



Whinless Down Academy Trust

Board Meeting

Tuesday 25th March 2025

CEO: Kelly Brown

Minutes of the Trust Board Meeting

Held at Trust Office at St Martin’s School at 4pm on 25th March 2025.

Board Trustees Present: Alison Mackintosh (chair), Tricia Sherling (vice chair), Anne Siggins, Kelly Brown

Others Present: Michelle Noden (Trust Business Manager), Anthony Welch

Governance Professional: Claudia Sawyers

1	<p><u>Welcome, Introduction and Apologies</u> Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies Apologies were received and accepted from Pam Brivio and Dean Jones. Resignations A notice of resignation has been sent by Tricia Sherling for the end of this academic year. Trustees thanked TS for her dedication to the Trust and to the schools prior to academising, as she has been involved for over 15 years. Succession planning will need to be thought about.</p>	<u>Actions</u>
<p>2 2.1</p>	<p><u>Minutes from Meeting 10th December 2024</u> Approval of Minutes The minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate reflection of the proceedings of the meeting. The minutes were signed by the chair of the Trust. Matters Arising TBM to arrange DBS for DJ.</p>	<p>DBS for DJ.</p>
<p>3 3.1</p>	<p><u>Register of Business and Pecuniary Interests</u> 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.</p>	

<p>4</p> <p>4.1</p>	<p><u>CEO report</u></p> <p>The CEO report was sent to Trustees to review prior to the meeting.</p> <p>A staff survey was conducted in Term 3 via an external provider called Edurio. The analysis provided by Edurio is proving to be very effective. The analysis provides benchmarks against respondents from other schools nationally who use their platform. It was highlighted that Edurio's average response rate is typically around 62% and the trust achieved a 90% response rate, which should reflect the views of almost all staff members. Unsurprisingly, workload and behaviour emerged as the weakest areas across the responses, though the benchmarking against other schools showed this to be a broader picture. In terms of next steps, the oversight of the 'what next' phase is being communicated to staff, along with an overview of both the strengths identified and areas requiring improvement. Headteachers met with the Edurio representative virtually to learn how to review their school's individual survey results in order to begin forming school-specific action plans. Each school will focus on its own key areas for development, working independently to address their priorities. CEO would like to tackle issues raised in role-specific 'focus groups' to look at how improvements can be made for all.</p> <p>A trustee asked whether behaviour was identified as a struggle in all the schools, as the feeling from the school reviews was that this had improved particularly in St Martin's. CEO explained that there have been improvements at St Martin's and to some extent at Vale View, however staff sickness compounds the challenge. Priory Fields is facing significant levels of challenge. Approaches and strategies are being well managed, but staff sickness is also affecting Priory Fields particularly in leadership capacity.</p> <p>A trustee asked whether workload concerns specifically relate to teachers or other staff groups too. CEO explained that it was raised as a concern in several staffing groups, not just teachers. There have been measures in place in the past to address workload concerns such as reduction in marking and feedback, however this has specifically been identified by Ofsted and in visits by Graham Chisnall as development required. It is hoped that open conversations can be held in focus groups to address reasonable measures that could be achieved. A trustee asked whether inset days are still used as twilights completed through the year. Currently, one inset day is used for all staff members to attend on the first day of term one and the remaining 4 days are split over the course of twilights throughout the year however it is acknowledged that the full 4 days worth of hours are not fully directed.</p> <p>Many respondents highlighted staffing shortages as a concern, though it's evident that current budgets cannot support employing additional staff. While staff absence does contribute to the perception of being understaffed, the solution cannot lie in increasing headcount but in more effective absence management. However, some staff perceive this approach as having a negative impact on their wellbeing.</p>	
<p>5</p> <p>5.1</p>	<p><u>Standards Monitoring</u></p> <p>TS attended the mid term school review meetings for each school and has written a report which was provided to trustees prior to the meeting.</p> <p>The report highlights current challenges being faced by schools. Raising standards is the main priorities for all this year and the approaches in place were seen to be starting to have an impact however it is a long process.</p>	<p>End of year school reviews - GP to arrange.</p>

	An end of year school review needs to be organised for each school. Gov. Prof. to liaise with relevant parties to find suitable dates.	
6	<p><u>MAT Strategic Plan</u></p> <p>The MAT strategic Plan mid-year review was shared with trustees prior to the meeting to review.</p> <p>The report provides an update in each of the four key priority areas.</p> <p>In KPI 1 - High Quality and Inclusive Education & School Improvement, Across the three schools, strong progress has been made in Maths and Writing, with teachers generally meeting expectations and embedding key programmes like White Rose. However, further CPD is needed, especially in using stem sentences, and gaps remain in Years 4–6. In Writing, external guidance and targeted CPD, particularly for TAs, have led to early improvements especially in Key Stage 1.</p> <p>Attendance policy and procedures now fully align with DfE guidance, with clearer processes and staff training in place, though impact on data is still limited. Behaviour remains a significant challenge, especially at Priory Fields and Vale View, where support needs are rising and the uncertainty around HNF poses a challenge to recruitment.</p> <p>In KPI 2 - Workforce, responses to the survey as discussed earlier in the meeting includes trialling use of AI, such as ‘Teachmate AI’ to aid workload. CEO would like to establish an AI working party if there is interest amongst the staff to research and share how it can be used to streamline workload and tasks.</p>	
7	<p><u>FSARC Feedback</u></p> <p>A written report following the recent FSARC meeting was shared with trustees prior to the meeting to review.</p> <p>All Schools at the end of December were continuing to show an in-year deficit although this has lessened since the budget was set. This will continued to be monitored closely.</p> <p>The impact of National Insurance was not known at the time of the meeting, however there have been recent developments and a grant is being issued, however this is based on school roll number. TBM is going to check whether the grant is for this year only or subsequent years as well.</p> <p><u>Estates Update</u></p> <p>At Vale View, planning permission has been granted for a new mobile classroom, with work scheduled to begin during the Easter holidays. However, it is likely to extend into Term 5, meaning the school hall will temporarily be used for teaching. The Headteacher, with support from the CEO, will plan to minimise any disruption caused by this.</p> <p>Other completed projects include roof work and the development of a Forest School area at Priory Fields, as well as the expansion of the Trust office into the former infant toilet space to create additional staff office space. At Vale View, upgrades have also been completed, including new windows, a digital phone system, and the replacement of the site barrier.</p>	

8	<p><u>SRMA</u></p> <p>The School Resource Management Assessment has been completed and was shared with trustees prior to the meeting. The SRMA has been submitted.</p> <p>Trustees agreed the SRMA, noting no concerns.</p>	
9	<p><u>Branding</u></p> <p>The CEO and Gov. Prof. have been working with a local graphic design studio to refresh the branding of the Trust and its schools. This rebrand is part of a broader strategy to strengthen marketing and promotional efforts, helping to raise the Trust’s profile within the local community and appeal to prospective parents. With pupil numbers declining—and the corresponding impact on funding—it has become a priority to proactively market the schools. A clean, modern visual identity is seen as a key step in enhancing brand recognition and improving public perception. This rebrand will also support the launch of dedicated social media channels to showcase the many positive developments and achievements taking place across our schools.</p> <p>Trustees expressed concern over the costs involved in this. Gov Prof. explained that there will be a phased approach to things like signage and the most cost effective ways will be explored, however a good relationship has been established with the design studio who has offered extremely competitive pricing thus far. It was reiterated that the aim of rebranding is to improve the public image and recognition of the Trust and currently, very limited efforts are made to attract children and parents to choose our schools. With falling birth rates locally, it is imperative to attract as many children as possible to WDAT schools and enabling a small marketing budget in the upcoming year will support this goal. Given that most parents engage with social media, using these platforms to communicate directly will be a crucial way to influence their decision-making when choosing a school. The drop in birth rates also means greater competition, as parents will have access to schools further away that may be seen as more desirable that may not have been available to them in the past.</p>	
10	<p><u>Minutes from LGB meetings – Term 2</u></p> <p>For information purposes, LGB minutes were shared.</p> <p>It was noted that a staff governor election will need to take place at Vale View in September 2024 as the current staff governors is due to leave in the summer.</p>	
11	<p><u>Policies</u></p> <p><u>Suspension and Exclusion Policy</u></p> <p>The policy has been amended using a model policy from The Key. There has been no change in the procedures in school, however the process has been explained in more detail. Trustees agreed the policy.</p> <p><u>Medical Needs Policy</u></p> <p>There were no material changes to the policy. The policy was agreed by Trustees.</p> <p><u>Procurement and Tendering Policy</u></p> <p>There were no material changes to the policy. The policy was agreed by Trustees.</p>	

12	GDPR Update No breaches.	
13	AOB	
13.1	A 'Dear Accounting Officer' Letter has been shared with Trustees. The letter relates to the cessation of the ESFA. Trustees acknowledged the letter and there were no further comments.	
13.2	See confidential Minutes	
14	Dates The next meeting is due to take place on Wednesday 21 st May 25 at 4pm.	
15	Confidentiality of Proceedings Item 13.2 – AOB.	

Minutes taken by Governance Professional Claudia Sawyers

Signed by Chair of Whinless Down Academy Trust: _____ Date: _____
Alison Mackintosh