

TOGETHER LEARNING TRUST
CASTLE HILL SCHOOL
Local Governing Committee Meeting Minutes
 Tuesday 5 May 2026, 15:30-17:30

Present:	Emma Firth (EF) – Chair, Til Wright (TW), Kristy Dyson (KD) – Vice Chair, Katrina Whale (KW), Jayne Askew (JA), Joan Haines (JH)(Teams), Richard Instone (RI) (Left at 16:30) (Teams)
In Attendance:	Steve Perren (SP) – Principal, Dan Pearce (DP) – Deputy Principal, Allanna Hoyer (AH) – School Business Manager, Susan Bracey (SB) – Trustee, Kim Williams (KW) – Trust Support
Item	
1.	<p>Welcome and Apologies: The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting. The meeting was confirmed as quorate. Governors were reminded that the meeting would be audio recorded to support the production of minutes in line with Trust arrangements</p>
2.1	Declarations of Interest – None
2.2	<p>Minutes of Meeting held on 3 March 2026 The minutes were reviewed. Governors confirmed that all actions had been completed, including policy updates and governance changes. RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2026 be approved as a true and accurate record.</p>
2.3	<p>Matters Arising A request was made for the inclusion, under Any Other Business, of a review of the Manual Handling Policy sign-off and a discussion on the use of AI. This was agreed.</p>
3	<p>Finance Update The School Business Manager presented the financial position to the end of March 2026, noting this represented the mid-year closedown point in line with Trust financial policy and financial year-end reporting requirements.</p> <p>Governors were informed that a full review of all cost centres had been undertaken, with income and expenditure updated to reflect the latest position.</p> <p>An overall positive income variance of £112,000 was reported. This variance was attributed to a combination of factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth funding allocation of £14,000 from the Local Authority linked to increased specialist place numbers • Receipt of the newly introduced Legacy Grant (£75,000), consolidating historic funding streams into a single allocation distributed via the National Funding Formula • Restricted funding of £20,000 from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation • Increased self-generated income, including approximately £11,000 from Makaton training provision <p>Governors noted that the introduction of the Legacy Grant represents a nationally standardised funding mechanism, removing previous local authority discretion and ensuring consistency across schools.</p> <p>Expenditure Position The staffing position was outlined as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A teaching staff overspend was identified, attributable to:

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- Keeping in Touch (KIT) days
- Shared parental leave commitments not originally budgeted
- A support staff variance of £2,541, linked to:
 - Additional hours worked
 - Final salary payments for a staff leaver

Overall, staffing showed a net overspend of £7,655.

Additional cost pressures were noted under other staff costs (£8,000 overspend), driven by:

- Investment in staff professional development, including a master's qualification in Inclusion
- Introduction of annual Team Teach training, replacing the previous three-year cycle and enabling in-house delivery

Premises and Operational Costs

Governors were advised that:

- Utilities remained slightly under budget
- Central "top-slice" charges remained on track
- General supplies expenditure remained within expected levels

A significant variance of £55,000 in revenue contribution to capital was reported, relating to:

- Purchase of a new minibus
- Installation of the 8x8 phone system

Overall Financial Position

The current forecast indicates:

- An in-year surplus improvement of £23,000 above budget
- A revised total projected surplus of £139,000 at year-end

Governors noted that this strengthens the school's reserve position and provides increased financial resilience.

Strategic Financial Planning

The School Business Manager confirmed that financial planning is being aligned to longer-term risks, including:

- Preparation for PFI contract changes from 2031, at which point responsibility for the full estate (including buildings and infrastructure) will transfer
- Inclusion of additional capital reserve contributions within future budgets
- Development of a three-year budget plan, to be presented at the next meeting

Q: Do you have any indication what the legal costs associated to the PFI contract changes would be?

A: No, participation in PFI discussions is ongoing, and while future legal and survey costs are anticipated, these have not yet been quantified

Risk and Mitigation

- Risk: Exposure to future capital and legal costs associated with PFI transfer and estate responsibility
- Risk: Unplanned staffing costs impacting budget forecasts

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthening of reserves ○ Forward financial modelling through the three-year budget ○ Active participation in Trust and PFI planning discussions <p>Outcome Governors noted the report and received assurance that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial management remains robust • Variances are understood and controlled • Strategic planning is in place to address future financial risks
4.	<p>Headteacher’s Report</p> <p>The principal presented the Headteacher’s Report as circulated, covering attendance, safeguarding, curriculum, staffing, and school improvement priorities.</p> <p>Attendance and Safeguarding</p> <p>The principal reported that overall attendance remained broadly in line with local authority expectations, with cumulative attendance data indicating that, following adjustments, the school is meeting expected thresholds.</p> <p>It was noted that attendance continues to show recovery towards pre-COVID levels (2018–19 baseline), although full recovery has not yet been achieved. The principal identified this as being linked to ongoing cultural changes in parental attitudes following the pandemic, particularly within a vulnerable cohort.</p> <p>The school continues to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply the attendance policy consistently • Contact families where absence reasons are not provided • Monitor patterns of absence closely <p>Targeted use of outreach provision remains a significant support mechanism, particularly for pupils with complex medical needs. This is applied flexibly, based on individual circumstances, and withdrawn or adapted as needs change.</p> <p>Safeguarding continues to be a central priority, with the principal confirming that the school maintains a focus on ensuring “eyes on” all pupils at all times.</p> <p>Q: When you say culturally, we still have some issues in terms of COVID, is it parents not sending the children in with a cold?</p> <p>A: Increased parental vigilance regarding illness and vulnerability, is contributing to attendance behaviours</p> <p>Risk and Mitigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk: Persistent absence influenced by parental anxiety and cultural change • Mitigation: Consistent application of attendance procedures and strengthened parental engagement <p>Pupil Numbers, Capacity and Placement</p> <p>The principal confirmed that pupil numbers increase to 132 following the February half term, with continued discussions with SENDACT regarding future placements.</p>

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Capacity pressures remain a key consideration. The school has undertaken detailed planning to optimise space usage, including:

- Repurposing the music room for classroom use
- Reconfiguring learning spaces
- Adjusting classroom allocations

Governors were advised that these arrangements remain subject to change, reflecting the dynamic nature of pupil need and intake.

Q: Do the local authorities, take the traveling time and distance into consideration regarding placement suitability?

A: Whilst travel distances are considered, placement decisions balance travel with continuity, educational stability and overall pupil wellbeing.

Q: is the cost per student the same if they come from out of area or is there an increased payment?

A: Funding is determined by the receiving local authority banding system and may vary; some placements may be higher or lower in cost.

Q: In the EHCP reviews, do we ever have conversations around how effective the transport is and how long it takes?

A: Transport is reviewed where it impacts on a pupil's regulation, wellbeing or access to learning, with adjustments made where appropriate

Risk and Mitigation

- Risk: Impact of extended travel on pupil wellbeing and readiness to learn
- Risk: Pressure on physical space due to increasing numbers
- Mitigation: Individualised placement review and proactive space planning

Safeguarding Systems and Multi-Agency Working

Governors received a safeguarding update including reference to a detailed CPOMS case study. This demonstrated:

- Complexity of pupil and family circumstances
- Importance of multi-agency collaboration
- Need for responsive and adaptive safeguarding approaches

The case highlighted the need to manage transitions across different local authorities whilst maintaining consistency of support.

Risk and Mitigation

- Risk: Complexity of multi-agency working leading to potential gaps in oversight
- Mitigation: Strong coordination, consistent communication and safeguarding systems

Curriculum, Quality of Education and Assessment

The principal reported that teaching continues to focus on **innovation**, reflecting the highly individualised needs of pupils.

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Learning walks and observations have focused on adaptive approaches, with findings used to inform ongoing improvement.

Assessment processes remain under continual review, with mid-term data identifying some areas where targets are not yet met. In these cases:

- Teacher discussions have taken place
- Approaches have been amended to address identified gaps

Governors noted the inclusion of detailed observation feedback within the report as supporting understanding of teaching practice

Assurance

The principal confirmed that:

- Assessment systems are responsive and adjusted where required
- Quality assurance processes (learning walks and observations) are robust

Personal Development and Staff Training

The report highlighted a strong professional development offer, including:

- National Professional Qualification (NPQH)
- Level 5 teaching assistant apprenticeship
- Master's degree in Inclusion
- Business management qualification
- Medical and specialist training (e.g. gastrostomy, Makaton)

Additional developments include:

- Expansion of Team Teach training to annual delivery
- Increased number of Makaton-trained staff

Training is aligned to pupil need and operational requirements.

Staffing

The principal confirmed successful recruitment of:

- Three teaching staff
- Four ETAs
- Additional supply capacity

This strengthens the school's workforce capacity, although some reliance on supply staff remains.

Risk and Mitigation

- Risk: Ongoing staffing pressures and dependency on supply staff
- Mitigation: Active recruitment and expansion of staffing pipeline

Ofsted and School Improvement

The principal reported:

- Upcoming peer review activity within the KSSH group
- Preparation for anticipated Ofsted inspections

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement of the School Improvement Partner to support moderation activity <p>The SEF, school improvement plan and strategic plan continue to be updated on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>Assurance Governors received assurance that the school remains actively engaged in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation External review Continuous improvement planning <p>Governors noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive trajectory in attendance Successful recruitment outcomes Impact of community engagement and events Strength and detail of the Headteacher's report
5.	<p>School Policies</p> <p>Policies were reviewed and discussed in accordance with the agenda. Governors confirmed that policies were clear, compliant and appropriate to context.</p> <p>Decision RESOLVED: That all policies be approved. Action: Governors to sign manual handling policy declaration.</p>
6.	<p>Governance Matters</p> <p>Governor Visits Governors reported on visits undertaken, noting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective oversight of key operational areas Positive engagement with school leaders Value in structured visit reporting <p>Action Governors to consider forward planning of visits at the start of the next academic year.</p> <p>Governor Training No training reported. Future opportunities noted.</p> <p>Governor Recruitment The Chair provided an update on current governor recruitment activity and composition of the Local Governing Committee. It was confirmed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new Staff Governor, Katie Marshall, has been appointed following appropriate process <p>The appointment followed discussion within the governing body, including the stepping down of an existing governor JA at the end of term</p> <p>An additional prospective co-opted governor has been identified. It was confirmed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial discussions have taken place regarding interest in the role Required governance documentation will be circulated to enable completion of the appointment process Formal approval by the governing body will be required prior to appointment

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	<p>Q Who will be the governors in September?</p> <p>A: Except for one planned departure, the current governors will stay. A staff governor has been appointed, and a co-opted governor may be added pending approval.</p>
7.	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>Manual Handling Policy – Governor Responsibilities Governors were reminded of their responsibilities in relation to the manual handling policy, specifically the requirement to formally acknowledge understanding of governance oversight responsibilities. It was confirmed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors had been asked to review the policy in advance • The policy outlines both staff operational responsibilities and governance responsibilities, including oversight of resourcing and compliance • A formal declaration appendix is required to confirm that governors have read and understood the policy <p>Arrangements were made for signatures to be collected during and following the meeting. Action: All governors to sign the manual handling declaration, with follow-up arrangements for those not present in person.</p> <p>Use of AI in Governance (Minute Taking) A detailed and extended discussion took place regarding the introduction of AI-supported minute-taking, including the removal of traditional clerking arrangements for some meetings. It was confirmed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recording of meetings is used to generate draft minutes through a controlled system • The system operates within the Trust’s internal environment and does not access external data sources • Final minutes remain subject to review and approval by school leadership before publication • Recordings are deleted following approval of the minutes <p><u>The discussion covered several key governance considerations:</u></p> <p><u>Role of the Clerk</u> Governors highlighted the importance of the clerk’s role in providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedural advice during meetings • Governance assurance and challenge • Independent oversight of compliance with governance processes <p><u>Quality and Accuracy of Minutes</u> Concerns were raised regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether AI-generated minutes would adequately capture discussion, context, and nuance • The potential for over-detail or lack of clarity if outputs are not appropriately refined <p><u>Impact on Governance Culture</u> Governors discussed whether recording meetings may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affect openness of discussion • Limit challenge and debate • Influence how participants contribute, particularly where sensitive matters are discussed <p><u>Transparency and Awareness</u> It was noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants must be clearly informed of recording arrangements • Privacy notices should accurately reflect current practice <p><u>Wider Context</u> Information was shared that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach has been trialled across the Trust • Some other trusts have adopted different governance models, including reduced LGC structures

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	<p>Q: How will governance assurance be maintained without a clerk present? A: Governance oversight will continue through leadership review processes and alternative support arrangements, with minutes formally approved before publication.</p> <p>Q: Will this impact openness of discussion? A: Recordings are used solely for accuracy, are retained internally, and deleted after approval; SP and Chair retain control over the final content of minutes.</p> <p>Q: What is the plan for the next meeting and beyond? A: The approach is to continue, with further review following feedback and evaluation across the Trust.</p> <p>Governor Training and Development (AOB Reference) Governors were reminded of upcoming training opportunities, including the Chairs' Network meeting. Action: Chair to attend Chairs' Network and report back to the governing body.</p>
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Item	Action Points	Who	When
1	Sign manual handling declaration	All	ASAP
2	Plan governors visit programme for next academic year	All	Sep 26
3	Present AI governance feedback at Chairs Network	Chair	June 26
4	Development of a three-year budget plan	SBM	June 26