



The Castle School

A SPECIALIST COLLEGE FOR COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

Love Lane, Newbury, RG14 2JG

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MINUTES of a Meeting of the Full Governing Board held on Thursday 3rd July 2025 at 5.00pm, Held at the Love Lane Site

Present: Helen Cabell (HC) (Chair) (Co-opted Governor), Nicola Markham (NM) (Vice Chair) (Co-opted Governor), Jo Davis (JD) (Staff Governor), Adrian Crawford (AC) (Parent Governor), Chris Fisher (CF) (Co-opted Governor), Indira Hann (JH) (Co-opted Governor), Jon Hewitt (JH) (Headteacher), Emily Owles (EO) (Co-opted Governor), Jane Seymour (JS) (Co-opted Governor)

In attendance: Atul Attra (AA) (School Business Manager), Anne Hunter (AH) (Clerk)

1. Apologies Received

Apologies for absence were received from William Alexander and Charlie Kowalski. Indira Hann arrived late. The meeting was quorate. Caroline Whitlock and James Whybra also gave their apologies.

2. Declarations of Interest on Items Pertaining to this Agenda

There were no declarations of interest declared.

3. Any Other Business Items to be Raised at this Meeting

The following items of business were raised:

- Catering Contract
- Legacy Donation
- Minutes from the Full Governors Budget Sign-Off Meeting

4. Minutes from the Last Meeting, 20th March 2025, and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair.

Actions arising from the previous meeting were discussed as follows:

- Action 2 – AC advised that the Local Authority (LA) had contacted the School last week about the playground in the Donnington building which was falling away. Due to staff shortages the LA have asked if the School would be prepared to manage the works as they couldn't commit to the works being investigated. A provisional sum of £60k has been provided and a survey was due to be undertaken in the summer.
- Action 3 – Governors were taken on a tour of the Love Lane site during the Governors' Strategy Session held in June. The intention was to hold a site walk at Castle @ Theale prior to the November FGB meeting. EO will be undertaking health and safety visits in due course.
- Action 8 – NM confirmed that she had met with Caroline Whitlock today and would provide further information in her Safeguarding Update.

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- Action 10 – EO and CF have attended Part 1 of the New to Governance Training sessions, with Part 2 likely to be in the Autumn Term and EO has attended Finance training. JS will attend training in the Autumn Term. Governors were asked to notify the Clerk about any other training needs.

It was noted that all other actions had been completed.

5. Committee Reports

The committee chairs provided the following updates in relation to their last meetings:

- **Curriculum Committee held on 15th May 2025**

NM reported on the areas covered at the meeting which included a safeguarding update from Caroline Whitlock.

- **Staffing Committee held on 15th May 2025**

Following on from NM's update JH reported that the Love Lane and Post-16 sites were close to being fully staffed and three vacancies existed at the Theale site. JH advised that interviews had recently been held for Will Harvey's replacement and thanked CF for his really useful contribution to the interview process. Katie Morley, who has lots of experience, was the successful candidate. and would be starting in Post-16 in September.

- **Premises Committee held on 3rd April 2025**

AC reported that there were currently 18 live projects including carpet cleaning, repairs to the Sunflower playground, tree pruning etc. JH gave an update on the new building which was going well and confirmed that the School was very happy with the build team. The only issue was car parking and the fact that the LA might be in breach of planning consent as fewer parking spaces were being provided than had been stated. Discussions were currently being held with the LA about how this could be resolved and the School had stated that it would be happy to contribute to the cost of tarmacking some of the area currently used for parking.

- **Finance Committee held on 3rd April 2025**

AC advised that the figures provided at the budget sign-off meeting had not changed with an end of year underspend of approximately £480k. This had been achieved by savings in staffing and non-staffing costs. Following a query by HC AA confirmed that cross charging of admin staff between the Love Lane site and Castle @ Theale was going to continue.

AA confirmed that the Primary Sports Funding would be continuing but it was noted that it was difficult to spend as funds could only be spent on specific items.

With regard to the Capital Fund AA confirmed that a minibus had been purchased which was due to be picked up next week.

6. Headteacher's Report

All Governors were sent JH's detailed Headteacher's Report prior to the meeting and JH asked if Governors had any questions. The following questions and comments were raised:

- JH advised that since the report had been written there had been two fixed term exclusions at Castle @ Theale.
- Following a query by JS relating to increasing capacity at Castle @ Theale JH advised that Tigers Nursery, which was based on the Theale site, was relocating to a new building and wished to sell their existing building. The LA are intending to undertake a feasibility study on

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the possible use of the building for three additional classrooms. JH confirmed that the building would need a lot of work to make it suitable for pupils' needs but the space would be useful, especially the car park which could be used as a drop off/pick up point.

- Given the high number of MyConcerns raised AC asked for more detail to be provided on what these concerns related to in order to ensure that there wasn't a problem at the School.

Indira Hann joined the meeting at 5.21pm

JH advised that the reason the numbers were high was because staff were encouraged to document any concern, however minor and often concerns have a number of categories allocated to them. HC felt that quoting a number didn't provide Governors with the assurance that there were no major concerns at the School. NM informed the meeting that during her recent meeting with CW she had discussed MyConcern and had been informed about the multi-faceted nature of some of the concerns that were documented and also how they were triaged and dealt with. JH also provided some information on the process that was followed when a concern was documented and the different ways various levels of concern were dealt with. It was agreed that JH would speak to CW to ascertain if in future reports more meaningful information could be included to highlight issues that the Governors need to know about. It was noted that this would have to be within confidentiality rules.

Action 1 – JH to speak to Caroline Whitlock to ascertain if in future reports more meaningful information could be provided on the concerns raised on MyConcern.

- Following a query by AC JH provided further information on what the Confide system was used for and the process that was followed when a concern was raised about a staff member. It was noted that this year there had been five or six issues raised, two of which had been escalated to the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO), but no safeguarding issues had come out of any of the issues raised. AC felt that additional information about the concerns raised should be included in future reports.
- With regard to the pastoral and behaviour update HC queried how the work was evaluated to ensure that it was effective and how the different activities were assessed to decide which should continue? JH stated that this was achieved through feedback from parents and the fact that parents came back. HC queried whether engaging with 46 parents was a significant figure? Taking account of the fact that it was often difficult to engage with parents it was felt that this was a good number as it was 50% of the number of pupil premium children in the School. It was agreed that Kaylene Christensen, the Pastoral and Behaviour Lead, be invited to the next FGB to give an update on the work being carried out.

Action 2 – JH to invite Kaylene Christensen to the next FGB meeting to provide an update on the work being carried out to support pastoral care.

Results of the Parents' Survey

Governors went through the survey results and made the following comments:

- JH felt that the results were very good and did not show any significant trends.
- AC found the response to the question about online safety interesting and wondered if more could be done to inform parents about online safety. JH responded that the School already did a lot about online safety with pupils and there was only so much the School could do to support parents.
- IH found it interesting that in relation to the question about whether teaching about relationships and sex education met the needs of their child a large number of parents didn't appear to know what the School did.

7. School Development Plan (SDP)

JH reminded Governors that at the Strategy Session they had agreed the format of the SDP and that it would be brought back to the FGB. JH pointed out that due to wanting to get a larger number of staff involved in the production of the SDP the community section had not yet been completed.

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JD stated that one of the ideas that was being considered as part of the community targets was the setting up of houses across all sites which could be used to foster greater relationships between the sites and different year groups and at events eg sports day. SLT and team leaders would also be assigned to the houses.

Governors agreed the School Development Plan subject to the inclusion of the community targets. AC pointed out that on p3 of the document the word "Fundsing" needed to be amended to read "Fundraising".

HC asked how it was intended to measure and track progress and AC asked how the School's strategic goals would be demonstrated? JH stated that his headteacher review, which takes place in the Autumn with the School Improvement Adviser and the Headteacher Appraisal Panel, should include targets relating to the SDP. It was noted that regular reviews of JH's targets had not always taken place and it was agreed that HC would set some dates for the next academic year.

Action 3 – HC to set dates for regular reviews of JH's targets.

8. Policies for Ratification

Having been submitted to the relevant committees, the following policies were considered:

- School Behaviour Policy. Governors were very impressed with the amount of detail in the Policy and the fact that it was bespoke for the School. JH advised that there was an appendix that still needed to be added to the Policy. The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.

Action 4 – JH to provide the Clerk with the appendix to the Policy.

- Complaints Procedure – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Persistent Complainants. JH explained that following a persistent complainant around 7-8 years ago the School had been advised to have a policy to cover future eventualities. Since that time there had not been any persistent complainants. The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Model Disciplinary Procedure for Schools – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Engaging Volunteers in Schools – Model Policy and Procedure – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Model Grievance Procedure for Schools - The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Leave of Absence Procedure - the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- PPG Support Fund Policy – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB

Action 5 – The Clerk to add the relevant appendix to the School Behaviour Policy and file the agreed policies in the relevant paper file and on GovernorHub

9. Safeguarding Update and Signing of the Single Central Record

NM reported that she had met with CW today and had found the information provided to be very detailed and CW to be very thorough. CW is preparing refresher Safeguarding training for staff and a new Safeguarding Policy is expected from WB in September.

NM had also met with Cassy Clark and discussed the Single Central Record (SCR) and had found no concerns. Currently the SCR information was logged onto a spreadsheet but Cassy is intending to move the information to Bromcom.

10. Governance and Training

10.1 Constitution of Governing Board – Variation of Instrument of Government

HC advised that following on from discussions to reduce the number of Governors at the Strategy Session a variation to the Governing Board's Instrument of Government (IOG) was being proposed. AH tabled the variation to the IOG which sought to reduce the number of Governors from 13 to 11 (three x parent governors, one x local authority governor, one x staff governor, one x headteacher and five x co-opted governors). HC reminded the meeting that the reason for the change was

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because of the difficulty in recruiting governors and this was backed up by the fact that there was still currently two vacancies on the Governing Board.

The Governing Board agreed to the variation.

It was noted that there were currently six co-opted Governors and once the varied IOG came into effect this would reduce to five. It was therefore proposed that one of the co-opted Governors should apply to take up the vacant role of a local authority governor. HC agreed to put herself forward for the role of local authority governor. AH agreed to send HC the relevant application form.

AH advised that Governors would need to agree a date when the IOG would take effect from, which should ideally be at the beginning of a school term or half term. AH confirmed that the next steps were for the IOG to be sent to Governor Services who having checked it was compliant would then be sent to Legal Services for sealing. When considering a suitable date, the Governing Board took into account the process that the variation would need to follow and the time that might take as well as the time it might take for HC to be appointed as a local authority governor. Following discussion it was agreed that the date the variation should take effect from should be 1st January 2026.

Action 6 – AH to send a copy of the agreed Variation to the Instrument of Government to Governor Services and a copy of the application form to become a local authority governor to HC.

10.2 Confirmation of Committee Structure for 2025/26

As discussed at the Governors' Strategy Session it was proposed that the current Finance and Premises Committees would be amalgamated to become the Finance and Premises Committee. In addition, the Curriculum and Staffing Committees would be amalgamated to become the Student and Staffing Committee. The new committee structure was agreed by FGB.

The membership of each Committee was confirmed as follows:

Finance and Premises Committee
Adrian Crawford (Chair)
Will Alexander (Vice Chair)
Helen Cabell
Charlie Kowalski
Emily Owles
Jon Hewitt

Student and Staffing Committee
Nicola Markham (Chair)
Indira Hann (Vice Chair)
Jo Davis
Jane Seymour
Chris Fisher
Jon Hewitt

10.3 Agreement of Meeting Dates for 2025/26

The meeting dates for the 2025/26 academic year, as set out in the revised tabled version, were agreed by the FGB. It was noted that next year an additional FGB meeting had been added on 4th September 2025 which would be held on-line and would primarily deal with the appointment of a Chair and Vice Chair.

10.4 Ratification of Link Governor Positions

In line with discussions at the Governors' Strategy Session the following link governor positions were confirmed:

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Safeguarding – Nicola Markham
Health and Safety – Emily Owles
ArtsMark – Jo Davis
World of Work – Chris Fisher
Castle @ Theale – Helen Cabell
Castle @ Newbury – Jane Seymour

10.5 Upcoming Training and Training Needs

CF and EO to be booked onto New to Governance 2 and JS onto both sessions of New to Governance. NM asked if she could attend the Exclusions Training in September.

Action 7 – AH to book NM onto the Exclusions Training.

10.6 Skills Audit

AH advised that a Skills Audit of the Governing Board did not appear to have been completed for a number of years. It was noted that the results of the Skills Audit would be used to identify training needs and assist with the recruitment of future governors. It was therefore agreed that AH would send out skills audit forms for completion. The scores would then be collated and brought to the November FGB meeting.

Action 8 – AH to send out skills audit forms and guidance to Governors for completion. Governors to complete the forms and return them to AH. AH to add the Skills Audit to the November FGB meeting.

11. AOB items

- **Catering Contract**

AA gave an update on the new catering contract which would be starting in September. The contract was for 3 years with the option to extend for a further year. It was noted that around 50% of pupils had school meals and as a special school the contract contained a number of food variations eg beige foods etc.

AA reported that the company were intending on training up all the current catering staff in their ways and he was meeting with the Operations Director next week.

- **Legacy Donation**

JH advised about a donation in the sum of £155k which had recently been received. AA confirmed that the amount was currently being held in a charity account which was not receiving any interest. As the School wanted time to consider how best to spend the money AA proposed opening a interest accruing account eg an overnight investment account. Governors agreed to this request.

- **Minutes from the Full Governors' Budget Sign-Off Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th April 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chair.

12. Dates and Times of the Next FGB Meeting

Full Governing Board – Thursday 4th September 2025 at 4.30pm on-line.

The meeting closed at 6.40pm