

Trustees Board Minutes

Meeting	Trustees Board	Date	Tuesday, 16 <sup>th</sup> September 2025
Location	EKC Schools Trust Boardroom	Time	2.00 pm
Membership	Tammmy Mitchell (CEO), Bernadette Lax - Chair (Chair), Alan Horton – Vice Chair (AH-); Peter Troke (PT), Peter Goldsack (PG), Barbara Conroy (BC), Emma Wilkinson (EW); Ollie Laughton (OL); Paul Sayers (PS); Alison Gray (AG); Lucy McLeod (LM)		
In Attendance	Matthew Cooper (CFO) Sharon Hollingsworth, Director of Governance (DG) Minute Clerk - Claire Edgeworth (CE)		
	Guest: Jason Howard, Executive Headteacher at Queenborough Primary School		

	ITEM	COMMENTS	ACTION
1	Welcome and apologies for absence	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and there were no apologies.	
2	Appointment of Lucy McLeod, CEO EKC Group as Trustee	LM has been appointed onto the Board of Trustees by the Members and Introductions were made.	
3.	Declarations of Interest	There were no declarations of interest other than those standing	
4.	Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2025	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record.	
5.	Matters arising not covered by this agenda	AH advised that one of the long-standing Governors at Hollywell, Edward Murphy (EM), has retired and the Trustees agreed they would like to acknowledge EM's commitment to the Governing Board. The CEO will arrange this.	CEO

		<p>In the minutes dated the 1<sup>st</sup> July, the previous Chair had discussed in general terms whether the Trust needed to take on a Specialist School, as he was keen to serve all parts of the community. The CEO advised that currently KCC are reviewing their provision and recently there were five Special schools, mainly from Maidstone, who wanted to form a Multi Academy Trust (MAT), but this was declined. KCC no longer publish minutes from the meetings, so the CEO is only aware of the outcome and not the reason behind this. The CEO advised that she is keeping a watching brief as it is unclear until the review is completed, what Special schools are expected to do but the CEO will bring back to the Trust Board if appropriate.</p> <p>The CEO is aware that there would be a benefit to the Trust to have the expertise from a Special school but is aware of the challenges. The Trustees discussed that this could be reviewed annually so that when the opportunity arises, the Trust can take advantage of it.</p>	
6.	Chair's Communication	<p>The Chair discussed her role as Chair and advised she was happy for Trustees to discuss any area they wished her to take forward and to let her know if they feel she has missed anything.</p> <p>The Chair set out how she likes to work and wants to follow how the previous Chair ran the meetings.</p>	
7.	EKC Schools Trust Improvement Plan 2025 -2026	<p>The CEO shared the Trust Improvement Plan 2025-2026 prior to the meeting.</p> <p>This plan is an annual response to aspects of the Trust that are identified as being strategic priorities over the year. This annual plan sets out the detail of how the Trust will make progress towards the Long Term 5 Year Strategic Plan 2023-2028. Both the long-term strategic direction of the Trust and the annual priorities are aligned to the Trust Framework.</p> <p>The CEO has set out six priorities for this year and there will be strategy changes.</p> <p>Work with parents and carers has been added due to an exciting project that the COO is leading on, which leads to a national Kite mark called Parent Kind. The Trust are well on their way to achieving this already and the Trust could be the first Trust in the country to achieve this. Trustees queried the timescale on Parent Kind and the CEO advised they are looking for gold by April/May 2026. There are four stages and a couple of schools have already reached Silver.</p> <p>LM queried why multiplication was not a strategic priority, as mentioned in the minutes from the last meeting. The CEO advised that six schools were not where they should be, but it does not require Trust input or investment, and this was discussed at the Headteacher meeting.</p>	

		<p><b>RATIFIED – EKC Schools Trust Improvement Plan 20-25-2026</b></p>	
8.	Reading Project Update	<p>JH attended the Trust Board meeting to give an update on the Reading Project. The update was circulated prior to the meeting.</p> <p>JH advised the research project, conducted over the course of the 2024-25 academic year, brought together EYFS leaders, SENCOs, and reading leaders from across the Trust. The collaborative inquiry aimed to explore the experiences and progress of children for whom a Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) approach had not reached the expected results. Through a detailed examination of practice, data, and pupil profiles, the project sought to identify patterns, uncover underlying needs, and inform more inclusive and responsive approaches to early reading instruction.</p> <p>In June 2025, 82% of children across EKC Schools Trust passed the Phonics Screening Check (National average 80%). There were, however, 62 children across the Trust who did not reach this standard. The project looked at the characteristics that made up these children, to identify them earlier and look at the characteristics about their reading habits. The project showed that SSP should not be the only approach for some children.</p> <p>As well as the more commonly used pupil characteristics already examined, the research conducted a deeper dive into other factors which might help to have a better understanding of the typicality of children who do not pass the Phonics Screening Check, including attendance and prior attainment.</p> <p>The data showed that the average non pass was a disadvantaged, SEND, summer-born boy. The majority of children who do not pass and are SEND, the main area of need is ASC.</p> <p>There was some work undertaken around pupil voice but although was age appropriate, their understanding of the question was limited, but it highlighted a significant number of children who do not enjoy reading or have difficulties. One of the challenges is to show that whilst phonics might be challenging, children can still enjoy other aspects of reading. Christine Court, a literacy guru, was commissioned to undertake observation surveys in each school and she undertook 6 mini assessments with each child. The report goes through each survey assessment and there are key questions against each one, with recommendations for leaders to consider against each key area of reading. The appendices to the report are strategies that the group developed.</p>	

	<p>Trustees queried that there is evidence that some children are reading backwards and JH confirmed that teachers assume that children read left to right but if this is not taught, this is not always the case. JH advised that some letters are hard to distinguish e.g. N and Z as the shape is the same. Trustees queried if cursive writing is a problem and JH advised there is an argument for cursive writing as it improves spelling for muscle memory, but most phonic schemes move away from cursive and lead back up to it. In the letter identification survey, children could identify 'a' and 'g' but not when printed in Times New Roman. Trustees advised that they were surprised that English as a Second Language (EAL) was not one of the characteristics they had looked at. The CEO advised that a high proportion of EAL students passed the phonics screen.</p> <p>Trustees queried what happens with this research and whether there was any thought of setting measures or feeding into the action plan. JH advised this will come up in the CEO visits and school improvement visits. Although schools are above national, it is hoped that outcomes will be more qualitative and can identify those children who do not pass and make sure they go into year 3 ready.</p> <p>Trustees queried what the biggest challenge will be to moving this forward. JH advised that the research was last year's priority and people have already moved on to this year's priorities. Also, staff should not be being dictated to by their schemes. Trustees queried if there was an opportunity for new staff to have training, so nothing is taken for granted. The CEO advised that there is a political challenge around this, as Ofsted will want to see that schools are teaching relentlessly to a phonic programme and will be judged on this. The CEO advised that in East Stour and Bysing Wood there are large numbers of children who have joined the schools who have not accessed pre-school provision. For that 15 -18% the research shows the children are being failed but deviating from the phonics scheme is not permitted in schools. The Trust is providing supplementary approaches to meet need underpinned by this robust research.</p> <p>Trustees queried if the data showed KS1 reading ages and JH advised that underneath the research is data for every child, and everyone is using the same reading test body. Trustees queried if there was anything that could be done to help the children enjoy reading and to like opening a book. The CEO advised this shift typically happens in year 1. Trustees acknowledged that every year there will be children in the same position and the CEO advised this has not gone off the Headteachers radar and she will be reviewing their provision plan. Trustees requested that the CEO reports back to the Trustees if there are any problems and the CEO agreed to add to her report and asked JH to put this in his notes of visit and to share with Emma Law (EL). Trustees acknowledged that the same children will be picked up as a concern in other subjects for example, mathematics. Trustees queried if there was a reading reader,</p>	<p>CEO</p>
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	<p>and the CEO advised there was a different structure in each school but there was someone in every school who has responsibility. Trustees queried whether some of this cohort could be dyslexic, and JH agreed this could be the case, but they are able to screen for dyslexia and then apply for a diagnosis. Trustees thanked JH for his report.</p> <p><b>NOTED: Reading Project Update</b></p>	
<p>9. Director of Governance Report to include:</p>	<p>The Director of Governance Report and appendices were circulated prior to the meeting. DG noted the changes to Membership of the Members Board and Trust Board. KY's membership had ended in March 2025, and GR had stepped down as Trustee following his retirement from EKC Group. In accordance with the Governance Agreement between EKC Schools Trust (EK CST) and EKC Group, the CEO of EKC Group will serve as a Trustee on EK CST Board, and LM has taken up the role of Trustee with effect from 16 September 2025. The DG will update Companies House. Bernadette Lax, Chair of Trustees and Alan Horton, Vice Chair of Trustees were appointed for the 2025-26 schools year (1 September 2025 – 31 August 2026) and this was presented for formal minuting. Due to GR retiring from the Board, this has left a vacancy on the Finance and People Committee. The Chair of Trustees should be on this Committee however it was agreed with BL that she would not need to undertake this due to her other commitments. Currently the Board consists of OL, AG and PS. LM agreed to join the Board if it fits in with her diary. The CEO advised that there will be two new Trustees when the Church school join the Trust, and this could be reviewed at that time. There were two written resolutions sent to the Trustees during the summer: <b>Special Resolution dated 22 July 2025</b> – Trustees approved the updated Admissions Policy 2026-2027 following the recent determination by the office of the School's Adjudicator. <b>Special Resolution dated 22 July 2025</b> – Finance and People Committee approved changes to the Trust's depreciation policies in EK CST's Financial Regulations, so the Trust and EKC Group have the same approaches within the new financial system, with effect from 1 September 2025.</p>	

	<p>Both were approved by the Trustees and were presented for formal minute.</p> <p>From the Autumn there is a new legal requirement for all Directors to verify their Identification. The DG has shared the link in her paper and explained the process. If Trustees are a Director for another company, they will need to follow this process for each company. The CEO requested that all Trustees completed this as soon as possible as the Auditors are likely to look at this.</p> <p>The Local Governing Board (LGB) Terms of Reference (ToR) has been reviewed and there are some changes which were outlined in the report. Trustees queried that it mentions the LGB producing a health and safety report for the Trustees three times a year and the CEO advised that the Group Deputy Director of Estates completes this on behalf of the LGB when he undertakes his report for the Risk, Audit and Compliance Committee. Trustees queried if there could be a section added regarding getting papers out a week before the meeting. The DG will arrange for this to be added.</p> <p><b>APPROVED – Local Governing Board Terms of Reference pending the change to be made by the DG.</b></p> <p>The new LGB and Trustee Skills Audit was shared with the Governance Report. Previously the Skills Audits were based on the DfE Competency Framework which was withdrawn last year. The DG requested approval that the GovernorHub Skills Audit be adopted for use by the LGBs, and the National Governance Association template be used for Trustees. Both will be developed using Microsoft Forms.</p> <p><b>APPROVED – GovernorHub Skills Audit for LGBs and National Governance Association Skills Audit for Trustees.</b></p> <p>Governors were reminded to sign up for GovernorHub if they have not already done so. PTs email will need changing to his personal email. CE to resend the link.</p> <p>The Trustee Development Plan was shared with Trustees with the report. It was agreed that the DG would schedule a 30-minute meeting after each Trust Board meeting for Headteachers to virtually meet Trustees, so they can discuss things raised in the CEO report. These meetings will start in March.</p> <p>The Code of Conduct for Members is in the draft stage and will come to the Trust Board for agreement. Trustees queried if this would need updating when Church schools join and the CEO confirmed they would need reviewing. Trustees agreed that they would like one Code of Conduct for Members, Trustees and Governors. The DG will draft and bring back to the Trust Board.</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>DG</p> <p>DG</p> <p>DG</p>
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10.	<p>CFO's papers</p> <p>The CFO shared the Financial Returns 2025-2026 prior to the meeting. The paper highlighted a list of financial returns that the Trust is required to submit to the DfE. The Budget Forecast Return has been submitted.</p> <p>The CEO highlighted the changes to the Academies Handbook on behalf of the CFO. It is a statutory duty that the Trustees are advised of the changes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Trust should also be working towards meeting the following 6 core standards by 2030 which are linked to Broadband internet, Network switching, Wireless network, Cyber security, Filtering and monitoring and Digital leadership and governance. The Director of Safeguarding and Compliance has already started to put a plan together to work with schools on these standards over the next few years.</li> <li>• There has been more guidance published to support Trusts with estate management, and this has been shared with Estates staff in schools. The Trust already has an Estates Strategy so are ahead of what is expected. The Trust has hit the threshold to receive capital money into the Trust.</li> <li>• The fundamental duties of the Chief Accounting Officer remain the same, but there is now more detail and definitions on what 'high standards of probity in the management of public funds' looks like and gives definitions of the terms 'regularity', 'propriety', 'feasibility' and 'value for money', to align with existing government guidance on managing public money.</li> </ul>	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is additional guidance to support procurement and advising Trusts should consider DfE opportunities when making purchases. The Trust has recently signed a new energy contract with the DfE, so the Trust are already undertaking this.</li> <li>• The Pay Policy must set out the Trusts approach to Executive pay and the Trusts Pay Policy already sets this out.</li> <li>• Trusts must have an internal audit from an external service, and the Trust is already compliant.</li> <li>• Educational performance is no longer grounds for Notice to Improve but this is now only around finances.</li> <li>• The DfE may recover funds where there's evidence of irregularity or fraud.</li> <li>• Under Delegated Authorities there is a change to rules on novel, contentious or repercussive transactions. Previously the handbook stated that Trusts must refer a novel, contentious or repercussive transaction for approval before the transaction occurs. The update clarifies that Trusts must have the approval granted before the transaction is agreed and transaction occurs.</li> <li>• Trusts may not pay cyber ransom demands.</li> </ul> <p>All Trustees have received detailed and comprehensive updates and links where appropriate.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>NOTED – Financial Returns 2025-2026 Updates to Academies Handbook 2025</b></p>	
11.	Policy Report	<p>The following EKC Schools Trust policies were reviewed by Trustees prior to the meeting and brought to the meeting for resolution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appraisal Policy</li> <li>- Capability Policy</li> <li>- Charges and Remission Policy</li> <li>- Complaints Policy</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data Protection Policy</li> <li>- Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedure</li> <li>- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy</li> <li>- Financial Regulations</li> <li>- Grievance Policy</li> <li>- Health and Safety &amp; Premises Management Policy</li> <li>- Pay Policy</li> <li>- Privacy Notice – EKC Schools Trust</li> <li>- Privacy Notice – Marketing</li> <li>- Recruitment Policy</li> <li>- Risk Management Policy</li> <li>- Safeguarding &amp; Child Protection Policy</li> <li>- Staff Attendance Policy</li> <li>- Staff Code of Conduct</li> <li>- Time Off Policy</li> <li>- Whistleblowing Policy</li> </ul> <p>The Trustees discussed if the policies could be spaced out during the year, however the CEO advised that the business meeting is at the beginning of the year. A suggestion was put forward that the policies could be divided up and Trustees review on behalf of the other Trustees. The Trustees agreed, and this will start June 2026. The DG will work out a lead Trustee each policy.</p> <p>Trustees queried the Health and Safety Policy refers to Forest School rules and it was agreed it would be helpful to have a link added to the policy. Trustees agreed this could be done retrospectively.</p> <p>Trustees queried if the Public Liability on lettings is also in the schools Letting Policy. The CEO advised there should be a line in the Lettings Policy referring to the EKC Schools Trust Health and Safety Policy. The CEO will check this.</p> <p>Trustees queried that in the Safeguarding Policy, the Trust needs a statement if the turnover is in excess of £36m. The CEO advised that the Trust is not at that point yet. The COO keeps a business planner and checks when thresholds are met.</p> <p>The CEO requested permission to add a line into the Pay Policy regarding death in service. Unfortunately, a member of staff passed away suddenly, and it has highlighted that the policy should</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">CEO</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DG</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CEO</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CEO</p>
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		<p>reflect death in service. The CEO sought permission to add a line advising that the staff members pay should continue until the end of the month in which the death in service occurred.</p> <p>The CEO had sent a message advising Trustees of the death and advising that she wanted to grant a day's closure of the school so the staff could attend the funeral. Trustees queried what the implication was, and the CEO advised that it is a statutory duty for schools to be open 190 days, and this can only be broken for exceptional circumstances. The CEO advised that the school will not have a chance to make this day up. Trustees agreed this should be a Trust wide policy. It will however be down to the individual school, depending on whether the family wish colleagues to attend the funeral.</p> <p><b>AGREED – The CEO to add a line to the Pay Policy regarding death in service.</b>  <b>AGREED – From June 26, the Director of Governance will designate a lead Trustee for each policy.</b>  <b>RATIFIED – EKC Schools Trust Policies</b></p>	
12.	Feedback from CEO's End of Year Review <b>Confidential Item</b>	<p>The CEO, CFO and Trust staff were not in attendance for this item.</p> <p>The item was considered confidential and will form part A of the minutes.</p>	
13.	Any other business	There was no other business.	
14.	Matters considered confidential.	Item 12 was considered confidential and will form Part A of the minutes.	
15.	Date and time of next Meeting	Date and time of next meeting: <b>2 December 2025</b>	

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

Signed: 

Print: 

Dated: 