

COTHAM SCHOOL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Full Governing Body

Thursday 3 April 2025, 5pm, Room: K102

Governors Present:		
Jo Butler (JBU), Headteacher & Accounting Officer	Jack Barber (JB), CG	Richard Puttick (RP), PG
Sandra Fryer (SF), CG, Chair of Governors	Jared Rufus (JR), CG	Henna Nathwani (HN), CG
Dora Alderson (DA), MG	Ruth Thomas (RT), PG	Tom Corrigan (TC), CG
Graham Nutbrown (GN), CG	Jakub Wilczewski (JW), CG	Rachel Jewell (RJ), CG
Isabel Tobias (IT), MG	Ian Spencer (IS), CG	
	Peter Huckle (PH), MG	
In Attendance (non-voting)	Apologies	Quorum required: 5
Chris Reed (CR), Senior Deputy Headteacher	Allison Crossland, Director of Finance & Resources (DoFR)	Governors present: 14/15 (due to later arrival/earlier departure)
Domini Leong (DL), Deputy Headteacher	Rebecca Reid (RR), PG	Key
Owen Morgan (OM), Deputy Headteacher	Sophie Hamilton (SH), PG	MG = Member Appointed Governor
Aimi Potter (AP), Director of Post 16	Lucy Hunt (LH), MG	CG = Co-opted Governor
Gosia Dreissig, Compliance, Information & Governance Officer (CIGO)		PG = Parent Governor
	Absent: N/A	Q: Governor support, questions, and challenge
		A: Responses

No	Subject	Who	By when
1	Welcome, Introductions and Apologies. Items for AOB, Declarations of interest Chair welcomed everyone and introduced two new co-opted governors: Rachel Jewell and Tom Corrigan. Governors shared their roles and backgrounds. Chair mentioned another governor to join, Susanne, who is pending final checks confirmation. Apologies received from: DoFR, RR, SH and LH. It was noted that RT has informed the Clerk of her late arrival. Chair noted AOB: The request for release of capital funds from 2024-25 reserves for Yondr Phone Pouches. No declarations of interest. Chair reminded everyone to check their Declarations of Interest on the school website and Governor Hub for accuracy. The meeting was quorate.		

2	Minutes of Last Meeting of 12 December 2024. Agreed as fair and accurate.		
3	Matters Arising and Actions - see action summary of actions on page 9		
4	Chair's Business Report - Governor Vacancies, Recruitment and Succession Chair discussed the need for an accountant on the governing body. Chair confirmed that LH stands down in the Autumn. Chair and DA's terms of office end in the Autumn. - One to ones and skills audit Chair confirmed that most 121's are done with outstanding ones to be completed by the end of Term 5. Chair added that there are no particular skills missing. <i>RT arrived at 17:14</i> Action: Chair to complete outstanding 121's by 23rd May 2025. - Annual Governor Conference and Strategy Chair confirmed that the Annual Governance Conference is scheduled for June 19th and sought input on the format and content. Discussion around the topics for the Annual Governance Conference. Some suggestions included: fresh walk around the site and a game; safeguarding, possibility of having external speakers on youth violence and gang culture. Governors raised concerns about respect and social issues, whereas DL mentioned ongoing work on misogyny and homophobia. Headteacher and Deputy Headteachers discussed options for governors briefings to include the above topics. Chair confirmed that the Strategy to be signed at the conference and to cover the next three years. - Members update Chair recalled the memory of David Yorath, school member and governor of the last 20 years at Cotham school. - Governance Compliance - Outstanding training and Skills Audit Action: Governors to complete their outstanding training confirmations by 27th Apr 2025	Chair Governors	by 23rd May by 27th Apr 2025

	- Draft 2025-26 Governors Meeting Schedule Draft was shared prior to the meeting. Action: Finalise the schedule of meetings for the next year by the end of Term 5. Action: CIGO to revisit the draft meetings dates around Easter break for 2025-26.	Chair/FGB /CIGO	by the end of Term 5
5	Headteacher's Report The Headteacher's Report had been circulated prior to the meeting. Additional comments and questions were as follows: Positive comments about listing all the school trips on the report. Governors asked for all documents links in the report to be accessible. PH praised the way that the report is structured around the KPIs to include some details as well. It was good to see the Year 11 mock exams results which were quite promising. Year 13 predictive grades were quite positive. <i>Q: Has there been a change in policy in whether students who present behaviour challenges are classified as SEND?</i> <i>A: It is not really changing the policy. We find our criteria for identifying students with SEND. If we got students presenting with some behavioral difficulties, we then look at every single piece of information about these students, including feedback from teachers, to try and then accurately identify their SEND, so that part has changed slightly. And that would potentially affect the SEND numbers.</i> <i>Q: Looking at the student elective leadership team, it has now changed to the student executive team?</i> <i>A: Yes, it has been introduced by the Learning Coordinators and there were relatively small numbers of students who were given leadership opportunities. The rationale for the change and the details of the change were presented to the Learning and Wellbeing Committee on 11th March 2025.</i> <i>Q: Just wondering if a presentation from the Student Council could be part of the Governors Conference?</i> <i>A: Yes, that could be possible. We'd asked them to stay behind a bit longer. We could ask the Post 16 Student Leadership Team to join in as well.</i> <i>Q: I'm interested in the longitudinal success of young people who join us as refugees. Could we have a bit more information about them?</i> <i>A: We could arrange for the refugee cohort to come present, not necessarily at the Governors' Conference, but to the Learning and Wellbeing Committee.</i>		

	Chair asked for the governor's feedback on the Headteacher's report. Governors commented on a really helpful compilation of what the various members of staff with those areas of responsibility were able to bring all important updates in one document. Some suggestions around "spoon feeding" and providing some overview of the report from the Headteacher to governors would be much appreciated. Chair thanked the Headteacher for such a full report.		
6	Staff Survey: Governors' Role and Visibility Staff Survey results, summary and Visible Governance documents had been circulated prior to the meeting. Additional comments and questions were as follows: The Headteacher shared the summary of the Staff Survey and how some of the issues were dealt with. The staff survey was overall very positive but highlighted national issues like workload, well-being, and student behaviour. Governors shared proposals to improve governor-staff interactions including attending key events, summarising visit feedback, and increasing visibility through informal interactions. Arrangements to make staff feel valued include: off site PPA, possibility of working from home and free yoga classes. <i>Q: Have you addressed the staff references to respect yet?</i> <i>A: Yes, we did a lot of work on International Women's Day to include misogyny.</i> DL added that misogyny is driven by social media and pornography. Discussion around supporting parents and carers with mobile device awareness to encourage open communication about online activities, utilize parental controls, and promote healthy screen time habits, while also providing resources and guidance on online safety. CR confirmed working on the mobile device awareness paper, which he will share at the parents event in June. Action: CIGO to share the Headteacher's Staff Survey response presentation with Governors. Action: Explore opportunities for governors to be more visible to staff, such as attending school events, providing video introductions, and presenting at staff meetings. Action: Redesign the staff survey questions to avoid portmanteau questions.	CIGO All Governors	by 9 Apr 2025 Ongoing/ review at the next FGB 10 Jul

	Discussion around inviting governors to some of the staff events to increase governance visibility, e.g. Staff Christmas lunches or Staff Briefings. Action: CR to provide some possible dates for governors to visit the school.	DA&RT CR	by Term 2 of 2025-26 by 12 May
7	Annual Complaints Report The below documents were shared prior to the meeting: • Report front sheet • Complaints Report • Draft Complaint Policy • Draft Protocol for responding to a Serious Incident Involving a Student CIGO provided an overview of the complaints received by Cotham School during the academic year 2023/2024 and 2024/25 up to 12 March 2025. The Annual Complaints Report showed a low number of complaints, attributed to the effective Strategic Leadership Team and their instant responses to stakeholders' concerns. 10 complaints were noted from September 2023 to March 2025, to include 6 complaints escalated to Panel Hearing at Stage 3. The key issues raised in complaints included Payroll, Flexible working hours, Trips refund, Pathway Choices, Suspensions, Health & Safety and Safeguarding. Actions taken by the school after the Panel Hearing recommendations included: 1. Developing 'Critical Incident Response - Policy and Procedures'. 2. Setting up an Actions Log for 2024-2025. The report main findings included: 1. Apart from updating the policy template and adding the note of the last policy updates, there are no changes to the policy. 2. The Policy and procedure are simple and easy to understand. 3. All roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. 4. The introduction of the Compliance, Information and Governance Officer(CIGO) role for centralisation of all complaints works well. 5. There is a scope to recognise complaints and appeals as opportunities to learn and engage positively with parents and other stakeholders. 6. Complaint's subjects and responses are monitored by the Headteacher and the CIGO.		

	<u>Draft Complaint Policy and Procedures have been approved by Governors with some minor changes:</u> Action: - to add a section on how anonymous complaints will be handled - to add a section on regarding withdrawal of complaints - to check the use of word “proprietor” on page 2 of the Draft policy under 1.4 point. <u>Draft Protocol for responding to a Serious Incident Involving a Student was approved by Governors with a minor change of replacing <i>In the event of a student’s passing</i> with a <i>student’s death</i> on page 4 under Step 5.</u> Governors expressed their wish to receive a similar report and Action Log for Permanent Exclusions for the next meeting. Action: Head’s PA and CIGO. RP raised concerns about the risk of complaints in terms of reputation and cost, suggesting the need for external support. However, the majority of Governors did not consider a further need for training or legal advice on complaints procedures, and were satisfied with the current school complaint policy and procedures. PH recommended Bristol Governance Development Service free online training on dealing with complaints. Action: CIGO to share with governors a free online training on effective complaints handling from the VWV solicitors. Action: Set up a Standing Committee to handle complaints, disciplinaries, and exclusions.	CIGO Head’s PA/CIGO CIGO Chair	By end of term 5 By 10 Jul 2025 By 8 Apr 2025 At FGB September 2025
8	Management accounts RP reported that the Management accounts were circulated for approval and signed off by the FPGP Committee. <u>Governors signed off the Management Accounts.</u>		
9	Cotham Playing Fields, Stoke Lodge update Chair provided a verbal update on the legal case mentioning that the outcome is expected in late June or early July. Chair discussed the need for a mobilisation and communication plan to address the potential outcome of the legal case.	Chair	by mid June 2025
10	Committee Chairs Updates and Minutes <i>AP arrived at 18:50</i>		

	<u>Learning & Wellbeing - PH</u> Learning focused meeting on 14 January included: • a report from PE Faculty Head who is passionate about impact of PE on student's wellbeing • annual report from SENDCO who described major successes e.g. Y7 transition, plans e.g. streamlining the referral process and challenges, primarily the lack of financial and practical support from the LA; • and a report on Pupil Premium students who are increasing in number but whose attainment gap is sadly widening. Wellbeing focused meeting on 11 March included: • safeguarding update which highlighted the huge workload due to increasing number of incidents logged and emphasised how educating parents about online safety is vital • an update on behaviour which was overwhelmingly identified as the most important issue for the school to address in the staff survey and referenced the significant increase in suspensions (a city wide pattern) • explained why the Accelerate Programme had been discontinued • the annual Equality and Diversity Report (EDI being identified as the school's major strength in the staff survey) which contrasted ongoing concerns about misogyny with progress made in tackling colourism and the Pride strategy. <u>Personnel & Training - IT</u> Main points included: • approval of the new suite of Family Friendly policies – in particular these establish the entitlement for various kinds of paid family-related leave. • discussing the results of the staff survey in particular ways to increase governor visibility. The list of suggestions can be taken from the minutes. • CIGO's school-based project to review the governor induction process. • IT and RP Isabel followed up two issues outside the meeting with DoFR and HR Manager: staff exit questionnaire which HR Manager will re-draft and KPIs which will be the student teacher ratio; the number of male staff and the number of BME staff. The HR Manager will also redraft the format of the staffing report to governors. IT also provided an update on the latest Single Central Register monitoring visit on 27 March, confirming that the school single central register is maintained well, and the school is working on a new privacy statement to address record-keeping issues.		
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	<u>Finance, Premises & General Purposes - RP</u> RP's main update points included: • FPGP approved the running monthly budget and forecast for the current year, showing a small surplus of £50,000. • The forecast for 2025-2026 shows a significant deficit, reflecting increased non-staff costs and unfunded staff salary increases. • There is a need to increase class sizes to reduce staffing costs, which plans to reduce the number of forms of entry from nine to eight. • DoFR is preparing a plan B budget involving cost-saving measures, which will be presented to the FP&GP Committee on 19th May 2025. Plan B may come to the FP&GP outside of the normal cycle. The Headteacher pointed out the need to make some decisions now. The Headteacher also informed Governors that she will share with staff the current school financial position on the w/c 29 April in readiness for September. Governors expressed their concerns about being put in a very tight and challenging position if they need to approve Plan B during an extraordinary FGB meeting. <i>Q: Are we getting more students in?</i> <i>A: This year we will reduce from 9 to 8 forms - 240 students in year 9 and 261 students in year 8.</i> The Headteacher said that the school hoped for more funding from the government and where possible changes will be managed via redeployment.		
11	AoB: Yondr mobile phone Pouches: Request for release of capital funds from 2024-2025 reserves The conversation around the implementation of a mobile phone pouch system, specifically the Yonder pouch, to manage student phone usage. Governors also acknowledged that some students will try to bypass the system and pointed out that they found videos showing how to open the pouch without breaking it. The Headteacher highlighted the fact that some students will always try to bend the rules. Governors also shared positive examples of other local schools indicating the system's effectiveness. The Headteacher explained that the Yondr Programme utilises a simple, secure pouch that stores a phone. Every student will secure their phone in a personally assigned Yondr pouch when they arrive at school. Students will maintain possession of their phones and will not use them until their pouches are opened at the end of the school day. <u>Governors approved to release up to *£25,000 from 2024-25 reserves to fund Yondr as a Capital initiative</u> (*up to £25,000 because the school plans to set up a GoFundMe with parents and carers, which governors approved as well).		

	<u>Governors agree that the school can introduce Yonder pouches as part of the school uniform requirement from September 2026.</u>		
12	Date of next meeting: 10 July 2025		

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting closed at 19:36.

Summary of actions

No	Action	Who	By when	Completed? Y/N
3	3.1 To send out reminders to the governors with outstanding training.	CIGO	8 April 2025	Y
	3.2 To complete the audit skills review for governors.	Chair	by 23 May 2025	Y
	3.3 To determine the agenda and topics for the Annual Governor Conference - Chair.	Chair	by 23 May 2025	Y
	3.4 To set up a remuneration Committee with membership determined at the Annual General Meeting.	Chair	by 23 May 2025	N - postponed until the next FGB in Sept
4	4.1 To complete outstanding 121s by 23rd May 2025.	Chair	by 23 May 2025	Y
	4.2 To finalise the schedule of meetings for the next year.	Chair	by the end of Term 5	Y
	4.3 To complete outstanding training and Skills Audit on GovernorHub	Governors	by 27th Apr 2025	Y
6	6.1 To share the Headteacher's Staff Survey response presentation with Governors.	CIGO	by 9 April 2025	Y
	6.2 To explore opportunities for governors to be more visible to staff, such as attending school events, providing video introductions, and presenting at staff meetings	All Governors	Ongoing/ to review at FGB 10/06	Y

	6.3 To redesign the staff survey questions to avoid portmanteau questions.	DA&RT	By Term 2 of 25/26	N - by the Term 2 of 25/26
	6.4 To provide some possible dates for governors to visit the school as a part of governance visibility.	CR	By 12 May	Y
7	7.1 To amend the Complaint Policy with Governors' suggestions.	CIGO	By end of Term 6 By 10 July 2025	Y
	7.2 To prepare Report and Action Log for Permanent Exclusions	CIGO	by 8 Apr 2025	N - postponed until the next meeting in Sep
	7.3 To share with governors a free online training on effective complaints handling from the VWV solicitors.	CIGO	by the end of June 2025	Y
	7.4 To set up a Standing Committee to handle complaints, disciplinaries, and exclusions.	Chair	by the end of June 2025	N - postponed until the next meeting in Sep

Approved as a correct record by the Board on 10 July 2025.