



Whinless Down Academy Trust

FSARC Meeting

Thursday 12th February 2026

Minutes of the Finance, Strategy, Risk and Audit Committee Meeting

Held on Thursday 12th February 2026 at 3pm at the Trust Office, St Martin's School

Committee Members Present: Dean Jones (Chair of FSARC), Alison Mackintosh, Felicity Pearce and Carol Rayfield (Vice Chair of FSARC)

Others Present: Michelle Noden (Trust Business Manager), Kelly Brown (CEO), Casey Hall (Priory Fields Headteacher), Lisa Sprigmore (Vale View Headteacher), Helen Thompson (St Martin's Headteacher)

Governance Professional: Katie Banes

1	<u>Welcome, Introduction, Resignations and Apologies</u> All committee members were welcomed to the meeting and the meeting was confirmed to be quorate. Michelle Hards, Trust Bursar sent her apologies for absence for the meeting.
2	<u>Register of Business and Pecuniary Interest</u> All committee members were given the opportunity to declare any new business interests. No new business interests were declared. There were no interests declared against this agenda.
3	<u>Minutes from the meeting held on Thursday 13th November 2025</u>
3.1	Previous minutes were made available to the committee prior to the meeting. The minutes of the FSARC meeting held on Thursday 13th November 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record. <i>All committee members agreed for minutes to be marked as signed on Governor Hub.</i>
3.2	<u>Actions/Matters Arising</u> - <i>Governance Professional to update the Terms of Reference to reflect new committee membership.</i> <i>This has been completed by the Governance Professional.</i>

	- TBM to upload the audit schedule of works. <i>Audit Schedule of Works was uploaded to Governor Hub by TMB.</i>
4	Pupil Premium Strategy Headteachers from all three schools gave a brief overview of the impact of pupil premium funding in their schools and the provisions in place to support pupils eligible for pupil premium. Pupil Premium Reviews for each school were made available to the committee via Governor Hub prior to the meeting.
4.1	St Martin's St Martin's has fifty-three (53) pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, representing 29% of the school population. As a result, the school has been allocated sixty-eight thousand, four hundred and ninety pounds (£68,490). The main barriers for pupil premium children at St Martin's are low levels of literacy and speech, language and communication needs. In addition, some pupil premium children with multiple vulnerabilities are underachieving in core subjects. These barriers will be addressed through consistent quality-first teaching and classroom practice, ensuring that all staff follow the Teaching and Learning Strategy, leading to positive outcomes for pupils. Additional training has been provided to both teaching and support staff through a tiered coaching approach, online training and face-to-face training. As a result, expectations of pupils have increased, leading to improved outcomes. There has been a relentless focus on mathematics and the new White Rose Maths scheme of work, which has resulted in accelerated progress for pupils at St Martin's, with attainment above the national average at Key Stage 2. Due to a reduction in funding, volunteers have been used to support pupils' reading and progress. Pathways to Spell is a new spelling scheme that is being implemented across the Trust. This scheme of work will also support reading progress. With more children at greater risk of experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), it is likely that they will experience lower levels of well-being, which can often result in lower attainment. Pupil premium funding has been used to develop a sensory room, which is benefiting a wide range of children. The Pastoral Support Lead has been supporting some of the most vulnerable children, some of whom have been at risk of suspension or placed on reduced timetables. The Pastoral Support Lead has successfully reintegrated some children into full-time education. Attendance for pupil premium children is lower than that of non-pupil premium children at St Martin's. Attendance is continually monitored, and penalty notices are issued to families who meet the relevant threshold. It was also highlighted that there has been an increase in SEND needs across the school. A committee member asked how many children had other contextual issues. FSARC was informed that there are many children with multiple vulnerabilities across the school and that currently eight (8) pupils have services involved, while a further eight (8) children have recently been closed to services.

A committee member asked whether there were any additional plans to support EYFS and the development of speech, language and communication skills. The EYFS Lead Practitioner has developed a Speech, Language and Communication Strategy, which has been shared with staff. Additional CPD sessions will also be provided, alongside revisiting the main Teaching and Learning Strategy.

4.2 Vale View

Vale View received a total of one hundred and sixty-five thousand, two hundred and forty-six pounds and sixty-eight pence (£165,246.68) in pupil premium funding for the academic year 2024–2025. This comprises one hundred and fifty-eight thousand, seven hundred pounds (£158,700) in pupil premium funding, five thousand, seven hundred and forty-six pounds and sixty-eight pence (£5,746.68) in Early Years Pupil Premium funding, and an additional eight hundred pounds (£800) for a child in care. This means that 67.4% of children at Vale View are eligible for pupil premium funding.

Barriers to learning for children at Vale View were identified as follows:

- 33% of pupil premium children are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 28% of pupil premium children are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL).
- 47% of pupil premium children also have a special educational need.
- 24% of pupil premium children are persistently absent.
- Forty-two (42) children across the school are currently working with, or have previously worked with, Children's Social Care. Of these children, thirty-eight (38) are eligible for pupil premium.

Many children start school with low levels of language and emotional literacy, alongside multiple vulnerabilities.

These barriers are addressed through:

Embedded through teaching:

- High-quality teaching for all children.
- Coaching and high-quality professional development opportunities.
- Schemes of work taught with fidelity.
- Timely and precise feedback.
- A focus on oracy.

Targeted academic support:

- Targeted small-group interventions.
- Speech and language interventions.
- Pre- and post-teaching.
- Precision teaching.

Wider strategies:

- Trained Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs).
- A Speech and Language Assistant.
- Homework Club.
- Attendance support and associated targeted action plans.

It was highlighted that children with EAL have the lowest attendance rates. It is believed that this is largely due to cultural barriers. Language differences are not always the greatest challenge; cultural factors can contribute significantly to non-attendance and, consequently, negatively affect pupil attainment.

The Trust School Improvement Lead (SIP) has been working with teachers, providing additional coaching and support where appropriate. The Trust SIP has also supported the implementation of new schemes of work, including White Rose Maths and Pathways to Spell, and has mentored Early Career Teachers (ECTs), thereby supporting the Headteacher's workload.

The school has prioritised language development and oracy through the implementation of the Speech, Language and Communication Strategy, Speech and Language Link, and support from a Speech and Language Therapist. Opportunities have been planned to enable children to practise these skills through activities such as debates and verbal presentations.

The Headteacher highlighted that Thrive has not been renewed this year. It is felt that existing resources within the school, together with the Play Therapist, sufficiently meet the needs of pupils at Vale View without the significant annual cost of the Thrive subscription and training.

There have been some concerns regarding pupil premium pupils with SEND. A number of children at Vale View have cognition and learning needs. To support a child in care, VSK has funded a school subscription to Nessy. This has enabled other children with cognition and learning needs to access the programme as an intervention to support their SEND needs.

There are many different vulnerable groups at Vale View. In-year admissions continue to present a challenge, with some children unable to access the curriculum in the same way as their peers.

A trustee asked whether the proportion of pupil premium children was stabilising or increasing at Vale View. Trustees were informed that the proportion of pupil premium children with multiple vulnerabilities continues to rise, particularly due to the increase in in-year admissions. There has also been an increase of nearly 10% in the number of children involved with social services or living in temporary accommodation.

4.3 Priory Fields School

Priory Fields School received a total of three hundred and thirty-eight thousand and ninety-five pounds (£338,095) in pupil premium funding. Sixty-five per cent of the school population is eligible for pupil premium funding, equating to two hundred and seven (207) children. Of these children, eighty-two (82) have SEND and sixty-four (64) speak English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Attendance for pupil premium children is 89.4%, compared with 95.2% for non-pupil premium children. Persistent absenteeism disproportionately affects pupil premium pupils. Attendance barriers often have a greater impact on pupils with EAL due to cultural influences. In addition, parental mental health and well-being can reduce families' capacity to support regular attendance. It is also common for pupils to arrive late in the mornings and for parents to arrive late when collecting their children at the end of the day.

To address attendance barriers, the Family Liaison Officer (FLO), Parent Support Advisor (PSA), Assistant Headteacher and Headteacher work closely with families, particularly those of persistent absentees, to address issues at an early stage. Attendance challenges are often linked to wider issues, including the increasing complexity of pupil needs, such as SEMH needs, mental health difficulties and medical conditions, all of which can adversely affect attendance.

	Fifty-five (55) pupils have been identified as having Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Of these pupils, thirty-nine (39) are eligible for pupil premium funding, meaning that a greater proportion may be less able to self-regulate and demonstrate readiness for learning, highlighting the need for targeted support. To address academic barriers, the school is: • Using National College CPD to strengthen pedagogy. • Continuing to provide high-quality CPD through the School Improvement Lead. • Utilising the EYFS Lead Practitioner to support early language development, Drawing Club, Curious Quests, early writing and mathematics development. • Implementing White Rose Maths across the whole school. • Strengthening the Feedback and Marking Policy. • Applying a systematic and consistent approach to phonics teaching throughout EYFS and Key Stage 1, including Little Wandle catch-up sessions. • Delivering small-group interventions in writing and mathematics. • Developing a whole-school oracy programme. The impact of these initiatives has included: • Increased fluency and reasoning in mathematics. • Improved vocabulary and oral language development. • Greater consistency in teaching across the school. • Raised expectations through research-informed schemes of work. • Accelerated early reading progress. • Improved phonics outcomes. • Better identification of, and support for, speech, language and communication needs. In 2024, progress for pupil premium pupils exceeded that of non-pupil premium pupils. Greater depth attainment was also broadly in line for pupil premium children. Similarly, in the current Year 3 cohort, 62% of pupils are working at the expected standard and 10% are working at greater depth. This demonstrates strong, sequential mathematical foundations established in Key Stage 1, providing the building blocks for success in Key Stage 2. To address SEMH and pastoral needs, a number of staff across the school work collaboratively to identify needs early using Language Link and the Boxall Profile, deliver Thrive interventions, implement trauma-informed approaches, and provide designated breakout spaces and sensory room provision. Collectively, these approaches offer structured support for self-regulation and emotional readiness.
5	<u>Budget Monitoring – December 2025</u> All budget monitoring and variance reports were made available to the committee prior to the meeting. The Bursar gave an overview of variance between November and December 2025 budgets.
5.1	<u>St Martin's School</u> November 2025: £50,327 December 2025: £47,448 Variance: - £2,879

	Main variances over £500: The teachers pay cost centre has been amended by two thousand, five hundred and fifty pounds (£2,550), due to a correction required on the BPS tool. There is also a variance of five hundred and eighty-five pounds (£585) within the staff medical and counselling fees. This was due to an occupational health (OH) management referral and the flu vaccinations provided for staff.
5.2	<u>Vale View School</u> November 2025: £234,370 December 2025: £231,689 Variance: - £2,681 Main variances over £500: There was a variance in the Nursery Midday Supervisor cost centre; this was due to a change in the start date for the new member of staff. The total variance for this was five hundred and eighty-two pounds (£582). There is also a variance of five hundred and eighty-five pounds (£585) within the staff medical and counselling fees. This is due to an OH management referral and the flu vaccinations provided for staff. Grounds maintenance has a variance of one thousand, one hundred and eighty pounds (£1,180) due to essential tree maintenance which needed to be carried out. FSARC discussed and acknowledged that they will continue to closely monitor the Nursery and the potential deficit it may face. Last year, a deficit of over fifty thousand pounds (£50,000) was predicted however, the deficit ended up coming in at just under ten thousand pounds (£10,000). FSARC and the Trust Board still remain cautious, but feel the positive impact for the Trust outweigh any potential negative impact the deficit could have. KCC surveyed nursery establishments asking if they wish to continue receiving funding termly or monthly. Vale View have responded requesting it is received on a monthly basis in order to support the financial monitoring in line with the monthly management accounts.
5.3	<u>Priory Fields School</u> November 2025: £128,875 December 2025: £144,510 Variance: + £15,635 Main variances over £500: There is an increase of ten thousand, five hundred and four pounds (£10,504) in high needs funding. This is due to receiving funding for a child who was awarded an EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan), which was back-dated to September 2025.

	A grant of eight thousand, three hundred and forty-three pounds (£8,343) has been received as part of the Early Careers Framework. Seven hundred and five pounds (£705) has been received following the delivery of the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) Lead Practitioner Course to Kent Teaching School Hub (led and delivered by Trust EYFS Lead). There was an increase in the support staff pay cost centre of nine hundred and twenty-eight pounds (£928). This was due to national insurance savings and unpaid leave. The forecast for Sports and Playground equipment was increased to three thousand, two hundred and fifty pounds (£3,250) due to repairs which were necessary for the playground equipment. This variance equated to one thousand, seven hundred and fifty pounds (£1,750). There is a variance of five hundred pounds (£500), which is the contribution to cover the Trust Governance Professional costs. A variance of two thousand, two hundred and seventeen pounds (£2,217) in the teacher pay cost centre. The variance is made up of both additional hours claimed and unpaid leave. It was acknowledged that staffing levels are very different at Priory Fields in comparison to a few years ago. There used to be the capacity to have a significant number of support staff and senior leaders working out of class. All senior leaders now have a class-based responsibility except for the Headteacher. Due to the situation changing over time there has been a need to use supply agencies to support covering staff absence.
5.4	<u>Trust</u> November 2025: £151,732 December 2025: £151,754 Variance: £22 Main variances over £500: The twenty-two pounds (£22) variance was due to interest received on the account. There was a variance of nine hundred and ninety-seven pounds (£997) due a member of support staff taking authorised unpaid leave and therefore a saving made. The forecast for professional fees was increased to cover costs as required. The following cost centres were unused: staff advertising, staff development, building maintenance, cleaning, admin purchases, admin subscriptions and bank fees.
5.5	<u>Catering</u> November 2025: £35,339 December 2025: £34,212 Variance: -£1,127 There is a variance within catering staff pay, primarily due to additional hours claimed for extra hours worked for training and covering staff absences.

6	<u>Estates Management Plan</u> The Trust Business Manager (TBM) gave a brief update of the premises across the Trust and explained that some priorities have changed across the year as new issues have arisen. It was explained that an Estates Strategy will be developed to cover estates priorities across the trust. The Buildings Condition survey has highlighted some works which need to be carried out. Although they do not come up as a failure when tested, the electrics at St Martin's require attention as the electricity boards are not evenly distributed. Unfortunately, the cost of these works will need to be planned to come from the school's budget, as CIF funding applications are not successful for this. The TBM has had fire doors assessed at all three sites across the trust and is working to gather quotes for works which will need carrying out. The children's toilets at St Martin's were also discussed at length. The toilets are in need of some work to rectify several issues in the toilets. The TBM and Estates Manager are working together on this and will provide an update at the next meeting. FSARC were made aware the Trust will be developing a Sustainability Plan across the next year, which will also feed into the Estates Strategy.
7	<u>Policies</u> <u>Conflict of Interest</u> The Conflict of Interest Policy was made available to committee members prior to the meeting. The policy has been updated in line with DfE (Department for Education) guidelines. <i>The Conflict of Interest Policy was agreed and approved by all members of the committee.</i> <u>Finance Regulations</u> The updated Finance Regulations Policy was made available to committee members prior to the meeting. The change has been made to support the smooth running of the schools and ensure safeguarding requirements are adhered to. The policy has been updated to allow card holders without delegated financial authority to spend up to £100 for a single transaction without a signed purchase order form. <i>The Finance Regulations Policy was agreed and approved by all members of the committee.</i>
Audit and Risk Committee <i>CEO is present for the Audit and Risk Committee for advisory purposes and not in the capacity of trustee.</i>	
8	<u>Internal Audit Feedback</u> FSARC were provided with a brief update following the recent Internal Audit. Outcomes from the audit were of an exceptionally high standard. Only one item was raised as a best practice recommendation which was related to checking supplier VAT details. The checks required are already part of the Trust's usual practice however, documentation will be amended to demonstrate this more clearly. FSARC noted the positive internal audit outcome and asked that its appreciation be conveyed to the Trust Finance Team for their work in achieving this result.

9	<u>Risk Register</u> Committee members had access to the updated Risk Register prior to the meeting. It was recommended that the new Ofsted framework is added as a new risk, as currently there are a lot of unknown implications related to the new framework. In addition to this, it was suggested the updated admission figures for 2026-2027 are added to the risk register and the impact this could have on the falling roll number.
10	<u>Meeting Dates</u> It was agreed the next FSARC meeting would be held on the same day as the Trust Board meeting. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 21st May at 2:30pm, followed by the Trust Board meeting at 4pm.
11	<u>Any Other Business</u> No items of any other business were raised in the meeting.
12	<u>Confidentiality of Proceeding</u> No items of a confidential nature were raised in the meeting.
13	<u>Publication of Minutes</u> The next FSARC meeting will take place on Thursday 21st May 2026 at 2:30pm, at which these minutes will be agreed and published.
<u>Actions</u> - <i>Risk Register to be updated to include implications of the new Ofsted framework and falling roll numbers for 2026-2027.</i>	

Minutes taken by Governance Professional, Katie Banes