

Trustees Board Minutes

Meeting	Trustees Board	Date	Friday, 11 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
Location	Bysing Wood Primary School	Time	2.00 pm
Membership	Tammy Mitchell (CEO), Graham Razey- Chair (GR), Bernadette Lax - Vice Chair (BL), Peter Troke (PT), Peter Goldsack (PG), Alan Horton (AH), Barbara Conroy (BC), <i>Emma Wilkinson (EW)</i> ; Ollie Laughton (OL); <i>Paul Sayers (PS)</i> ; Alison Gray (AG) – virtual		
In Attendance	Matthew Cooper (CFO) – for item 10 Sharon Hollingsworth, Director of Governance (DG) Guest - Emma Law Minute Clerk - Claire Edgeworth		

*Italics denote absence.*

	ITEM	COMMENTS	ACTION
1	Welcome and apologies for absence	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. EL was thanked for her attendance.,  Apologies were received from PS and EW.  The Chair, Graham Razey will step down on 31 August 2025. The CEO advised that Lucy McLeod, EKC Group CEO will join the Trust Board as a Trustee, and will attend the September Trust Board meeting,	
2	Declarations of Interest	There were no declarations other than those standing.	
3.	Minutes of Trustees meetings	The minutes of the Trust Board Meeting held on the 11 <sup>th</sup> March 2025, and the Extraordinary Trust Board Meeting held on the 25 <sup>th</sup> April 2025 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.  The minutes will be signed by the Chair after the meeting.	

4.	Matters arising not covered by this agenda	OL advised that he needed to leave the meeting at 3.30 pm due to a work commitment, the Chair asked for agenda item 10 to be brought forward to 3 pm so OL was available.	
5.	Chairs Communication	<p>The Chair advised that the CEO had her appraisal today and her objectives will be set at the beginning of the next academic year.</p> <p>The Chair advised that this would be his last meeting and will be sad to leave. The Trust came about in 2015/16 and was effective from 2018. The first schools joined in 2020.</p> <p>This year has been a positive year.</p>	
6.	CEO's Report	<p>The CEO shared her Report prior to the meeting. The CEO suggested that as the Trust grows whether Trustees should have separate items of the CEO report to delve in to, so they can read different parts, rather than having to read all of it. This will be something for Trustees to consider.</p> <p>The CEO went through the headlines of the report.</p> <p>The CEO has been tracking pupil numbers and the KCC commission plan. There was predicted to be high level of growth in Faversham, but the numbers forecast over the past few years have not materialised. The CEO has been working with Bysing Wood LGB to consider a reduction in PAN for 2027. The LGB have agreed, and the CEO will be meeting with KCC. There is a continual challenge for Bysing Wood as they have spaces, that are filled by KCC with hard-to-place pupils. The CEO has also been working with Churchill, but it is felt they have the finances to go for a further year before considering moving to a one form entry.</p> <p>Attendance is a challenge for the Trust and there have been some successes. The CEO will be leading on attendance as a strategic priority next year. AH advised that Sheppey Secondary (EKCSS) has the highest attendance of any secondary school on the Island. Attendance at EKCSS has improved term by term, which has not happened previously. In the past, they would have the highest attendance in term 1 and then it would go down. There is a 3% difference in attendance between EKCSS and the other school on the Island. EKCSS will finish with 88.9% attendance. It was 90% for a week or two. Oasis had persistent absence of 47.2% and reduced to 36% which was highest in the country.</p> <p>Suspensions across the Trust remain low, particularly given the demographic and need across a lot of the schools. The CEO has tracked suspensions closely and Headteachers make the CEO aware if they want to suspend a child. Suspensions at EKCSS are disappointing but there needs to be some discussion</p>	

		<p>around alternative provision, as some children are coming back to school and are not ready and this is affecting other students who are then suspended. Aylesham suspensions have come down and are in line with the other schools.</p> <p>The changes around High Needs Funding and SEN have created some challenges for the Trust. The Trust is not at financial risk but there are financial challenges and this needs to be monitored closely. Finance and People Committee are aware of the challenges. Trustees queried what conversations there had been with KCC and the CEO advised that one of the Executive Headteachers is an Exclusion Champion and is a voice at the top table and has spoken about what it means at ground level. There is a large political agenda and currently schools are living in a world where they do not know what it looks like. There will be challenges around the new process. Schools have been placed in communities, and they need to work out how to devolve the money. There are secondary schools in the communities and some of these schools had high needs funding in excess of £1m last year. These schools will not have as much money and their provision will be ripped out, and when realisation hits, there might be a change in the direction of travel.</p> <p>Primary colleagues are worried about the new process. The Chair advised that EHCPs will go for children not in special schools and this will manage funding for the children in special schools. The Chair acknowledged this could be a plus for the Trust, as they are reliant on other factors to support children with needs which will go in their favour. The biggest danger is inconsistency across all the schools as there will be a different Chair in the different communities making different decisions. There will be less money available.</p> <p>The CEO advised that from the Trust perspective the best thing that could happen would be for schools to be taken out of that arrangement and have increased SEN budget and although less money, the schools would know what they are getting.</p> <p>The CEO shared a Safeguarding paper prior to the meeting as appendix 3 of the CEO Report.</p> <p>There will be a full review of the Strategic Plan. It has been a positive year and headway has been made in the challenge areas. The CEO will share the Strategic Plan that fits with the 5 Year Plan, particularly around admissions. As the Trust grows with more staff, the staff surveys are broadly positive. EKCSS was a painful transition for staff, but they have been positive. AH advised that he had never seen such a positive staff survey and the staff love the school and the Headteacher.</p>	
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	<p>The CEO had shared the data outcomes in her report. There was a good level of development at the end of year R. This data looks at whether children are school ready and able to undertake a formalised curriculum. All the schools except Holywell had a significant number of children coming into school with low speech and language, still in nappies and the starting point is low. The focus is not around benchmarking in year R, but it is about making the children school ready, and the results are broadly good with high outcomes. Trustees queried how this was measured and the CEO advised it is about transition into year 1 the goal is GLD. The CEO feels that the number of children not at age appropriate is frightening and many are not ready to appropriately integrate. Reading is an important key indicator as to how they will access the curriculum. The CEO advised that GLD is a tick box exercise. Trustees agreed that if children are not socialised then they will not cope. The phonics outcomes are the ones that matter, and the CEO was pleased with the results. The national is 89% and every single school was within one child of national or above national. The progress is fantastic and in particular, Aylesham who were at 62% last year and 86% this year.</p> <p>The CEO is disappointed with the multiplication check results. Some schools had done well and there has been some improvement, but the Trust focus is not significant. About 60% of the SATs paper at the end of year 6 is about children being able to divide and multiply successfully. The CEO will be having conversations next year and this needs the same gravitas as phonics. The CEO is not convinced that the maths leaders are spending enough time in yr 4 checking on multiplication. This will not be a strategic priority, but the CEO will be discussing this.</p> <p>The CEO advised the SATS results were phenomenal and are exceptional high. Trustees acknowledged that three out of the four schools with good results were the starter schools. The CEO highlighted that there were particularly positive outcomes for Churchill and Palm Bay. Palm Bay had exceptionally high results in maths and reading but it is the writing that is holding them back. It was acknowledged however that they have made a huge difference compared with a few years ago.</p> <p>The Chair advised it would be useful to understand the results from the last couple of year to make analysis easier. There was a mistake on Bysing Wood GPS age related data, and it should read 34%. Trustees were happy with the performance of the schools and felt the leading schools had come through the Trust system and the results evidenced that what is being done is the right thing. Trustees would like to see year specific trends. The CEO advised that Trustees will receive the data in a dashboard when it is verified at the December meeting.</p> <p>Trustees felt that the results were what was expected in the main and there is continued high performance and improvement. There are challenges with the new schools, but Trustees are aware this</p>	
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	<p>happens when schools join the Trust, they go through a blip whilst being challenged. It was felt that EKCSS data was reassuring. The surveys at EKCSS were not expected to be that high.</p> <p>Trustees agreed that the Trust Board should write to the Headteachers collectively to advise that they are pleased with the outcomes and progress that has been made. There are positives in all the data.</p> <p>Trustees queried what the potential was, without breaking what is working, if someone had a serious illness and was off for a long time, could the Trust give support? The CEO advised that she had met with Holywell to discuss how to build capacity without reducing their strength and it is a balancing act. Statistics show if a strong school support a weaker school, they both become average schools. The Trust has strong leadership at all levels in some of the schools, the Trust could give staff the opportunity to do a project in another school. The CEO has had a request from a Senior Leader to look at teaching and learning at another school. The CEO acknowledged that it is a delicate balance as she would not want to take the skills out of one school which then dips. It was acknowledged that there are more schools closer together now, so staff can come out for shorter amount of time due to travel.</p> <p>Trustees queried that across the primary schools, pupil numbers are 94 below PAN which equates to £350,000. Trustees queried if the Trust needed to take action and would like more formal discussions around this as it is a lot of money and costs are not going down. The CEO advised that Lisa Hogan, Group Head of Financial Planning, meets the schools and uses a zero-budget model. The only time this was different was when the Trust helped Bysing Wood in a growth period. The Trust are not putting resources into the schools to help them. The Chair acknowledged that financial sustainability is important, and it would be useful to bring this back to the Trust Board from Finance and People Committee. OL advised that the previous CFO had produced a paper to show how the Trust would be self-sustaining and felt this would be good to be brought to the Trust Board.</p> <p>Trustees questioned that teaching 2 different years in 1 is not ideal. The CEO advised that the breakeven position for a teacher is 25 children and a cohort of 50 can afford to run two classes. When numbers fall below that, the school must use money from elsewhere. The CEO advised she would rather Bysing Wood reduced their PAN otherwise they are constantly battling finances and in year growth. The Chair acknowledged that the school had been banking on housing growth and had thought it would get to a full two form entry. Trustees queried if the housing growth had not happened. The CEO advised that a number of phase 2 parts of builds have not happened as phase 1 has not sold. There has also been over placement planning of new builds on the other side of Faversham, so children have moved there but not come to Bysing Wood. Families are going into Whitstable schools as they have places. The commissioning wards do not look at what happens to children on boundaries. Hawkinge and Sellindge</p>	<p>DG/CEO</p> <p>CFO/DG</p>
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7.	Sheppey Secondary Update	<p>The Sheppey Secondary Update paper was shared prior to the meeting.</p> <p>AH advised that he chaired the last Sheppey Secondary LGB meeting of the year yesterday and the Governing Board are delighted with the progress at EKCSS. The first year has gone better than hoped for. EKCSS is a well-functioning secondary school and is firmly into RI or RI plus but the journey to good</p>	

		<p>will be a challenge. An external review was held last week and advised the schools is RI. The CEO advised that a proportion of staff were inadequate in September, but a significant number are now in the RI bracket. The staff need to be able to manage a vast range of needs in the classroom. There are 10 teachers that are not yet good but would be good if they were at a grammar school. This is around the level of differentiation to meet the needs, given that 40% of children have a diagnosis. Teachers have not had the right development, so they are now being supported to get them too good. The CEO acknowledged that there is a high turnover of staff. Some staff find it too hard and for some it might not be in them. Trustees were pleased with the staff survey and satisfaction seems high and acknowledged they do not have a shortage of people applying for positions. Trustees will see if the survey results dip next year as expectations rise.</p> <p>The Chair advised that it was important to note the Trustees continued support for the stance around pupil numbers and the LA's desire for the school to expand before it can walk. There is a lot of political challenge, and the CEO has written to the Director of Education. It is important that the Trustees stand firmly behind the CEO and the LGB not to increase the PAN. The Chair advised that the children who did not get in, did not apply for the school as their first choice. It was acknowledged that the Director of Education is in a difficult position. The CEO advised that she was concerned that she had met with the MP, Councillors and the DfE and there was a potential for that level of invasion to derail what the Trust is trying to achieve. The Trust needs to protect the Headteacher and the team to stop them handling calls. The MP is meeting with the DfE today so there will be an update. The Trust signed clear conditions and headlines how they will operate.</p> <p>Trustees queried that as well as the letter to the Headteachers, should a letter be sent to the staff at EKCSS. All the Trustees agreed. The Chair of the EKCSS advised the LGB were planning to send a letter, and it was agreed that the letter would be combined from the Trustees and LGB.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>NOTED – Sheppey Secondary Update Paper</b></p>	AH/DC
8.	Attendance Report	<p>EL attended the meeting today to present her Attendance Report. This report was shared prior to the meeting.</p> <p>EL advised that the outcome of the project was that there needed to be another year to get behind the data forensically. The project has revealed that there is not one strategy that has worked to bring up attendance. The project now needs to look at the barriers and to match strategies to these barriers.</p>	

	<p>The project looked at success stories and where there has been careful investigation into the barriers what strategies put in place have helped. Trustees queried if they are going to be forensically looking at the data already collected or obtaining new data. EL advised that the data collected is around year groups, vulnerable groups and which strategies have worked on improving attendance. The results were 50% for everything across all different groups and the control group was also 50%. The project has looked at variables for example, mobility and attendance in different terms for example, term 2 when there is chicken pox and flu. For younger children the project looked at whether they were being specific enough to target parents and year 4 onwards to target the children. The project also looked at what barriers were in place and whether the barriers were addressed or whether they have not got under the barriers.</p> <p>Trustees acknowledged that all the schools were doing a lot of work around attendance. EL advised each school chose a strategy to apply to a group of children. The Chair advised that the Group had done something similar. The Chair suggested that for the next year when determining the barriers, care needs to be taken when determining what the barriers are. There needs to be a clear hypothesis. Trustees acknowledged that at this point, projects usually go out to the Universities to pick up. The CEO advised that the Universities nor the DfE wanted to pick this up.</p> <p>EL acknowledged that value for money wise, doing nothing is the same as doing something, and building relationships is important. Trustees were mindful that Ofsted will criticise for not doing anything. Trustees queried how the project will find out what the barriers are and EL advised that those people who are building relationships with the control group will get to know what the barriers are. EL was mindful that not all variables can be accounted for, but they need to find what works for those children who have those issues. EL advised they know what the barriers are but need to match them to the children. Based on society, it is known that some families have more crisis and more medical appointments, and it will be good research to see how the demographic changes and it will be interesting to know about the cohort.</p> <p>The CEO advised that what did come out of the project was the level of interest that leaders and Attendance Officers have and they are hungry to solve and discuss this.</p> <p>The CEO summarised that from all the data and analysis it is clear that there are a couple of groups of children who are having significant impact on the data, who do not fit into a category. This will be the starting point next year. There are two groups where it is felt something can be done. Siblings of children who have an older sibling with significant SEMH needs who are regularly suspended, have poor attendance. This knowledge is shared by DSLs and Safeguarding Leads. Those children without an</p>	
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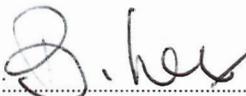
		EHCP but have high needs are the most vulnerable groups and the barriers need to be understood as absence is high as learning is difficult and they have friendship issues.  <b>NOTED – Attendance Report</b>	
9.	Director of Governance Report to incl. Trust Board & Committee Membership update	The GD's paper was shared prior to the meeting and was taken as read.  PG queried point 3 on the Action Plan appendix 1 whether the meeting with Headteachers following the Trust Board should include the Chair. The DG advised that it is an option, but it might not happen.  The Trustee feedback forms from Trustee visits were shared prior to the meeting.  DG advised that for formal minuting there was a Special Resolution passed dated 13 May 2025 – approval of Minster CE Primary School: Monkton CE Primary School and Teynham Parochial CE Primary School each to be provided with a formal Consent Letter to join EKC Schools Trust.  The process for appointing a Chair and Vice-Chair will take place late August or early September.  Mandator training is moving to National College, and each Trustee will receive a log in. The DG will contact Trustees with the detail.  <b>NOTED – Governance Report</b>	DG
10.	Trust Budget 2025-26 and 3-year Budget Financial Return	MC was welcomed to the meeting. The CEO advised that the new CFO has only recently come into post so she would help answer any questions.  The 2025/26 budget was shared prior to the meeting. The CFO talked the Trustees through the budget and highlighted the main areas.  The CFO advised the Trust was in a good place.  The key highlights are that Sheppey Secondary will have an additional year group, which will bring in additional money. Sheppey Secondary will draw down £570k less this year and they are in a good place. Aylesham joined the Trust in February 2025 so for 25/26 there will be a full year budget. There were two new grants received to support 4% pay increase that came in this year and the National Insurance rise, however this does not cover all of the monetary rises.	

		<p><u>Pay</u> The biggest cost for schools is pay and this is increasing from £18.5 to £21m next year. The primary components are again Aylesham as there will now be a full year of pay costs, teacher pay rises, increase in the National Minimum Wage and the National Insurance rise. There have been some new roles at Sheppey Secondary, one administrator, five Teachers, seven Teaching Assistants and 3 Support Staff.</p> <p><u>Non-Pay</u> The non-pay is going from £5.8m to £6.1m, primarily re 25/6 being Aylesham's first full year with us.</p> <p>The Finance and People Committee recommended to the Trustees that the budget be approved, and the Trustees approved the budget.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>APPROVED – Trust Budget 2025/26</b></p>	
11.	Trust Management Accounts May 2025	<p>The CFO shared the Trust Management Accounts for May 25 prior to the meeting.</p> <p>YTD Income is £30.5m ahead of target. Primarily the Trust has now received the valuations for the 2 new additional schools, Aylesham (£6.9m) and Sheppey Secondary (£22.5m). Otherwise Income is up by £1.2m, primarily re £0.6m of Core Schools Budget Grant for the pay award, which offsets in Pay, and also £115k for Sheppey Alternative Provision.</p> <p>Pay is over by £0.5m; £160k due to unbudgeted pay rises 5.5% vs 3.3%, £130k re national living wage and NI, both covered by the Core Schools Budget Grant. £60k due to Sheppey Secondary catering being insured.</p> <p>Full year forecast vs Budget. The CFO advised income is up by £1.7m; £0.6m Core Schools Budget re pay award, Sheppey drawdown £308k, Sheppey alternative provision £160k, NI Grant £143k, Higher needs £149k, Nursery £102k.</p> <p>Pay is over by £856k, £350k re pay rises and NI, £120k re new staff at Sheppey.</p> <p>Non-pay costs have increased by £623k. This is due to a significant budget being added to develop the Key Stage 4 building of £100k, the Alternative Provision expenditure is £160k additional expenditure that was not part of the original budget, and Repairs and Maintenance has increased by £68k due to additional works being carried out.</p>	

		<p>The Trustees queried whether the grants received covered the costs over what was budgeted. The CEO advised that 74% received for National Insurance was covered. As a Trust they base the amount on pupil numbers not on staff, so this disadvantaged the more vulnerable schools that had more staffing. There is a flat rate per pupil. Overall, the Trust received about 80%.</p> <p>Trustees acknowledged the EBITDA forecast is flat at 0.48% so it will be tight. Trustees queried if the Trust had looked at the vulnerability around pupil numbers. OL advised there are different numbers at different schools but could average what we get. The CEO advised that it is LAG funded so the figures are for 2026/27, and Lisa Hogan has been working with the schools based on the October census. The October budget predicts the budget for next year. Headteachers are aware income is going to drop, and they need to look at short term or cover contracts. Every school has a contingency for 2026/27. The CEO will discuss with the Finance and People Committee what this will look like for 2027/28.</p> <p>The CEO advised that they hope to know how many children will get PP and FSM so they can look at the funding for FSM from September 2026. Trustees acknowledged that it does not cover the cost of food, and the CEO advised schools must top it up. The CEO advised that there are 40% of families not working but it is not known how many are living on the poverty line. This will impact when the new Universal Credit rules come in. It is predicted that the FSM will not go up. The soft data shows that Bysing Wood have one family that is working at a professional level.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>NOTED – Management Accounts May 2025</b></p> <p>OL left the meeting.</p>	CEO
12.	Trust Academies Handbook	<p>The CFO will complete a paper in the new academic year. The CFO has had a quick look at the changes to the Academies Handbook and there have been mainly tweaks or things have already been communicated.</p> <p>Trustees agreed to delegate this to the Finance and People Committee to look at any key changes and to update the Trustees.</p> <p>The Financial Regulations will be changed and will come to the Trust Board, but this has only just been published.</p>	CFO

13.	Feedback from Committee meetings	The RAC Committee meeting minutes from 18/03/25 and 10/06/25 were shared prior to the meeting. The Chair advised there had been a healthy debate on expansion and on the DPSC paper.  The Finance and People Committee meeting minutes from 25/03/25 and 24/06/25 were shared prior to the meeting. The Chair advised it had been a good meeting and again a healthy debate.	
14.	Any other business -	The CEO presented the Chair with a gift from the Trust. The Trustees wished the Chair well in his retirement.	
15.	Matters considered confidential.	No matters were considered confidential.	
16.	Date and time of next Meeting	Date and time of next meeting: 16 September 2025 at 2.00pm	

There being no further business the meeting closed at 4.10 pm.

Signed:  Print: B. Lax Dated: 16.9.25