



**WHINLESS DOWN
ACADEMY TRUST**

Whinless Down Academy Trust Board Meeting

Tuesday 8th July 2025

CEO: Kelly Brown

Public Minutes of the Trust Board Meeting Held at Trust Office at St Martin’s School at 4pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025

Board Trustees Present	Alison Mackintosh (chair), Tricia Sherling (vice chair), Anne Siggins, Pam Brivio, Dean Jones, Kelly Brown
Others Present	Michelle Noden (Trust Business Manager), Carol Rayfield (Member), Anthony Welch (Member)
Governance Professional	Claudia Sawyers
1	<u>Welcome, Introduction and Apologies</u> Chair welcomed all to the meeting. This is the final meeting of the academic year and the final meeting for Tricia Sherling, who is resigning as a Trustee after many years of service to WDAT and as a governor prior to the formation of the Trust. Trustees gave thanks to TS.
1.1	
	Apologies There were no apologies, all trustees are present.
1.2	
	Resignations TS had given notice of resignation and as it is the last meeting of the year, TS has resigned from today.
2	<u>Minutes from Meeting 21st May 2025</u>
2.1	Approval of Minutes The minutes of the meeting held on 21 st May 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the proceedings of the meeting. The minutes will be marked as signed on GovernorHub.
	Matters Arising Action from the last meeting: <i>Bullying and Harassment policy to be emailed out and agreed-</i> Gov. Prof. confirmed that all trustees responded to agree the policy.
3	<u>Register of Business and Pecuniary Interests</u>
3.1	
	Actions

	All trustees were given the opportunity to update business interests or declare any interests against this agenda. There were no updates and no interests declared.	
4 4.1	<p><u>CEO Report</u></p> <p>CEO Report was sent to Trustees to review prior to the meeting which included outcomes, with KS2 results being shared on the screen in the meeting room as they were only released today. Due to this, it has not been possible to analyse the results in full, however raw scores were discussed and compared to national. It was clear to see that KS2 SATS outcomes have improved from last year in all schools and CEO commented that the results are the closest they have ever been to the predicted outcomes. CEO highlighted that, while Priory Fields and Vale View did not quite meet the national combined figure of 62%, their outcomes were not far behind. She noted that both schools face significantly greater challenges than average, with levels of disadvantage around 40% higher than the national picture and levels of SEN approximately 20% above the national level. St Martin's did exceed the national combined. A trustee asked how COVID would have affected this cohort, CEO explained that their Key Stage 1 years were affected so it is positive to see how much progress has been made since then.</p> <p>A trustee asked how the roll numbers in Early Years have progressed since the last update, CEO reported that all schools have received more enrolments and numbers have increased to a more positive picture. It has meant that the idea of a mixed year R-1 at Priory Fields is now not possible, so there will be a mixed Year 1-2 class.</p> <p>A trustee highlighted in the report that there has been a lot of unpaid leave and asked how that compares to previous years and the reasons for it. CEO explained that there has not been a marked increase in the amount of leave being taken, however in the past it was paid so the only change is now that the policy is being followed more tightly. CEO explained that, following feedback from the staff survey and discussions with other trusts, part of the new 'People Strategy' is introducing some measures to provide more flexibility around leave. The first being two days of paid dependent leave, and the second a paid 'wellbeing' day. HR Connect had advised that these initiatives should be trialled before any formal policy changes were made. A trustee questioned whether the offer of dependent leave would be viewed as equitable for staff without dependents. The CEO explained that, in fact, the proposal would provide more consistency, as previously such leave had often been granted and paid in an unstructured and unmonitored way, which those without dependents could have viewed as unfair and unlimited. CEO noted that survey feedback had highlighted the stress staff felt when leave was unpaid, particularly when no alternative was available. A trustee asked whether an allowance of two days would be sufficient to make a meaningful difference. The CEO acknowledged the point but emphasised that, as a trial, this already represented an enhancement on the current provision. With regard to the wellbeing day, CEO that clear stipulations would be in place to ensure its effective management. Both initiatives would form part of the wider people strategy.</p>	
5 5.1	<p><u>Finalised Staffing Structures</u></p> <p>The staffing structures are largely unchanged since reviewing at the last meeting, however as mentioned above the mixed year group at Priory Fields is proposed as a year 1-2 mix rather than year R-1. It was also noted that the number of Mid Day Supervisors at Priory Fields will be three rather than four.</p> <p>Trustees agreed the staffing structures.</p>	

	<p><u>FSARC (Finance Strategy, Audit & Risk Committee) Feedback</u></p> <p>The chair of FSARC reported that budgets remain tight and are expected to continue in this way. Last year in May 2024 the budget was set with a focus on reducing staffing costs and this has been achieved without the need for redundancies, with staff redeployed across schools to cover vacancies. St Martin’s budget continues to be particularly tight, and by the third year the rollover is projected to be very small, which is always a concern for the latter years of a three-year budget plan. However, there is no concern regarding the school’s ability to manage its position effectively. Vale View’s outlook is more positive, with surplus funds allowing for the replacement of children’s toilets.</p> <p>The Business Continuity Plan was also reviewed alongside the Cyber Security Plan and this was agreed by FSARC.</p> <p>At the FSARC meeting, TBM provided a verbal report on premises and health and safety. The roof works at St Martin’s and the mobile classroom at Vale View, funded through last year’s CIF bid, have been completed. St Martin’s has recently sustained flooding caused by heavy rainfall, which led to the closure of Year R for two days; flooring works will be required, and these are covered by the RPA and being undertaken in the summer holiday. At Priory Fields, due to the heavy rainfall water ingress through the roof led to damage, with Portakabin agreeing to replace ceiling tiles and investigate issues with the watertightness due to it being a modular building.</p> <p>The Audit and Risk Committee reviewed the recent internal audit, which was positive overall. Risk management was rated at 100%, and the income and debtors review resulted in one recommendation concerning the documentation of bank paying-in slips. As very little cash is handled, this has already been addressed and will be incorporated into the finance regulations. The pension audit was clear, and the risk register continues to be monitored.</p> <p>The RPA renewal was agreed and will continue.</p> <p>Lettings fees, which had been significantly increased last year, were discussed and it was agreed that no further increase would be made this year.</p>	
<p>6</p>	<p><u>Budget Approval</u></p> <p>The three year budget forecasts have been sent to Trustees prior to the meeting. Further updates on SEN entitlements have been received, resulting in revised budgets for Priory Fields and Vale View, each showing an increase of £49,000. Staffing numbers are projected to reduce in Years 2 and 3, with income and expenditure based on historical spending patterns and percentage increases. The GAG income includes additional grants in Years 2 and 3. A teachers’ pay increase of 4% has been factored into the first year of the budget, with 3% included for Years 2 and 3. Support staff will move onto the new Kent scheme from September, with the introduction of a new incremental pay system.</p> <p>FSARC chair noted the year-on-year decline, which remains a concern. High needs funding was identified as a particular risk, with 75% protection in place this year but due to be removed next year. Kent has rolled out a ‘community’ model, although the associated funding is minimal, with approximately £97,000 allocated across 12 schools in the group, one of which is Astor, a very large secondary school.</p> <p>Trust Board agreed the budget and the Budget Forecast Return to be submitted to DfE.</p>	
<p>7 7.1</p>	<p><u>Going Concern</u></p> <p>TBM has updated the assessment and there as one point that a highlighted as a ‘red’ concern – which is ‘is the trust anticipating a drop in pupil numbers’ and the answer is yes. This is a</p>	

	<p>known factor locally in the area due to birth rate decline. There has not been a drastic drop in numbers and efforts are being made to increase promotion and public image of the schools to help encourage parent choice.</p> <p>The Trust Board does consider WDAT to be a 'going concern' and financially sustainable in the long term.</p>	
8 8.1	<p><u>Standards Monitoring – School Reviews Feedback</u></p> <p>Standards monitoring has taken place with the committee attending school reviews and a report has been written and sent to trustees.</p> <p>Concerns were noted around Years 3 and 5 in all schools, due to cohort specific needs. All schools reported that writing at Key Stage 1 was at its strongest level to date, reflecting raised expectations and aspirations. Progress at Key Stage 2 has been slower, owing to the need to address gaps in learning, but overall outcomes are looking positive. When asked about the confidence placed in the results, it was confirmed that the outcomes have validated that confidence. Assessment practices across the schools were reported to be the strongest they have been. Overall the committee felt the school reviews to be promising in maintaining the improvements being made across the Trust.</p>	
	<p><u>Policies</u></p> <p>Asbestos Management Plan</p> <p>The Asbestos Management Plan has been reviewed by TBM. There were no updates required. Trustees agreed the Asbestos Management Plan.</p>	
10 10.1	<p><u>GDPR Update</u></p> <p>No breaches.</p>	
11 11.1	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>A letter to the Accounting Officer from DfE has been published which discusses the new Academy Trust Handbook and outlines any changes. Trustees acknowledged the letter and TBM will update the Finance Regulations Policy as necessary.</p>	
12	<p><u>Dates</u></p> <p>Dates for 2025-2026 meetings have been proposed with two different options for conducting finance monitoring to ensure effectiveness at meetings and ensuring the Bursar has sufficient time to produce the necessary paperwork. Confirmed dates will be circulated to Trustees via Governor Hub.</p>	
13	<p><u>Confidentiality of Proceedings</u></p> <p>None.</p>	

<u>Action Points</u>
<p>11.1 – Gov. Prof. to email information about registering ID checks on companies house.</p> <p>12 – Gov. Prof to publish 2025-2026 dates on Governor Hub.</p>

Minutes taken by Governance Professional Claudia Sawyers