

**ETHOS ACADEMY TRUST
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday 11 December 2025 at 4pm
via MS Teams

Present:	Graham Dewhirst (GD)	Chair & Trustee
	Sally Bridges-Wickham (SBW)	Trustee
	Tracey Greenough (TG)	Trustee
	Sally Henshall (SH)	Trustee
	Phil Mellor (PM)	Trustee
	Lloyd Nolan (NL)	Trustee
	Sally Peedle (SP)	Trustee
	Rebecca Richards (RR)	Trustee
In Attendance:	Chris Davis (CD)	CEO
	Kate Hewson (KH)	Chief Education Officer (CEdO)
	Callum Priestley (CP)	COO
	Victoria Evans (VE)	CFO
	Rebecca Smith (RS)	Executive Head
	Matthew Long (ML)	Head of School, Evolve (item 2)
	Chloe Rhodes (CR)	Associate Director, Crisp (item 3)
	Melanie Nightingale (MN)	Clerk to the Board

Item		Action
1	Welcome, Apologies & Declarations of Interest	
	Apologies had been received and accepted from Sarah Corbridge. There were no declarations of interest	
2	Evolve Academy – Approval of Student Number / Age Range Expansion	
	A proposal to expand the Evolve Academy age range (to include Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils) and to increase the PAN (published admission numbers) by 14 had been circulated in advance. Matt Long and colleagues took questions from Trustees and provided further detail as follows. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proposed increase was from 75 to 89 pupils. As well as creating space for EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) and KS1 (Key Stage 1), the expansion would enable additional places in KS3 and reduce the number of pupils being sent out of area following a permanent exclusion. A previous proposal had been to set up a provision in Castleford but the Trust had decided a separate site would not be appropriate, hence the revised proposal to develop the existing Evolve site in Lupset, which removed all significant risks. Extra spaces in KS3 would enable more step out provision, which was required in the Wakefield area. Evolve would also be able to carry out early intervention work with young people in mainstream to lower exclusions. The expansion would bring in additional income of £357k regardless of pupil numbers and there would still be a surplus after recruiting the required staff. Part of this surplus would fund the transition of ML’s role from Head of School to Headteacher and enable a full time SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) to be on site. Wakefield was also providing £250k of capital funding to make the required improvements to the Lupset site. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EAT would remain the sole provider in the LA for permanently excluded pupils. • The Board were asked to support the submission of a significant change in partnership with the LA for EYFS and KS1 from February and KS3 from Easter. <p>Trustees queried the following points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there were risks attached to the proposal. • Whether the £250k capital funding would be sufficient and if there was a cap on this. • If the short timescale was sufficient to be up and running by February. <p>The Executive Team responded as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There would be some CPD (continuing professional development) and educational risk, as there were currently no EYFS teachers on site but this could be mitigated • The plan was to inform the LA what the cost would be to improve the existing Lupset site and make it a more nurturing building. The LA wanted support from EAT with this provision and the £250k capital funding seemed sufficient for a building that mainly required aesthetic improvement compared with the £350k previously offered for the site at Castleford, which required more capital work. • A February start was viable, as there would only be a couple of children initially and the increased numbers would be staggered thereafter. Wakefield had a statutory responsibility to provide education for these children and would fund the provision from February even if it was not fully up and running until Easter. <p>Trustees were reassured that there was sufficient assurance from the LA in terms of funding and support.</p> <p>Action 2.1: SP to speak to CD / ML about her experience of setting up a similar model in Rotherham, which had been successful in lowering permanent exclusions.</p> <p>Resolved: Trustees approved the submission of the significant change for Wakefield (Evolve) to the DfE to enable the expansion of the age range and PAN at Evolve Academy.</p> <p><i>ML left the meeting at 16:20</i></p>	
<p>3</p>	<p>Competent Person Contract from Crisp Health & Safety</p>	
	<p>Chloe Rhodes, Associate Director of Crisp, new Health & Safety provider for EAT, attended for this item to take questions from Trustees on the competent person contract. She noted that a clear SLA (service level agreement) was in place and she was optimistic that Crisp could get to the crux of the health and safety issues quite quickly.</p> <p>Trustees noted that improving health and safety would remain a focus from the Board and they needed guidance from Crisp on what needed to be done in partnership with the new COO. They raised queries and made comments as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether FARC (Finance, Audit & Risk Committee) would monitor health and safety compliance in more detail to reduce the risk of unexpected issues in future. • Who monitored whether the appropriate work was being carried out. • Whether Headteachers, Heads of School and SBMs (School Business Managers) now understood that health and safety was part of their responsibility. <p>CR and the Executive Team responded as follows.</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports would be written following each visit by Crisp and there would be a tailored report for the FARC and the CEO with a breakdown of the key areas of concern, where the focus needed to be and what improvements could be put in place. • Health and safety (H&S) visits were split into two parts; a documentation compliance audit and a visual inspection. CR could review the reporting template with the COO and Chair of FARC to ensure it contained the most relevant information to enable FARC to monitor the situation effectively. CR encouraged Trustees to join any H&S visits to see the issues that were coming up. • The Executive Team, particularly the CEO and COO, would be checking that the appropriate work was being carried out, along with Headteachers and SBMs, who were responsible for their respective school sites. There would be a report with an action plan and priorities and Crisp would provide support to ensure that actions were being carried out effectively. Every Compliance could also be used to track progress. The COO would be benchmarking the Trust against the new DfE Estates Management Standards and developing a long term estates and H&S strategy. • The Executive Team was working with Headteachers to create a culture of accountability with support and challenge. <p>Action 3.1: CR to advise of H&S visit dates so that Trustees could join in.</p> <p>The CEO recorded his thanks to CR on behalf of the Trust for her work on the reports and her professional approach.</p> <p><i>CR left the meeting at 16:32</i></p>	CR
4	<p>Previous Minutes & Matters Arising</p>	
	<p>The minutes from the Board meeting held on 25 September 2025 were reviewed. The 10% increase in attendance at Enrich under section 8 was queried and it was confirmed that there was a 10% increase from summer term to autumn but not year on year. The Clerk would amend the wording to make this clearer.</p> <p><u>Resolved:</u> Subject to the amendment agreed above, the minutes of Board Meeting held on 25 September 2025 were agreed as an accurate record.</p>	
5	<p>Presentation of Annual Accounts & Approval by Trustees</p>	
	<p>The annual report and financial statements for 2024/25 had been discussed at FARC along with the auditor’s report and had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The FARC recommended the annual report and financial statements for 2024/25 to the Board of Trustees for approval and the CFO provided an overview of the key figures, audit points and submission dates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total funds were £25.3m. The increase from 2023/24 to 2024/25 was mainly due to investment in CIF (condition improvement fund) projects. • Total grant funding was £17.6m, made up of GAG (general annual grant), pupil premium and LA grants. LA grants made up 71% of grant funding and 64% of total funding. • Operational expenditure was £16.2m. • Capital spending was £1.25m. 	

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- The £550k year-end surplus after the transfer of £340k to capital funds was close to the £535k estimate and in line with expectations.
- Cyber security and AI risks needed to be considered for the future.
- The issues from the prior year audit had been resolved and there were two small recommendations from this year relating to local authority income reconciliations and the fixed asset register. Both had been discussed with FARC.

Trustees queried the following points.

- **How to plan for the requested 10% pay award for support staff and 6% for teachers for 2026/27**
- **Why there was a significant surplus compared with last year and what the forecast surplus was for 2025/26.**

VE responded as follows.

- Any pay rises would have to be covered from efficiencies elsewhere and were unlikely to be funded in full by the DfE.
- There had been a change of funding since last year, e.g. higher income per pupil for Elevate pupils and some LA funding for the restructure of the Wakefield academies. The Trust had made a commitment towards CIF funding, which would be spent out of reserves. Capital and estate plans would be reviewed in light of education resources and the new Strategy to Deliver Excellence (five pillars). There needed to be a careful balance between financial resilience and investment in pupils.
- A surplus of £380k was forecasted for the current year but this would be impacted by the additional expenditure approved for Enrich Academy.

VE recorded her thanks to the finance team for their hard work in challenging circumstances.

Resolved: Trustees approved the annual report and financial statements for 2024/25.

6 Update on Enrich Business Case

At the meeting on 27th November, FARC approved expenditure of £250k to secure the sites, rebuild safeguarding systems, stabilise staffing and restore educational and operational capability of Enrich Academy, subject to further clarification and escalation of the situation to the Board. A summary was provided in the CEO report and the Executive Team provided some context and an update as follows.

- The Estates work required resulted from an unsatisfactory onboarding process when the school joined the Trust. It was hoped that some funding would be received via the RPA (risk protection agreement) for the building work.
- There had only been one member of SLT (senior leadership team) in the building for several weeks and significant investment in leadership would be required to support the new Headteacher when he joined in January.
- Financial investment was also required for online learning to cover 15 students not currently attending in order to ensure their safeguarding and continued education.
- Improvements were already evident at Enrich and the Executive Team were confident of further rapid improvement when the new Headteacher started in January 2026.

Trustees queried the following points about the situation at Enrich Academy.

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- **The SEF (self-evaluation form) judgements being made, if there was some flexibility in the new Ofsted framework and if more evidence was being gathered to present a more positive picture.**
- **Whether there was any external verification of the school in addition to the RSBs (Raising Standards Boards).**
- **What action was being taken to address staff underperformance and if there would be staff turnover as a result.**
- **When there would be an update from Enrich following the implementation of the plan.**

The Executive Team responded as follows.

- Urgent improvement was required for all areas that Ofsted would inspect but it was hoped Ofsted would recognise some emerging strength/evidence around leadership and governance. The Executive Team wanted the Ofsted report to reflect the fact that leaders had taken robust action to address the situation and build confidence in leadership for the future, this was also underpinned by strong relationships with the LA. Further evidence was being gathered.
- A report was expected around March 2026 from the external reviewer and the last report from the Oasis visit had articulated swift action taken by the Trust to address the situation. These reports would be given to the Ofsted inspection team. The RSB would be held on Tuesday and Oasis would visit again in spring 1.
- Underperformance was being handled using management instructions, performance management, support plans etc but this often resulted in staff sickness absence. There had been turbulence due to a change in leadership and this would continue until the new Headteacher started in January. It was hoped that some staff would align with the Trust vision.

Trustees made the following observations.

- **Due diligence when onboarding new schools required improvement.**
- **There was now an accurate understanding of the situation at Enrich with some green shoots of improvement. The evidence would follow as the culture was changing.**

Action 6.1: TG to visit Enrich and have a discussion with CEO and CEo about the potential Ofsted judgement.

TG

Action 6.2: Clerk to add an update on Enrich as a standing item on the Board agenda and each Committee agenda.

MN

Action 6.3: CEo to provide a regular update to Trustees (half termly) in conjunction with the COO and CFO.

KH

Action 6.4: CEO to update the Chair at his two-weekly catch up meetings.

CD

Although the expenditure presented in the business case for Enrich was within the FARC delegation limit, all Trustees needed to be made aware of the situation at Enrich and full Board approval was required for deviating from the target 2025/26 year-end surplus.

Resolved: Trustees agreed to deviate from the target year-end surplus for 2025/26 in order to make the required investment at Enrich Academy.

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7	<p>CEO Report</p> <p>The CEO report had been circulated in advance. The CEO highlighted key points and took questions / feedback from Trustees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CEO recorded his thanks to the CFO for her hard work on the audit. • The recent SRMA (School Resource Management Advisor) visit from the DfE seemed to go well and the report was awaited. Based on ICFP (integrated curriculum and financial planning) metrics, the Trust may need to address the percentage spent on staffing. • The DfE had not given permission for EAT to make a settlement in the ongoing employment tribunal case and had advised that it may be in the public interest for the case to go to court. Stone King was advising EAT on this and legal costs and any payment to the complainant would be covered by the RPA. • Callum Priestley was welcomed to EAT as the new COO, having joined this week three weeks earlier than planned. • Following the third attempt at recruitment, a substantive Headteacher had not been appointed at Elements and Satis had been engaged to headhunt suitable candidates. • As a result of the SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) deficit in councils, discussions with the DfE and the LA were ongoing about alternative provisions in Kirklees that were acting as special schools with a view to redesignating the EAT Kirklees schools to special schools. • The budget information provided was the worst scenario and currently included the vacant Executive Head role in Wakefield and the People and Culture Lead, both of which may not be replaced like for like. <p>Trustees queried the following points from the CEO report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If Satis had given any advice about why the previous attempts at recruitment for the Headteacher post at Elements had been unsuccessful, e.g. job description, remuneration etc and if their headhunting approach would mitigate previous issues. • How Elements was performing as a school. • Whether Stone King’s advice was effective, given some recent legal situations the Trust had been dealing with. • The use of PR when responding to high profile incidents and if the Trust received alerts when their name appeared in the press. <p>The Executive Team responded as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timing of the first round of recruitment for the Elements Headteacher role just prior to the summer holidays with a September closing date had not been ideal. There was a strong field of candidates the second time around but there was too big a skills gap in some cases and a lack of transparency from one applicant. The job description would remain unchanged but the headhunting process would more targeted and the salary may need to be increased to be competitive with other trusts. There was a shortage of headteachers but Satis had strong networks. • Elements was one of the biggest special schools in the country and was going from strength to strength but still required further improvement. Attendance was stable
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	<p>but could be better. The next phase (e.g. classroom environment, curriculum) would take longer to embed. The Interim Head had requested CPD for staff on quality of education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stone King was well respected in the sector but it was important to ensure the contract represented value for money. The Executive Team would review the contract when it was due for renewal and would take advice from the Board as needed. PR was not currently a priority but this would become more of a focus once the Trust was in a more stable position. Papillon would be consulted about any potential negative PR relating to the ongoing employment tribunal. <p>Action 7.1: SP to share her middle leadership CPD with EAT for Elements based on the success in her own provision.</p> <p>Action 7.2: SBW had set up alerts to monitor any press coverage that the MAT generated and would share this information with the CEO, including how to set up his own alerts.</p>	<p align="center">SP</p> <p align="center">SBW</p>
<p align="center">8</p>	<p align="center">Strategic Development Plan</p>	
	<p>The Strategy to Deliver Excellence had been circulated in advance and the CEO shared a video with Trustees about nurturing towards excellence. The strategic development plan would be launched as part of the INSET day in January 2026. The CEO thanked Trustees and colleagues for their input into the strategy.</p> <p>Trustees noted it the Strategy to Deliver Excellence was an excellent piece of work with tangible indicators of success and asked how this would be monitored and if Trustees could be involved in the launch. The CEO explained that he would work with the Clerk to find the best way of reporting, e.g. reviewing a pillar at each meeting. The launch would take place on 26th January in Batley and Trustees were welcome to attend.</p>	
<p align="center">9</p>	<p align="center">School Improvement Quality Assurance</p>	
	<p>The School Improvement Quality Assurance paper had been circulated in advance, highlighting key themes arising from Raising Standard Boards (RSBs) and the resulting risks and mitigations. The CEo noted that the Headteachers and Heads of School felt challenged by the RSBs more so than external visits but the external visits from Oasis would continue.</p> <p>Trustees queried the following points and made comments as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What had been done to address inconsistencies in the delivery of SEND. There seemed to be more of a team approach to ensuring children received the best provision. Whether there were any issues that may arise from the staff turnover and decline in attendance at Reach. <p>The Executive Team responded as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEND was being addressed via CPD and talking to teachers about subject content and pedagogy. There was not necessarily an issue with SEND adaptations but how to teach the subject under the lens of SEND. There was a recurring theme of Maths anxiety being more prevalent with SEND students. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headteachers had fed back that they felt part of a wider team. Project plan review meetings had been introduced to ensure Headteachers could challenge the work of the school improvement team. • Reach had achieved significant improvement over the last two years and did not present any concerns. The spike in behaviour incidents was due issues not being reported previously and challenges with the building. Staff turnover was a significant challenge because of the key stage and the high numbers of RPIs (restrictive physical intervention) due to pupils of that age not being able to regulate. Many staff came into the school as inclusion workers and decided it wasn't for them or were upskilled, resulting in them moving on to promotion elsewhere. No specific issues were being highlighted in exit interviews. 	
10	Committee Update & Impact	
	<p><u>People & Culture Committee</u></p> <p>The Clerk provided an update from Sarah Corbridge, Chair of the People and Culture Committee, who had sent apologies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanks were recorded to Jane Burton and Nathan Millington for their hard work in preparing the papers and for the clarity and thoughtfulness with which they presented. Their contributions ensured a strong foundation for discussion and set the tone for future meetings. • Time was spent reflecting on how the Committee could best add value to the Trust and be a productive forum for all involved. The structure and focus of meetings would continue to evolve to ensure they supported informed decision-making, strengthened oversight and focused on strategic discussion. <p><u>Learning & Achievement Committee</u></p> <p>Sally Henshall, Chair of the Learning & Achievement Committee provided a summary of discussions at the autumn term meeting and thanked RS and KH for their contributions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was an evolving Committee in terms of reporting systems. • The introduction of Power BI would improve reporting across Trust. • There was a new 10 point plan for personal development. • New school improvement planning was introduced to align with the Trust development plan. • RSB reports were reviewed. • Safeguarding and attendance was discussed. <p><u>Finance, Audit & Risk Committee</u></p> <p>Phil Mellor, Chair of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee provided a summary of discussions at the autumn term meetings and thanked VE for her hard work in her first term as CFO.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main focus was on the annual accounts and audit, as discussed under item 5 of today's meeting. • Good progress had been made on the audit. • The situation at Enrich Academy had been discussed in detail. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health & safety needed to be monitored more closely. Crysp would provide assurance and the incoming COO would be focusing more on this. There was a healthy surplus which needed to be maintained whilst dealing with any emerging issues that required financial input. <p><i>RR left the meeting at 18:00</i></p>	
11	Three Items of Celebration	
	<p>The Executive Team shared their items for celebration as follows.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO – offering our children in special and AP (alternative provision) the same if not a better educational experience than their mainstream peers. The extracurricular opportunities at Elements were a cause for celebration and the school had played its first competitive sporting fixture recently. CFO – The Trust Finance Officer (Abda), who had worked at EAT for a long time, had just been approved to undertake an apprenticeship to become a chartered accountant. CEdO – Sam Crossley (new Data Manager) was revolutionising data. Aimee Bedford was doing really well in her new role. Danny Ross had achieved a better work / life balance now that he had reverted to a strategic role. Rebecca Smith – the staff team who go above and beyond to support pupils every day. Pupils were developing positive relationships with staff and felt safer, incidents were reducing, schools were calmer and needs were being met. 	
12	Any Other Urgent Business	
	<p>The CEO thanked Trustees for their support in challenging times over his first 12 months and wished everyone a happy and restful Christmas.</p> <p>There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 18:08</p>	
13	Date of Next Meeting	
	23 April 2026	

Action Points

- Action 2.1: SP to speak to CD / ML about her experience of setting up a similar model in Rotherham, which had been successful in lowering permanent exclusions.
- Action 3.1: CR to advise of H&S visit dates so that Trustees could join in.
- Action 6.1: TG to visit Enrich and have a discussion with CEO and CEdO about the potential Ofsted judgement.
- Action 6.2: Clerk to add an update on Enrich as a standing item on the Board agenda and each Committee agenda.
- Action 6.3: CEdO to provide a regular update to Trustees (half termly) in conjunction with the COO and CFO.

Responsibility

SP
CR
TG
MN
KH

Deadline

January 2026
January 2026
January 2026
January 2026
Ongoing

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| • Action 6.4: CEO to update the Chair at his two-weekly catch up meetings. | CD | Ongoing |
| • Action 7.1: SP to share her middle leadership CPD with EAT for Elements based on the success in her own provision. | SP | January 2026 |
| • Action 7.2: SBW had set up alerts to monitor any press coverage that the MAT generated and would share this information with the CEO, including how to set up his own alerts. | SBW | January 2026 |