

Trust Board Confidential Meeting Minutes

Wednesday 20th May 2026 – Central Offices

Present: Paul Howieson (PH), Martin Copsey (MC) (Chair), Brendan Mullany (BM), Paul Chadwick (PC), Claire Lawrenson (CL), James Mikolajewski (JM), Rod Woodford (RW), Les Lane (LL)

Apologies: Jo Levasier (JL), John Varney (JV), Lucy Waterhouse (LW)

In Attendance: Sue Bennett (SEB) Minutes

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4.	Continued Management of Falling Pupil Numbers (document circulated with the agenda)	
4b	<u>St Mark's & St George's Merger Proposal</u> PH advised that the merger proposal documents circulated to the board are currently in draft form. The board is seeking formal approval to commence a public consultation on the proposed merger, which would run from 2nd June to 10th July. As part of the consultation process, three face-to-face meetings are planned: two specifically for parents and one open to the wider community. There is also the possibility of being invited to present to local town councils and other stakeholders. Informal consultation has already been taking place. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] So far, all discussions have been pragmatic and have demonstrated a good level of understanding among stakeholders. RW added that [REDACTED] the trust's primary focus remains on securing the best possible educational outcomes for all children affected by the proposed merger. JL emailed the following message prior to the meeting as she was unable to attend: <i>Apologies for not being able to attend this meeting, but as I have been closely involved in the consultation and planning of the proposed St George's and St Mark's merger, I just wanted to send a brief comment to the board, in support of the proposal to move to the consultation phase. I would like to reassure the Board that the planning group [REDACTED]</i> [REDACTED] [REDACTED] felt that the draft documentation provided the right balance of information and helped present the narrative behind our proposal [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I would also like	

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4c	<i>to express my personal thanks to Paul for the level of care, detail and responsiveness that he has invested in this project, and I trust that this will stand us in good stead once we launch the public consultation.</i> <u>Trustee questions / comments</u> With regard to inclusion and equity, we need to ensure that the consultation documentation explicitly outlines how these principles will be upheld throughout the process. It is important that the approach to inclusion and equity is clearly articulated within the materials. Has the documentation benefited from sufficient input from individuals representing a broad cross-section of society to ensure that the language and content are accessible and clearly communicated to all stakeholders. We are making a concerted effort to encourage as many people as possible to respond to the consultation survey. Clear instructions have been provided on the various ways in which stakeholders can submit their feedback, ensuring accessibility for all. The consultation materials have, to some extent, been co-constructed with input from a diverse group of people, including those with varying levels of understanding of educational issues. We were concerned about the length of the document, but it was felt that the level of detail included was necessary to provide stakeholders with all relevant information. With regards to mixed-age class teaching, the documentation needs to clearly state the trust's position on this matter. While the preference is to avoid mixed-age classes, we must acknowledge that this is already a reality in some schools where pupil numbers make it unavoidable. Trustees were asked whether there were any specific aspects they wished to address or seek clarification on in relation to the consultation process. Trustees were also invited to attend any of the planned consultation events if they wished. Following discussion, trustees approved the commencement of the public consultation, which will begin on 2nd June.	

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5.	Governance Structure (document circulated with the agenda) PH reported that the governance restructure process has now been completed. As part of this process, one of the clerks who also works within the central administration team, has increased their contracted hours to support the new structure. PH noted that some of the concerns and tensions being expressed by LGBs in their feedback are attributable to the impact on individuals who have been directly affected by these staffing changes. Currently, there is a degree of uncertainty and lack of information among LGBs, with some members under the impression that their clerking service has been removed entirely. PH emphasised the importance of moving swiftly to implement the new governance structure and to provide clear communication to allay concerns and clarify the situation. It was acknowledged that, at the recent Chairs' Forum, communication about these changes was not as clear as it could have been, leading to dissatisfaction among some chairs. <u>Local Governing Body (LGB) Structure</u> PH advised that the question of the impact and effectiveness of local governance has been raised frequently in recent years. While the scheme of delegation outlines the core purpose of LGBs, additional responsibilities have been added over time. Insights gained from a recent visit to ACE Trust have informed our thinking: we want our headteachers to be able to focus on the key educational priorities within their schools. When consulted, headteachers	

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	identified local governance as a significant barrier, describing it as overly burdensome and time-consuming. In reviewing the structure of local governance support, it is proposed that LGB meetings be streamlined and focused on clearly defined areas of education, with meetings held less frequently. Research into best practice, including guidance from the National Governance Association (NGA), suggests that local governance should be centred around four key areas: Standards, Special Educational Needs (SEN), Safeguarding, and Stakeholder Engagement. Any additional items are likely to detract from the effectiveness of meetings. The draft revised structure therefore removes any responsibilities that do not align with these four core areas (the ‘four S’s’) and proposes that LGBs meet three times per year. Specialist governors would continue to visit schools each term and report directly to the LGB at these meetings. <u>Next Steps</u> Given the current volume of changes within governance, it is suggested that both the staffing and structural changes be addressed together, framed within the narrative that these changes are a direct response to feedback from headteachers about what is hindering their focus on core educational priorities. A trustee agreed that basing the change process on the issues raised by headteachers is a sound and constructive approach.	

Meeting closed at 9:00

Next meeting: Wednesday 8th July 2026 at The Central Offices, Heathlands School