

Minutes of the Board of Trustees' meeting
Wednesday 10 December 2025
Held at Hills Road Sixth Form College

Present:

Jane Sterling (Chair)
Bruno Cotta
Paula Heaney
Anthony Omo
Carrie Anne Philbin
Jonathan Russell
Kevin Taylor
Jo Trump (CEO/Principal)
Richard Westcott

In attendance:

Rachel Hooper (Chief Operating Officer)
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)
Sarah Seed (observer)
Oliver deGroot (observer)

- 1. Appointment of Parent Trustees and formal welcome**
The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Sarah Seed and Oliver deGroot who were confirmed as Parent Trustees, subject to completion of satisfactory DBS checks.
- 2. Apologies for absence**
Adrian Clark (He had confirmed that he had reviewed the financial statements and had not identified any issues of concern).
- 3. Declarations of interests**
There were no new declarations of interests.
- 4. Minutes of the last meeting held on 6 November 2025**
The Board approved the minutes as a true and accurate record.

Matters arising were noted. The strategic plan will be monitored in future using the newly designed tool once launched.
- 5. Chair's report**
The Chair, along with some Trustees, had been involved in the interview and selection process for the Principal/CEO; with a decision anticipated at the end of the week.
The Members of the Trust had approved an amendment to the Articles of Association to enable the Trust's provision of adult education and sports facilities. The Trust's charitable object was

Action

amended to include: "to promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Cambridge and the surrounding area who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances or for the public at large the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time activities in the interests of social welfare and the object of improving the condition of life of the said inhabitants)."

6. Principal/CEO's report

The Principal drew Trustees attention to key areas covered in the report with questions invited. There was a question about local government reorganisation with the response that no decision had been made to date for Cambridgeshire. The Trustees will be updated on any developments.

A summary of the new Ofsted framework, which went live in November, was provided noting the 5-point grading scale. There was discussion as to whether the Trust should aspire to achieve the highest grade 'exceptional'. In conclusion, it was noted that it is anticipated that there will be very few 'exceptional' grades awarded, although this will be watched with interest as the framework beds in. Pilot inspections have taken place evidencing that all criteria for the 'expected' criteria must be attained before inspection teams will start to consider the 'strong' grade score.

7. College Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The Chair apologised for the delay in uploading the College SAR noting that this had been an administrative error rather than a production timescale issue. The Deputy Principal explained that the format of the SAR had been standardised before highlighting key points. The SAR was based on the old Ofsted Framework and took account of last year's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The introduction and summary evidenced the positive position and outcomes, such as strong retention, attendance, value added, EPQ and outcomes. Trustees agreed that the HESA progression and destination data was excellent. The QIP included a separate section for inclusion. The SAR will be uploaded to Ofsted by the end of January 2026. There had been regular reporting to the Board during the year regarding issues incorporated in the SAR.

The SAR was approved in principle with Trustees invited to submit any additional comments to the Deputy Principal by 19 December.

8. Quality Improvement Plan 2025/26

The QIP had been reformatted to reflect the new Ofsted framework. It included an update as at the autumn term and a

separate section on inclusion. Data tracking identified students' progress on programmes with measurable success criteria for each subject.

A Trustee enquired when results from student surveys and mocks will be added as there will be a time lag with mock results not available as an indicator until after January. There was discussion about timing issues noting that a progress review with courses has just taken place which will be used to update the QIP and with the suggestion that a mid-year performance snapshot could be provided. Tutors work hard with students to ensure that they are supported on their journey to improve and achieve. The student observers confirmed that they have been issued with current evaluation grade predictions alongside their UCAS predicted grades with progress reviews from assessments and subjects provided regularly. The college works with students to embed support on their journey.

There was discussion about the DDP workshops which staff observers agreed are successful, collaborative and supportive. These were completed before half term. Copies of plans and data will be provided to link Trustees. It was noted that the link scheme is under review; however, some link visits had already taken place, and others were shortly to happen. It was agreed that no new visits under the old link scheme would be expected from the new calendar year.

The QIP 2025/26 was noted and its new format welcomed. It will continue to be monitored throughout the year.

9. **Minutes from the AF&R Committee 12/11/25 and 4/12/25**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 December would be uploaded to Governorhub once available. In summary, the Committee Chair outlined the following key matters, particularly those recommended for approval.

AF&R Committee annual report to 31 August 2025 gave assurance to the Board that there was evidence of sound internal control, risk management and assurance processes for Hills Road Sixth Form College, and the Trust up until the annual accounts are signed.

Hills Road Sixth Form College financial statements for the year ended 31 August 2025 had given an unqualified audit opinion based on 'other than a going concern' and an unqualified opinion for the regularity assurance review. This was based on the transfer of Hills Road Sixth Form College to Hills Education Trust. Cantabrigian Ltd annual accounts were also provided based on a going concern opinion. Letters of representation were recommended for signature by the Chair. A Trustee

queried the accuracy of the UK greenhouse gas emissions and energy use data (page 7) which would be checked for accuracy and amended accordingly.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Trust and Cantabrigian Ltd had been presented which is under review to ensure transparency in its operations.

The strategic risk discussion paper had been discussed and was being presented to the Board, including a request for interest from Trustees to join the strategic working group.

The Board agreed:

- To note assurance provided by the AF&R Committee's annual report to 31 August 2025
- To approve Hills Road Sixth Form College's financial statements to 31 August 2025 subject to ensuring the greenhouse gas emissions are correct
- To approve Cantabrigian Ltd's financial statements to 31 August 2025
- The Chair and Accounting Officer would sign the annual accounts and letters of representation

10. Monthly management accounts: October 2025

The CFO explained that the monthly accounts to 31 October 2025 had been discussed by the AF&R Committee. It is a requirement to present monthly accounts for discussion at each Trust Board meeting. Monthly accounts will be made available on Governorhub as they are produced, and the most recent monthly accounts will be considered at each Board meeting. Trustees were encouraged to contact the CFO with any questions. There were no additional questions about the October 2025 management accounts which were noted.

11. Risk management board assurance framework and proposal for risk management

The AF&R Committee had received the Board assurance framework (BAF) in a revised format which had been aligned with the strategic plan and QIP. High-level risks were outlined in the BAF. In discussion of high-scoring risks, it was noted that the new CFO is in post. A platform, Artemis, has been introduced as a tool to support young people with their mental health. The parallel network housed at the Sports and Tennis Centre failed to switch over in a recent test involving the core switch. While this failure persists, the College would lose network connection for c2 hours' time to reboot and recover data. Remedial work to this dual system will be implemented and, in the meantime, the solution is possible manually. Plans for further switch capacity are being implemented in February. The internal auditors will review cybersecurity arrangements in March, which was noted as timely. In response to a question, there had not been any loss of data or cyberbreaches.

The strategic risk discussion paper, including consideration of the Trust's approach to risk and its risk appetite following academisation, had been discussed by the AF&R Committee. In summary, a simpler, sharper approach to risk was proposed to enable Trustees to concentrate on uncontrolled risks as opposed to routine risks which have effective mitigation by CST. A small working group is being established with a request for a Trustee to join; Carrie Anne Philbin volunteered which was unanimously supported.

There was a question about how scores are determined; these are calculated by CST based on likelihood, impact and mitigation. Descriptors regarding the likelihood and impact are incorporated in the risk policy.

The format of the revised BAF dovetailed to the strategic plan and QIP. There was a suggestion to add a key to the BAF. Trustees supported a review of the risk appetite following conversion to an academy. There was a suggestion to calibrate risk appetites with other trusts which would bring external validation. The Governance Professional would work with the COO to do this.

The Board agreed:

- To support the BAF structure which dovetailed to the strategic plan and QIP
- Carrie Anne Philbin would join the working group
- Risk appetites would be calibrated with other trusts

12. Trust policy schedule and policies for approval as applicable

The COO reported that a Compliance Officer has been appointed who will oversee the policy cycle. Review dates and consistency following conversion to a Trust are being addressed with overdue and crucial policies being actively reviewed; such as the Health and Safety Policy which will be presented to the AF&R Committee in February. The policy schedule, showing progress, will be presented to the Board later in the spring term. It was noted that the Principal and CST sign off policies which are not approved by the Trust Board.

13. Trust department link proposal (presentation) and Trustee visits

Governors were appointed to subject and key areas throughout the college previously. The Vice Principal Staff and Student Learning had prepared a proposal to change the link scheme with input from Jonathan Russell and the Chair.

Statutory requirements and recommendations were included, namely: safeguarding and prevent, careers, SEND and DfE digital and technology standards.

RHOO/LKGOV

RHOO/LK Gov

It was proposed to build links broadly around the four strategic pillars: People, Progress, Place, Planet with a total of twelve areas suggested. CST members were proposed as the contact point to organise visits to the college and would be responsible for directing trustees to the right colleagues for their visits.

In discussion, it was noted that inclusion including SEND, was a distinct link area under 'People'; however, inclusion would be covered in all areas. Sustainability, also a distinct area, should also be covered generically.

Trustees were supportive of the proposal agreeing that the Chair would request Trustees to indicate any areas they would prefer not to be linked to. Trustees would be invited to provide brief verbal reports on visits at Trust Board meetings with the new link scheme operational from January. The Deputy Principal would notify Heads of Departments about the new link scheme.

JSTER

IPRY

Trustees who had already arranged link visits during December under the old link scheme could continue their visits.

14. Any other business

No items

15. Date of next meetings

AGM: **Wednesday 4 February 2026 commencing at 5.30pm** before the Trustee's meeting which would allow opportunity for Trustees and Members to engage.

Trust Board: **Wednesday 4 February 2026** commencing at 6.30pm

Future Trust Board meetings: Wednesday 25 March 2026
Wednesday 13 May 2026
Wednesday 1 July 2026
All at 6.30pm.

Signed as a true and accurate record:

Chair Date