

**COTHAM SCHOOL**  
**Meeting of the Academy Governing Body**  
**Thursday 12 December 2024**

**MINUTES OF MEETING**

<b>Governors Present:</b> Jo Butler, Headteacher/Accounting Officer Sandra Fryer, CG Chair of Governors Dora Alderson, MG Sophie Hamilton, PG			Lucy Hunt, MG Graham Nutbrown, CG Richard Puttick, PG Rebecca Reid, PG Jack Barber, CG	Jared Rufus, CG Ruth Thomas, PG Jakub Wilczewski, CG
<b>In Attendance</b> (non-voting) Chris Reed, Deputy Head Domini Leong, Deputy Head Aimi Potter, Director of Post 16 Allison Crossland, Director of Finance & Resources Owen Morgan, Gosia Dreissig Governance Professional		<b>Apologies</b> Ian Spencer, CG Isabel Tobias, MG Henna Nathwani, CG Peter Huckle, MG  <b>Absent</b> N/A	MG = Member Appointed Governor CG = Co-opted Governor PG = Parent Governor	

Item	Minutes of Meeting
1	<b>Welcome, Introductions and Apologies. Items for AOB, Declarations of interest - annual compliance completion (hard copy document) &amp; meeting (verbal)</b> Chair welcomed everyone. No declarations of interest. No other business. Apologies received from IS, IT, HN and PH. JW will arrive late.
2	<b>Minutes of Last Meeting</b> - 19 September 2024 - Agreed as fair and accurate.
3	<b>Matters Arising and Actions</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governors to read and mark as signed all compulsory safeguarding training on GovernorHub by 11 October 2024. <b>Outstanding. Action: Governors to complete the mandatory training on the GovernorHub by the end of the week.</b> The Governance Professional shared the instruction via Governor Hub Noticeboard.</li> <li>Chair to carry out the governors' reviews by Christmas. DoFR asked the Chair to complete the audit skills review for new governors as soon as possible in readiness for the audit. <b>Ongoing.</b></li> </ol>
4	<b>Governors Declaration of Eligibility form</b> Governors were asked to sign the Declaration of Eligibility form. The form acts as a reminder for what may disqualify trustees from continuing in their position.
5	<b>Headteacher's Report</b> <u>Overall School Performance</u> The Headteacher's report highlighted improvements in school standards, attributable to interventions and additional resources.

	<p><b>Q - Regarding improvement in the standard scores and whether it is due to additional resources or other factors?</b> Headteacher explained that primary schools are sending children with lower attainment, and the school interventions are improving results.</p> <p>Discussion around the combination of teaching strategies, teacher support and their impact on students.</p> <p><b>Q - Can we have some data on the Accelerate provision?</b> Headteacher explained that this is a new provision and the data on the Accelerate provision will be reported back to the Learning &amp; Wellbeing Committee.</p> <p>Governors praised the frank report especially in relation to point 8.3 on personalised provision. Headteacher mentioned a meeting with the new Executive Director of the Children and Educational Directorate at Bristol City Council, Hannah Woodhouse. Concerns were raised about the chaos in external services affecting students.</p> <p><u>Student leadership and House System</u></p> <p><b>Q - Inquiry about the restructuring of the Student Leadership System.</b> DL explained the integration of the House System and Student Council, aiming for a unified representation across all year groups.</p> <p>Chair thanked the Headteacher for such a full report.</p>
6	<p><b>Approve Annual Report and Accounts</b></p> <p>RR introduced the approval of the Annual Report and Financial Statements at the last Finance, Premises &amp; General Practice meeting on 2 December 2024. RR reported on the positive audit findings and key issues discussed with Bishop Fleming (Auditors).</p> <p>The Annual report and financial statements were approved by Governors, showing a healthy reserve of £1,774,784.</p> <p>There were no questions noted.</p>
7	<p><b>Chairs Business Report</b></p> <p><u>Update on recent activities</u></p> <p>Chair thanked all for their hard work.</p> <p><u>Remuneration Committee</u></p> <p>Chair mentioned the need to set up the Remuneration Committee</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To set up a remuneration Committee with membership determined at the Annual General Meeting - Chair.</p> <p><u>Complaint and Appeals</u></p> <p>Chair discussed the complaints and appeals process and mentioned the need for a comprehensive report.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To prepare a report on the complaints and appeals process for the next FGB on 3 April 2025 - Chair &amp; Governance Professional.</p> <p><u>Strategy update</u></p> <p><b>Action:</b> To finalise the School's Strategy update by incorporating feedback and circulating it to All Governors - Chair &amp; RP. DoFR will support putting School Strategy Document into a Cotham format.</p> <p><u>Annual Governor Conference</u></p> <p><b>Action:</b> To determine the agenda and topics for Annual Governor Conference - Chair.</p>

	<p><u>Governor Vacancies, Recruitment and Succession Planning</u></p> <p>Chair discussed the recent advertisement for parent governor and the need to improve the selection process to ensure they understand the responsibilities and workload involved.</p> <p>This part of the meeting focused on the composition and recruitment of the governing body, including the need to fill parent governor and co-opted vacancies. The Governors discussed the pros and cons of electing versus selecting governors and the importance of maintaining a management accountant position (one of the vacancies must be kept for a management accountant, as dedicated by the governing body's requirements).</p> <p>Chair expressed concerns about the lack of knowledge and control over the recruitment process. Chair mentioned the need to fill in one or two parent governors vacancies and the recruitment process.</p> <p>Some governors suggested contacting local primary school governors to encourage them to apply for secondary school governor positions.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To revise the parent governor recruitment process to include CV, letter of application and one-on-one interviews. To prepare a paper on the process for selecting parent governors and whether to use election or selection for parent governors - Chair &amp; Governance Professional.</p> <p><u>Confirmation of Members approval for IT standing for another term</u></p> <p>Chair confirmed the extension of IT's term and the need to approve PH's term at the AGM.</p> <p>Chair discussed the need to rethink the AGM process and the potential impact on governance if PH does not continue.</p>
8	<p><b>Internal Audit Three Year Plan, and first year actions for information</b></p> <p>RP outlined the internal audit process, emphasising its role in risk management and operational efficiency. The need for a standardised audit template and prioritised list of items to audit was highlighted.</p> <p>RP described the process of gathering a list of core items to audit, combining it with issues from the school's register and individual governor interests.</p> <p>RP mentioned the need to prioritise and rationalise the list to add to the multi-year audit programme which is in the FGB papers, starting with the first year's activities.</p> <p>DoFR explained the requirements for an audit committee and the process for handling audits, including safeguarding audit and other relevant reports.</p> <p>Discussion on audit priorities and scope. Governors asked for the possibility of auditing issues around creative subjects and the school's competitiveness. DoFR clarified that the review of the curriculum is already included as a proposed topic in the Audit Programme and discussed the need to procure professionals capable of conducting audits in the topics selected to form the programme.</p> <p>Budget allocation for audit work was discussed and the need to prioritise audits based on the RISK Management of the school including cross referencing to the RISK Register and then prioritising in line with the schools overall RISK profile the potential impact of this.</p> <p>RP emphasised the importance of starting the audit process quickly and the need for governors to contribute their ideas and interests.</p> <p>DoFR suggested revisiting the risk register and the school's risk management framework to inform the audit process.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To contribute individual ideas for potential internal audit to the list - All.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To send a reminder to governors in early January to submit their ideas for potential internal audits - RP.</p>

	<p><b>Action:</b> DoFR to publish the RISK Register on Governorhub as a reminder for Governors of the RISK profile of the school and to assist in identification of audit areas to provide to RP.</p>
9	<p><b>Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation - Approved</b></p> <p>Governance Professional presented the updated Terms of Reference and the Scheme of Delegation for approval, noting that those documents were shared and approved by the relevant committee Chairs and Vice Chairs.</p>
10	<p><b>Policies - For Approval / Review</b></p> <p><u>Careers and Employability Policy - Approved</u></p> <p>OM presented the updated Careers and Employability Policy for approval, noting that it has been updated with minor changes.</p> <p><u>Governors' Code of Practice - Approved</u></p> <p>Chair introduced the updated Code of Conduct, noting that it was redrafted to reflect the governing body's current structure.</p> <p>A concern about the alignment of the conduct with the Scheme of Delegation and the need for governors to act within their delegated authority as raised. Chair acknowledged the need to clarify the relationship between the code and the Scheme of Delegation and suggested a review of the document.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Chair &amp; Governance Professional to review and amend the Governors Code of Practice and send it for signing.</p> <p><u>Admissions Criteria/Arrangements for 2026/27 - Approved</u></p>
11	<p><b>Cotham Playing Fields, Stoke Lodge update</b></p> <p>Chair discussed the status of the public rights of way application over Stoke Lodge Playing Fields. A report by Robin Carr, Consultant, was reviewed, and the PROWG committee at an Extraordinary Committee Meeting on 27.11.2024 concluded there is a balance of probability for the public rights of way to exist. An eight-week objection period begins on Monday 16.12.2024, Cotham will be determining its plans for objections and will do so within the given timeframe of the process. The Secretary of State and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will decide on a public inquiry.</p> <p>Further criminal damage on the site was reported in relation to the existing fence, it was reported to the police and a crime reference number obtained. The school's legal team is preparing for the High Court case in January regarding the Town and Village Green Registration.</p> <p>The need for community engagement and positive communication moving forward when the school seeks to return to its playing fields was discussed.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To procure a public rights of way and green consultant to review and challenge the Rights of Way 'Notice of Application' - Chair/Headteacher/DoFR.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To develop a mobilisation plan to engage the local community - Chair/Headteacher.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To provide witness training for the key individuals involved in the High Court - Chair.</p>
12	<p><b>Committee Chairs Updates and minutes</b></p> <p><u>Learning &amp; Wellbeing</u></p> <p>GN shared the committee updated on behalf of PH. Key themes included detailed SLT reports on student cohorts, GCSE results and safeguarding issues. Safeguarding issues were highlighted, to include a lack of police notifications on youth violence. Attendance and mental health links were highlighted, with a focus on enrichment activities. AL use in education was discussed, noting concerns about academic integrity and potential benefits for SEND students.</p>

	<p>Discussion around incorporating AI into digital learning, prioritising staff training and quick wins. Some examples shared around experience with using AI in student workload, with mixed results. Governors discussed potential benefits of ChatGPT for students with autism, including improved understanding of social interactions.</p> <p>DoFR explained how ChatGPT is used to streamline workload in Estates and Governance.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To develop a digital strategy and policy that incorporates AI and bring it back to the Learning and Wellbeing committee - Headteacher.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To prioritise actions and allocate work related to the digital strategy - Headteacher.</p> <p><u>Finance, Premises &amp; General Purposes Management Accounts Approval</u></p> <p>RR pointed out the key takeaways from the meeting included updates on school funding, finance system migration, personnel training and the asbestos report. New finance system will start in December 2025.</p> <p><u>Personnel &amp; Training</u></p> <p>Staff recruitment challenges were noted, with low PGCE course applications. The committee also reviewed staff exit surveys (generally positive comments from exiting staff) and in addition the plans for a general staff survey to be issued in T3.</p> <p>Committee discussed representation of BME teachers.</p> <p>Committee debated staff diversity targets and key performance indicators.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To conduct a general staff survey, to be issued directly to staff in T3 - Headteacher/HR.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> To review and discuss the newly proposed family friendly policies - HR/DoFR/IT.</p>
13	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>The AGM's in person requirement was debated. At the moment, the meeting is scheduled for 3rd March 2025. DoFR mentioned that the AGM should be in person, not virtually, as per the latest Model Articles adopted in 2020.</p> <p>Some governors suggested holding the AGM around the next FGB meeting. DoFR pointed out that the AGM must be attended by the Members, Governance Professional, Chair, Headteacher (accounting Officer) and DoFR (Chief Financial Officer). School Governors can attend if they wish to.</p>
	<p><b>Summary of Actions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From the previous meeting: Governors to complete the mandatory training on the GovernorHub by 20 December 2024.</li> <li>2. From the previous meeting: Chair to complete the audit skills review for governors.</li> <li>3. Chair to set up a remuneration Committee with membership determined at the Annual General Meeting.</li> <li>4. To prepare a comprehensive report on the complaints process for the next FGB 3 April 2025 - Chair &amp; Governance Professional.</li> <li>5. To finalise the School's Strategy update by incorporating feedback and circulating it to All Governors - Chair &amp; RP.</li> <li>6. To determine the agenda and topics for the Annual Governor Conference - Chair.</li> <li>7. To revise the parent governor recruitment process to include CV, letter of application and one-on-one interviews. To prepare a paper on the process for selecting parent governors and whether to use election or selection for parent governors - Chair &amp; Governance Professional.</li> <li>8. To contribute individual ideas for potential internal audit to the list - All.</li> <li>9. To send a reminder to governors in early January to submit their ideas for potential internal audits - RP.</li> <li>10. Chair &amp; Governance Professional to review and amend the Governors Code of Practice and send it for signing.</li> </ol>

	<p>11. To procure a public rights of way and green consultant to review and challenge the Rights of Way 'Notice of Application' - Chair/Headteacher/DoFR.</p> <p>12. To develop a mobilisation plan to engage the local community - Chair/Headteacher.</p> <p>13. To provide witness training for the key individuals involved in the High Court - Chair.</p> <p>14. To develop a digital strategy and policy that incorporates AI and bring it back to the Learning and Wellbeing committee - Headteacher.</p> <p>15. To prioritise actions and allocate work related to the digital strategy - Headteacher.</p> <p>16. To conduct a general staff survey, to be issued directly to staff after the holiday period - Headteacher/HR.</p> <p>17. To review and discuss the new family friendly policies - HR/DofR/IT.</p>
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Meeting closed at 19:50

Next Meeting – Thursday 3 April 2025