



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 19th March 2026 at 5.00pm, Held at Castle Post-16

Present: Helen Cabell (HC) (Chair) (Co-opted Governor), Nicola Markham (NM) (Vice Chair) (Co-opted Governor), William Alexander (WA) (Parent Governor), Jo Davis (JD) (Staff Governor), Chris Fisher (CF) (Co-opted Governor), Jon Hewitt (JH) (Headteacher), Charlie Kowalski (CK) (Parent Governor), Emily Owles (EO) (Co-opted Governor), Jane Seymour (JS) (Co-opted Governor)

In attendance: Caroline Whitlock (CW) (Deputy Head), James Whybra (JW) (Deputy Head), Kaylene Christensen (KS) Pastoral and Behaviour Lead, Atul Attra (AA) (School Business Manager), Anne Hunter (AH) (Clerk)

1. Election of the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors

AH advised that as the Governing Board had been newly constituted, following receipt of the Governing Board's varied Instrument of Government, there was a need to appoint to the roles of Chair and Vice Chair.

Chair – Jon Hewitt (JH) nominated Helen Cabell (HC) for the role of Chair. All voting Governors agreed unanimously with this nomination.

Helen Cabell took over the role of Chair from the Clerk.

Vice Chair – JD nominated Nicola Markham (NM) for the role of Vice Chair. All voting Governors agreed unanimously with this nomination.

Therefore, as agreed at the meeting held on 4th September 2025, Helen Cabell was elected Chair and Nicola Markham Vice Chair of the Governing Board for a period of three years or until their term of office ended whichever was sooner.

2. Apologies

An apology for absence was received and accepted from Adrian Crawford and Indira Hann did not attend. Nicola Markham attended the meeting on Teams. The meeting was quorate.

3. Declarations of Interest on Items Pertaining to this Agenda

There were no declarations of interest declared.

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

There were no items of any other business put forward.

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5. Update from Kaylene Christensen, Pastoral and Behaviour Lead

Kaylene Christensen provided an update on the work being carried out to support pastoral care at the School. During her update KC advised that the Pastoral and Behaviour Team had three key aims:

- To clarify the role and support that they could offer to staff, students and their parents;
- To implement a system that would allow tracking of need and the impact of their support;
- To constantly review everything they were doing to ensure that they evolved with changing need.

WA asked for an example of where the team had made a difference. KC advised that they had introduced emotional support packages which were adapted to a particular student's needs. This was done in consultation with relevant staff members and it was found that there was an increase in the relationships that were built with the students.

JS queried what support was provided to parents. KC confirmed that the team were often struggling to get parents to engage. The support ranged from signposting to external providers, having an open-door policy, putting on events and just from talking to parents. KC informed Governors that her previous role, as a family support worker in the Disabilities Team, meant that she had knowledge of the process for a Parent Carer Needs Assessment and therefore could support parents in the completion of the assessment.

WA asked what support was provided to those students transitioning to adulthood. KC advised that the team were building relationships with the Adult Social Care Team and were able to advise students on the support that would be available to them. JW confirmed that the School had good links with the Adult Support Team.

Given that students had such diverse needs over the three sites HC queried how it was possible to tailor support for everyone's needs. KC confirmed that any intervention that had been put in place and found to have a positive impact would be used again when needed. If a hotspot was found and the School did not have the skills to support it then these would be acquired. JW advised that teachers would complete a pupil referral form to flag the needs of particular students.

Governors thanked KC for attending the meeting and providing an update on the work of the team.

6. Minutes from the Last Meeting, 20th November 2025, and Matters Arising

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

Actions arising from this meeting were discussed as follows:

- Action 2 – AH confirmed that all Governors had confirmed on GovernorHub that they had read the Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) 2025 version.
- Action 3 – AH advised that having checked with Kate Mason IH and JS had still not completed the on-line refresher safeguarding training. Kate Mason had recently sent a further reminder to both Governors who were asked to complete the on-line training as soon as possible. HC, NM, AC and CK still needed to attend face-to-face safeguarding training and would be advised when training sessions were available.
Action 1 – IH and JS to complete their on-line refresher safeguarding training and upload the details to GovernorHub. HC, NM, AC and CK to attend face-to-face safeguarding training when sessions were available.

The difficulty for Governors to attend training during the day was recognised therefore CW stated that she would be happy to set up a face-to-face safeguarding training session on one evening between 6-8pm on-line. It was agreed that CW would provide AH with some possible dates.

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Action 2 – CW to provide AH with some possible dates to carry out face-to-face safeguarding training in the evening.

- Action 4 – JH apologised that he wasn't in a position currently to provide information for the Interpreting Progress Data agenda item and suggested deferring the item to the next meeting. HC asked that a discussion be held at this meeting in order to ascertain exactly what Governors' requirements were.
- Action 7 – AH advised that the results of the Skills Audit would be added to the agendas for the next Finance and Premises and Student and Staffing Committees.

Action 3 – AH to add the Skills Audit to the agendas of the next Finance and Premises and Student and Staffing Committees.

- Action 8 – AA confirmed that there was no impact to the phone system contract or its terms and conditions.

It was noted that all other actions had been completed.

7. Committee Reports

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

- **Finance and Premises Committee held on 22nd January 2026**

WA advised that the budget was looking healthy and therefore there was a risk that WBC might claw some of it back. AA confirmed that following a meeting he had attended a few weeks ago he believed that it was unlikely that a claw-back request would be received.

The Committee had been provided with an updated list of property projects most of which had been completed. AA confirmed that work on the bungalow had been completed and students were now occupying the building. There were still snagging issues, none of which posed a health and safety concern, which were due to be discussed at a meeting between WBC, the contractor and AA.

The Committee were informed of the outcome of a health and safety walkaround that had taken place at the Lovel Lane site and the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) Checklist had been completed.

WA confirmed that the Committee had considered a number of policies. With regard to the Financial Management Policy, a change was proposed and agreed to the value of items that the School was required to be included in an inventory, which had risen from £100 to £1,000. AA confirmed that this change did not apply to laptops etc which would still be recorded.

- **Student and Staffing Committee held on 29th January 2026**

NM informed the meeting that CW had provided a safeguarding update during which she advised that the Annual 147 Safeguarding Audit had been completed and forwarded to the WB Safeguarding Board. CW provided some background information on the audit and advised that the only action coming out of the audit related to the provision of support to asylum seekers and this was because it was not something that the School had ever needed to do. CW also advised that the new KCSiE document, which was due in September, would require the audit process to be more robust.

NM stated that she had recently sat on an Independent Review Panel and one of the things that had come up was that the school in question had not been inputting information onto CPOMS accurately or in a timely manner. CW had provided the Committee with information that provided reassurance that this would not happen at The Castle.

The Committee had also received a staffing update and were informed that a number of recruitment drives were currently ongoing. A large number of policies were also considered.

NM also highlighted that she had attended an Ofsted Preparation for Governors course which had started a conversation about the benefits of Governors visiting the School and talking to staff. The slides from this course had been circulated to all Governors.

8. 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:

- JS queried whether there was an update on the banding exercise. JH provided an update on a meeting he had attended which included other heads of special schools and Helen Redding, the person undertaking the banding review. JH advised that at the meeting the idea of schools receiving a fixed amount for their SEND students rather than a complicated banding system was put forward.
- HC noted the list of whole school training that had been undertaken by staff but queried how effective whole school training was in terms of staff having the opportunity to develop and grow. Governors were advised that usually training requirements did come out of appraisals but bespoke packages, including coaching and mentoring, were not logged on the system.
- JD stated that she had been asked if there was any capacity for teacher only training in order that teachers could come together to discuss areas of expertise? JH felt that it was good practice for support staff to be involved in all training, particularly if they wanted to progress. JH asked JD to bring the matter to SLT in order that he could understand more about the rationale behind the request.

JH brought to Governors' attention the fact that the Safeguarding Team and a member of WBC' Education Department had visited the Castle @ Theale site last week following a concern that had been raised by someone in relation to students absconding from the site and behavioural issues. The two people who visited the site asked a large number of questions and were keen to see how the School dealt with dysregulated students. They had the opportunity to view dysregulated students and from the responses to their questions they were satisfied that there weren't any safeguarding concerns. CW felt that although it was stressful at the time she it was good to go through the process and intended to undertake some refresher training on the back of it. Governors asked if it would be possible to get some feedback from the visit and it was agreed that JH would contact the visitors to see if they would provide him with a document setting out the outcome of their visit.

Action 4 – JH to contact the Safeguarding Team to ask if they would provide him with a document setting out the outcome of their visit.

8.1 Review of Absence Data

Following a request at the previous FGB meeting HC confirmed that she would like to know more about any themes of staff absence and understand more about the impact of these absences on the School.

JH informed the meeting that it was usual for special schools have higher staff absence rates than other schools. The spread of Norovirus was a particular issue which was due to the close working relationship that staff had to have with the students. Due to higher staffing levels compared to other schools meant that classes could continue with a reduction of staff however if it was felt that there was a safety issue then staff would be used from elsewhere in the School or a system whereby half the class came in one day and the other on the next day would be put into operation. It was noted that agency staff were sometimes used but because of the nature of the School this had not always provided successful.

HC highlighted that absences were not always related to illness and queried how the School managed to ensure that people were not taking advantage of the system. JW confirmed that the HR Officer would flag anyone who was absent and a senior member of staff would check in with them when they came back. It was noted that Kate Mason took the lead on staff absences.

HC was concerned about the health and wellbeing of staff and asked when the last staff survey was completed. It was noted that this was undertaken last year and HC asked that a further survey be undertaken in the summer term.

Action 5 – JH to carry out a staff survey in the summer term.

NM informed the meeting that she had received a report from the HR Officer which showed that staff absences had increased over the last three years and asked if Kate was reviewing this? JH felt that Governors should be cautious when interpreting the data as although absences had gone up so had the number of staff. JH advised that he would see what information could be provided on staff absences from the current system in order to provide Governors with consistent and meaningful metrics that they could consider.

Action 6 – JH to see what information could be provided on staff absences from the current system in order to provide Governors with consistent and meaningful metrics that they could consider.

9. Interpreting Progress Data

HC confirmed that Governors wanted to know how best to interpret progress data so that they could understand exactly what it was saying and therefore ask the right questions to be confident that students were making sufficient progress. WA felt it would be useful to view data from two years ago to now to show the progress made.

JW felt that what Governors wanted to achieve could be better delivered by looking at a student's EHCP and the progress made as this would prove how the School was meeting students' needs. JW proposed that Governors could be taken through the process from baselining a student, to day to day logging, termly reviews and the end review process.

It was felt that this topic should be covered at the Governors' Strategy Session in June.

Action 7 – JH/AH to add Interpreting Progress Data to the agenda for the Governors' Strategy Session.

10. Policies for Ratification

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

- Admissions – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Appraisals – JH advised that he needed to remove mention of the Bluesky system as this was no longer used. The policy was agreed, subject to the deletion of mention of the Bluesky system and ratified by FGB.
- Attendance – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Capability Procedure- the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Care Experienced Children – It was noted that NM's link Governor role had changed to Safeguarding, including Care Experienced Children. The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Charging and Remissions – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Flexible Working – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Health and Safety – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Lockdown Procedures – Governors were advised that this was a new policy and it was noted that given the needs of students the intention was to carry out the minimum of drills. The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Offsite Activity Guidance – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- School Financial Management – the policy, including the appendices, were agreed and ratified by FGB.
- SEND – the policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions – JH advised that new guidance was due to be received and the policy would be changed as soon as possible afterwards and come back to Governors. The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.

Action 8 – The Clerk to make the amendment to the Appraisals Policy as requested and file the agreed policies in the relevant paper file and on GovernorHub.

11. Safeguarding Update and Signing of the Single Central Record

Governors had received a comprehensive report from CW prior to the meeting. CW reported that she would be meeting up with NM in due course to discuss safeguarding and also drew Governors' attention to the section about what might come out of the KCSiE review. HC asked what the School expected to have to change as a result of the review? CW advised that from what she understood there would be minimal impact and it was not expected to have to change the School's processes. The document was currently only in draft form and the intention was to monitor its development.

NM informed the meeting that she had met with Cassy Clark last month to sign-off the Single Central Record. Whilst she had found a few gaps Cassy was aware of them and closely monitoring them.

12. Governance and Training

12.1 SFVS Sign-Off

WA reported that the SFVS had been through the Finance and Premises Committee and been discussed by himself and AA, who advised that there were only minor changes from last year. It was agreed that the SFVS could be signed off and forwarded to the LA.

12.2 Governor Training

AH reminded that Governor Services would be sending out a list of available training sessions at the beginning of the summer term and asked Governors to let her know if they wished to be booked on any of the courses. In addition, if Governors had any other training requirements they should let AH know.

12.3 Governor Visits

AH reminded Governors that she had previously advised them that at the last Student and Staffing Committee meeting it was agreed that all Governors should make an effort to visit the School during the school day. Depending on which site Governors wished to visit they were asked to contact either Jon, Caroline or James to arrange a suitable date. Governors were also asked to complete a Governor Visit Form and either upload it to the Governor Visits Report section on GovernorHub or e-mail it to AH. JS and CF had both recently visited the School and JS stated that her visit had brought to life discussions that were held at Governor meetings.

Action 9 – Governors to consider visiting the School and contact the relevant member of SLT.

NM asked if it would be possible to be provided with Governor labelled lanyards when visiting the School. It was agreed that this would be looked into.

Action 10 – AA to consider the provision of Governor labelled lanyards for when Governors were visiting the School.

13. AOB items

There were no other items of business.

14. Dates and Times of the Next Meetings

Signed:

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JH advised that the Deputy Headteacher interview process was due to take place on 26th/27th March. The Full Governing Board needed to ratify the interview panel's decision therefore he was proposing that a FGB meeting take place at 12.00pm on Friday 27th March on Teams which was agreed.

Finance and Premises Committee – Thursday 16th April 2026, 4.30pm on Teams
Full Governing Board - Budget Sign Off Meeting – Thursday 30th April 2026 4.30pm on Teams
Student and Staffing Committee – Thursday 14th May 2026, 4.30pm on Teams
Governors' Strategy Session – Tuesday 16th June 2026 at 3.30pm in person at Love Lane
Full Governing Board – Thursday 2nd July 2026 at 5.00pm at Love Lane

The meeting closed at 6.40pm

Signed:

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