



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BoD) OF THE RURAL CHURCH SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST (RCSAT) HELD AT BUNBURY ALDERSEY CE PRIMARY SCHOOL ON 10th JULY 2024 (Commenced 4pm)

Directors in Attendance:

P Bostock	(PB)	Chair of Board of Directors
N Badger	(NB)	Executive Headteacher
P North	(PN)	
J Griffith	(JG)	

Also in Attendance:

B Brockbank	(BB)	Chair St Oswald's LGC
M Gate	(MG)	Chair Warmingham LGC
V Greenbury	(VG)	Chair Bunbury LGC
J Jones	(JJ)	Trust Business Manager
H Cummings	(Clerk)	

PART ONE

The meeting opened with a prayer.

1. APOLOGIES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB) ITEMS

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Beth Holdcroft and Rev Tim Hayward.

There were no additional items of part 1 business to consider.

2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the business of the meeting. General declarations of interest were recorded in full on GovernorHub.

3. MEMBERSHIP

- a) There had been no changes to the membership of the Board of Directors since the previous meeting.
- b) There were no new appointments to any of the Local Governing Committees to approve.

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OFFICIAL

- c) Directors noted the resignation of the following members of the Local Governing Committees:
 - Charlie Ashworth – St Oswald’s LGC
 - Graham Melia – Bunbury LGC
- d) There were no current vacancies on the Board of Directors.
- e) There were no terms of office of Directors that were due to expire before the next meeting.
- f) All criminal record and section 128 checks had been completed.

4. PART ONE MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The part one minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2024 were agreed as a true record, signed by the Chair and retained by the trust.

Matters arising

The action log from the previous meeting was reviewed and all actions had been completed with the exception of the following, which were carried forward:

- Circulate slides from Governor Safeguarding training.
- Draft a meeting protocol for review.
- Completion of Board self-review.

5. CHAIR’S POWER TO ACT

No actions had been taken on behalf of the Trust Board since the previous meeting

6. PART ONE REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES AND REPORTS FROM GOVERNORS WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Directors had reviewed the minutes from each of the summer term LGC meetings, and the committee Chairs added the following comments:

Warmingham

MG reported that only 7 pupils would be joining Warmingham in Reception in September (PAN was 12), and that the lack of wrap-around care had been identified as an issue. Governors would continue to review the feasibility of introducing wrap-around care.

Parking at drop-off and pick-up remained a contentious issue. The Village Hall committee had tried to support the school by banning parking without an agreed permit, but complaints about the school car park continued. The school was listening to parental concerns, but it was agreed that there was little that could be done and the real solution lay in parents parking more carefully and showing greater consideration for other users.

Governors had been greatly concerned by the impact on staff of the number of SEND pupils. Mixed year teaching meant that there would be a high concentration of complex needs in the year 5-6 class from September, and governors worried that the additional pressure could impact on staff wellbeing and potentially lead to staff absence. In addition, a child was scheduled to join Reception in September, with a very high level of need, but the EHCP application was still in process.

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Question: Is there anything that can be done if the school does not feel it can properly meet the needs of this pupil?

Response: Until the EHCP identifies the child's specific needs, we cannot say whether or not we are able to meet need. However, we have a plan in place for reduced hours with 1:1 support in September, to ensure that the child is kept safe.

Early indications from the KS2 SATs data suggested that the emphasis on Greater Depth had been successful. Results would be analysed in greater detail in the autumn term LGC meeting.

St Oswald's (STO)

BB reported that the situation with SEND at STO was more manageable since one pupil had moved to specialist provision. Another pupil who had been on reduced hours was now back in school full time, but this had required a great deal of support from staff.

Governors had discussed the redevelopment of the front of the school, and hoped that work to create additional parking and a drop-off area could be carried out at the same time as the rebuilding of the conservatory and the tree removal. The funds that had been set aside for this additional work had been used to support the school budget, but JJ was awaiting quotes and LM would be speaking to the parish council about any practical help that could be offered by the local community.

ACTION: JJ to keep PB informed of likely cost to allow for a decision before the summer break if possible.

Bunbury

VG reported that the LGC had received a useful presentation on the connected curriculum and STEM. They were also pleased to note that the staffing reductions required by the budget cuts had not proved to be as difficult as initially thought, due to the natural turnover of staff.

Directors discussed the wellbeing of staff at all schools, and this discussion was recorded under part 2 of the minutes.

There were no further reports from committees, or recommendations requiring approval at this point.

Directors noted that they could not approve Warmingham's application for a change of age range, as the consultation period had not yet ended.

ACTION: PB to arrange a meeting of the internal audit committee.

7. FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE

Directors confirmed the following:

- a) The 2022/23 audited financial statements had been submitted to Companies House by the deadline of 31st May 2024.
- b) Arrangements were in place to ensure the submission of the budget forecast by the deadline of 29th August.
- c) The Section 175 Safeguarding audit had been completed and submitted for each school by the Pastoral Manager.

Approvals:

- d) Directors had reviewed the draft budget on GovernorHub, noting that there was a small surplus at the end of 2025/26. Directors were concerned at the lack of flexibility in the

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budget, but acknowledged that additional funding was unlikely while large reserves were held by schools nationally. **Directors approved the draft budget for 2024/25.**

- e) The staffing structure for each school had been discussed by the relevant LGC and Directors approved the overall structure for the trust.
- f) A list of ongoing contracts had been uploaded to GovernorHub and was approved by Directors.
- g) Directors discussed the need for an online training offer for governors, which could be used to complement the training offered by Cheshire East, but at governors' convenience.

ACTION: JJ to request quote for the NGA Learning Link.

To review:

- a) Monthly Management Accounts up to and including May 2024 had been circulated on GovernorHub for Directors to review.

ACTION: JG to meet with JJ to develop understanding of trust finance.

8. SCHOOL CATERING

NB confirmed that Cheshire East Catering would cease trading at the end of March 2025, and the trust was still considering options for each of the 3 schools.

Warmingham had hoped to use meals provided by Mablins Lane Primary, but there were possible complications around staffing. JJ had arranged a meeting with HR to discuss further.

Bunbury and St Oswalds had met with Shire Services (a school meals provider run by Shropshire CC), but the cost would be prohibitive. NB and JJ planned to arrange a visit to Kelsall Primary to look more closely at the feasibility of in-house catering.

In the meantime however, Cheshire East would be increasing the price of meals to £3.20 from September, so Directors discussed whether or not to increase the price for parents (currently £2.75 per meal). It was felt that any price increase was likely to reduce uptake and could therefore make it more challenging to find an alternative provider, but the subsidy required to keep the price at £2.75 was not sustainable for the school budgets. On balance it was **agreed to increase the price to £3.20 from September 2024**. Every effort would be made to match this price, or even reduce it when new arrangements were agreed.

9. PART ONE EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER'S REPORT AND MATTERS ARISING

The report had been circulated on GH in advance of the meeting and questions were invited.

Question: The report refers to LA concerns around the plan for nursery provision at Warmingham. What are the concerns?

Response: The concern is around floor space.

NB drew directors' attention to section 2 of the report looking at current challenges facing the trust, and in particular the breakdown of costs. The figures showed clearly that staffing costs at all 3 schools exceeded 90% of the funding received from the DfE, and in the case of St Oswalds, were 121% of the funding received. When school-generated income was factored in, the picture improved, but St Oswald's staffing costs still accounted for 90% of total income, leaving just 10% for fixed costs and teaching & learning costs.

Directors discussed the reasons for this, including low pupil numbers giving a pupil/teacher ratio of 1:16, and high levels of SEND which required additional staffing that was not fully funded.

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10. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS 2023/24

The school development plan for each school had been reviewed in detail at the relevant LGC meeting and RAG rated plans were available for Directors on GovernorHub.

11. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER/EXTERNAL ADVISER

BP had confirmed his availability to support with the performance management of the EHT in the autumn term. A new external adviser would need to be appointed after that, but it was agreed to defer any appointment subject to progress in the merger with CDAT.

12. TERM DATES FOR 2025/26

The trust was waiting for local high schools to confirm term dates before final approval could be given.

ACTION: Clerk to add to agenda for autumn 24.

13. DIRECTOR’S REPORT SUMMER 2024

The Director’s Report had been circulated on GovernorHub earlier in the term and items raised at LGC meetings as appropriate. The clerk noted the availability of new governance guidance, and a link would be posted on GovernorHub.

14. GOVERNOR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Directors agreed that access to online training was important and JJ would request a quote for the NGA Learning link (see item 7 above).

Only 2 responses had been received to the board self-review, so all directors were reminded of the need to complete in time for discussion at the autumn term meeting.

15. SCHOOL POLICIES

Directors had reviewed the following policies uploaded to GovernorHub for summer 2024:

- RCSAT-P-014-03 Risk Management Policy
- RCSAT-P-027 E Safety Policy

All policies were **approved** with no amendments.

16. PLANNED RESIDENTIAL VISITS

There were no residential visits requiring Directors’ approval.

17. MEETINGS

The date of the next Board of Directors’ meeting would be arranged after the meeting.

ACTION: Clerk to contact Chair with suggested dates.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to be discussed in part 1 of the meeting.

Meeting closed at 6.20pm.

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