

ETHOS ACADEMY TRUST
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES
 Thursday 10 July 2025 at 4pm via MS Teams

Present:	Graham Dewhirst (GD)	Chair & Trustee
	Tracey Greenough (TG)	Trustee
	Sally Henshall (SH)	Trustee
	Phil Mellor (PM)	Trustee
	Lloyd Nolan (NL)	Trustee
In Attendance:	Dewi Bennett (DB)	CFOO
	Lesley Conway (LC)	People & Culture Manager
	Chris Davis (CD)	CEO
	Victoria Evans (VE)	Head of Finance
	Nathan Millington (NM)	COO
	Rebecca Smith (RS)	Executive Head
	Rebecca Richards (RR)	Potential Trustee (observing)
	Sally Bridges-Wickham (SBW)	Potential Trustee (observing)
	Melanie Nightingale (MN)	Clerk to the Board

Item		Action
1	Welcome, Apologies & Declarations of Interest	
	Apologies were received and accepted from Sarah Corbridge. There were no declarations of interest.	
2	Bringing the Trust to Life	
	Jack Ghee (JG), Head of School for Reach Academy, recounted his journey from joining Ethos College as a non-teaching member of staff ten years ago to his current leadership role and talked about the significant period of change for Reach Academy in the last 18 months, as well as the recent big changes across the Trust. JG felt well supported by his Executive Head, Rebecca Smith, and had a sense of loyalty and pride in being part of Ethos Academy Trust. Trustees asked the following questions. • What challenges had JG and his colleagues faced and how had the leadership supported with this? • What did the young people say was the best thing about Reach Academy? • What had changed JG's attitude about being part of a MAT (multi academy trust). JG responded as follows. • It could be difficult to accept change and some colleagues had experienced more change than others. Good practice and areas for improvement had been identified ready to move forward in September. There was a lack of leadership capacity but support was there if needed, particularly from the Executive Head. • Staff was the biggest resource that had kept the school together and supported the pupils. There had been many quotes from pupils about the impact of the staff on their lives and he was really proud of this. • JG started when Reach was part of the three Kirklees schools that worked well together as a small MAT. As the Trust grew, the sense of working together was somewhat lost but JG was confident that EAT would return to a position of sharing	

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	good practice and supporting school improvement for the benefit of all schools in the Trust. <i>JG left the meeting at 16:19</i> Trustees commented on JG's positive journey within the MAT. The CEO noted the need for a talent map in order to develop and retain good staff. Action 2.1: LC to create a talent map for review by the People and Culture Committee.	LC
3	Previous Minutes & Matters Arising	
	<u>Resolved:</u> The minutes of the meetings held on 20 March 2025 and 3 June 3035 (extraordinary) were agreed as an accurate record. The action log was reviewed and the Clerk would work with the CEO to update and close off the action log ready for the new academic year. <u>Matters Arising</u> • It was ratified that Trustees had approved the following business via email in advance of the meeting. ○ Business case regarding Elements Headteacher ○ Business case regarding the Wakefield Executive Headteacher • There was an ongoing employment tribunal relating to the withdrawal of a job offer, which was the first tribunal claim lodged directly against the Trust. Legal advice was being taken.	
4	Executive Summary	
	The executive summary had been circulated in advance of the meeting and the CEO reported on key points. • The CEO recorded his thanks to Dewi Bennett, CFOO, for his contribution to the Trust. DB would be retiring on 31 August 2025. <u>2024-27 Strategic Priorities – Assurance Reporting & New Strategic Objectives</u> • An update on progress against the current strategic aims was provided. Five new strategic aims had been agreed at the Trustee Strategy Day in June 2025 with “excellence” being a common thread. The central message was operating as one Trust and the fifth aim of excellent IT supported the other four aims. • Trust leaders had been asked to come up with tasks for each aim and this would feed into a full strategic plan that the CEO would develop with the Executive Team in the new academic year. Trustees asked the following questions. • Who would lead on the excellent digital technology and how long would it be before there was a plan for each aim? • Would staff have the opportunity to nominate colleagues for awards? The CEO responded as follows. • Nathan Millington (COO) would lead on digital technology (aim 5) with Danny Ross, who had experience of working with big technology companies. The DfE digital	

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standards and the use of AI (artificial intelligence) would need to be considered as part of this.

- The Executive Team would work on the plan during the autumn term to seek buy in from staff, present it at the December Board meeting and launch it with staff at the whole Trust inset day in January.
- There was a plan to run some kind of awards ceremony at the January inset day. Following feedback from Trustees, LC would streamline the process and would be asking for nominations in September.

Budget Approval 2025/26

- The Finance, Audit & Risk Committee (FARC) had discussed the 2025/26 budget at their meeting on 2 July 2025 and had recommended it to the Board for approval. The budget was outlined in a separate paper, which included assumptions and a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis.
- PM reported that FARC did not want to see too big a surplus so that money could be used appropriately to benefit pupils for the best outcomes. The surplus did not include any capital spend. The government was not covering all the expenditure, e.g. pay awards.

Trustees queried the following points in the budget.

- **The potential governmental U-turn on the free schools listed as a threat in the SWOT analysis.**
- **The inclusion of central leadership turnover under weaknesses.**
- **If there were any key items that could materially change the outcome (£400k surplus).**
- **If this year was the first time the pay award had not been fully funded by the government.**

The Executive Team addressed the queries as follows.

- EAT had been awarded the free schools via the tender process under the Conservative party. Labour had held back on their decision since coming to power therefore this was a potential future risk. The CEO was trying to seek clarity along with other CEOs from the DfE on the free schools.
- At the time of writing the report, there were still some unknown factors in relation to central leadership and a prudent approach had been taken but this was likely to become a strength.
- Three large capital projects requiring expenditure in advance of income would have an impact on cash flow and FARC would monitor this during 2025.26. The renewal of the Kirklees SLA (service level agreement) could present financial pressures in the 2026/27 year.
- It was the first time in a number of years that the government had not fully funded the pay rises and 1% would have to be funded by the Trust this year.

Resolved: Trustees approved the 2025/26 budget for submission to the DfE as part of the budget forecast return.

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Risk Register

- The risk register was a standing item for the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and was included with the Board papers, along with an overview within the executive report.

Trustees queried the following points relating to risk.

- **How the Board would have oversight of risks to specific schools, e.g. Enrich.**
- **The frequency of the Raising Standards Boards for Enrich Academy.**
- **A more specific update being given to the Board for Enrich as well as at Learning & Achievement to ensure that the biggest risk in the risk register was reported as a matter of good practice.**

The Executive Team addressed the queries as follows.

- The CEO spoke to the Chair of Trustees fortnightly and anything significant would be shared with the Board and also at the Raising Standards Boards, which would report into Learning & Achievement. External reviews were taking place and the reports would be circulated to the Board. Rebecca Smith would be at Enrich Academy from September. The CEO would send additional emails to Trustees as needed or call an extraordinary meeting if required.
- The Raising Standards Boards would be held three times a year for stable schools and five times a year for Enrich. Committee Chairs would be updated accordingly.
- There was some discussion about the best way of reporting to the Board whilst avoiding duplication of work and keeping reports strategic. RS provided reassurance that she would be in Enrich much more frequently and whilst there was a lot of work to do, it was achievable. RS would be open and transparent in raising concerns as they arose.

Trustees agreed to allow time for the new governance system with Raising Standards Boards and the link to the Board via Learning & Achievement to become established and review the situation at the end of the autumn term.

Timetable for addressing recommendations from the external review of governance (ERG)

The CEO highlighted key points from the ERG action plan, which was provided as a separate document and summarised in the executive report.

- There was a lot to be proud of in terms of actions, some of which had been completed ahead of schedule. Trustee recruitment was underway.
- Trustees to consider whether meetings should be remote or hybrid.
- Executive reporting needed to be more streamlined. CD planned to work on this over the summer and make it clear whether items were for approval, information etc.
- The strength of governance would be reviewed by the DfE when considering Trust growth and a repeat visit by the ERG reviewer would help with this.

Action 4.1: CEO to put together a Board and Committee reporting template for Trustees to agree.

CD

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Evolve KS1 proposal

A business case for the new KS1 satellite provision at Evolve had been circulated for approval in advance of meeting and was included with the Board papers.

Trustees asked the following questions.

- Was EAT required to put in any money to this project, had the lease charges on IT equipment been taken into account before calculating the £50k surplus and was the ongoing funding based on Wakefield's new model?
- Would further staff need to be recruited to operate the site and would there be recruitment fees?
- Had E3Cube accurately calculated the capital costs?
- Would there be 14 children on the new site and would there be funding for 14 regardless of actual numbers?

The Executive Team responded as follows.

- There were no capital items but possibly some IT equipment might be required, which would be leased and this had been accounted for in the £50k surplus for the first year. Everything else would be paid for by Wakefield and EAT had received confirmation that funding was based on the new model.
- Two teachers, two support staff and possibly a part time administration assistant and caretaker were included in the budget but as it was a shared site, there was the possibility of entering a shared services arrangement for administration and caretaker support. There were contingencies of £30k and project management costings to allow for the unexpected, such as recruitment fees.
- The Executive Team was confident that the total cost of £298k (including contingencies and E3Cube project management) was realistic and at the top end of the expected expenditure.
- It was unlikely that there would be 14 pupils on site from day one but there was a need for up to 14. Usually funding was based on PAN (published admission numbers) rather than the number of pupils actually on site but the Executive Team would seek assurance from the LA on pupil numbers and request a detailed staffing plan. Approval was being requested to tender for the building works and agree to the short term lease and licence to operate. There would be no liability for the Trust at this point and EAT could still pull out of the arrangement if needed.

Resolved: Trustees approved moving forward with the KS1 proposal at Evolve, i.e. to tender for the building works and agree to the short term lease and licence to operate.

Annual Review of the Board's stakeholder engagement activities

Lesley Conway (LC), People and Culture Lead, reported as follows.

- The staff survey closed recently and the results were available last week. An executive summary had been provided with the Board pack. This would be reviewed fully in the People & Culture Committee, reporting to the Board as appropriate.

Trustees queried the following points.

- Staff workload was still an issue and Ofsted had previously noted that the Board did not discuss this very much.

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	• The fact that staff appreciated other staff rather than the children according to the “word cloud” graphic. The Executive Team addressed the queries as follows. • Staff workload had improved compared with last year but was still coming up as an issue. This would be tracked via the People and Culture Committee from September. • There were significant numbers of comments within the survey that needed to be reviewed and themes would be picked out by Edurio using AI. The wording of the question in terms of what staff appreciated most might have affected the response. A lot of the responses would be from support staff and teachers and the staff community was key when working as a team to best support the pupils. Clearer wording, such as asking what the driver was for coming to work would potentially reflect the presence of pupils more. Communications needed to improve, as noted in the survey and the CEO had some ideas for next year, such as online briefings. Action 4.2: LC to produce a Trust-wide action plan for the stakeholder surveys for review at People and Culture Committee in the autumn term. <u>Committee Membership</u> The following proposal for Committee membership would be agreed via email outside of the meeting and Committee Chairs would be appointed at the September Board meeting. • Finance, Audit & Risk – Phil Mellor, Graham Dewhirst, Rebecca Richards • Learning & Achievement – Sally Henshall, Tracey Greenough, Lloyd Nolan, Sally Peedle • People & Culture – Sarah Corbridge, Sally Bridges-Wickham, Craig Fawcett <u>Dear Accounting Officer letter</u> • The Dear Accounting Officer Letter from the DfE advising of the updates to the Academy Trust Handbook for September 2025 had been uploaded to the Board folder for Trustees to note. <u>Items for Ratification</u> It was ratified that Trustees had approved the following via email in advance of the meeting. • The appointment of Craig Fawcett to the People and Culture Committee with effect from September 2025. • To recommend to Members the appointment of three new Trustees (Sally Bridges-Wickham, Sally Peedle and Rebecca Richards).	LC
5	Updates from Assurance Partners (Safeguarding and SEND)	
	Lloyd Nolan had met with the Executive SENDCo, Kate Lyell, and would introduce new data at the next Learning & Achievement Committee.	
6	Policies & Statutory Documents	
	Minor changes to the Equality Policy were noted, as listed in the executive summary and a copy of the policy had been included in the Board pack. The equality objectives had been streamlined and would be monitored by the People & Culture Committee <u>Resolved:</u> Trustees approved the Equality Policy.	

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7	Any Other Urgent Business	
	The Chair thanked the Board for their input and the senior leaders for their hard work and wished everyone a good summer break. There being no further business, the meeting closed at 17:52.	
8	Date of Next Meeting	
	Thursday 25 September at 4pm.	

Action Points	Responsibility	Deadline
• Action 2.1: Create a talent map for review by the People and Culture Committee.	LC	November 2025
• Action 4.1: CEO to put together a Board and Committee reporting template for Trustees to agree.	CD	September 2025
• Action 4.2: Produce a Trust-wide action plan for the stakeholder surveys for review at People and Culture Committee in the autumn term.	LC	November 2025