

**Minutes of the Board of Trustees' meeting**  
**Wednesday 25 March 2026**  
**Held at Hills Road Sixth Form College**

**Present:**

Jane Sterling (Chair)  
Bruno Cotta  
Oliver de Groot  
Paula Heaney  
Anthony Omo  
Jonathan Russell  
Sarah Seed  
Jo Trump (CEO/Principal)  
Richard Westcott

**In attendance:**

Rachel Hooper (Chief Operating Officer)  
Ali Kirkman (Assistant Principal)  
Tim Lomas (Assistant Principal)  
Stuart Tinsley (Chief Financial Officer)  
Linda Watkins (Governance Professional)  
Katie Paton (Staff Observer)  
Matthew Smalley (Staff Observer)  
Alisiah Crawford (Student Observer)  
Jasmine Tsai (Student Observer)  
Vicky Williamson (Director of SEND) item 3  
Gill Sunderland (Adult Education Manager) item 4

**1. Apologies for absence**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Adrian Clark, Carrie Anne Philbin and Kevin Taylor.

**2. Declarations of interests**

There were no new declarations of interest.

**3. SEND update**

The Chair welcomed the Director of SEND commending her informative report. Key points included the strong focus on inclusive practice embedded in the classroom which reduced the need for additional support. 25.4% of students have a SEND diagnosis with individual differing needs. The value-added gap between SEND students had been narrowing. Numbers of High-Needs students have increased, with offers made to 23 young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) made for September with a brief explanation of funding provided. Legislative changes could impact on funding in the future.

There were questions from Trustees including how EHCP students are supported to apply for work experience along with the proportion of take-up and employer support. It was challenging to track a detailed analysis of cohorts undertaking work experience.

**Action**

Reasons for the increase in SEND students were requested; student needs are identified from screening at enrolment. The Year 12 and year 13 variation in SEND was explained as illustrative of some young people having been identified with SEND by the College, but the degree of support needed by students with a SEND diagnosis is broad. Reasons for diagnosis in sixth form included that some high achieving young people who cope easily with GCSE demands can sometimes mask learning difficulties which are only subsequently exposed whilst studying A Levels.

The positive impact of the Director of SEND who provided support and strategic direction to tutors was acknowledged with appreciation recorded.

#### **4. Adult Education report**

The Adult Education Manager presented the progress that has been made in rebuilding adult education and counselling programmes. An online booking system was introduced last year. 2024/25 income had been below the ambitious recovery targets set with comparative enrolment data in counselling, arts, business and ESOL courses provided. Digital advertising had increased enrolments with good progression to Level 3 counselling courses. Retention rates were high. It was anticipated that the budget would be achieved this year in the final year of the challenging budget set. Adult education student survey feedback was positive, acknowledging the high quality of tutors. Areas for improvement were being addressed; some related to ceramics equipment and parking which are more difficult to address. Future plans and course developments were outlined. A Trustee enquired if language courses could be delivered as online provision; however, most learners who choose HRSFC courses are because they enjoy social interaction. Accessibility concerns were raised which generally related to parking issues. There is a competitive local market for adult education.

The Board thanked the Adult Education Manager for her work to reinvigorate the provision.

#### **5. Minutes of the last meeting held on 4 February 2026**

The Board approved the minutes as a true and accurate record. Matters arising would be covered on the agenda.

#### **6. Chair of the Trust's report**

The Chair reported that she had signed off some large amounts for budgeted exam entries. The Nominations and Governance Committee had met to consider the Board's composition and current skills representation from Trustees balanced with discussion about potential Trustees. The Committee had agreed that a Chartered Accountant should be sought to join the Board with an

invitation to Trustees to make suggestions; these would be subject to a robust recruitment process. Members would seek to increase the Board with two additional Trustees.

## **7. Principal/CEO's report**

The Principal highlighted key aspects from her written report notably the Keeping Children Safe in Education consultation, and the Schools' White Paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving' with a consultation alongside the SEND reform. A post-16 funding increase of 0.5% has been announced for next year compared to at least 3% inflation; national pay negotiations for the sector are unknown. These would be reflected in the draft budget for 2026/27 to be presented at the next Board meeting.

A Trustee referred to the admissions policy and asked if this would be amended to reduce the geographical area for students to live in Cambridge city or if there would be alternative approaches taking account of the 14% increase in applications for September. Approximately 75% of places are made to Cambridge Area Partnership school applicants, with the remaining 25% going to a combination of independent and state school student, depending on the combination of subjects requested and mileage limits. Discretionary offers beyond mileage limits are also made to learners experiencing disadvantage. CST are reviewing the admissions policy, which would determine the College's strategy, for presentation at the next meeting.

The peer review was a positive experience; however, none of the reviewers had undergone Ofsted inspections under the new framework. The first V Levels have been announced for 2028/29 delivery which, if offered at Hills Road, would require changes to the curriculum offer. The College has a stable course delivery offer of A levels with no current plans to include vocational courses.

A Trustee asked if there were any areas for concern identified from mock exams. The results showed more lower-end grades this year than last at this point. Reasons were thought to include some more rigorous mock exams this year to reflect exam papers more closely (often using past papers). Department Development Plans (DDPs) have identified strategies to ensure consistency in grades looking at some previously overinflated predictions in some subjects.

The impact on anxiety was raised in relation to students receiving U grades at this stage, with reassurance that support had been provided with some young people signposted to additional support. There was discussion about the EPQ submission date and impact on some young people to balance this with their coursework and revision.

IPRY

**8. QIP**

The Vice Principal had prepared the report highlighting the positive progress in the two focused areas of oracy and relationships. A new assessment tracker would be rolled out to students next academic year to enable them to track their assessment, deadlines and progress for their individual course combination. Student pinch points have been identified for tutors to support students.

The external peer review provided constructive feedback which had been shared with Heads of Departments. There were no major courses identified as a concern. The peer review report will be brought to the next meeting.

IPRY

It was encouraging that attainment gaps are closing; with the exception where gender gaps are skewed in specific subjects, such as Maths, which was a national trend. There were no equivalent gender attainment gaps in Computer Science even though females are in the minority and in Economics, females performed better than males.

Analytical progress based on targets was requested where possible in future updates of QIP as opposed to narrative progress.

IPRY

**9. Monthly finance report period 6**

The CFO presented the latest finance report in a revised format drawing Trustees' attention to key points.

Forecasted changes between the management accounts and budget provided crucial narrative for CST. Data metrics have been added which was aligned to academy trust requirements as opposed to the post-16 sector. This included student number growth which would impact on budget planning. Cost centres identified key risk areas including the deficit in catering. A Trustee asked if there were any trends and if catering had previously achieved breakeven; it had always operated at a deficit. Catering had been provided in-house for 2 years. Outsourcing would not create financial savings. CST had discussed the position and provided assurance that the deficit situation continues to be seen as acceptable in order to provide a service to students but that efficiencies would need to be found in the service from 26-27 and be incorporated in budget setting. Utilities forecast was comparable to last year at £274k which had been set lower in the budget. The contract is due for renewal in October. An energy consultant had been appointed to achieve a competitive price with indicative numbers predicting a saving.

There was a question to provide context to the full year group surplus forecast of £1m; this was largely driven by income generation of £189k above budget and is related to the new presentation of accounts, which deals with capital differently.

Staffing appointments had been deferred where possible to support financial control. Clarification was requested regarding the cashflow increase of only £0.5m despite the surplus. The deferred grants accounting method on the balance sheet would be resolved with the Trust's auditors in May 2026. This will be reported to the Board with an explanation.

STIN

In summary, there were changes to accounting processes following conversion from FE to an academy trust. There will be consistency, accuracy and stability in reporting going forward, enhanced by use of financial software and improved communication with budget holders and departments. There was another question about progress to prepare the draft budget noting that most departments had already returned draft budgets and staffing structures for consideration by CST. The DfE funding statement had been received for next year. A draft budget will be presented in May for approval by the Trust in July.

#### **10. Gender pay gap report**

The Board approved the gender pay gap report which provides a snapshot of staff on the payroll on 31 March of each year. This was an annual requirement which must also be published. Trustees acknowledged that this was a positive report asking whether a target should be set; an enquiry would be made to the SFCA to ascertain if there are any metrics nationally to benchmark against.

LK GOV

#### **11. Audit Finance and Risk Committee minutes of the meeting on 2 March 2026**

The Board noted the minutes of the AF&R Committee and approved the following documents recommended by the Committee:

- DfE School Resource Management Self-Assessment
- Health and Safety Policy

In discussion, Trustees recognised that the health and safety policy is an overarching policy; however, visibility of associated policies was requested which were available for staff on a SharePoint link. Details of policies would be reported to the AF&R Committee and Link Trustee periodically to provide additional assurance.

RHOO

A Trustee referred to the recent phishing test asking about subsequent action with assurance provided that staff had been reminded to remain vigilant regarding fraud and cybercrime.

#### **12. Link Trustees**

I. The link scheme for Trustees was adopted which linked Trustees to areas of the strategic plan as opposed to subject areas. Trustees were encouraged to record link visits on the spreadsheet on Governorhub with invitations to outline links

	at meetings. The risk working group had been established which had proposed Link Trustees ask questions related to risks identified in the risk register. In addition, Trustees were encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Ofsted framework. These points would be added to the link scheme.	JSTE/LK GOV
II.	Designated Trustee verbal updates (safeguarding, and digital and technology standards). Carrie Anne Philbin had met the Director of Digital Strategy to discuss implementation of the DfE digital and technology standards. A significant part of discussion focused on the use of AI with support to provide a briefing for Trustees. The two safeguarding trustees attend monthly meetings with the safeguarding team and recently discussed extra support for some students with increased stresses during exams this term.	LK GOV
III.	Link Trustees were encouraged to complete visits in the Summer term.	ALL

### 13. Governance report

The governance report covered the following items:

- I. The Board approved the governance procedures which had been issued in draft at the last meeting with comments from Trustees incorporated. These ensured effective governance and compliance with legal requirements and would be reviewed annually.
- II. The senior postholders' pay review and role of the Remuneration Committee draft (SFCA model) policy was presented inviting comments by email from Trustees before consultation with senior postholders. A change was proposed that the Board review pay as opposed to set pay in paragraph 1.2 was agreed.
- III. The CFO updated Trustees on the process to tender for auditors. Two firms were interviewed by a panel comprising the Chair of the AF&R Committee and two Members of the Trust. The panel would make a recommendation to the Members for appointment of the Trust's external auditors for the year ending 31 August 2026 on a 3+2-year contract. Appreciation was recorded to the Chair of the AF&R Committee and Members who were involved in the appointment process.
- IV. Beyond The Agenda survey results, summary and recommendations were noted. The purpose of the survey was to better understand and strengthen governance across multi-academy trusts, sixth forms and colleges. This was also presented to the Nominations and Governance Committee (comprising Trust Members) whose role was to ensure governance is effective in the Trust. It was concluded to note the survey but not take any further action currently following conversion to an academy trust and changes to the senior team when the Principal changes in August 2026.

**14. Any other business**

A Trustee praised everyone involved in the Spring concert at Hills Road suggesting that events are publicised to Trustees and Members in advance; events are published on the College's website which would also be circulated regularly.

LK GOV

**15. Date of next meetings:**

**Wednesday 13 May 2026 at 6.30pm**

Wednesday 1 July 2026 at 6.30pm

Signed as a true and accurate record:

Chair ..... Date .....