Board of Trustees

Wednesday 9 July 2025, 9.30am
Buckfast Abbey Conference Centre

Attended:

Andy Mulcock (AM) - Chair	**Philip Bostock (PB) – Vice Chair**
Lee Elliot-Major (LEM)	**Teresa Gardner (TG)**
Richard Jacobs (RJ)	**Moira Marder (MM)**
Sarah O'Meara (SOM)	**Jade Otty (JO)**
Alex Walmsley (AW)	
In Attendance	
Melody Floyde (MF) – Trust Governance Coordinator	**Tim Rutherford (TR) – Deputy Chief Executive**
Mo Marchant (MMa) – Head of Governance	

Apologies:

Shraddha Chaudhary (SC) **James Frampton (JF)**

Meeting Minutes

Item No.	Business	Action
1.	**Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest** AM welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from SC and JF. Declarations of interest were noted, as follows: AW: Director, First Federation Trust & Member of Diocesan Education Group AW, RJ, AM: Directors, Fusion School Services Ltd JO: Vice Principal, Exeter College The meeting was confirmed as being quorate.	
2.	**Minutes of Previous Meeting, Update on Actions and Matters Arising** The minutes of the meeting held on 07.05.25 were approved as a full and accurate record. Updates were received on the following actions: TB1202.4 – The Quality Assurance process for Chairs was being finalised. MMa would provide a further update.	

3. LGB & Trust Board Update

LGB Appointments & Resignations

Trustees reviewed approved the new governor appointments:

- David Watson, All Saints Academy Plymouth
- Peter Dyson, All Saints Academy Plymouth
- Tanya Jones, MAP Secondary
- Claire Jones, MAP Secondary
- Velda Woodruff, Sidmouth College
- Daniel Watling, Lipson Academy
- Leigh Withers, Exmouth Community College
- James Bass, Honiton College
- Andrew Stiles, St Luke's
- Sarah O'Shea, West Exe
- Mark Baptist, Queen Elizabeth's
- Sam Weeks, Queen Elizabeth's

The strength of the candidates was noted as being very positive.

Trustees noted that one of the applicants at QE had a role within the company currently working with the Estates team on the QE project. Assurance was given that this had been reviewed at Heads of Service and was not felt to be a conflict due to the nature of the governors' role in the company which was not related to the work being undertaken with the Trust. This would be declared on the register of interests.

Trustees also noted the recent elected parent governor appointment and governor resignations.

Trustees queried the selection process for Trust Appointed Governors, TR explained how these were identified for each school.

Trustees requested that additional summary information was provided for Trust Appointed Governors, it was confirmed that this was already in the application forms but could also be added to the summary sheet.

Action: Add further information about the proposed Trust Appointed Governors to the summary sheet provided to Trustees for consideration. — **MF**

Action: Complete Onboarding process for new governors — **MF**

Chairs of LGB

The Trustees noted and **approved the LGB Chairs** for 2025-26.

Trustees noted that AD was Chair at both Honiton & Sidmouth and asked if this was a reasonable expectation. It was confirmed that it was included in succession planning to identify a new Chair for one of the boards. AD's excellent work was noted by both the Executive and Trustees. **Action: Send thank you letters to AD and other Governors who have gone above and beyond expectations in their roles.** — **AM/MF**

Trust Board Constitution – the current composition was shared for information. Work was ongoing to confirm the future Trust Board composition following the ERG. A new SEND Link Trustee was in the process of being appointed. There was also the potential to co-opt non-executives to Trust Board committees with expertise in specific areas.

SWITT Trustee – It was noted that JO currently sat on the SWITT Board on behalf of the Trust Board. The commitment was four online meetings per year which tended to have an operational focus around planning the SWITT offer. JO no longer had capacity to undertake this role.

MF advised that, historically, SWITT had provided an annual report to the Education Committee. It was felt that this would be sufficient to give assurance that SWITT was well-run. It was also noted that SWITT Governance arrangements had been previously noted in their last Ofsted inspection.

Action: Review the governance requirements for SWITT and ensure this is added to the Trust Cycle of Business. **MF/MMa**

Link Trustee Roles

TG was currently covering link roles for Safeguarding, Careers and Health & Safety for the Trust Board and asked what the plan was for these roles long-term.

Consideration should be given to another Trustee taking on the Safeguarding Link Role. SOM was happy to support with this link. Trustees noted the need for confidence in the level of expertise of the link Trustee to be able to hold to account the Trust Safeguarding Leads who were Level 5 trained. This was also a key role in LGBs who bring expertise and insight into their local settings.

MF confirmed that it was not a mandatory requirement to have an appointed Health & Safety Link Trustee. It was agreed that the Health & Safety trustee role was not needed as there was robust reporting to Trustees from the Estates Lead which provided reassurance.

Thanks were extended to TG for her hard work in the roles.

Safeguarding Review

The report from the recent Trust external safeguarding review would be shared.
Action: Share the External Safeguarding Report with Trustees **MF**

The review had been very positive, there was confidence in the Safeguarding within the Trust which was very well managed by Leaders. Trustees recorded thanks to AMi, LQ and the DSLs within schools for their hard work.

Some specific areas raised in the review relating to Governance were highlighted. It was important for Trustees to retain a strong link with the Safeguarding Lead and it was felt that this could be achieved through more informal meetings. Safeguarding also needed to be integrated into Trust Board Meetings, this would be added as a standing item to each agenda.
Action: Add Safeguarding as a standing item to future Board Agendas. **MF**

	It had been recommended that the Trust Chair, Vice-Chair and Safeguarding Link Trustee completed Level 3 Safeguarding training. This would be arranged. **Action: Confirm dates for Level 3 Safeguarding Training and book Trustees on.** The report had noted that DBS checks were not undertaken annually within the Trust. There was a suggestion that an annual confirmation regarding criminal records was put in place. **Action: Develop a confirmation to be completed annually to confirm any changes to the DBS check for all Governors and Trustees.** *Did the external auditors see the Education Committee cycle of business and was there confidence that everything was being covered?* Trustees need to drive the strategic approach to safeguarding from the top down. This does need to be more formally included in the cycle of business of the Education Committee. The data is shared freely with the safeguarding trustee. Safeguarding is the responsibility of all Trustees. <u>Governance Meeting Dates 2025-26</u> Noted for information. Two Education Committee meeting dates were still to be finalised. <u>Attendance Register 2024-25</u> The draft attendance register was reviewed, this would be updated following the meeting. It was agreed to add scrutiny panel attendance alongside the Education Committee, noting that these were being combined for 2025-26. **Action: Update Attendance Register for 2024-25 and publish on the Trust website.** <u>Master Funding Agreement – Deed of Variation</u> Trustees noted the update to the MFA relating to the Exwick Nursery provision, this had been submitted for Secretary of State sign off. Thanks to AW for his support with the process.	**MF** **MF** **MF**
4.	**Policies for Approval** There were no policies scheduled for approval.	
5.	**Budget Update 2025-26** Trustees reviewed the proposed budget following a recommendation from the Finance & Resources Committee who had met on 18.06.2025 to review in detail. It was noted that this had been an emerging budget under constant review by the F&R committee and that the position was fluid. A deficit budget would be filed. However, reserves were expected to remain strong over the next three years. Money was being reserved and used for educational purposes. Some had also been ringfenced for future QE spend. It was noted that all Trusts were facing financial challenges and that the funding increases were minimal.	

	What is the long-term budget strategy? We are assuming for a 0.5% increase in funding. *Does the F&R committee discuss budget further than the 3-year strategy?* Yes, in the broader sense, however DfE do not provide detail on future-thinking so it is largely uncertain. SEND funding would be expected to need a radical review and a white paper was due for publication. Sustainability was also likely to need radical thinking. The three strategies for budgeting were noted as being income generation; efficiencies and cuts/remodelling. Liam Dingle was thanked for his hard work on the budget and for reducing the deficit as much as possible. Thanks were also recorded to AW and the Exec for the hard work in managing and supporting the difficult work with the finances. Fusion remained positive and had potential to grow in the future. **The Budget for 2025-26 was approved for submission.** **Action: Submit the 2025-26 budget to DfE**	**LD**
6.	**QE Update and Approval of Land Disposal** TF was in attendance for this item. Trustees reviewed the report that had been circulated prior to the meeting. Thanks were extended to the Trustees who had met with TF outside of the main meeting to review this in more detail. It was confirmed that the strategy for QE remained to keep as many doors open as possible, whilst gathering facts and bringing other stakeholders onboard in the process. AW, RJ and PB would continue to attend the QE strategy group to represent the Trust Board. **A full record of the discussion is in Part B of the minutes.**	
7.	**External Review of Governance** The proposed actions following the External Review of Governance were reviewed. 1.3 – It was agreed that the Strategy Day on 01.10.2025 would be used to identify long-term strategy allowing Trustees to fulfil their function of setting the strategic direction for the Trust and for an element of "blue sky" thinking. Development of a formal strategic document would be key in separating strategic planning from operational workflow.	

	The February away day would be used for short-term focus and a strategy and implementation update from the Executive, following consultation with stakeholders during November and December. 2.1 – It was agreed that key questions arising from the strategy meeting would be defined for each committee. This would be trialled through report templates and linked to the Trust Cycle of Business. 2.4 - The Chairs Governance Committee would be disbanded with approval of the Pay Policy and Senior Executive Pay scales to be moved to the Trust Board cycle of business. It was noted that the new Academy Trust Handbook required executive pay scales to be approved by the full board rather than a committee. The Growth & Development Committee would also be disbanded with any future growth or development opportunities being tabled for Trust Board discussion. The Education Scrutiny Panel would be integrated into the Education Committee cycle of business for 2025-26. 4.2 – There was discussion around the suggestion of arranging short, closed sessions for Trustees. Some Trustees felt the benefit of this was unclear, although collective time for Trustees to meet together was important, amalgamating Chairs and Growth Committee business into the Trust Board meetings would also support with this. Trustees felt that they already had strong relationships and were confident in raising points directly with each other. It was agreed to make rooms available 30 minutes before the start of each meeting for those Trustees who wished to attend. It was also agreed to extend the duration of each Trust Board meeting by 30 minutes to allow adequate time for discussion. 5.1 – It was agreed to adopt a parallel process of formally advertising and informal conversations for future recruitment of Trustees and Governors. It was important to be clear why recruitment was being undertaken and to ensure that the correct expertise was appointed. 7.1 –It was agreed that strengthening upward communication from LGBs to the Trust Board was needed, with the correct points going to the correct committees. MMa would be the filter for LGB feedback to the Board, and feedback on celebrations would be sought as well as concerns. 7.3 – It was important to increase Board engagement with school communities and Trustees agreed that they would like to visit schools more often. The Trust Open Mornings being held on Wednesdays prohibited some Trustees from attending, however informal visits from Trustees to schools would be welcome. It was agreed to facilitate one meeting of each Trust committee being held in schools per year, where possible. Trustees should also be kept informed of events in schools, MF would explore ways of doing this effectively. 7.4 – Building the Trust's external transparency was important, particularly the Trustees sharing strategic aims with wider stakeholders. Trustees felt that the annual report was a positive document however this needed to be shared more widely. Other methods of communication were also important. Social media was already being used positively for operational work.	

	It was also agreed that a "strategy on a page" document should be developed to clearly articulate the Trust's vision.	
8.	**Chief Executive Officer's Report** The CEO report had been circulated in advance. TR gave a presentation to outline the strategic priorities for 2025-26 and the new project boards. **Action: Presentation to be shared with the minutes of the meeting.** *Trustees noted that there were 8 Project Boards for the coming year which was a reduced number from 2024-25.* Some project boards have finished and some have been combined. *Trustees noted that TWT were doing well with disadvantaged (DS) students, they asked what the strategy was?* The approach is multi-faceted. The Education Committee reviews outcomes and there is a Trust-wide DS focus. All schools have DS leads. It is a leadership priority with events being held to build good communities. TWT is working at a national level, sharing best practice. Transition is a challenge and will be a focus for the coming year. MM gave an overview of key areas of development. The Trust's KS2 SATs results had been very positive with all schools achieving above the national average of 62%. Two schools had been significantly above this. The initial review of DS outcomes was looking positive. It was noted that the strengthening communities work had played an important part in these outcomes. TWT was providing RISE support to other schools, this would be starting next term supporting a local secondary school. The Torbay place-based plan was being led by TR and Rob Wiliams. TWT would be playing a key leadership role. Challenges in DCC remained a key priority for TWT and work was being undertaken to bring other Trusts together on this. It had been a successful year, with TWT in a strong place, shaping both locally and nationally. Trustees remained supportive of the TWT leadership and noted that it could become a model. The work being undertaken in Plymouth around Alternative Provisions in schools was also very positive. There was a desire to bring this into Devon. A different type of leadership was required and learning was being shared. There had been positive feedback about the Plymouth work. MMa left the meeting at 11.56am Transforming Futures – It was noted that Transforming Futures had decided to join another Trust who already had special schools. MM and JF had met with them to receive feedback on the reasons for the decision.	 **MF**

9.	**Review of Strategic Risk Register** The Strategic Risk Register was shared for information. TWTs strategy remained to minimise risk. <u>Audit & Risk Committee Annual Assurance Report</u> This was shared for information.	
Items for Information		
INFO	Growth & Development Committee Minutes Noted	
INFO	May Management Accounts The Management accounts had been received and were inline with expectations.	
INFO	Letter to Accounting Officer re Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) The ATH 2025 had been published, a summary of changes would be shared.	
Any Other Business		
	Thanks were recorded to all Trustees for their work and contributions over the last academic year. The meeting closed at 12.05pm. **Date of Next Meetings:** **Wednesday 1 October 2025, Strategy Day (TBC)** **Wednesday 22 October 2025**	

Signed by the Chair of the Board:

Signed on Governor Hub

Date: 22/10/2025