

Invited:

Cheryl Mathieson (Chair)	Sarah Cox (SC)
Nicky Dunford (CEO)	Paul Waterworth (PW)
Christopher Norman (CN)	Kate Evans (KE)
Ben Thorne (BT)	
Graeme Scott (GS)	Max Thomas (MT)
Matt Matthew (DCEO)	Charlotte Roe (Governance Professional)
Christine Cottle (CC)	

Minutes: Nicol Bush- Clerk to the Trust

No	Item	Action
1.	Private Meeting of Non-Executive Trustees/Directors Remuneration Committee Report <i>CEO, DCEO, GP and Clerk to withdraw</i>	
2.	Welcome and apologies The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome and thanks to the Trustees. Apologies were received from Dominic Course. These were accepted by the meeting,	
3.	Declarations of interest The CEO is a Trustee for the Bearnes Education Foundation. Dominic Course is Chair of Governors at South Dartmoor Community College and a Director of DACORS Ltd. Sarah Cox is Shareholder of S Cox &Co Ltd, Shareholder of Naked Sprout, Trustee of The Fryer Welfare Trust and The Fryer Recreational Trust, Trustee of Drake's School PTFA. Graeme Scott is an employee and Executive Chairperson for educational software company, The Mario Framework. Chris Norman is Director of CANE Properties Ltd. Kate Evans is Director for Education of The Good Shepherd MAT and Governor at Boscastle County Primary School. There were no other declarations of interests brought forward.	
4.	Any other business There was no other business brought forward to the meeting.	
5.	Approval of meeting minutes The minutes of the meeting on 21 st October 2024 were approved as a true record and were signed by the Chair.	
6.	Matters arising from 21st October 2024 not on the agenda 6.9.1 Data on in-year pupils leaving schools The data outlining the numbers of pupils leaving schools in-year was shared with the meeting. In response to a question, the DCEO explained that the data had come from the new SIMS MIS system. He added that the figures would be produced on a more regular basis going forward once some additional work was done on the SIMS program. The figures showed that 178 pupils had left which did not include nursery numbers. The Chair commented that there were 121 in-year applications last year, which included nursery applications, so the Trust was slightly down on numbers overall. <i>The Trustees asked the following questions:</i>	

	<p><i>Was the Trust surprised at the number of pupils home-schooled being so high?</i> The CEO said that since the Covid pandemic, the numbers of home-schooled pupils had been growing. It was seen to be easier to home-school now than pre-Covid.</p> <p><i>Did the Local Authority follow up on those children particularly as a safeguarding issue?</i> The CEO responded that there had not been much follow up previously, but following recent incidents and more press coverage, there was to be more follow up and pupils with amber or red flags against them would likely not be allowed to be home-schooled.</p> <p><i>The Trustees requested a column to be added to the data chart with total pupils on roll so that pupil ratios could be considered.</i></p> <p><i>The data showed that one school had 12 leavers which seemed high, and Trustees asked for further clarification of the "other reasons".</i> The DCEO said the Trust was looking at adding greater depth analysis options to SIMS to understand the data better.</p> <p><i>The numbers looked high, did the Trust know if the numbers were standard? It would be good to get some legacy data.</i> The DCEO said the numbers had not been tracked previously, however, going forward the Trust would factor them into the termly reporting and create a bespoke report within SIMs on group analytics. The DCEO added it was an area that Ofsted would scrutinise during an inspection.</p> <p><i>Was the Trust asking the reasons for home-schooling and was the Trust expecting parents to give the reasons to make the process more formal?</i> The CEO responded that the responsibility was on the Local Authority to ask the Trust for information, but agreed that it would be good to identify a person within the Trust to take responsibility for this information.</p> <p>The Trustees suggested that when a family decided to home-school, if they had to make a request in writing to the Academy Head, it would make it a more formal process, and would also help the EIT identify what the reasons were and whether there were any commonalities.</p> <p><i>If there was a safeguarding issue raised around the family taking a child out of school to home-educate, did the Trust have to report it?</i> The CEO said the Trust had to report the issue; however, the Trust could not refuse the request, as the law allowed children to be home-schooled; it was the parent's choice.</p> <p>With regard to home-schooling, the Trustees asked if the Trust was <i>looking at the data often enough and did it have enough relevant data to be able to identify trends before they accelerated?</i> The CEO said it was good to have the trends flagged up and it would be also interesting to know of the families that went back into education after home-schooling. The CEO added the importance of the Inclusion hub and the expertise within the Trust, as well as the bought in services, such as Mast in Plymouth, to show parents the Trust was trying hard to provide them with what the Local Authority could not or had long waiting lists for.</p>	<p>DCEO</p> <p>CEO</p>
7.	<p>2024-2025 Annual Report and Financial Statements</p> <p>7.1 Management Report by the External Audit Service Bishop Fleming.</p> <p>7.2 Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st August 2024 which include (included in report above)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Trustees' Report • The Governance Statement • CEO's Value for Money Report (included in Governance Statement) • CEO's Statement on Regularity, Propriety and Compliance (included in Governance Statement) • The Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities (included in Governance Statement) • The Auditor's Letter of Representation <p>BT confirmed that Bishop Fleming had completed the financial audit and had met with the Audit Committee. They had provided their management report and their audit findings. The DCEO presented the Annual report to the meeting which had been discussed at length at the recent Audit committee meeting. BT added it had been a successful audit this year and added that Bishop Fleming had commented it was a clean audit considering the size of the numbers of</p>	

	<p>schools that the Trust had. There had been adjustments made to figures because of how accounting standards required certain transactions to be treated in the financial statements, such as capital transactions with Church schools which was important to understand. The DCEO presented a financial overview of the Trust which showed free reserves of £1.46 million. However, this included the Urgent Capital Loan. BT explained that Bishop Fleming had required some further documents and evidence as reassurance that the Trustees considered the Trust to be a going concern (for at least twelve months). These had been provided.</p> <p>BT moved on to the budget for the next financial year which provided worst case scenarios due to a number of unknowns around funding. However, the CEO and DCEO had put together a deficit recovery plan which included a timeline of when actions would need to be considered and when information would become available which would ensure that the big decisions would be made with enough information and in a timely manner.</p> <p>The CEO added that a positive outcome from recent discussions of the deficit recovery plan was that if the Trust scrutinised every area of spend and took small decisions now, the Trust should be able to gain more control for the future. The CEO said all forms of government funding including conversion grants had ceased, so there were no additional funds for anything including expansion which was a concern. The Trustees also expressed their concern at this.</p> <p>The Chair gave thanks to those involved in the audit.</p> <p>The Trustees approved the annual reports and financial statements and authorised the Chair and CEO to sign them on behalf of the Trust for submission to the External Auditors for signature and then the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and Companies House.</p>	
8.	<p>Chief Executive Officer's Report (Circulated prior to the meeting)</p> <p>The CEO said there had not been any significant updates since the previous meeting's report on 16th October 2024. There were no questions raised.</p>	
9.	<p>Trust Growth</p> <p>The CEO said she had met with 5 Church schools in East Devon that had shown an interest in joining the Trust.</p> <p>The Trustees asked the following questions: <i>There was £200k allocated to growth, what was the plan for this budget line, considering the stretched capacity of the central team? Did the lack of carefully targeted and planned spending impact on the quality of education and the pupil outcomes?</i> The CEO explained that the Trust had now split the schools into 3 new hubs with a Director of School Improvement leading each hub. This had a financial implication and although the amount may not have been spent in the previous academic year, it had been included in this financial year's budget. Extra SEND support had also been added. The CEO added that the Trust had spent what it had expected to spend and she felt that the school improvement capacity was now in a place that matched the work going forward.</p> <p><i>The Trustees asked the CEO to explain the absence of any grants to deal with administrative arrangements for expansion.</i> The CEO responded that there appeared to be barriers in place to stop trust expansion. With no conversion grants, the CEO considered that any new schools would need to have at least £25k in order to cover conversion costs. The CEO said that in addition only three schools at a time would be considered for conversion and it would not be possible to convert just one. <i>The Trustees commented that it would be helpful for them to have the CEO's recommendations on investigating any school advances that the CEO had received, before things progressed further so that Trustees could make a decision in principle.</i> The CEO responded that of the 5 schools she had spoken to, one was very keen and two others may be interested which would give us potentially three schools, but agreed that the Trust had to be cautious, in firstly getting the newly joined schools in order, before considering taking on more schools.</p> <p><i>The Trustees commented that it was good that the Trust's reputation was causing other schools to look their way and asked if the Trust had the capacity to take on more schools, given the challenges of the most recently joined</i></p>	

	<p><i>schools. Was it appropriate to be meeting with Governors in January when the Trust needed to pace themselves?</i> The CEO responded that the meeting was an initial meeting for the schools to have an understanding of the Trust and was more about factfinding. The CEO noted that the conversion of Wolborough school had been a success largely because it had been in a management partnership first. This period had given the Trust longer time to put in order the estate issues and reduce any deficit. She considered a management partnership was the right approach. The Chair reiterated that it was wise to proceed with caution at this stage, as the Trust did not know where finances were headed and the more information that was gathered would help with future decision making.</p> <p>The Trustees commented that growth was not just about finance, but about quality of education and pupil outcomes as well, which was the Trust's core business. Data for the last academic year indicated that existing schools may have suffered at the expense of growth. It was important for the Trust to protect the longer-standing schools.</p>	
10.	<p>Trust Risk Register</p> <p>10.1 Trustees to consider the Risk register report with the Trust risk categories with particular scrutiny of amber risks highlighted at last Board meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and Reputation • Governance • Strategic <p>The DCEO explained there had been a reallocation of the risk register and risks had been reassigned to various committees, risks had been taken from the Terms of reference and risks had been added that had been requested by SC.</p> <p>SC suggested it would be useful for the GP to circulate risks assigned to the Board of Trustees ahead of the next meeting as it was important for Trustees to agree that all the Board risks were included. The GP said the DCEO and the CEO planned to look further at the risk register.</p> <p>SC presented the risk register document to the meeting and the Trustees discussed each area and considered the RAG rating. The DCEO advised that counter-measures were the actions taken to mitigate the risk down from the current level. The following comments were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust Growth – Trustees agreed that this was being covered. After discussion it was agreed that the RAG rating remained at green. • Reputation and Competition - Trustees agreed that some counter-measures needed to be added. The CEO commented that the reputation of the Trust was how it was seen by the Diocese, nationally and the Regions board and about making sure that the Trust was known and that reports were submitted to the ESFA at the correct times. The CEO said the counter-measures should include keeping people informed about the Trust, at an appropriate time and measure. It was agreed to add the counter-measures as discussed. The Trustees considered that the Trust's reputation was currently very strong and it was agreed to change the risk rating from amber to green. • Strategic risks - SC explained the amber rating was partly due to the data the Trust had in place on which the Trust strategy was based. The CEO said the only strategic risk she recognised would be the financial position that the Trust was in, and the Trust was unsure of where the current Government was headed and on what the trajectory was based. However, this was outside the Trust's influence. The Trustees raised that the Trust did not have a strong base of pupil outcomes data or attendance at pupil characteristic level yet but as strategic risk was discussed regularly at committee and Board level, did not think it was a high risk. The meeting agreed to change the risk rating from amber to green. • Governance risks - the meeting agreed the risk was reviewed on a regular enough basis and should stay at green. 	DCEO/GP

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy management - the meeting agreed the GP had an effective process on ensuring policies were reviewed and adopted in a timely manner. It was agreed that it should remain as green. <p>It was noted that risks should be owned by someone in the Trust and not by an individual Trustee.</p> <p>10.2 Trustees to consider any Risk Register issues from Committee Meetings – there were no other risk issues to consider from Committee meetings.</p>	
11.	<p>Audit Committee Minutes from 5th December 2024</p> <p>11.1 Chair of Committee to outline any additional points and take questions The minutes were not yet available, but most points had been discussed earlier in the meeting. There were no comments brought forward.</p> <p>11.2 Terms of Reference for approval Audit Committee Constitution and Terms of Reference 2024. The Trustees approved the Audit Committee’s Terms of Reference.</p> <p>11.3 Annual confirmation of the appointment of Bishop Fleming to conduct the external audit for the year 2024-25 as per the Academy Handbook 4.14 and 4.15</p> <p>SC explained that the Chair of the Audit Committee had produced a paper recommending Bishop Fleming continue as auditors for the year 2024/25 - for approval from the Members at the upcoming AGM. The Trustees supported the recommendation.</p>	
12.	<p>Finance & General Purposes Committee Minutes from 12th December 2024.</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting were not yet available, but the Chair of the committee commented that the DCEO and CEO had updated the financial forecast with the latest information and added that the current main focus for the committee was budgeting and planning for next year. There were no questions raised.</p>	
13.	<p>Remuneration Committee Minutes from 12th December 2024</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting were not yet available. The Chair commented that the main focus of the meeting had been the items discussed at the non-executive Directors’ meeting earlier. There were no other issues or comments brought forward to the meeting.</p>	
14.	<p>Standards & Curriculum Committee 14.1 Minutes from 10th December 2024.</p> <p>The minutes were not yet available.</p> <p>The Chair of the Committee explained that the Audit Committee had asked S&C to address some highlighted issues from the Trustees’ Report in the Financial Statements in relation to data being below the national average. Whilst the dip in outcomes had been attributed to the inclusion of data from the two new schools, the Trustees’ Report had shown that if the two new schools had not been included there would have been only a 2% difference.</p> <p><i>The S&C Committee had been requesting analysis of the data for quite some time and did not feel that the Trust had a full evaluation of why the outcomes were so low and whether it was a trend over time. An analysis of progress of disadvantaged pupils had also been required, in particular to determine whether the gap was being narrowed. This information was still awaited. Whilst it had been pleasing to see in the Trustees’ Report that closing the gap for disadvantaged pupils was appropriately listed within the Trust’s aims and ambitions, there was nothing in the strategy about outcomes for Pupil Premium children and whether the gap was narrowing.</i></p> <p>The CEO said the Trust’s previous data system had not been able to provide this level of information. <i>The Trustees added that the information from the LAC reports and visits to schools indicated that the AHs knew their individual school data extremely well and analysed it well. It was questioned therefore whether this information could be harnessed to provide a Trust wide position, as the Trust could be challenged on outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in a MAT evaluation.</i></p> <p>The</p>	

	<p>CEO said she would work with the EIT to try and identify the historic data requested as quickly and as accurately as possible but that it would be a big piece of work which she would need to undertake herself in order to understand what information was and was not available. The challenge was with the historic data and going forward it was hoped that, with the new data system, this information would be more readily available. It would also be important to compare the Trust's picture with both Devon and national figures.</p> <p>14.2 Local Boards There were no issues brought forward from the Local Boards.</p>	<p>CEO/AK</p>
<p>15.</p>	<p>Governance 15.1 Update – The Chair to summarise any changes or appointments of Trustees and Governors. The Chair updated the meeting that both PW and SC were coming to the end of their Trustee terms on 31 December. PW had agreed to continue as a Trustee (subject to the Foundation Members' approval) but SC had decided to step down due to her business commitments. The Chair gave thanks to SC for all her hard work, particularly with the risk register and commitment as a Trustee. PW's reappointment would be brought forward to the AGM. The Chair updated the meeting on the LAC structure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Devon LAC had a new Trustee appointed Governor, as well as another Foundation Governor due to the number of Church schools within the hub. • Moorland LAC had filled the position of Staff Governor and had a vacancy for a Parent Governor which the Chair of the committee was covering in the interim. • Mid Devon LAC was full and had no issues. • Totnes LAC needed a LAC chair urgently and were currently rotating a Chair to attend the S&C meetings. The GP asked the meeting for approval to send a letter to the parents and community of the Totnes LAC to seek nomination of a Trustee appointed Chair for the committee. The Trustees approved the GP's request. <p>15.2 MAT Governance Self Evaluation- the GP encouraged Trustees to complete any outstanding paperwork.</p> <p>15.3 Trustee Self Assessment- the Chair thanked Trustees for their responses and noted there was still time for anyone still wishing to complete the assessment.</p>	<p>GP</p> <p>GP/Trustees</p>
<p>16.</p>	<p>External Inspections 16.1 Ofsted: Broadhempston - final report now available 16.2 Ofsted: Sparkwell – final report now available 16.3 Ofsted: Diptford- final report The CEO had covered the inspections in her CEO's report and it was confirmed that the final reports for the three schools were now available. The CEO added that Ofsted were due at Harbertonford school the following day for a one day inspection. The two day inspection at Bearnas had had to be deferred due to staff illness and it was unlikely that it would happen this term. There were no further comments brought to the meeting.</p>	
<p>17.</p>	<p>Safeguarding 17.1 GS/CEO to highlight any issues – the CEO noted a couple of issues had been referred to LADO and confirmed that matters were in hand. 17.2 Trustees to discuss how they would like the Safeguarding reports from CPOMS to look and advise what information would be helpful. GS noted that he had a meeting in January with the Trust's Safeguarding Lead to consider the reporting opportunities the new CPOMS system would give the Trust. He said that it would be helpful to have input from Trustees as to what they would like included in a safeguarding report and added that to help with this he would circulate a document containing examples of useful information to include and asked that Trustees provided him with any comments or additions by 14th January 2025.</p>	<p>Trustees</p>

	<p>The GP asked if going forward a report on safeguarding for the S&C committee would be provided by the Safeguarding Lead now that GS was no longer on the committee. GS confirmed that it would be possible for any reports from CPOMS to be forwarded to the committee once the content had been agreed, together with an update from the Safeguarding Lead.</p> <p><i>The Trustees asked if there was a staff wellbeing/mental health report?</i> The CEO responded there was a regular staff wellbeing survey undertaken by the HROM.</p>	GS/AW/GP
18.	<p>Health and Safety The CEO updated the meeting on the completion of the fencing at Diptford and Cheriton Bishop and the heating at Diptford and Branscombe. The CEO noted there were other health and safety aspects which had been included within the CIF bids. Apart from an incident at one of the schools, no other issues were highlighted.</p>	
19.	<p>Strategic Plan The Chair raised that going forward a Trustee would be chosen at each meeting to give a more detailed report on their area.</p> <p>There were no further comments brought forward to the meeting.</p>	
20.	<p>Policies for approval The following policies were reviewed and updated and were presented for approval:</p> <p>20.1 Standards & Curriculum Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints Policy 2024 - the meeting approved the policy <p>20.2 Finance & General Purposes Committee No policies needing Full Board approval</p> <p>20.3 Remuneration Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual Harassment Policy 2024- the Chair explained that this was a new policy to comply with the new duty under the Equality Act 2010. The meeting approved the policy. <p>The CEO added that she would ask Academy Heads to take the policy to their next staff meetings to ensure that it was fully discussed with all staff.</p> <p>20.4 Audit Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health & Safety Policy 2024-25 - the meeting approved the policy. <p>20.5 Board of Trustees Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trustees and LAC Expenses Policy 2024 - the meeting approved the policy. <p>It was noted that a number of Trust policies referred to the ESFA which soon would no longer be in existence. It was agreed that any such references would be changed to DfE as and when the relevant policies were updated.</p>	CEO
21.	<p>Evaluation of governance impact The Trustees agreed that the meeting had been a detailed examination and had had a positive impact.</p>	

The meeting ended at 6.20pm

Signed by the Chair.....on 10th February 2025.