



# The Castle School

A SPECIALIST COLLEGE FOR COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION

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## MINUTES of a Meeting of the Full Governing Board held on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2025 at 5.00pm, Held on TEAMS

**Present:** Helen Cabell (HC) (Chair) (Co-opted Governor), William Alexander (WA) (Parent 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:** Caroline Whitlock (CW) (Deputy Headteacher), James Whybra (JW) (Deputy Headteacher), Anne Hunter (AH) (Clerk)

### 1. Apologies Received

Apologies for absence were received from Charlie Kowalski and Nicola Markham. The meeting was quorate. Atul Attra also gave his 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 additional item of business were raised:

- Phone System

### 4. Minutes from the Last Meetings, 3<sup>rd</sup> July and 4<sup>th</sup> September 2025, and Matters Arising

The minutes of the meetings held on 3<sup>rd</sup> July and 4<sup>th</sup> September 2025 were agreed as true and accurate records and would be signed by the Chair at a later date.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2025 Meeting

Actions arising from this meeting were discussed as follows:

- Action 1 – CW advised that the information requested was difficult to provide but she had included an overview in the Safeguarding report due to be considered at the meeting.
- Action 2 – JH advised that he had not invited Kaylene Christensen to this FGB meeting and asked that it be postponed to a future meeting.  
*Action 1 – JH to invite Kaylene Christensen to a future FGB meeting to provide an update on the work being carried out to support pastoral care.*
- Action 3 – HC advised that she, with NM and CF had carried out JH's performance review and once the Pay Committee was formally set up she intended to set up regular meetings to review JH's targets.

It was noted that all other actions had been completed.

Signed:

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#### **4<sup>th</sup> September 2025 Meeting**

Actions arising from the previous meeting were discussed as follows:

- Action 3 – AH was asked to check that all Governors had confirmed on GovernorHub that they had read the Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 version.  
*Action 2 – AH to check that all Governors had confirmed on GovernorHub that they had read the Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 version.*
- Action 5 – It was noted that the Chair, in consultation with the Headteacher, had agreed the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

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:

- **Student and Staffing Committee held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2025**

JS reported on the areas covered at the meeting which included:

- Reviewing the Committee's Term of Reference.
- A safeguarding update was received from CW, who confirmed that all safeguarding processes had been updated in line with the new Keeping Children Safe in Education. CW also reminded Governors that they were required to undertake face to face Safeguarding training every three years and it was agreed that all Governors should also complete on-line refresher safeguarding training on an annual basis.
- JH had provided a staffing update and advised that the School was close to full capacity. There were a few vacancies at Castle @ Theale but these were being managed.
- A number of policies were reviewed and recommended to FGB for adoption.

HC wasn't sure if she had completed the on-line refresher safeguarding training and asked whether there was a log of who had completed the training. It was agreed that AH would check on who had completed the training. AH also confirmed that AC and Nicola Markham needed to complete their face-to-face safeguarding training as their three years was coming to an end in February.

*Action 3 – AH to check with Kate Mason which Governors had completed the on-line refresher safeguarding training and send a reminder to those Governors who had not yet done so.*

**Student and Staffing Committee Terms of Reference.** The terms of reference were agreed and adopted.

- **Finance and Premises Committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

WA reported on the areas covered at the meeting which included:

- Reviewing the Committee's Term of Reference.
- A number of policies were reviewed and recommended to the FGB for adoption.
- Receiving an update from Atul Attra (AA) on the school's various budgets, which showed that spending was as it should be. There was a slight underspend in staffing at Castle @ Theale which was mainly due to staff vacancies and the fact that the budget had been predicated on having higher level support staff in posts.
- AA also provided an update on the Private Fund account and advised that the School was looking at how to get the best return on these funds.
- Reviewing the list of projects, most of which had been completed, including the new access control upgrade and the installation of solar panels. It was noted that some works had been delayed due to bad weather, but these would be completed in the first quarter of 2026.
- During the health and safety update Governors were informed that a court case, relating to an accident by a staff member on the running track which happened over three years ago, had been thrown out.

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- EO reported that she had undertaken a health and safety walkaround and the only issue she had found was that the School did not have a lock down procedure in place.

**Finance and Premises Committee Terms of Reference.** The terms of reference were agreed and adopted.

## 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 the report did not include figures relating to the fact that the number of consultations and Education Health Care Plans had increased. It was noted that the high needs block funds of all LAs was significantly overspent.
- AC felt that the progress data chart on p7 was difficult to understand and queried what exactly it was supposed to be telling Governors? AC asked what the baseline and benchmark was and how consistent was the information. JH responded that the School offered a bespoke service and therefore it was often difficult to capture data on particular teams. JW advised that data on individual pupils was available but when grouped together it was difficult to interpret. This was due to the fact that each pupil's needs were different, and it was difficult to compare pupil A with pupil B. HC felt that what Governors needed was a way to ensure that they were asking the right questions to understand the progress data and asked that this be considered at the next FGB meeting.

*Action 4 – AH to add Interpreting Progress Data to the next FGB agenda.*

- JS noted that the number of MyConcerns raised had increased this academic year. JS understood that this was partly due to increased pupil numbers but asked if there were any other issues? CW responded that when the data was analysed it was found that the percentage increase in the number of MyConcerns raised correlated with the increase in pupil numbers. In addition, there were additional children with more complex social and care needs and more children in care. CW highlighted that the number of issues that were referred to Children's Services had not increased.
- AC asked why the incidences of racial abuse was higher at Castle @ Theale. JH advised that this was due to the particular needs of pupils at Theale and was to be expected. JH confirmed that the incidences, which he felt were low, were mainly to do with language used and were always addressed by staff. AC asked that in future more explanation should be given in the report.
- HC felt that there was a lot that should be celebrated in relation to the work of the School Council and World of Work (WOW). JH felt that the report didn't do justice to the excellent work carried out by the WOW team. He encouraged Governors to view the WOW page on the website and if available visit the stalls in Newbury Market Square on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November between 10am -2pm.
- With regard to para 5.4 HC noted that only long term absences were included. HC felt that often short term absences had more of an impact on the School and asked if this could be reflected in the report. JH stated that the implications of short term absences was difficult to present as the teams worked closely together and staff were moved around where possible to fill any gaps caused by sickness absences. A couple of agency staff had been employed which had worked well but was expensive and there were sometimes reliability or training issues. JH was trying to recruit bank staff who would be available to cover absences at short notice. HC stated that Governors needed to understand the pressures caused by short term absences eg what % of staff were you running under because of short term absences and what was the impact/mitigations. JH stated that he would discuss the matter with JW and CW and consider how best to provide this information. HC stated that if it was found that the School was running with 5 or 10% shortage in staff then this would assist a discussion about possibly employing additional staff.

*Action 5 – JH to consider how best to address the comments raised by Governors for inclusion in his next report.*

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## 7. School Development Plan (SDP)

JH went through the document and reminded Governors that it had been agreed to have different objectives for Newbury and Theale as both sites' needs were different.

JH highlighted the long term target of developing an outreach programme for mainstream schools. AC was concerned that such a programme might lead to Castle's budget resources being eroded and also didn't want Castle doing all the work for other schools. JH confirmed that nothing had been decided yet and any proposal would be brought before Governors.

With regard to funding and budget pressures for future years JH reminded Governors that the impact of the White Paper and the banding exercise were still unknown. He thanked JS for going through proposals for the new bandings, however there were still no figures attached to each band.

## 8. Policies for Ratification

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

- Children with Health Needs who Cannot Attend School – It was noted that following a request at the Student and Staffing Committee meeting the policy had been updated by JH and was the version included in the agenda. The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Safer Recruitment – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Exclusions – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- First Aid – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Manual Handling – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Pay Policy – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Private Fund – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- 16-19 Bursary – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- GDPR – it was noted that an updated link to the School's Privacy Notice still needed to be included in the Policy. JS asked if staff knew what steps to take if they accidentally sent a communication to the wrong person as she could not see the process in the policy. JH stated that staff knew that they had to report any GDPR breach to Atul Attra, who was the School's Data Protection Officer. The policy was agreed subject to the inclusion of the updated link and ratified by FGB.  
*Action 6 – The Clerk to add the updated link to the GDPR policy and file the agreed policies in the relevant paper file and on GovernorHub*

## 9. Safeguarding Update and Signing of the Single Central Record

Governors considered the Safeguarding Report which had been the basis of the meeting between CW and Nicola Markham earlier in the week. CW asked whether in future Governors wanted this extended overview or would prefer a more focussed document? AC felt it was an excellent report but queried again about the increase in concerns raised. In addition to the information provided earlier in the meeting, that the increase in the number of concerns correlated to the increase in pupils and their needs, CW stated that data can be misleading as often concerns can relate to more than one issue. AC asked if an explanation to this effect could be added to the report.

## 10. Governance and Training

### 10.1 Pay Committee Membership and Terms of Reference

AH advised that as requested by the Finance and Premises Committee she had produced a Terms of Reference for the Pay Committee. She had changed the name from the Pay Panel to the Pay Committee as this was in line with the Pay Policy.

Governors considered the membership of the Pay Committee and it was agreed as follows:

Signed:

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Helen Cabell  
Nicola Markham  
Chris Fisher  
Jane Seymour

## **10.2 Constitution of Governing Board – Variation of Instrument of Government**

AH advised that the Instrument of Government (IOG) had been sealed by Legal however the date on the document was incorrect when received. The IOG had been sent back via Governor Services to Legal in September and AH was still awaiting the amended version, which was again chased this week. It was noted that the IOG was due to come into effect on 1 January 2026.

## **10.3 Update on Governing Board Membership**

AH advised that HC's application to be a Local Authority Governor had been sent to Governor Services following the last FGB meeting in July. Due to protracted correspondence with Governor Services it was understood that the application was finally with the Director of Education for consideration. It was hoped that a positive update would be received shortly.

## **10.4 Skills Audit**

Governors considered the results of the skills audit, which showed that there were no major gaps in the skills, knowledge and experience of the Governing Board. HC queried whether enough was being done to utilise the skills of Governors and to this end asked that the Committees consider the results of the skills audit and in particular the comments that were received as part of the audit. Training needs should also be picked up during this process.

AC felt that succession planning should also be proactively considered.

*Action 7 – AH to add the Skills Audit to the agendas of the next Finance and Premises and Student and Staffing Committees.*

## **11. AOB items**

### **Telephone System**

JH informed the meeting that the School had gone into a contract with BT to supply a telephone system however BT, who had provided a large discount, had advised that some of the functionality that was expected was not to be included in the contract. One of the functions that had been expected was cloud voice connect packs for all staff which would enable them to unplug their phones and plug them in at home and pick up School calls from there. BT had stated that they could provide the increased functionality for an increase in costs from £450-£930 per month which was less than the comparable price of £1,600 per month. This would be counted as a change to the current system not a new contract.

AC queried whether this was an extension to the contract. JH believed that the contract length would be the same and confirmed that the School would be provided with new, more advanced, phone units. It was believed that this would be good value across all the sites and as the provision of the new phones would not be until February 2026 the majority of the cost wouldn't come through until the next financial year.

HC asked JH to check that this was not an extension to the current contract and also that there would be no change to the current contract's terms and conditions. Governors agreed to the additional cost subject to there being no extension of the contract or change to the current contract's terms and conditions.

*Action 6 – JH to speak to Atul Attra to confirm that the additional functionality to the phone system would not be an extension to the current contract or a change to the contract's terms and conditions.*

Signed:

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## **12. Dates and Times of the Next Meetings**

Finance and Premises Committee, Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2025, 4.30pm, to be held on Teams

Student and Staffing Committee, Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2026, 4.30pm to be held on Teams

Full Governing Board, Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026, 5pm, to be held at Post-16

The meeting closed at 6.25pm

Signed:

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