

Minutes of CAST Board Meeting held on Friday 18th July 2025
in person at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton from 10.30am

Attendees:	Ruth O'Donovan (RO)	-	Foundation Director (Chair)
	Sandy Anderson (SA)	-	Foundation Director
	Steve Hole (SH)	-	Foundation Director
	Deacon Nick Johnson (NJ)	-	Foundation Director
	John Cosgrove (JC)	-	Foundation Director
	Graham Briscoe (GB)	-	Co-opted Director
In Attendance:	Zoe Batten (ZB)	-	CEO
	Karl Murphy-Barnes (KMB)	-	CFO
	Rose Colpus-Fricker (RCF)	-	COO
	Kevin Butlin (KB)	-	DoE
	Leah Paiano (LP)	-	Clerk
	Helen Brown (HB)	-	DSC

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer

RO welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum

ALN, AN, NB, JA. Quorum met.

3. Declaration of Interest

NJ - Governor at St Edward's School.

4. Minutes of previous meeting 04.07.2025 (Part I and Part II)

Minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Action Summary - July 2025

24.52 Insert the word 'safe' in the SG3. Good basis for next year's review.

24.36 Policy before Strategy? Suggestion that the Policy will inform the strategy. AI training courses to be completed by school leaders before use of AI in schools. KB and RCF working together with Data Protection Officer (DPO). A&R and then Board.

24.34 Two JCC (Joint Consultative Committee) meetings but neither have been quorate. Next JCC meeting. On today's agenda.

23.58 HB has attended the majority of Deanery meetings. Concerned at the lack of relationship between schools and Parish Priest but an improving picture. NJ and HB to meet, retain as an action.

Q. Is this obsolete? Need to consider the next stage. Conversations with Catholic people, individual nature of each school. The work is ongoing so complete as an action.

6. Chair's Business and Chair's Action (if required)

- **SBC formal review**

**Decision
/ Action**

Minutes
04.07.2025
approved

Strategy Day two years ago agreed to have a review. To have as an agenda item on December 2025 Board meeting. Need to discuss as RISE instead of Termination Warning Notice, all going well.

- **Director recruitment**

Have been approached by someone to potentially become a Co-opted Director. RO and ZB to meet over the summer. Two further potential candidates. Notices have gone into Parishes. The ideal number is 12 Directors.

- **Directors' expenses**

Reminder to submit expenses termly. Quarterly in the Finance Policy, helps with budgeting. Submit by end of term.

- **Heat Map**

Discussed at the Strategy Day, data drop was the day before Board papers were shared. Have delayed to the September Board meeting. E&S will review in September also.

7. CEO Report

The following 4 questions originate from the ED Stds. Meeting held 27th June:

Q. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS): Probably the most important stage in Education is the EYFS. There needs to be a EYFS policy laying out the principles and processes required at this stage together with the necessary funding. When can a paper be produced for the board?

Had hoped for time at the Strategy Day. In danger of failing pupils if not adequately funded. KB included a paper on EYFS in the CEO report. There is an EYFS Policy and will come to the Board in autumn, Principles of Early Years Practice document. Need a finance and recruitment policy, pupil numbers are reducing drastically, Government target 75% of children reaching GLD by 2028 which is fantastic. Need to consider if we want to keep discrete EY classes rather than combining classes. This is a tough national aspiration, have schools above and below this. Need to consider hub models and using Trust expertise and working with Stewart Gale, ex-HMI for Early Years. Need to know where we are in terms of capital funding, and staffing/pupil number arrangements. Need to consider what is required and the difficulty in achieving it.

Q. SENCO Pathway: Today there is unequal access to SENCO support across the Trust. SENCO teachers are not remunerated equally. The availability of SENCO teachers is very uneven across the Trust. Again there needs to be a paper produced to lay out the problem and the possible solutions together with the necessary finance. When can such a paper be produced?

Considered the Hub model previously, not possible. SELT have considered trying to implement the hub model where it can, using metrics to identify what schools need with time being allocated, lot of HTs are SENDCos and need to consider how to reduce the time commitments of HTs starting with Plymouth. Need to align payments in line with the Teacher Pay and Conditions, need to ensure there is a parity. Should be a leadership position, part of SLT, leading a significant area of the school team and should carry a TLR (Teaching and Learning Responsibility) and this would support the Hub model but will take time as people are in post. Hub model allows for a flex over time and can be directed in response to need.

SA requested a plan of action with timescales and would like to implement where possible. Directors had concerns at the variances in remuneration.

Q. Work on other posts through Harmonisation? That applied to Support Staff only, need to consider that people are in post, will take time to align. Arrangements will be different depending on the positions staff already hold.

Q. Timescale? There is the vision, need to know how to do it, difficult to give a timescale as people are in post and may require statutory process and consultations to take place. Can provide a paper to model.

SELT need to decide how standalone SENDCos are remunerated, want to decouple SENDCo from other leadership positions, want positions to be focussed on their primary roles but recognise that this may not always be possible. An operational process, SELT will take away and discuss with a paper.

Q. Would the paper include a job description? Would be included as part of the hub model.

Q. Off-Site Directive: There are too many suspensions/exclusions across our schools (although we are better than national figures especially in the secondary sector). Transferring a pupil to another CAST school rather than suspending the child is being implemented. Can KB explain to the Board please? Trying to reduce the number of suspensions and exclusions, link to SEND pupils, exploring off-site directions and enabling the parents to take the child to an alternative school for 4-6 weeks, a circuit breaker, full time education with specialist support, the support will move with the pupil. Don't have to have parental agreement legally, if the parent didn't support it would be an unauthorised absence, and wouldn't be recorded as a suspension. KB provided a current example of this working positively for the pupil and the parents. In discussion with other schools. Positive way forward.

Q. Site-administration: Could this be handled centrally rather like the school business managers? Have always believed in the CAST benefit of reducing HT responsibilities such as site management. ZB confirmed this is included in the Hub model conversations - better efficiencies and better service/support.

Q. What are the 6 core digital and technological standards that we need to meet by 2030? Broadband internet, wireless networks, network switches, digital leadership, filtering and monitoring, and cyber security.

Q. Particular levels to be achieved? GB as Lead Director confirmed meeting a lot of these standards, accreditation in place.

The standards are part of 11 standards, well on the journey, tracked through the A&R Committee. F&R Committee will be aware of the Digital Strategy with a sharper focus on KPIs, measurable targets. Directors recognised the Trust is ahead of the game on this and thanked staff for this.

Students' outcomes can be affected and increased by around 5 months. Funding to come in the future potentially. Small rural schools have greater challenges than city centre schools.

Q. Lighting replacement – If existing lighting is replaced by LEDs there will be a very significant electrical saving of the order of 90% - just a comment. It will prove to be an 'invest to save' scenario. Investment will be significant but long-term gains.

Q. GDPR update. Privacy notice –what has been the outcome of the dip tests? Results have been varied, schools are being supported by SBMs to ensure correct procedures are in place for the start of the new academic year.

Q. Record processing – have all schools completed the spread sheet? All schools have completed and made updates as required. Record of Processing Activities (RoPA) is a dynamic document, an annual review of the document will become embedded as good practice.

Q. Why are there only 27 responders to the staff survey follow up? The precise reason is unknown but could include general lack of engagement, no central visibility of whether the survey was shared with staff in schools, or a lack of time to complete the survey. The future approach to seeking the views of the workforce will be reconsidered – potentially through short 'pulse' surveys and a focus group approach. A low response but some positive messages compared to responses from 2022, shows the areas of focus that have been successful.

RCF suggestions on how to do things differently is a sensible approach, staff need ongoing reassurance that responses are anonymous. Important to show we have listened to feedback, will be publishing the feedback.

Q. Could strategic actions following the staff survey have target dates please? Not yet included in SELT SEF planning but a lot has been included through other means such as HT Forums, will include dates. Need to consider modern ways of seeking feedback.

Q. Contextual MAT report.

- There is a massive difference between the SEND with EHCP and notional SEND.
- What are we doing to get more EHCPs?

Work with SENDCos and HTs, increasingly difficult to achieve funding, Government has made an announcement to remove EHCPs. Staff are deployed across other schools to carry out the administrative roles to support the EHCP application process and to upskill staff in schools.

Directors discussed the role of the LA, the funding, and the challenges faced by schools with the rising number of EHCPs. Arrangements will change from September. Schools in Plymouth have been provided with significant sums of money to set up Alternative Provisions (AP) and working to ensure the policy and procedures are in place, can use alongside off-site directives.

RO advised the Board she has been contacted by a fellow Chair regarding the first 11 schools successfully installing Great British Energy solar panels. 4 of the 11 schools are Plymouth CAST schools.

8. TIP Annual Review

Review has been shared with the Board. SELT will meet to discuss the red areas to review whether this is still relevant.

9. Review of SEF and One Year Operational Plan

An operational plan and SELT showing how it ties to the Board's Strategic Goals.

10. RISE/Termination Warning Notice (TWN)

Q. What is RISE? Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence.

Old TWN, had vulnerable schools which fell into the RISE program. Assigned an advisor for SBC and three primary schools. RISE has commissioned advisors who are educational experts.

Pleased and had positive meetings with the Regional Director, strategies employed by the Trust which has driven school improvement at pace.

Site visits at schools. SBC visit. St Joseph's, NA, St Catherine's, and SMSJ, Wool. The advisors met with SIOs in each school. Two possible outcomes - 1: RISE advisors will monitor, 2: funding and linked to another Trust to carry out improvement plan. We suggested SBC - 1, NA - 1, St C - 1, SMSJ is 2.

SMSJ, Wool to link with Cornerstones, disappointing that £3000 to develop a focussed school improvement plan as we already have this in place. The funding pot is worth up to £100 000. Ofsted and RISE had noted the Trust is doing the right thing, just need to add to the leadership capacity.

Q. Any bearing on future Ofsted inspections? It will help to improve the school.

Q. Would supporting Trusts be Interviewed by Ofsted? Would be at our suggestion. The process has been fair, positive working relationship with the Advisors.

Q. Where does St Peter's fit into this? Currently a Good outcome from last inspection. Massive improvements on last year's SATs outcomes, good progress in other areas.

11. Safeguarding

Report provided to the Board.

Updates as follows:

Risk 2. Extremely complex case. Panel outcome was completed and onward referrals will be made by Plymouth CAST HR Team.

Risk 15. Panel outcome has been completed.

Appeal processes can take place if requested. KB highlighted the work of the HR staff and those involved in the hearings.

Directors congratulated the team on the work that should have taken place historically. Concerns about potential damage due to the timescales.

KB shared information on the loss of a student and the requirement for the school to be involved in the Coroner's Court inquest.

Q. Is it documented where the school has had positive interactions with the student? Yes, all reports have been provided.

RO thanked KB and the teams involved in these cases.

12. RE and Catholic Life

12.1 Strategic Update from DSC

Directors highlighted the excellent report. HB wanted Directors to have confidence in the Levy being well spent.

HB thanked KB, SIOs, and ZB for their feedback from CSI inspections, for the cohesiveness between the Diocese and the Trust.

Q. Why is this Diocese the only one that doesn't pay? We are all one Trust so can't have anyone inspecting in the schools who works in the same Trust.

11.2 RE and Catholic Life Lead Director Report

NJ has not met with JF. Difficulty in representing 34 schools when only visited 6.

12. Education and Standards Committee

12.1 Update from Chair of Education and Standards

Impact Statement has been shared. Statutory Grants reports next time due to data drop.

Trauma informed approach continues to have a big impact in our schools.

Q. New cohorts for Trauma Informed training? Completed second cohort but have had whole school training, and have trained 36 TI Practitioners and will ensure they are deployed properly and effectively in their schools, and across the Hub model. Need to ensure all schools buy into this approach. A huge shift this year.

13. Finance and Resources Committee

13.1 Update from Chair of Finance and Resources

Impact statement provided by AN.

Discussions on Net Zero Accelerator Project (NZAP) following an award to the Trust of £610 000 to pay for EV chargers and solar panels. Seeing savings on electricity costs, now investigating how to sell the electricity back to the National Grid. Proposals for a second round of funding and are interested in applying for.

New three-year contract with Chartwells for 16 schools. F&R Committee wants a detailed report on catering costs and arrangements due to the significant losses being made.

New contracts and potential tenders: repairs and maintenance, and MIS in schools (currently SIMS) runs out in August 2026.

13.2 Management Accounts to May 2025

For 2024/25. Detailed discussions around individual schools. Looking good for the year end £626 000, anticipate it will reduce slightly once adjustments are made, will achieve the 1% target.

Key areas of concern for expenditure.

Supply costs, still high but reducing. The Supply Register (TSR) is not a contract but a one-stop shop for all schools which gives better rates, have saved £33 000 by using TSR. Yearly savings of £100 000. Want to move all supply to TSR for further savings.

SEND and EHCPs. Being able to budget income, will be in receipt of more income than budgeting for last year due to unknown income streams throughout the year such as NZAP, NI, pay awards. A lot of the income is then off-set against costs. Can only budget for EHCPs that we know about, schools are getting better at securing this income.

Q. Is there an opportunity to invest more in Insignis? Investment Policy can invest up to £2m, want to make money do more, should be investing the full amount. Bank with Lloyds and have a cash management facility and on our behalf transfer money to savings accounts and will automatically transfer back when the current account reaches a particular figure. Investment has been approved at F&R.

13.3 Approval of Annual Budget and 3-Year Forecast

Forecasting for 2025/26 an overall surplus. At school level, net surplus is 0.4%. KMB is controlling the central pot for next year. Have moved approximately £3m expenditure for central management to generate savings. Have forward purchased systems from 24/25. Looking at 0.8% surplus next year against the 1% target.

This is a really positive position for a MAT to be in. Recent statistics - 22% of Trusts were looking to break even this year, 25/26 67% of respondents to the survey are predicting a deficit position.

Q. What is the legal position of a deficit budget? When schools were part of the LA would have had to seek a loan from the LA, Trusts would have had to discuss with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) previously and now the RD (Regional Director) to work on recovery plans, to follow the ICFP (Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning), and will be looking at how to bring back to a surplus position. SA shared his experience of having to go to the ESFA previously and the restrictions in place. Can have a deficit but has to be a licence deficit which is essentially approval.

Individual schools are discussed, with 7 projecting a deficit in 25/26. 3 are of concern, 4 are less so, due to the value of the deficit. Schools are aware of any additional income is to be used against the deficit.

Amalgamate the two secondary school budgets. F&R Committee would allow the deficit for 25/26 due to the internal and external scrutiny currently, but senior leaders have been informed of the need to review the staffing structure for 26/27.

Q. An improvement, a rising position? Yes, SBC is as the school is full.

Q. SBC green shoots, potential to increase the PAN, 6th Form, hope, suggested merging the two sites already discussed, this can't go on when a school is full and can't pay for itself? If SBC as a standalone school wouldn't be able to function, have to account for schools separately, the schools run in a combined way. Deficit position of £99 000 we believe can be turned around, staffing structure decisions have been made, tightly monitored and discussions have already taken place with school leaders.

Q. From a business perspective, would be better to have bigger secondary schools but need to demonstrate successful performance at ND and SBC, would rather overspend to ensure those results than worry about a small figure now, investment in secondaries is the right approach? This is the approach that has been taking place but also to provide the best education for the children.

Historically, SBC had 44 going into Year 7 when ZB joined Plymouth CAST, this year will be 80. All about the achievement, the improvement, the family and boys. Reflected in Ofsted feedback.

SMSJ Wool. Decreasing pupil numbers, need to support the school, ideally would have 4 classes but need to remain at 5. Ongoing focus for SBM and SIO.

St Catherine's Bridport. Decrease in pupil numbers. Need to have 4 classes to meet infant class size rules.

Looking at 0.8%, just short of the target with the potential to turnaround some schools.

2026/27 position does look better but in anticipation of right sizing schools to the correct number of classes. Discussion to take place from January.

2027/28 Likewise.

GAG pooling discussions. Increasingly difficult to get into a surplus position due to ongoing challenges in funding. KMB recommendation for way forward is towards GAG pooling, more Trusts are utilising for better control on finances, will be discussing in great detail, GAG pooling centralises everything and then financially manage the schools based on curriculum led planning which is the best practice for the DfE. Will be a big project but needs to happen. Can consider potentially in hubs.

RO confirmed GAG pooling has been approved by the Board in principle, will report to F&R Committee and then to the Board.

Q. St Catherine's is one school surrounded by other schools in a Trust, new school local to SMSJ Wool. Investing in Wool, trying to stabilise but has been so hard, will win people back when they have confidence and will make progress, but the presence of a new school locally is difficult. Remember local intelligence, Good in CSI (Catholic Schools Inspectorate) and positive in Ofsted. KMB has attended a CST (Confederation of School Trusts) briefing where GAG pooling was discussed, used ICFP, but also considered the contextual position. HB felt reassured to hear that the school context is included.

The Board approved the budget

F&R Committee has recommended the budget be approved. Directors approved.

Q. Is there an update to the staff sickness /maternity insurance search? It is being looked at, working with TP (Procurement Manager) to seek quotes.

Meeting paused at 1.02pm.
Meeting reconvened at 1.28pm

14. Audit and Risk Committee

14.1 Update from Chair of Audit and Risk

Minutes are included in the pack.

Links to Lead Director roles. Hoping that Internal Audit will review careers.

Meeting on 20th June was a week before the H&S meeting.

GB brought Directors' attention to VATB (violent, threatening, aggressive behaviour) incidents. RCF attempted two JCC meetings but not quorate as no teacher unions were in attendance. All reps have had papers.

H&S Committee in June reviewed organisational learning following two investigations. RCF has considered next steps from these investigations: policy enhancement relating to lone working and to reflect staff working alone with pupils. Will work with Devon County Council (DCC) H&S Service and could support wider schools and Trusts. Common themes – risk assessment processes with clearer procedures for reviewing and sharing with staff, additional documents including CAST guidance to sit alongside H&S Policy, enhancement of incident debriefs to support staff and to benefit the Trust, flowchart style guidance, emergency planning to potentially include VATB, and staff training to be reviewed.

A focussed group to take this forward to work with RCF, PS, SBMs, HTs, and DCC H&S staff.

Accepted the internal audit plan for the year going forward.

Francis Clark - cash handling at schools. Highlighted the need to give schools greater information on the cash procedures at school level.

Change with the new HR system. Twin View Estates is a new system. Have already invested in a service, pilot schools to look at but like to introduce Trust wide, want a cohesive reporting system. Need to consider expenditure, RCF, KMB and PS will provide a paper to F&R Committee to approve purchase.

Q. Is the data transferable, are the systems interlinkable? Twin View Estates will connect to lots of data sources, want to exploit the value and richness of the data in place.

15. Remuneration Committee

15.1 Update from Chair of RemCom

Report provided in the Board pack.

Excellent piece of work by KMB on the SIO pay scales.

HB confirmed you need to be a Catholic to be an Assistant Headteacher. Need to be clear on the job descriptions and bandings for the role and the Deputy Heads. The Committee supported this.

Q. Real Living Wage. Please can you provide an update as requested by the Remuneration Committee following the recent government announcement. RLW discussions on the impact on Support Staff. Started the budget scenarios but Parliament has approved the start-up of the Schools Support Staff Negotiability Board (SSSNB), and it is likely there will be a pay scale for all schools to adhere to. Would advise against a consultation to implement the RLW and then carry out a further consultation to implement the SSSNB pay scale.

Q. Made a historic decision to pay but wanted a figure on how much it would cost. The implementation of the RLW would be £200 000 to £210 000 with on-costs, on an annual basis.

Q. There may be money to go with the onset of the SSSNB? A Negotiating Board to discuss pay scales, the Government to then identify ways of funding or not.

Q. Way forward? All schools will have to adhere to the pay scale so recommend not going through consultation for RLW.

Q. Any other MATs paying this? Not done this yet.

16. Governance and Management

16.1 Link Director Reports

Two reports in the pack. Need them to be submitted.

Q. Link Director role review? RCF, ZB and RO to meet to discuss.

16.2 Lead Director Reports

- **Safeguarding** - report provided.
- **Statutory Grants** - next meeting
- **SEND**
- **Health, Safety and Data Protection**

As part of the A&R Minutes:

- **Careers**
- **Estates**

RO requested Directors submit reports as evidence of these roles.

16.3 Scheme of Delegated Authority (SoDA)

RCF has made the adjustments as discussed at the Board Strategy Day.

The Board approved the updates to the SoDA.

HB and RCF are going to meet so HB has a clearer understanding of the SoDA. There have been CES updates.

SoDA
updates
approved

17. Policies

17.1 Teachers' Pay Policy

RCF provided an overview of updates.

New allowance of £50 for teachers attending a residential will be added.

Q. STPCD to be expanded in the Policy? School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document

Approved.

STPCD to be
expanded in
the Policy.

Policy
approved

17.2 Risk Management Policy

All changes are to align with current national guidance.

Approved.

Policy
approved

17.3 Communications Policy

New policy and RCF provided an overview.

Q. Doesn't mention using work email and not private email, doesn't include emojis.

Q. Everyone is part of the Trust, should be a termly letter to all Chairs, HTs and staff to indicate the direction of the Trust.

Approved subject to suggestions.

Policy
approved
subject to
suggestions

17.4 Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy

Expecting a major rewrite of KCSiE 2025 but only shared last week with technical changes, will be 2026 now.

Changes have been shared with DSLs, have the Policy ready to personalise.

LP to share changes for Part A with Directors.

Approved.

Policy
approved

17.5 SEND Policy

Policy
approved

Tacked changes file was corrupted. Only minor changes to update terms and reference to additional policies.

SEND Policy is the overarching for other documents that make the SEND strategy.

Tables to be updated - LP to update.

Approved.

17.6 Prayer and Liturgy Policy (replaces Collective Worship)

ZB gave thanks to HB and JS at the Diocese. National changes to RED, and follows Diocesan requirements. HB felt a positive Policy and good to present to Inspectors.

Q. Will require constant updating as Parish Priests are named. HB this will be included in the governance schedule of work.

Q. Every school has a chapel? This is part of the personalisation that schools will undertake.

Q. If schools have a church next door can they use that? No, relates to being in school.

Approved.

HB provided her thanks on behalf of the Diocese to SA for his contribution and commitment to Plymouth CAST.

HB left at 2.20pm

18. DfE Wellbeing Charter

RCF provided an overview of the Charter.

The Board approved signing up for the Charter.

19. Meeting Dates

Dates of meetings are approved.

20. Rationalisation Update and Pupil Numbers – Confidential, Part II

Discussion moved to confidential minutes.

21. Close of Meeting

SA thanked Directors for their support and wished Plymouth CAST well going forward.

RO thanked SA for his years of service.

Meeting closed at 3.57pm

Policy
approved

The Board
approved
the DfE
Wellbeing
Charter

Meeting
dates
approved