

Minutes of the Board of Trustees' meeting
Wednesday 4 February 2026
Held at Hills Road Sixth Form College

Present:

Jane Sterling (Chair)
Adrian Clarke
Bruno Cotta
Oliver de Groot
Paula Heaney
Carrie Anne Philbin
Jonathan Russell
Sarah Seed
Kevin Taylor
Jo Trump (CEO/Principal)
Richard Westcott

In attendance:

Rachel Hooper (Chief Operating Officer)
Ali Kirkman (Assistant Principal)
Tim Lomas (Assistant Principal)
Ian Pryer (Deputy 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)

1. Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Anthony Omo.

2. Declarations of interests

Bruno Cotta and Jonathan Russell declared interests as they both have children who are on the admission list for Hills Road Sixth Form College.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 December 2025

The Board approved the minutes as a true and accurate record. Matters arising would be covered on the agenda with the exception that monthly management accounts are available for Trustees to access on Governorhub.

4. Chair of the Trust's report

The Chair reminded Trustees that anyone wishing to join future meetings remotely should request this by 1.00pm on the day of the meeting. This deadline is required to avoid arranging IT support to be on site outside their scheduled hours.

The Chair confirmed that the process for appointing the new Principal/CEO had concluded. The panel had interviewed an

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excellent field of candidates agreeing to appoint Ali Kirkman who had accepted the role effective from 24th August 2026.

5. Principal/CEO's report

The Principal highlighted key aspects from her written report, particularly, the record number of applications, representing a 14% increase compared to 2025; this aligns with demographic growth projections. The College had received 70 Oxbridge offers, which were considered a healthy outcome. A Trustee enquired about potential implications regarding the significant increase in applications on the Admissions Policy, particularly the potential impact on disadvantaged applicants. The College is inclusive and this is reflected in the policy which had been revised this year to incorporate postcode data and public transport accessibility. Wherever possible, Pupil Premium (also known as Ever6) students were offered places under our discretionary applications process. The College also considered the geographical spread of applicants. It was agreed that the Admissions Policy would be reviewed further and brought to the March Board meeting, if possible. The Board discussed the option of establishing a working group to consider the longer-term admissions strategy.

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The Board discussed whether the College would be able to accommodate approximately 250 projected additional students with the current Strategic Plan. It was reported that the majority of this growth has already been absorbed in the first couple of years of the plan. Actual capacity would depend on course combinations selected by applicants and whether these could be accommodated within existing timetabling and staffing structures. A flavour of patterns by subject was requested noting that applications to STEM subjects continued to be buoyant, while there had been a noticeable decline in applications for Music, Drama and Modern Foreign Languages.

The recent SFCA Conference had reported that there was no further information available to date regarding post-16 capacity funding.

The COO had submitted the College's response to the Cambridge Local Plan consultation, highlighting that the plan made limited reference to education with no recognition of post-16 provision. Feedback on the College's submission was awaited. A meeting with the Cambridge Growth Company was scheduled during March.

6. Strategic plan measures monitoring

A report had been issued to Trustees summarising progress towards implementation of the strategic plan. The live

monitoring tool was shared showing a snapshot of progress during the first third of the year against the four pillars in the strategic plan.

In summary, progress of the Planet pillar was marginally behind with measures being allocated to additional staff to enable progress. A Trustee asked if the target for measuring emissions was overinflated. Defining and measuring success for scope 3 emissions remains challenging; this is being discussed internally to identify methods to progress.

Discussion about the possibility or probability that some objectives may not be achieved, or are no longer relevant, could be reflected when setting the next strategic plan.

A Trustee referred to the shortfall in fundraising of £50k against the target and if it was likely that this would be achieved; this was unlikely to be achieved. The Development Director is a new post; a fixed term post for a Development Coordinator will be recruited. The CFO interjected that despite this shortfall, the Trust is forecasting a small surplus for the year, with some areas performing above target.

Trustees commended the framework and tool but supported access to the live tool to review granular detail to provide further context; this would be particularly useful for Link Trustees.

7. Student summary headlines

The Deputy Principal presented the written report highlighting high attendance levels which are comparable to last year. Retention remains strong with fewer leavers than last year; there was a correlation between high attendance and retention. Year 12 autumn student survey feedback was extremely positive showing continued progress in key areas, notably teaching and learning, priorities of relationships, oracy and independent learning; this was an additional area with useful and positive feedback. Only a few students did English GCSE in November with no students entered for Maths.

Year 13 headlines and comparisons with the same point for 2025 leavers were provided by individual inclusion groups.

Disadvantaged students are making good progress but this is marginally lower than last year. A proportion of Asian non-Chinese students were not diagnosed with SEND needs when they join the College. A SEND White Paper is anticipated. All students are screened for support when they join the College with applicable support provided.

Teachers and tutors undertake inclusion training. Early intervention programmes are implemented for students.

A Trustee suggested adding numbers of students to the report and enquired if there were any causes for concern regarding inclusion groups. Actions vary for individuals. Tutor meetings focus on oracy and the importance of every student contributing to lessons. A peer review has been arranged in March 2026 which will focus on inclusion; this area is part of the Ofsted Inspection Framework.

Student observers confirmed that they feel inclusion is embedded throughout the College and that they actively contribute to inclusion in the College community.

The student observers felt that students approach surveys with enthusiasm; there are high response rates as staff oversee completion of surveys. The Deputy Principal explained that personalised software is used to ensure questions to students are targeted and pertinent to their programme of study.

8. Self Assessment Report (final version)

The Self Assessment Report was commended as an informative document. The SAR is sent to Ofsted and shared widely with visitors.

9. Safeguarding report

The Vice Principal and DSL outlined the report prepared by the Head of Year 12. This evidenced the College's commitment to safeguarding along with staff training, trends, and a summary of anonymized cases. The Artemis A tracking tool has proved invaluable to enable the College to provide individual support to students.

A Trustee referred to the upward trend of incidents asking how this compared in the region and nationally. The recording process had been revised which had increased the number of comments from staff, some of which are positive comments. The safeguarding team works closely with the Local Authority who provide trend data.

A Trustee asked about the outcome of the student who had received a fixed term exclusion with confirmation that they returned to College with support embedded.

There was discussion about online safety and e-safety which are reported in the annual report and would be included in future reports along with the Single Central Record (SCR), which is another safeguarding mechanism. The designated Safeguarding Trustees confirmed that they are briefed on issues every month

in term when they meet the safeguarding team, who are dedicated and committed.

10. Gatsby Benchmarks and progress

The Vice Principal and DSL explained that the Gatsby Benchmarks were introduced in 2014 and subsequently amended in 2025. Progress was presented with evidence.

There was discussion about work experience particularly whether part time work is encouraged; the student code of conduct recommends no more than 8 hours of paid work per week. Anecdotally some students choose to leave part time jobs or take a break in the lead up to their exams. Students whose progress is being monitored at 'stage 3' are asked about potential over-commitment to part time jobs. Students are asked to reflect on any skills they have gained from jobs which contribute to UCAS applications and future employment. Currently, approximately 50% of work experience is recorded.

A question followed about securing work experience placements which are challenging to arrange; these are frequently driven by students' and families' own contacts. Bursary students and young carers are signposted to work experience. A suggestion was made to approach alumni to offer support with work experience. A Head of Careers is being recruited who will oversee work experience.

A Trustee asked about destination and HESA data asking if these are the last points of tracking students; this was confirmed. Year 13 leavers and alumni will improve career destinations data in future.

11. Monthly finance report period 4

The CFO presented the latest finance report evidencing that the cashflow is to budget. Income and expenditure showed a surplus of £485k year to date compared to budget, with a year-end forecast of a surplus compared to the budget of £74k. This year £200k is anticipated for VAT recovery with c£60k currently recovered, this is in line with the budget.

The CFO will work with the external auditors following their appointment regarding treatment of deferred capital grants as rules for academies differ to sixth form colleges. This is currently an entry on the balance sheet but will change once the auditors have commenced their contract for the Trust in May 2026. There is a closing balance for the Corporation and an opening balance following conversion to an academy.

12. Governance report

- I. There was positive feedback from the DfE financial management and governance audit with three routine recommendations. This gives reassurance that the Corporation had sound systems embedded before its conversion. The Trust has responded to the DfE providing deadlines to address the actions. DfE requires academies to complete an annual school resource management self assessment which covers similar questions.
- II. The Chair updated Trustees on Link Trustees following email correspondence. Benchmarking on engagement will be established linking to strategic plan monitoring. Trustees were requested to submit visit reports on Governorhub.

Paula Heaney visited Music, Science, Economics and Languages (last year's areas assigned). Commonalities included emerging challenges around meetings, workshops and enrichment (particularly at lunchtime for Music students) with end of day online workshops introduced as an innovative way to address this. Analysis of data for DDPs helped departments to act on student performance. The streamlined DDP process was welcomed to target actions, particularly inclusion. There were some concerns about enrolment patterns moving away from non-STEM subjects. Economics had highlighted that there were some students without prior independent skills with no homework policy in their previous schools.

Jonathan Russell was previously linked to enrichment, which is a key part of the curriculum and ethos of the College enabling young people to transfer skills, develop leadership skills, provide relaxation and social opportunities. The enrichment programme is inclusive of all students although some students are less engaged and reluctant to participate, particularly if they are not given their first choice activity. A new system has been introduced for students to select five choices with 68% achieving their first choice. Auditions are held for the orchestra and choirs and trials for the sports teams. Parent Trustees commented that less confident students can sometimes be reluctant to participate in activities. Student Observers felt that students enjoy enrichment and rate it as an important part of the curriculum.

Carrie Anne Philbin attended the robotics competition, which was an enjoyable event.

III. Comments were invited by email regarding the draft governance procedures; these will be emailed to Trustees along with the previous byelaws. In response to a question, it was noted that Parent Trustees are appointed for 2 years with the caveat that their young person remains a student at the College.

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13. Any other business

Dates of meetings for 2026/27 would be circulated imminently.

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14. Date of next meetings: Wednesday 25 March 2026 at 6.30pm

Wednesday 13 May 2026 at 6.30pm

Wednesday 1 July 2026 at 6.30pm

Signed as a true and accurate record:

Chair Date