

Trustees Board Minutes

Meeting	Trustees Board	Date	Tuesday, 11 <sup>th</sup> March 2025
Location	EKC Schools Trust Boardroom, Broadstairs	Time	2.00 pm
Membership	Tammy Mitchell (CEO), Graham Razez- Chair (GR), Bernadette Lax - Vice Chair (BL), Peter Troke (PT), Peter Goldsack (PG), Alan Horton (AH), Barbara Conroy (BC), Emma Wilkinson (EW); Ollie Laughton (OL); Paul Sayers (PS); Alison Gray (AG)		
In Attendance	Chris Legg, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Sharon Hollingsworth, Group Director of Governance (GDG) Summer Macer, Chief Operating Officer (COO) – Item 8 Jason Howard (JH) – Executive Headteacher – EKC Schools Trust Catherine Carden (CC) – External Governance Reviewer		

	ITEM	COMMENTS	ACTION
1	Welcome and apologies for absence	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies received.	
2	Declarations of Interest	There were no declarations other than those standing.	
3	Minutes of the meeting held 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2024	The minutes were considered an accurate record of the meeting held on the 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2024. The minutes will be signed by the Chair following the meeting.  <b>AGREED – Minutes from the meeting held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024.</b>	
4.	Matters arising not covered by this agenda	There were no matters not covered by the agenda	

5	Chairs Communication	<p>Chair updated on his resignation from his role as CEO of EKC Group and that Lucy McLeod has been appointed as his successor. He informed the Board that he would be leaving the Group in April but will remain as Chair of the Trust until the end of the academic year. The Board will need to find a replacement in September 2025.</p> <p>Lucy McLeod will be presented to Members for appointment as a Trustee, as per the Governance Agreement with EKC Group from September 2025 and will attend the July meeting as an observer.</p> <p>The Chair also updated the Trustees on the challenges around Year 7 admissions into EKC Sheppey Secondary. The was a significant oversubscription for places on the Island this year and the Trust has been under significant pressure to increase the size of the Pupil Admission Number. CEO and Chair have both engaged with a range of stakeholders including KCC, County and Swale Councillors and the Swale MP. A letter has been sent to all parties explaining the reasons why the school cannot expand. A copy of this letter will be circulated to the Board.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>NOTED: Chairs Communication</b></p>	
6.	<p>CEO Mid-Year Report to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overview of Leadership and CPD paper</li> </ul>	<p>The CEO presented the mid-year report and summarised the key headlines for Trustees.</p> <p>Pupil numbers have remained fairly consistent. Churchill and Thornden Wood have the most financial challenges around their pupil numbers although Thornden Wood are increasing and have a greater level of preferences for September 2025. Trustees asked about the actions being taken to support both Churchill and Thornden Wood, the CEO explained that the CFO and COO are working closely with both schools to support their budgetary pressures and strategic planning moving forward.</p> <p>All EKCST schools bar Holywell remain above the National average for disadvantage with an increase at Thornden Wood over the past year.</p> <p>Suspensions remain low across the Trust, despite the high levels of EHCPs for SEMH and the high levels of disadvantage. Trustees noted the suspension position at Aylsham, it was</p>	

	<p>reported that the CEO and Executive Headteacher are working with the school to ensure provision meets and needs and suspensions reduce.</p> <p>Suspensions at Sheppey Secondary remain high with just over 10% of students having a suspension since the school opened. Trustee were pleased to note that that behaviour has improved significantly in Term 3.</p> <p>A discussion followed regarding high levels of disadvantage and the correlation with challenging behaviour and suspensions.</p> <p>First choices and overall preferences are up from 2024 for Aylesham, East Stour, Holywell (the largest increase), Palm Bay and Thornden Wood.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the challenge for Churchill and noted that preferences have increased their market share following an impactful marketing campaign. Trustees understood that the over place planning in Folkestone is significant and the most vulnerable area being Hawkinge with over planning by 40%. Given the low number of children available, Churchill has achieved strong applications but there remains a challenge for the school as to whether to reduce PAN to 1 form of entry for the next couple of years while numbers of children in the local area remain so low.</p> <p>Preferences have remained positive and strong at Sheppey Secondary and Queenborough.</p> <p>Attendance continues to be a significant challenge across the Trust and particularly around persistent absence of the most vulnerable, disadvantaged families. Trustees asked how this challenge is being managed. The CEO explained that there is an almost direct correlation between levels of disadvantaged and persistent absence affecting the overall rates. Despite continual investment and implementing all advice and practice recommended, impact is minimal overall. Leaders are attending National training, engaging with all research and the Trust is undertaking a research project of its own this year. The project has started to provide data that indicates where impact can be made and the strategies that best create the conditions for this work. The CEO explained that the work is ongoing. Trustees were pleased with the new research initiative and with the work being undertaken to address the attendance problem.</p>	
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	<p>There is a rise in the number of parents who are raising concerns around their children's needs not being met in school when the pupil has SEND. The demand for provision is increasing across the Trust. Additionally, as the schools are directed to admit more and more pupils with high levels of SEMH and present with challenging behaviours, there is also an increase in parental challenges around their child being impacted by children with behavioural needs. Trustees asked how the Trust is dealing with the issue. The CEO reported significant work is being undertaken across the Trust to upskill support staff, develop better provisions and adaptations in class and communicate more effectively with all parents. These challenges will increase under Kent's changes in practice and the schools will receive less funding to support these pupils. This will be a significant challenge moving forward.</p> <p>The consultation is out for the new Ofsted Framework proposed from September 2025. Within the proposals are clear indicators that there will be a refocus on attainment and that schools serving disadvantaged communities may well be facing significant challenge against the new criteria.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the quality of teaching and learning across the Trust. It was reported that the CEO regularly audits the quality of teaching and learning across the Trust and agrees the judgements on TLA.</p> <p>GLD predicted outcomes are in line with where the Trust would expect them to be, given the different circumstances and cohorts.</p> <p>All of the schools are predicting to be broadly in line with National for phonics with Bysing Wood slightly below because of the challenging levels of speech and language needs in Year 1 and Churchill above.</p> <p>Outcomes for Year 6 are predicted to remain strong across the schools with a significant uplift in Aylesham. Palm Bay predictions are lower, and CEO is meeting leaders in Term 4 to moderate the predictions. Bysing Wood predictions are also lower than National, but the cohort has high levels of SEND and these outcomes will show strong progress from pupils' starting points.</p>	
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	<p>Trustee enquired about school improvement, it was reported that over the course of the year, the CEO has undertaken a significant number of school improvement activities to support the overall judgements of each academy in the Trust. This includes reviewing the school's self-evaluation, learning walks, book sampling, subject audits and reviews, review and evaluation of stakeholder voice and surveys, subject networks and moderation.</p> <p>The CEO updated the Trustees on the outcomes so far of each strategic goal. Jason Howard (JH), Executive Headteacher shared a paper with the Board prior to the meeting on Raising attainment across the Trust to increase the proportion of children who are Secondary ready in reading – agenda item 9. Trustees were pleased with the positive performance against the Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Trustees raised concern regarding the imminent departure of the CFO. The CEO stated that she is working closely with EKC Group colleagues to manage the transition for finance with the promotion of the Trust's CFO to a new position in London. An interim CFO has been sourced by EKC Group, and an advert is out for the substantive post. CEO has been invited to be part of the recruitment process</p> <p>There have been two formal complaints raised to Stage 3 within the Seasonal term. Both of these are from Churchill, and both related to provision for pupils with SEND needs and align to the challenges all schools are facing around parental expectations with regards to levels of support their children are receiving.</p> <p>Additionally, the Trust has had to create a series of templates and support materials for schools because of the increasing number of parents who are posting their views on social media platforms. There is a national issue currently with SEND concerns being posted on TikTok and this has become a concern Country wide and is starting to pose a challenge for schools in the Trust. Director of Safeguarding and Compliance has managed a number of situations relating to social media complaints over the past term.</p> <p><b>NOTED: The CEO Mid-Year Report</b></p>	
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7.	Growth Plan Update <b>Confidential paper</b>	This item was considered confidential and will form Part A of the minutes.
8.	Trust People Strategy	<p>The Chief Operations Officer (COO) joined the meeting for this item and provided an update on consultation and developments of the Trust People Strategy.</p> <p>Consultation had concluded and all feedback had been overwhelmingly positive. All Local Board Chairs fully endorsed the document with no suggested changes. Support staff who commented were all positive and reported being pleased to be involved and considered. Leaders at the Trust wide workshop provided valuable insights and feedback around how they felt the Strategy would operate at local level. Again, feedback was overwhelmingly positive with all attendees recognising strength in the document and approach.</p> <p>Trustees commented that the document was clear and concise, and all Trustees were supportive and firmly in favour of approving the presented Trust People Strategy.</p> <p><b>APPROVED: Trust People Strategy</b></p> <p>Trustees praised COO for her work on the Strategy. The COO left the meeting.</p>
9.	Reading Project Update	<p>JH presented an update to Trustees on the progress and impact of the strategic priority focusing on Reading across the Trust.</p> <p>JH advised that according to the DfE Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) is the most appropriate way that children learn to read. JH gave a detailed overview of SSP and commented that Ofsted inspect schools managing this approach to reading and alternative approaches are met with high levels of challenge.</p> <p>The Trust believes that SSP is not the only tool to teach children to read and this can disadvantage certain children within our schools.</p> <p>JH is leading a group of Early Years Leaders and SENCOs in a year-long research project around this and they have met once a term to discuss alternative approaches.</p>

	<p>The second strand of the priority is around children able to read fluently and with more pace. JH summarised this for the Board. JH is leading a group of the Trust's Excellent Teachers in another research project and again have met once a term.</p> <p>The key findings from the research to date are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fidelity to SSP schemes and a fear of moving away from them is preventing some children from being Key Stage 2 ready. Many teachers early in their careers have limited alternative strategies to SSP. The high-stakes repercussions of not showing fidelity to this approach has prevented teachers and leaders from changing their approach to meet the needs of their children.</li> <li>2. Our approach to teaching children to read is putting many children off reading. A narrow focus towards passing the PSC in Year 1 and then achieving the expected standard in the KS2 Reading paper is making reading a chore for too many. Reading is too important to ever be difficult.</li> <li>3. Fluency does not receive enough emphasis in many schools' reading curricula. The popular view that reading exists across two main skills, <i>decoding</i> and <i>comprehension</i> (known as the Simple View of Reading) has led to many schools designing their reading lessons around one or the other of these aspects, neglecting fluency as a crucial bridge between the two.</li> </ol> <p>The final three sessions are going to be framed towards the implementation of our findings across the Trust and measuring impact. It is the aim that both groups will collaborate on developing a bank of resources which colleagues can share with all staff in their schools, as well as sit centrally on the Trust Hub for the access of any member of staff facing the same challenges in the future.</p> <p>Trustees were complimentary regarding the research project initiative noting that it was particularly pleasing to see research taking place within the Trust to enhance Reading across all schools.</p> <p>Trustees questioned how impact will be measured. It was suggested JH set a few measurable targets.</p>	
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	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ACTION:</b> Trustees request JH provide a follow-up report in September 2025. <b>NOTED: Reading Project Update</b></p>	JH
<p>10. Group Director of Governance Report to incl: Trust Board and Committee membership update</p>	<p>The Group Director of Governance presented her report and led Trustees through the key items.</p> <p>There were no changes to report to the Trust and committee membership document.</p> <p>The written special e-resolution dated 5 February 2025 providing approval for the updated Admissions Policy 2024-25 and 2025-26 and the Admissions Policy 2026/27 was presented for formal note.</p> <p>The calendar of Trust Board and Committee meetings 2025-26 was noted.</p> <p>The National Governance Association's (NGA) awards are now open. Trustee were keen to raise the profile and gain more recognition for the Trust and felt it would be an ideal time to nominate the Trust for the award under the category of 'Outstanding governance in a multi academy trust'. The Group Director of Governance to work up the application and submit ahead of the closing date being 12 pm on Monday 14 April 2025. The Chair kindly offered the services of the Group's Chief Communications Officer to support the work.</p> <p>The updated Governance Agreement between EKC Group and EKC Schools Trust was executed on 31 January 2025.</p> <p>GovernorHub, a secure platform for governance papers, and other governance materials, is currently being explored to support good governance within the Trust. Trustees were in favour of this initiative; further information will follow as we move forward with the new arrangements.</p> <p>Trustees discussed feedback from the recent round of school visits, key questions from the CEO/Executive were reported and the below response noted:</p>	GDC

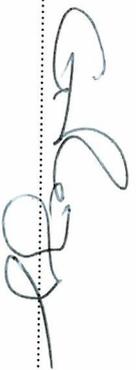
	<p><u>EKC Sheppey Secondary</u>  The Headteacher noted that moving to MS Office had brought another level of challenge in what was already a challenging situation. Most schools use Google as their operating platform and it has been a big culture and operational shift to accommodate a new way of working with Microsoft. Given that most schools use Google, it is recommended that going forward, the Trust and Group services consider whether it would be feasible for schools to maintain their Google operating systems.</p> <p>Response:  The development of IT in the school has been challenging and there are a range of significant issues related to IT in the school which Exec and School Leaders and Group SLA provider are working to resolve. These issues are beyond just the operating system. Currently the school could not afford to move away from Microsoft.</p> <p><u>Churchill</u>  The Trustees spoke with the Business Manager, who identified an opportunity for Business Managers to share experience and understanding of the financial processes, with each other and the finance department, including a regular training update.</p> <p>Response  There are termly workshops which all School Business Leaders are invited to attend. CH SBL has attended these since conversions.  The SBLs meet termly with the COO and other operational staff to review systems, processes, share any arising issues and discuss current matters challenging schools. CH SBL attends every term.</p> <p>The remaining school visits planned for this year were noted.</p> <p><b>NOTED: Group Director of Governance Report</b></p>	
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<p>11.</p> <p>School Resource Management Self-Assessment Return 2024-25</p>	<p>The School Resource Management Self-Assessment Return 2024-2025 was shared prior to the meeting. The completion of this tool has been undertaken by the Chief Financial Officer and the Group Director of Governance.</p> <p>Trustees were requested to review the contents of the SRMSAT, ahead of its submission to the Education, Skills, and Funding Agency on 14 March 2025. New questions for 2024-25 were highlighted.</p> <p>Trustee were comfortable with the responses within the self-assessment, there were no concerns raised.</p> <p><b>APPROVED: School Resource Management Self-Assessment Return 2024-2025</b></p>	
<p>12.</p> <p>January 2025 Management Accounts includes Q1 re-forecast</p>	<p>The CFO presented the January 2025 Management Accounts and summarised the key headlines for Trustees.</p> <p>The Q1 re-forecast exercise has been completed and reported in the management accounts.</p> <p>Income is positive and forecasted to be ahead of budget. This is due to an increase in the Sheppey Secondary financial support grant drawdown, an increase in high needs income across several schools and the addition across all schools of the Core Schools Budget Grant (CSBG).</p> <p>Trustee enquired about the use of the Grant, the CFO reported that this is to cover increased school running costs and includes meeting the increased cost of teacher pay awards for the period September 2024 to March 2025. It is indicated that a further grant, as yet unquantified, will be forthcoming to cover the period April 2025 to August 2025, due to be paid in May 2025.</p> <p>Pay costs are forecasted to be above budget. All schools are showing overspends, although it was noted that much of this is covered by the above mentioned CSBG. The Sheppey Secondary staff costs have been re-aligned since setting the pre-opening budget with</p>	

	<p>reduced teaching costs, increased teaching support costs and reduced administration costs, all covered by the DfE financial support package. The High Needs funding increase reported above has resulted in additional teaching support costs across several schools. Non-pay costs are approximately in line with budget across the Primary Schools, but additional costs have been identified for Sheppey Secondary to provide the necessary teaching resources, additional staff development costs and software.</p> <p>Overall, the EBITDA is forecasted to be ahead of budget with two schools setting break-even budgets, three schools setting surplus budgets and three schools setting deficit budgets to mitigate short-term drops in pupil numbers. Sheppey Secondary is a break-even budget due to the availability of DfE grant support to balance the underlying first-year deficit. The majority of the forecasted deficit comes from the central Trust budget where additional posts have been included this year, utilising accumulated reserves. Pay expenditure is overspent so far this year. Teaching costs were over-budget this month with overspending across most schools due to the teachers' pay award being higher than budgeted but vacancies at Sheppey Secondary have reduced the overall cost increase.</p> <p>Non-pay expenditure is underspent, there were no material variances of note.</p> <p>On the Balance sheet the fixed assets of the Trust are shown at depreciated value, the vast majority of which is the value of the school buildings.</p> <p>The cash inflow for the academic year so far is strong as a result of operating activities offset by net negative balance sheet movements.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the report showing the centrally-held and school reserves. This report shows the three strands to the Trust's revenue reserves and single capital reserve.</p> <p>The management accounts now include a report setting out the respective capital projects by school. These are largely completed in the year, with only minor balances rolling forward into 2024/25.</p>	
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		The capital works for Sheppey Secondary that were 100% grant-funded academic year, therefore "nil" in this academic year) are also being reported.  <b>NOTED: January 2025 Management Accounts</b>	
13.	Feedback from Finance and People Committee Meeting 21/01/25	The draft minutes from the Finance and People Committee meeting held on the 21 <sup>st</sup> January 2025 were shared prior to the meeting. The Chair of the Finance and People Committee gave a brief overview of the meeting.  <b>NOTED – Draft Minutes from the Finance and People Committee</b>	
14.	Any Other Business	There was no other business.	
15.	Matters considered confidential	Item 7 was considered confidential and will form Part A of the minutes.	
16.	Date and Time of next Meeting	Date and time of next meeting: Monday, 14 July 2025 at 2.00pm	

There being no further business the meeting closed at 4.00 pm.

Signed:  Print: Graham Carter Dated: 11/6/25