we are increasing our risk, is it our intention to commission and carry out buildings surveys before making decisions on the other schools which plan to join in the next 6-12 months? <i>R: (EJ/MS) we are in the process of discussing this as an option. It may depend on affordability and timing. The current approach is to conduct surveys post-transfer if necessary.</i> The co-CEO (MS) highlighted that HCPS would likely be a higher priority for capital investment due to the age of the main building (approx. 100 years old) and the presence of long-standing portacabins, and he noted that some investment had already been made in the hall and internal decoration. He said that, conversely, GCPS was housed in a modern, well-maintained building with spacious grounds which was considered to be in good condition and not a high priority for immediate investment.	

2. TRANSFER OF GROVELANDS & HELLINGLY COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOLS	ACTION
Trustees were reminded that the Trust would become eligible for capital funding through the Schools Conditions Allocation (SCA) in 2026/27 and spending would be prioritised based on a comprehensive review of the Trust's entire estate to address the most critical building challenges across all schools. A trustee pointed out that as a maintained federation, the schools currently shared a single governing body, and she sought clarification on the governance structure post-transition. The Head of Governance confirmed that, post-transfer to WLT, the schools would retain a single Local Academy Committee to govern both schools in the short-to-mid-term. A trustee followed on with a question about the leadership model at GCPS and HCPS post-transfer to the Trust. Q: Do we plan to retain an Executive Headteacher leadership model post-transfer and, if so, how would this support the longer-term strategy? <i>R: (MS) yes, we would retain the current leadership model of Executive Headteacher as part of the integration for HCPS and GCPS. This aligns with our vision of developing an East Sussex Hub.</i> The co-CEOs talked about the Executive Headteacher who was in post, and they expressed a confidence in his strong experience and background in working with London local authorities. The Chair highlighted the Executive Headteacher's longstanding professional relationships with executive leaders in the Trust and said he was well-regarded by other schools in the area. Trustees agreed that the due diligence reports for both schools indicated a straightforward transfer and onboarding process. The Chair noted that both schools were performing well and had existing relationships with the Trust, and the Governing Body of the incumbent Rampion Federation had formally approved the decision to join. Trustees concluded discussion with unanimous support for GCPS and HCPS to transfer to WLT on 1 September 2025.	

3. STRATEGY: CO-CEOS' REPORT TO THE BOARD	ACTION
Trustees used the information provided in the co-CEOs' report to frame their questions and focus strategic discussion.	

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i. Wandle 2030: five-year strategic plan The Trust's Five-Year Strategic Plan – Wandle 2030 – remained in draft and was on track for completion early in the autumn term. The co-CEOs presented the plan and emphasised the vision of achieving the best possible outcomes for all children and staff in the Trust. They were confident that the plan would accommodate organisational growth for up to twenty schools by 2030. Trustees were reminded that Wandle 2030 was constructed with four pillars: people, curriculum, school improvement, and capacity. Trustees understood that <i>Inclusion</i> was woven throughout as a guiding principle, to ensure it was at the heart of the Trust's core vision, culture, and ethos. The co-CEO (CK) highlighted the work done in collaboration with ImpactEd on the Inclusion Strategy. He explained that next steps would involve sharing the plan with the central team and school leaders, to build action plans for each year of the strategy. Trustees were assured that stakeholders would be informed, starting with a launch for staff at the Trust Development Day in November. When asked by the co-CEOs, trustees provided feedback and were clear about the need to prioritise strategic objectives and to ensure capacity to manage delivery of these. Trustees discussed the importance of maintaining a local culture and preserving each school's unique characteristics while centralising certain operational functions to deliver and realise the efficiencies of a multi-academy trust.	
ii. 2025/26 Final Budgets The CFOO and the Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee explained the rigorous approach which had been taken to setting the budgets for 2025/26, highlighting that a Budget Scrutiny Workshop had been held in early June to review the draft budgets in detail. Trustees were informed that three of the primary schools were still forecasting deficit positions, primarily due to falling pupil numbers. The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee shared that action plans were in development to address these deficits and would focus on cost-reduction strategies and look for ways to generate additional income. She was confident that the finance team would work with headteachers to implement these plans over the next twelve months to aid financial recovery. The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee signposted trustees to the planned deficit budget for Wandle Learning Partnership to utilise its large brought forward surplus. She said this was a strategic intention by the Committee and there were no concerns regarding financial viability.	

3. STRATEGY: CO-CEOS' REPORT TO THE BOARD	ACTION
The CFOO explained that with four new schools joining before the start of the new academic year, the budgets would change significantly, and revisions would be required. She committed to (ACTION:) circulate revised budgets to trustees by email during the autumn term for approval. iii. Other matters raised from the co-CEOs' report a) Transfer of Norbury High School and Kensington Avenue Primary School The Chair provided an update for all trustees on the transfer arrangements for Norbury High School (NHS) and Kensington Avenue Primary School (KAPS), confirming that the paperwork had been signed and last-minute issues raised by the unions had been addressed. The Chair gave further details that misunderstandings and confusion, particularly around union relations, had caused some delays to transfer arrangements, however, there had been considerable efforts made by all parties to address concerns and provide assurances for staff. The Chair of Trustees said that despite the challenges, she was optimistic about the integration of NHS and KAPS and she hoped that in joining WLT, there would be stability and opportunities for strong and impactful collaboration. b) 2025 Primary Outcomes (Headlines) and recent Ofsted inspections The co-CEO (MS) advised that the 2025 primary performance data was released in the week prior and would be circulated post-meeting for information. He was pleased to announce that early headlines indicated exceptionally strong results across the Trust with all schools showing an improvement compared to the previous year. The co-CEO (MS) spoke about recent Ofsted Inspections which had taken place in several of those schools in the pipeline to join the Trust during 2025/26, all with positive outcomes. He was delighted to announce that Thomson House School was rated Outstanding by Ofsted earlier in the term which meant that all schools in the Trust were now rated <i>Good</i> or better and were out of the Ofsted inspection window. The co-CEOs were confident that the Trust was well-positioned to support effective and collaborative school improvement programmes. They informed trustees about ongoing discussions with four to five additional schools but caveated that these were at an early stage and not yet formalised. Trustees understood there would be a natural pause in growth following the current wave of transfers. The co-CEOs talked about the longer-term strategy for growth and said this was in line with Wandle 2030 and included a target ratio of one secondary school for every four primaries, continued interest in expanding within Sussex, and exploring opportunities with secondary schools.	EJ

3. STRATEGY: CO-CEOS' REPORT TO THE BOARD		ACTION
c)	Little Wandle update Taken under Part II	

4. REPORTS FOR DISCUSSION		ACTION
	Committee and link role reporting (including Local Academy Committees) Updates from Trust board committees and Local Academy Committees (LACs) were included in the governance reporting section of the co-CEOs' report. A summary of the dashboards was provided, offering assurance that all key areas were addressed and delegated responsibilities were being fulfilled. Trustees welcomed the committee summary reporting. The Head of Governance expected that the reporting structure would continue to improve next year with the implementation of the new "Reimagined" local governance model which would align reporting more closely with local priorities and would simplify reporting for the LACs. The Head of Governance referred to the summary of changes to the local governance model and she emphasised these were not intended to disempower Academy Committees but rather would ensure they focussed on the areas which were most relevant for them in their local context. She hoped that the rationised structure should make it easier for LACs to provide meaningful feedback, particularly on ethos and culture in their schools and in providing insights into stakeholder experience of school improvement. A trustee wanted to better understand the role of the LACs in school improvement. Q: Under the new model, what is the role of the LAC with regards to holding their headteacher to account for the quality of education? <i>R: (AA) LACs will routinely receive the School Improvement Plan and a termly Headteacher's Report and will use these key documents to monitor progress against school improvement priorities, and to inform their link role work. The headteachers will be guided by the co-CEOs on school improvement strategy, it is the LACs' role to monitor delivery of this.</i> The Chair commented that the volume and quality of commentary suggested that link roles and committees were functioning effectively as a cohesive single governance community.	

5. SAFEGUARDING		ACTION
i.	Trustees were provided with several strands of information which assured them that safeguarding arrangements in the Trust were effective. The trustee linked to Safeguarding assured the Board that through her conversations with the Trust's Designated Safeguarding & Inclusion Lead (DSIL) she believed that the Trust's safeguarding oversight remained strong. The Safeguarding Trustee reported that the DSIL had conducted detailed internal safeguarding audits across all schools. The Safeguarding Trustee commended this approach for its rigour which had included this year the practical testing of filtering and monitoring systems in schools. Trustees were informed that action plans were developed for each school and had been shared with Local Academy Committees (LACs). A question was raised regarding the Trust DSIL's capacity to manage safeguarding across a growing organisation. The co-CEOs confirmed that current arrangements were sufficient and were supported by line management from the Director of Primary Education. The co-CEOs said that additional support would be considered if needed in the future. The Board expressed confidence in the Trust's safeguarding arrangements and acknowledged the positive impact of the DSIL's leadership in this area.	
ii.	WLT Safeguarding Policy Trustees reviewed the Trust Safeguarding Policy, which was shared in advance of the meeting. The trustee linked to safeguarding advised that the policy included minor updates. Trustees noted that the updated <i>Keeping Children Safe in Education</i> guidance had only just been released by the DfE and so the safeguarding link meeting which was originally scheduled for the previous week had been rescheduled for early September. The Safeguarding Policy was approved with no further updates, with the understanding that the personalised versions for each school would be shared and adopted by the Academy Committees in September.	

6. POLICIES UPDATE		ACTION
i.	WLT Governance Allowances Policy The Finance & Resources Committee had reviewed the Governance Allowances Policy in detail and recommended it for ratification by the Board. The Board approved and adopted the policy without further amendments. The Head of Governance took an <u>ACTION to arrange for the approved version of the policy to be circulated to relevant stakeholders.</u>	AA

6. POLICIES UPDATE		ACTION
ii. WLT Health & Safety Policy	The Finance & Resources Committee had reviewed the Health & Safety Policy in detail and recommended it for ratification by the Board. The Board approved and adopted the policy without further amendments. The Head of Governance took an <u>ACTION to arrange for the approved version of the policy to be circulated to relevant stakeholders.</u>	AA
iii. WLT Complaints Procedure	The Board was asked to review the Complaints Procedure. The Head of Governance signposted trustees to the updates which were an acknowledgement that the Department for Education had replaced the Education Skills Funding Agency as the responsible body for complaints against schools and trusts. The Chair noted that the annual complaints report had been reviewed by the Standards Committee at its meeting held 23/06/25. The Chair commended the continued improvement in the professional management of complaints across the Trust and thanked the Head of Governance for her work on this. The Chair highlighted the effectiveness of the Trust-wide approach to complaints investigations and panels which was coordinated by the Head of Governance. She pointed out this approach enabled trustees and local academy members with relevant knowledge and experience, such as in SEND, to participate in hearings which meant that the experience for families was enhanced, and their voices were represented. The Board approved and adopted the Complaints Procedure without further amendments. The Head of Governance took an <u>ACTION to arrange for the approved version of the policy to be circulated to key stakeholders.</u>	

7. REPORTS TO NOTE		ACTION
i. Progress against 2024/25 Board Development Plan	Trustees were pleased to note that all objectives detailed on the Board's development plan were delivered within the given timeframe.	All
ii. 2025 Self-evaluation of governance exercise	Trustees were reminded to <u>(ACTION:) complete the NGA's 21 Questions and 360 review of the Chairs' performance</u> as part of the annual governance self-evaluation, as referenced in the co-CEOs' report, by Friday 18 July.	

7. REPORTS TO NOTE	ACTION
Additionally, trustees were asked to complete the governance diversity monitoring evaluation which was an important part of the Trust's commitment to inclusive governance. The Head of Governance said she would <u>(ACTION:) summarise the findings of the trust-wide self-evaluation of governance and share at the next meeting.</u> iii. Statutory updates a) Letter to Accounting Officers and Academy Trust Handbook The Board was informed of recent updates to the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH), as outlined in a letter to Accounting Officers from the Director of the DfE's Financial & Funding Oversight. Trustees were told that these changes would take effect from 1 September 2025. Trustees were advised of the following key updates: - Executive pay – clarified expectations around the process for determining executive remuneration. - Digital & Technology Standards – Trusts are expected to work towards meeting six core standards by 2030. - Oversight and intervention – new guidance on the Department for Education's oversight, support, and intervention processes. - Recovery of funds – the DfE may recover funds where irregularity or fraud is identified. - Supplementary guidance – additional links provided to guidance on estates management, procurement, and sustainability. Trustees were encouraged to review the full list of changes in the "What's Changed" section of the updated handbook. b) Academy Trust Governance Guide Trustees were informed of recent updates to the Academy Trust Governance Guide (ATGG). Key changes included: - Financial Accountability – updated sources of financial data and tools for trust boards. - Complaints – clarified guidance on complaints made to the DfE and Ofsted, including qualifying criteria.	AA

7. REPORTS TO NOTE	ACTION
- Funding references – removal of outdated grants and updates to current funding streams. - Pupil Wellbeing – new guidance on nutrition and links to school food standards. - Medical conditions – clarification of the Board's responsibilities in supporting pupils with medical needs. Trustees were encouraged to read the full list of changes available in the “What’s Changed” section of the updated Guide. The Head of Governance advised she would be working with the Central Team to interpret the updates and ensure that relevant policies, procedures, and governance terms of reference were updated accordingly. c) Children’s Wellbeing and School Bill As an action to the previous meeting, trustees received a briefing on the Children’s Wellbeing & Schools Bill 2025, which aimed to raise educational standards, strengthen safeguarding, and improve outcomes for all children, particularly the most vulnerable. Key measures introduced by the Bill included: - Mandatory free breakfast clubs in all primary schools in England - Restrictions on branded school uniform items to reduce costs for families - New duties for local authorities and schools to register and monitor children not in formal education - Strengthened multi-agency child protection teams and enhanced Ofsted oversight of unregistered settings Specific implications for academy trusts were highlighted for trustees. These were: - Extension of National Curriculum expectations to academies - New powers for local authorities regarding admissions and place planning - Removal of the automatic requirement to issue Academy Orders for schools causing concern - Alignment of academy teacher pay and conditions with national frameworks	

7. REPORTS TO NOTE		ACTION
	The Chair noted that while the Children's Wellbeing & Schools Bill had raised concerns across the academy sector, particularly regarding perceived reductions in autonomy for multi-academy trusts, the specific changes were unlikely to have a significant impact on the Trust. She pointed out that the areas of concern, such as deviations from the national curriculum and differentiated pay arrangements, did not apply to the Trust's current practices. The Head of Governance committed to work with the Central Team to assess the impact of these changes and incorporate necessary updates into the Scheme of Delegation and governance terms of reference, for review by the Nominations Committee in September and subsequent approval by the Trust Board.	

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & CLOSING		ACTION
	The Chair took the opportunity to thank everyone for their continued commitment to the Trust over the past year, and she particularly thanked the co-CEOs for their contributions. The Chair closed the meeting by wishing everyone a welcomed summer break.	

Dates of next meetings	Nominations Committee	3:00pm Thursday 4 September
	Trust Board	6:00pm Thursday 11 September
	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 14/07/25

Action No	Item No	Action	Responsible	Timescale
1.	3.ii	2025/26 Final Budgets circulate revised budgets to trustees by email during the autumn term for approval	EJ	September 2025
2.	6.i	WLT Governance Allowances Policy arrange for the approved version of the policy to be circulated to relevant stakeholders	AA	Priority
3.	6.ii	WLT Health & Safety Policy arrange for the approved version of the policy to be circulated to relevant stakeholders	AA	Priority
4.	6.iii	WLT Complaints Procedure arrange for the approved version of the policy to be circulated to key stakeholders	AA	Priority
5.	7.ii	2025 Self-evaluation of governance exercise complete the NGA's 21 Questions and 360 review of the Chairs' performance	All	Priority
6.	7.ii	2025 Self-evaluation of governance exercise summarise the findings of the trust-wide self-evaluation of governance and share at the next meeting	AA	September 2025