

Minutes of CAST Board meeting held on Friday 16th May 2025
in person from 10.30am

Attendees:	Ruth O'Donovan (RO)	-	Foundation Director (Chair)
	Andy Nicholls (AN)	-	Foundation Director
	Sandy Anderson	-	Foundation Director
	Steve Hole (SH)	-	Foundation Director
	Deacon Nick Johnson (NJ)	-	Foundation Director
	Nick Baldwin (NB)	-	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

PM, ALN, JA, and JC. Quorum met.

3. Declaration of Interest

NJ - Governor at St Edward's School.

4. Minutes of previous meeting 07.03.2025

Minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

5. Action Summary – March 2025

Updated on the Actions Summary.

NB and NJ arrived 10.35am

24.22 RLW at F&R. Discussed at F&R. KMB provided information, impact would be in excess of £200 000. The Committee deemed it unaffordable so not recommending moving forward.

Directors discussed paying the RLW as an aim but the budget needed to be considered and whether this should be reviewed annually. HB highlighted a core principle of Catholic Social Teaching.

Q. Where does that money come from? Can't place the Trust at risk, a target aim to pay in increments. AN confirmed the budget gets worse each year. KMB highlighted the sector's unknown factors including pay awards, budgeting 2.8% for teachers but a leak to the Times over the weekend shows Teachers Pay Board is recommending 4%, currently unfunded. Not alone, CST confirms all Trusts are in the same position. If adopt the RLW and any uplift will be part of it, have to uplift the Living Wage (minimum wage). Can't afford it currently but adjust planning for the future.

**Decision
/Action**

Minutes
07.03.2025
approved

Q. Implications on employment, have to look at reducing staffing, more moral to keep someone in employment? Non-pay budgets have already been reviewed to make the money go further, 80% of costs are staffing, naturally an increase in cost will come from staffing which will mean reductions. Too late to implement for September 2025. Impact on the children if having to reduce.

Some areas that we don't know about, will be asking for budget approval at the July meeting. 2025/26 £300 000 surplus currently, intention is to reallocate for capital and school improvement so there would be no surplus to reinvest.

In a better position now as we didn't implement it when we discussed.

Benchmarking using the RLW against other Trusts, should not alter the intention but would contextualise as to whether we are in a minority or not, things in schools have never been tougher, reduced allocation to schools is frightening. Primary schools are losing 100 hours of TA time which is a significant impact.

If approved now, implement from September 2025, need more time to make a definite decision in July. Need to recognise the workload of the finance team. TUs would welcome the increase but would have concerns about potential redundancies. JCC meeting on 17th June.

Can have two budget scenarios.

ZB agrees with the aspiration but concerned about the real-time cuts in schools. Children and schools will suffer, the sector is so volatile currently, leaked pay award is going to be unfunded. Need more time.

Q. Paid the RLW previously? Not paid in the last few years. CAST pay structure discussions put it on hold, intention was to implement.

Balance of harm. Not giving RLW, balance with losing staff.

RO requested budget information to be provided, RCF to raise with JCC, decision in the July meeting.

Staffing consultations deadlines for 25/26 have passed, impact on 26/27 budget and things unknown.

24.21. Staff survey responses. Relaunch of surveys are live, closing on 2nd June. Bring to July.

23.58 Template. HB has met with NJ and JF. HB to put into a document. October 2025.

23.53 Staff survey. Linked to 24.21.

6. Chair's Business (including Chair's Action)

• PM

RO and PM have met. PM has tendered her resignation due to her F/T workload but would like to rejoin in due course. RO will write to PM.

• GB Term

Will be discussed in Articles.

• Finance Procedures and Policy

Directors to submit expenses once per term, to support with payments.

7. CEO Report

Budget scenarios to be provided.

RCF to liaise with JCC

Decision at July Board

RO to write to PM

Q. AI - is there a plan to give a course on AI to heads, teachers, clerks and Board? SWGfL gave a training session to HTs, which needs to be refreshed and rolled out. Use Robin for website and policy reviews across the Trust, ChatGPT, looking to work with a Teaching School Hub (TSH) to train staff but don't know when this will take place.

Risk of using AI, RCF is working with DPO to produce a due diligence document to apply to AI services. Staff training will need to consider risks from a data protection view. GB highlighted that CST and NGA are running courses. Lots of information is out there.

Q. AI Policy? Audit and Risk in June 2025.

AI Policy to A&R in June 2025

Q. SA asked GB to share training. LP shares CST briefings each week with Directors.

Q. How does it fit with the Lead Director role for IT?

Q. Risk of cyber-crime and stealing data? Comes through the work of the A&R Committee, Cyber Essentials insurance in place, discussed at A&R, externally audited in this area. Receive reports on unusual activity in emails. Teams are very proactive at reporting concerns.

Q. What are our staff absence rates? Absence - at end of April - 5776 days. Monitor monthly. April 44.37% reduction against March. The highest month was December. Actual figures are in the F&R reports. The data report is not helpful in presentation currently but will improve with the new system.

Q. What cost in terms of backfilling teachers? Significant.

Absence data to be shared annually with the Board

Q. Breakdown staffing groups? Can provide that information, reasons for absence are shared with F&R. Data to be provided annually to the Board.

Q. How many heads do we have at the moment that do not meet the Catholicity requirement? 8 - 6 HTs and 2 HoS.

Q. Permanent or interim? Mixture of both. Any HT interview panel includes Diocesan colleagues. Acknowledge it is a challenge, robust discussions with the Diocese.

Previously had 15 and now reduced to 8, historically the 15 were without Diocesan awareness. A positive picture. Advertise in parishes, nationally, Catholic Teachers' Gazette, external recruitment partner which specialises in Church school recruitment.

Q. Goals, how are they being achieved or not? The Strategic Goals are reviewed annually, a Trust Improvement Plan (TIP one-year operational plan) which is how we are meeting the goals, Board see the TIP, reflected in the Heat Map.

Q. How does a Director understand how the Goals are being met? The Heat Map and the TIP. Each Directorate is mapped and then RAG rated. The Heat Map data was discussed.

Q. St Edwards - keen to join CAST? Too early to have a formalised view, need to build a relationship, many stakeholders to consider.

HB confirmed that CAST and the Diocese are aligned in their thinking.

Q. DfE not supportive, is that because of ND and SBC? A moving picture, positive inspection, the fundamental point is the inspection data.

Q. From a Board perspective, would like a SWOT analysis to detail their strengths, weaknesses and financial position. That is all part of the process and due diligence.

Q. The Heat Map is a summary of the key data that the Board needs to consider, key points for Lead Directors to provide an update, finance, education, and estates, tells me more than what's in the CEO report, want to know the areas of concern. Exception reporting focuses on this.

Lead Director report is the summary of a meeting, not just focussing on red items. E&S Committee focusses on the most vulnerable schools and detail is in the minutes and papers.

Have been working on this, reporting is by exception, cannot reduce information further due to the information required by Directors.

Q. Chairs to feed their concerns, quality of education at SBC, what are the issues and what is the plan to address this? In 2020, the school was inadequate despite the Ofsted grading of RI, since then have had changes to the Ofsted regime, goalposts have been moved and expectations uplifted, previous inspection areas for improvement have been addressed, have to stabilise a school in all areas, sit here proud of the recent inspection outcome.

System is a deficit model, school has transformed, unheard of Good for Leadership and Management shows the confidence in the leadership, the Trust ownership in terms of challenge, HoS was superb demonstrating leadership. Strong leadership runs throughout the school. Success was recognised by the inspectors and the DfE. Attendance has been transformed, above the city average, in line with national, suspensions reduced, attainment and progress is improving. Quality of education is due to KS4 outcomes not close enough to national averages, a legacy of poor teaching and leadership. Current Year 10s are 60% incoming through being placed by the LA. Need greater consistency on teaching. ND is further behind but on the right journey. GCSE outcomes will take longer.

Q. What are you doing in 4 schools to move from red? Overview of the reasons why schools are red and the priorities, detail is provided to the E&S Committee, pulled together under the heading of each school.

Q. Not addressing problems, can't find information? Action plans are school level.

Directors want to go through everything at the Board, but that is the role of the Committees, SA confirmed the majority of E&S Committee's time is looking at attendance, data, and have two meetings to focus on this information.

The Board discussed how the information is presented. Too much - failings are hidden, too little - failings are not reported.

ZB highlighted the circular conversations over previous years, have responded every time the Board has requested information. AN confirmed the information is on the Heat Map, detail is carried out by Committee.

Q. Struggled to find answers to questions in paperwork, need to be more professional as a Board, about strategy and dealing with problems, don't identify the problems enough to say what we are doing about it, need to address in a simple way.

Inspection was around governance and strategy. Without the information, cannot discuss the strategy. RO asked Directors to share any constructive reporting suggestions directly to her.

Q. If spending money to keep a particular school going, is there any way the process can be advanced? Not just a CAST decision, RD and the LA. HB reminded Directors that the school is full of children and families that need our support. Needs to be maintained to provide a proper education for those children. The money being received is for those children in the school.

Q. ND and SBC operating at a deficit, £10m in terms of repairs, are we still looking at merging the schools? SELT is not looking at this and has previously reported on.

Q. How do we run a deficit with the £10m bill hanging over us? That is if everything was fixed, essential and desirable repairs.

Q. When will the Board look at this? It is under constant review at F&R, reviewed three years ago, space and cost already considered, don't have the facilities to put schools together and the cost would be greater.

Q. When last discussed? June Strategy Day. Always considering what is required to maintain school buildings, staffing, not being ignored, a national problem and F&R are well aware.

RO thanked KB for his report and the support during inspections. RO thanked HB for the support provided for the CSI inspections.

8. Articles of Association

RCF shared her screen to show the updated paper and walked Directors through the detail.

Q. What about the Anglican overlap of St Edwards, the Bishop of Salisbury? It would be included.

Q. Don't amend the Articles, amend when St Edwards wants to join? No facility in the model articles to begin the consent approval of amendments.

Q. Because the Diocese owns the land? Model articles of the CES.

Q. Where does the Diocese get involved? Schools' decision, decided not to join in 2014.

Document could have that availability, thought there was a distinct decision? Written in 2013 with the Bishop of Exeter and Salisbury, but in 2014 the schools decided not to become part of CAST so no need to proceed with Bishop of Exeter and Salisbury.

Could help the Diocese in the process, would canonically support.

Q. Why it had moved to the Diocesan Trustees and not the Members. Due to legal advice received, the personnel are the same, if had Exeter and Salisbury as a Member would be a different group of people. Always been the Diocesan Trustees, want to be clear on what this is saying. HB queried if it would be simpler to have the Members instead of Trustees.

The Board discussed the inclusion of Members. Looking at 2013 Articles as 2019 were not ratified.

Q. Proposals to fit with 2013? Proposals to fit with model 2019 articles.

ZB appointed ex-officio, all HTs are ex-officio on LCBs.

Q. Why appointed and removed last week? Want to follow the process carefully.

Q. Who is the Company secretary? RCF.

Appointed as per 2013, current articles and legal advice has stated that is what we should be following, legally ZB is a Director but wanted transparency and have it formalised.

Q. Discussions on CGI, how can someone be a Director on the body that holds them to account. DfE recommendation.

Abbot appointed as a Member, don't want to renege on the current relationship or position, don't want to remove the Abbot whilst this work is taking place.

Q. Co-opted Directors, from date of appointment or date of Articles, can't apply retrospectively?

Role of any Co-opted Director or Governor is to bring skills or experience, for a particular role. Brings into line with Foundation.

Q. Brings into line, not applied retrospectively? Bring into line with Foundation. Need to consider the skill set and what the Board requires.

Q. Not going to lose GB? No.

RCF will ensure the cap starts at the time the Articles are approved, not the date of approval of the Co-opted Director.

GB left the room at 12.40

GB would like to see out the full audit cycle. GB approved until September 2025, RO proposed appointment from July 2025 to July 2026 which covers the end of financial cycle and audit cycle, then review the skills required, as very meticulous and does a good job.

Directors discussed.

Q. Want all Co-opted Directors July to July? No, want spaced out.

The Board approved GB's term being July 2025 to July 2026.

GB returned at 12.44

Q. Can we keep to Members and not Trustees? More logical to be Members but how far to move from the model articles. Members are a sub-committee of the Trustees. The Board was happy.

Q. Where does the 12 years come from? CGI states 9 years which is two terms of 4, plus one year.

Q. A change, difficult to have changes approved.

Q. Cap? No current cap.

GB Term of Office approved July 2025 - July 2026

106 - wording "at the next Board meeting"

Q. Why introduce one? The Board agreed to remain with the model articles which is no cap at all.

Q. 106, what is "as soon as reasonably practicable"? Update to reword "at the next Board meeting". Approved.

Going to need permission to stray. In the SoDA, strategic Board business is related to the meeting cycle. Agreed to leave immediately.

ZB
reappointed
as a Director

ZB left the room 12.59

Happy for the Articles to be amended for the CEO, as ex-officio, in anticipation of these Articles being approved. The Board approved that ZB be reinstated as a Director with immediate effect.

ZB returned 13.00

RCF's proposal is to work towards a revised draft at the Board Strategy Day on 13th June.

RCF will revise and share her paper, seeking feedback via email for consideration at the Strategy Day.

Q. Need to reinstall the 2013 Articles at Companies House? Need to consider personnel.

NB thanked RCF, AN and SA for their work.

Meeting paused at 13.03

Meeting reconvened at 13.27

11. RE and Catholic life

Dates of leavers mass published - all invited.

Highest % of SEND with no EHCPs, highest Diocese. Shows CAST's commitment to inclusion.

RO thanked HB for her report.

9. Heat Map

Q. I should perhaps know this but how are the points scored for Education Ranking- I ask as our best school only achieves 50% of the possible points? RCF to review with PS and provide an update to the Board.

Q. There has been very little change in the final weighting scores for our schools -a 1% decline from Dec 23 to Dec 24 and a 1.2 % increase from May 23 to May 24. I find this surprising as I would have expected that with the effort on Ed & Stds. And the amount being spent on Estates we would have achieved a better overall improvement? This is linked to the metrics, a lot spent on NZAP for six schools.

Q. Spent £1.5m? Yes, on various projects.

Directors felt that schools they visit are better than two years' ago but not seeing the impact on the Heat Map. The only actual movement was St Mary's, Poole due to an improved energy efficiency certificate which suggests the weighting and scoring needs reviewing.

Have seen the E&S improvement and want to see this reflected.

Linked to the CAST standards, written the best criteria for education, finance, estates, discussions previously on whether we were being too harsh. Thresholds are so high, it is difficult to reflect in the Trust overview.

Directors discussed the Heat Map data. ZB confirmed the data relates to the standards set, happy to review but if we change the standards now it will have an impact on the grading of each area and the data since December 2023, as comparing two different datasets.

SA felt it was the scoring of the standards and would like to review the data. School condition surveys feed into this data.

10. Safeguarding Report

Q. HT taking the child into own home? LA pressure but Trust not allowing it to happen.

12. Finance and Resources

12.1 Update from Chair of F&R

AN provided an update from F&R. Board goal is 2% and the 1% is a revised target for one year only.

RLW discussions will impact on Draft 3 budget.

Directors highlighted there is a deficit but linked ongoing investment in school.

Q. Food standards have decreased in our schools? Have to adhere to Food Standards qualities, procurement activities confirm meet the standards, and policy means allergies and dietary needs are met, don't have a statement on what we would like our food to be.

12.2 Management Accounts to March 2025

KMB provided the headlines of his report.

Some reduction in supply costs due to The Supply Register (TSR).

The Government has funded approximately 96% of the NI increase. Just under £700 000 per year, will be built into GAG funding going forward.

Q. Where is the income from Insignis shown in the accounts?

Included in 'other income' which is non-Government grants, SEND funding, nursery income. Current financial year approximately £70 000 received. Want to increase this.

Q. £1m in cash, can we afford to put more? Reserves Policy (part of Finance Policy) allows us to invest up to £2m. Started a cash management plan with Lloyds.

12.3 GAG Pooling Update

No update at this stage.

13 Audit and Risk

13.1 Update from Chair of A&R

GB confirmed no meeting since last Board meeting.

13.2 Risk Register Review

Reviewed in April 2025. Exception report circulated.

HB left 2.04pm

Q. Only changes to wording? Yes.

14. Education and Standards

14.1 Update from Chair of E&S

Impact statement provided.

Schools are having to do more with the youngest children, and this is causing an enormous strain. Often have mixed age range classes which adds to the pressure. Brought in expert help to support schools and sharing good practice across the Trust. Early Years has the biggest impact on the life of the children.

Discuss all the schools at Committee. KB reports all information to Directors.

Q. With ND and SBC, is there separation for subjects? SH will liaise with KB.

Teachers are having to carry out the role of parents. The Prime Minister target 75% of children being school ready by 2026, the target is not going to be met due to funding and support cuts, a societal problem. Schools are doing a tremendous job despite the challenges.

Statutory Grants Report. Not achieving national standards for PP children. Lots of reasons why PP children are not doing as well as non-PP children. Disproportionate number of PP and SEND pupils, reducing staffing, making it harder for schools. Not achieving what we should but it is not for the lack of trying.

SH to liaise with KB on secondary subjects

15. Trust Board Governance Update

15.1 Link Reports

Provided.

15.2 Lead Reports

RO asked all Lead Directors to provide reports. SA provided and ALN due to submit.

15.3 ToR - Chair and Vice-Chair

The Vice-Chair is to support the Chair and to deputise.

Q. Representing the Trust at any stakeholder meetings, should be a comment that the Chair is the senior ambassador and lead spokesperson in any incidents, should be stronger? No, CEO is the lead spokesperson for the Trust.

The Board approved the ToR.

Chair and V-C ToR approved

16. Policies

16.1 Collective Worship Policy

HB updating the Policy, HB will address any questions during CSI. Move to the July meeting. Approved.

Collective
Worship
Policy
approval
now July

16.2 Exclusions Policy

Approval to permanent change, national updates released during summer holidays, October Board meeting.

Q. Training for Directors in disciplinary hearings? HR Manager is extremely well qualified and has produced guidance and parameters on how to apply the policy and practice. Can look for training but need to follow own policies and would receive support.

Exclusions
Policy
approval
now
October

17. Part II Confidential Item

Meeting moved to confidential discussion.

18. Close of Meeting

RO thanked all for attending.

Meeting closed at 14.50pm

2024-25 Board Meeting Dates – All to be held at the CAST Offices

Day	Meeting	Date	Start Time	Location
Friday	Board Strategy Day	4 th July 2025	10am	CAST Office, Plymouth
Friday	Board Meeting	18th July 2025	10.30am	CAST Office, Plymouth