HILLS EDUCATION TRUST LIMITED

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Trustees: 17 September 2025

Trustees Present	Jane Sterling (Chair), Adrian Clark, Bruno Cotta, Anthony Omo, Carrie-Anne Philbin, Jonathan Russell, Kevin Taylor, Jo Trump (Principal).
Governance Services	Robert Smith (Governance Professional)
In Attendance	Ian Pryer (Deputy Principal), Ali Kirkman (Vice-Principal: Staff & Student Learning), Tim Lomas (Vice-Principal: Student Progression & Support), Alice Adams (PA: Governance Professional).

1 Formal Report of the Election of the Chair of the Trust, Apologies for Absence & Quoracy

The Governance Professional formally reported that Jane Sterling had been elected Chair of the Trust in accordance with the procedure set out in Bye Law 4.5 of the Trust.

It was noted that an election for the office of Vice-Chair of the Trust will be held before the end of the current month.

The following persons were welcomed to their first meeting as Trustees: Bruno Cotta, Anthony Omo, Jonathan Russell.

Alice Adams (PA to the Governance Professional) was welcomed as an observer.

Apologies for absence had been received from the following Trustees: Paula Heaney, Richard Westcott.

The meeting was quorate.

2 Declarations of Interest

The interests of Adrian Clark and Kevin Taylor in Cambridge University Press and Assessment were noted.

It was also noted that matters concerning the College’s business relationship with Cambridge University Press and Assessment are operational, and therefore within the area of responsibility of the Principal, not the Board of Trustees.

This minute is deemed to apply to all future meetings held in the year, whether of the Board of Trustees, committees or *ad hoc* groups formed by the Board of Trustees, which are attended by the said members, and future reference will be made to it as and when needed.

3 Approved Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Corporation of Hills Road Sixth Form College held on 25 June 2025 & Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Hills Education Trust Limited held on 4 July 2025

The approved minutes of the last meeting of the Corporation of Hills Road Sixth Form College, which had received formal approval by the members by circulated written resolution, were received for information.

It was reported that the draft minutes of the previous meeting of the Trustees held on 4 July 2025 had been approved for circulation by the Chair of the Meeting.

The minutes of the 4 July 2025 Trustees' meeting were duly approved as a correct record of the business transacted and *prima facie* evidence of the proceedings to which they relate.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting: 4 July 2025

The following matters were noted:

Minute 6: Members of Hills Education Trust Limited had duly approved the company's revised Articles of Association by special resolution.

Minute 6: other documents attending the conversion of the College to a multi-academy trust had been signed by the College's proper officers.

5 Chair's Actions

None.

6 Confirmation of the Conclusion of the Academisation Process

It was confirmed that an Academy Order had been issued in relation to the College, which had thereby become a 16-19 multi-academy trust (currently with a sole constituent member) with effect from 1 September 2025.

The Corporation of Hills Road Sixth Form College had been wound up on 31 August 2025.

7 Principal's Update & Non-Financial Key Performance Indicators

The Principal's written update was received for information, together with the letter from the Secretary of State for Education recording agreement to the College's conversion to a multi-academy trust.

Closing figures for key performance indicators relating to staff turnover and student attendance for the year were also received.

The Board noted information concerning examination performance (Summer 2025), student progression & destinations, the national pay offers made by the Sixth Form Colleges' Association (SFCA) on behalf of the sector to teaching and support staff representatives and the responses of the recognised trade unions, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data, College admissions (2025), the Thrive Survey (Y12 parents and students), quality assurance, and preparations for a submission to the Condition Improvement Fund (December 2025).

It was particularly noted that, in the absence of firm information from Ofsted about its new inspection framework, the College is planning an interim approach to Quality Assurance processes during the 2025-26 year which will *inter alia* include an in-depth two-day External Quality Visit by senior colleagues from high-performing sixth form colleges to take place in March 2026. It was also noted that the annual Department Development Plan (DDP) conversations will be adapted to allow a measure of intelligent accountability by differentiating the experience for different subjects and departments according to need. The previous attendance of Link Governors at the annual DDP will be replaced by involvement by other means in their link subjects.

It was further noted that the College is working with architects over the submission of a bid for Condition Improvement Funding, with a focus on addressing some of the College's issues around social and study space.

It was also noted that staff turnover targets for the year had been met, and a further improvement in full-time student attendance achieved.

8 Year 12 Survey 2024-25

Detailed survey outcomes were received. It was noted that the survey had been intended to gather feedback on subject experience to benchmark progress against departmental and individual objectives.

It was particularly noted that:

a 57% response rate had been achieved;

the average score per response had increased from 1.1 (2024) to 1.3 (possible max. 2.0);

the most significant gains had been reported in relation to questions focused on how the College ensures students are aware of the skills they are developing, and the future routes open to them from studying a particular subject;

other notable gains had been reported in relation to the extent to which students enjoy their subject and the positive relationships built with teachers; and

the lowest scoring question had related to the value of homework activities.

It was also noted that overall scores by department had been more consistent by comparison with the previous year, with particular improvement noted for subjects which had previously received lower satisfaction scores.

Causal factors driving improvement are thought to include the focus on skills in lesson materials, the continued emphasis on digital learning materials and organisation, support for high quality teaching and learning through learning walks, and the roles of CPD and quality visits.

It was further noted that curriculum leaders will reflect on this data to support Heads of Department through the departmental development planning process, and follow up on areas of concern, for example around the responses to specific questions in a subject or a particular class with lower relative satisfaction.

9 Staff Survey 2024-25

Detailed survey outcomes were received.

It was noted that:

a 58% response rate (2024: 59%) had been achieved;

the greatest improvements had been observed in the following categories - understanding of career/promotion path, opportunities for professional development; and

a comparison of all questions against last year's results had shown an improvement for all categories of staff, though the increase recorded for support staff had been lower than that for managerial and teaching/tutorial staff. The widened sense of community within the College with a feeling of purpose has been one factor contributing to the overall improvement.

It was reported that the survey will be revised for 2026 which, though making results more difficult to compare with 2025 data, will, it is hoped, provide more detailed and relevant information.

Actions to be taken by the College management in response to the current survey outcomes were also noted.

Some concern was expressed at the 43% response rate achieved in relation to support staff. Raising a sense of inclusion for such staff will continue to be a College priority.

It was reported that a Communications Officer is to be appointed whose brief will include internal as well as external communications.

10 Summer Examinations' Outcome 2025

A report prepared by the Deputy Principal was received.

It was noted that:

2025 A level examinations had been sat by a cohort for whom the pandemic began in Year 8, with significant disruption lasting into Year 9, and that they had sat GCSEs in 2023, the second year in a two-year planned reduction in GCSE grading to restore outcomes to pre-pandemic levels;

the College's examination performance in 2025 (prior to the outcome of re-marking) – while slightly down on 2024 – remains one of the top performances nationally for sixth form colleges, with the College continuing to perform ahead of its most successful year pre-Covid on the revised A level specifications (which were first examined as a full suite in 2018);

in terms of achievement measured by percentage of grades at A-B the College's grades remain higher than in the pre-pandemic year of 2019;*

4% of grades received had been a grade above that which might have been expected, given a student's prior GCSE attainment (2024: 9% prior to re-marking);

A results (prior to re-marking) had shown a mixed picture, with notable increases in some Humanities but corresponding falls in some STEM subjects;*

departments on special support plans had demonstrated strong progress;

students across every band of prior attainment had made, on average, the expected level of progress whilst enrolled at the College, with those at the lower end of the prior attainment banding making, on average, significantly more progress than national data would predict;

students in receipt of free college meals had made substantial progress by comparison with the 2024 cohort;

the progress gap between male and female students had narrowed to 0.15 of a grade (2024: 0.19);

Chinese and mixed heritage students had performed very strongly in added value terms, but Asian non-Chinese and black students had, in conformity with the national picture, not made the progress their prior attainment would suggest they are capable of; and

extended project outcomes had attained a new high watermark – although in raw terms they fall below the sector average, in most other colleges entry is restricted to those on a gifted and talented programme thereby skewing outcomes in a positive direction.

The results of final remarks are awaited with some significant movement already which will make a difference in some of the smaller subjects and is likely to have a small positive improvement at College headline level and in VA terms.

It was reported that the implementation of 2025-26 Department Development Plans will see a focus on those departments for whom they will be of particular benefit, investigating in depth the reasons for relative under-performance by students and helping curriculum managers devise robust action plans for improvement accompanied by appropriate support.

11 Departmental Quality Visits: Physics and Physical Education

The relevant reports were received.

It was noted that the Physics Department continues to offer a challenging and well-supported programme with dedicated, expert staff and clear care for student outcomes, but with a few remaining structural inconsistencies particularly around assessment practices, digital learning platforms and staff contributions.

It was noted that the Physical Education Department had received a broadly positive report, with particularly strong value added, though some areas for further development were also noted.

12 Safeguarding Update for Trustees

Trustees had been sent a training and briefing video prior to the meeting, to be viewed alongside the most recent edition of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE).

The Chair noted that only 50% of Trustees had so far reported reading KCSIE and she emphasised the importance of all members doing so as a key priority.

Members' questions and comments in relation to safeguarding in the College were addressed by relevant members of the College Strategy Team and the Designated Safeguarding Lead was thanked for the thorough and professional training video that he and his team had produced.

13 Safeguarding Policies

The following policies were approved:

Safeguarding Policy
Child Protection Policy and Procedure
Safeguarding Adult Learners Policy
Staff Recruitment Policy (referencing safe recruitment)
Prevent Policy
Management of Abuse Allegations against Staff

14 Audit, Finance & Risk Committee

It was agreed that the following trustees will form the membership of the Committee: Anthony Omo (Chair), Adrian Clark, Bruno Cotta, Richard Westcott.

It was also agreed that Anthony Omo will chair the Committee. The Vice-Chair will be appointed by the Committee.

Dates for meetings will be agreed and circulated in due course

15 Trustees' Link Scheme

The Chair reported that departmental links had been assigned to all current trustees, but that some links remain unassigned pending the appointment of parent trustees. The list will be circulated at an early opportunity, together with details of the activities link trustees are expected to accomplish and how they are to be recorded.

Trustees discussed possible alternatives to the current link scheme based on different criteria for implementation in 2026-27 and agreed that the matter should be considered in greater detail at a later date.

16 Observers at Trustees' Meetings

The following arrangements were agreed for staff observers at Trustees' meetings, namely that:

the erstwhile staff nominee members of the Corporation shall act as staff observers for a further period of up to two academic years (to 31 August 2027); and

a range of possibilities be explored for selecting future staff observers.

It was noted that the role of staff observer is wholly different from that of staff governor (as previously operated under the arrangements for Corporation membership).

The following arrangements were agreed for student observers at Trustees' meetings, namely that:

the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Student Council for the time being shall act as student observers; and

deputies for the above persons shall not ordinarily be permitted and shall in any event require the advance consent of the Chair of Trustees.

Guidelines for these observers will be drawn up and made available to the attending staff and students.

17 Election of Parent Trustees

It was noted that the College, for so long as it remains the sole institution within the multi-academy trust, is required to appoint two persons who on the date of their appointment are parents of full-time students enrolled at the College, and that such appointments (subject to a test of eligibility) shall be determined by election by parents (defined as persons exercising a recognised parental role, whether or not biological parents).

It was also noted that the Trustees may determine all matters in relation to the election, including who is entitled to participate (as candidates and voters), voting arrangements and the duration of appointments, but that such powers shall be exercised reasonably and in accordance with regulatory intent and natural justice.

It was agreed that the incoming Governance Professional service be asked to advise further on the details attending the election.

18 Appeals Policy and Procedure

Trustees noted a new version of the appeals policy which had been reviewed by the College's legal advisers and is to be adopted by the College.

19 Governance Professional's Announcements

None.

20 Dates and Times of Remaining Trustees' Meetings 2025-26

The following approved dates and times were noted:

Thursday 6 November 2025 (6.30pm)
Wednesday 10 December 2025 (6.30pm)
Wednesday 4 February 2026 (6.30pm)
Wednesday 25 March 2026 (6.30pm)
Wednesday 13 May 2026 (6.30pm)

The following additional date and time was approved:

Wednesday 1 July 2026 (6.30pm)

21 Any Other Competent Business

None.