The Castle School
A SPECIALIST COLLEGE FOR COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION
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MINUTES of a Meeting of the Full Governing Board held on Thursday 2nd July 2026 at 5.00pm, Held at the Love Lane Site

Present: Jane Seymour (JS) (Acting Chair) (Co-opted Governor), Jo Davis (JD) (Staff Governor), William Alexander (WA) (Parent Governor), Jo Davis (JD) (Staff Governor), Chris Fisher (CF) (Co-opted Governor), Indira Hann (JH) (Co-opted Governor), Jon Hewitt (JH) (Headteacher), Charlie Kowalski (CK) (Parent Governor)

In attendance: Atul Attra (AA) (School Business Manager), Caroline Whitlock (CW) (Deputy Head), James Whybra (JW) (Deputy Head), Anne Hunter (AH) (Clerk)

1. **Apologies Received**

   Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Helen Cabell, Adrian Crawford and Nicola Markham. It was noted that Indira Hann was due to arrive late. The meeting was quorate.

   As the Chair and Vice Chair had both given their apologies Jane Seymour was elected Chair for this meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interest on Items Pertaining to this Agenda**

   There were no declarations of interest declared.

3. **Any Other Business Items to be Raised at this Meeting**

   There were no other business items put forward.

4. **Minutes from the Previous Meetings held on 19th March 2026 and 30th April 2026 and the Extraordinary Meetings held on 27th March 2026 and 28th April 2026**

   The minutes of the meetings held on 19th March 2026 and 30th April 2026 and the Extraordinary Meetings held on 27th March 2026 and 28th April 2026 were agreed as true and accurate records and were signed by the Chair.

   Actions arising from the 19th March 2026 meeting were discussed as follows:

   - Action 1 and Action 2 – JS confirmed that she had completed her on-line refresher safeguarding training and her details still needed to be uploaded to GovernorHub. It was not known if Indira Hann had completed her on-line refresher safeguarding training. It was noted that it had not been possible to set up suitable dates therefore HC, NM, AC and CK had still to attend face to face safeguarding training when sessions were available. CW advised that she was holding a face-to-face safeguarding training session on Monday 6th July at 3pm at Theale if any of the Governors were free to attend that session.
     Action 1 – The Clerk to check if IH had undertaken her on-line refresher safeguarding training session. HC, NM, AC and CK to attend face-to-face safeguarding training when sessions were available. The Clerk to advise HC, NM and AC about the training session on Monday 6th July.

- Action 4 – JH advised that he had contacted the Safeguarding Team to ask for a document setting out the outcome of their visit but had not received any response from them.
- Action 5 – Due to the appointment of a new Headteacher JH confirmed that he had agreed with Helen Cabell that the Staff Survey would not be undertaken this term but left until the Autumn Term.
- Action 6 – JH advised that this would be provided in the Autumn Term.
  Action 2 – The new Headteacher to be asked to see what information could be provided on staff absences from the current system in order to provide Governors with consistent and meaningful metrics that they could consider.
- Action 7 – The Clerk confirmed that Interpreting Progress Data would be added to the Governors' Strategy Session which with the agreement of the Chair of Governors had been deferred to the Autumn term.
  Action 3 – AH to add Interpreting Progress Data to the agenda for the Governors' Strategy Session.
  Action 9 – It was noted that CF, EO and JS had visited the School this term. JW stated that staff really valued Governors' visits. All Governors were asked to consider visiting the School and contact the relevant member of SLT and the Clerk was asked in future to add Governor Visits to the Upcoming Training agenda item.
  Action 4 – Governors to consider visiting the School and contact the relevant member of SLT.
  Action 5 – AH to add Governor Visits to the Upcoming Training agenda item on future FGB agendas.
  Action 10 – It was noted that Governor labelled lanyards were now available and Governors were reminded to send the Clerk their photographs so that they could be provided with security badges.
  Action 6 – Governors to send the Clerk their photographs in order that they could be provided with security badges.

It was noted that all other actions had been completed.

There were no actions from meetings held on 27th March, 28th March and 30th April 2026.

5. Committee Reports

The committee chairs provided the following updates in relation to their last meetings:

- **Finance and Premises Committee held on 16th April 2026**

WA reported on the areas covered at the meeting which included reviewing the budget monitoring reports in detail and highlighted that the School were still owed money from other local authorities. Following a query by JS AA advised that some monies had been received from Oxford County Council but there was still £27k outstanding from them and £24k from Surrey County Council. From communication with both councils it had been established where the disputed differences were and the money was expected.

Following a query about the solar panels AA confirmed that they had been installed and connected to the grid but as yet any reduction in bills had not been noticed.

WA further reported that Castle@Theale would be full next year which would provide the opportunity to have a better understanding of the actual costings associated with the site. Although the staffing complement at Theale was never at full capacity the budget had been set on full staffing levels in order to get a true reflection of the cost of running the site.

The Committee received an update on the Private Fund and with regard to investing some of the Fund AA was still waiting for the Chair of Governors to agree to a proposal to do so.

WA confirmed that the Committee had reviewed the results of the Governors' Skills Audit in relation to their requirements and were happy that the Committee had the stills required.

- **Student and Staffing Committee held on 14th May 2026**

JS reported on the areas covered at the meeting which included a Safeguarding Update from CW and a discussion about CW producing a handover document for the new Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) who had yet to be decided.

JS reminded Governors of the three senior leadership team appointments that had recently been made: Paul Van Walwyk as Headteacher, Shayam Dhokia as the Head of School at Castle@ Theale and Tony Trigwell-Jones as Assistant Headteacher.

JS confirmed that the Committee had also reviewed the Governors' Skills Audit, as it related to the Committee, and although they felt the Committee currently had the relevant skills consideration should be given to succession planning given that the three Parent Governors' terms of office finished in November 2026. To this end it had been agreed that Governors would have a presence at the Castle Fest on 20th June. CF stated that although the Governors who attended the Castle Fest managed to speak to some parents it hadn't been as successful as he had hoped.

6. Headteacher's Report

All Governors were sent JH's detailed Headteacher's Report prior to the meeting and had been reviewed by them. JH advised that 400 consultations had been received this year with the likelihood of a number of them ending up in tribunals. He highlighted the issue faced by Post-16 in 2027 when the number eligible to attend would rise to 65 pupils but the building capacity was only for 35 pupils. Consideration would therefore need to be given to accommodating some of the pupils in rooms on the Love Lane Site.

CK asked what the proportion of out of district pupils was. JH advised that approximately 96% of pupils were from West Berkshire with the remainder mainly coming from Wokingham, Oxford and Wiltshire. It was noted that this was an increasing problem but there was no justification not to take out of area children.

JS asked if staff had found any issues with the Family First Partnership Reforms which had come into effect. CW informed the Governors that the Reforms dealt with lower level issues that required early interventions. Staff had found very little change and felt that it was more a rebranding exercise. JW confirmed that the process to access support had not changed.

7. School Development Plan (SDP)

Detailed information from the SDP 2024-2025 review and long term plans for up to 2027 as well as the SDP for 2025-2026 and the Annual Pupil Progress Report for 2024-2025 were included in the Headteacher's report. JH confirmed that following agreement with the Chair of Governors it had been decided that with a new headteacher starting it was not appropriate to develop an SDP for 2026-2027 without his input therefore it was intended to put this on hold until the Autumn Term with the Governors' Strategy Session starting off the process.

WA queried whether it was known what the new headteacher's intentions were. JH advised that Paul was currently spending two days a week in School and was spending time looking at current processes in School and visiting other special needs establishments.

8. Policies for Ratification

8.1 At the recent Student and Staffing Committee meeting it had been agreed that FGB would be asked to consider whether in future all policies should contain a front sheet showing the document history, related documents and a synopsis as contained in the Behaviour Policy. During discussion Governors felt that going forward having a single front page, to include the Castle School Badge, version control and review dates and who by would be a good idea but it was not felt that a synopsis was necessary.

It was therefore agreed that AH would produce a policy front page template, for consideration by the Chair of Governors and Headteacher with a view to this being used on all future policies under review.
Action 7 – AH to produce a policy front page template, for consideration by the Chair of Governors and Headteacher with a view to this being used on all future policies under review.

8.2 **Policy Ratification**
Having been submitted to the relevant committees, the following policies were considered:

- Allegations Against Staff, Volunteers or Carers - The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Anti Bullying – The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Behaviour - The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Code of Conduct – The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Early Years Foundation Stage – The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Internet - The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Minimising Work Related Stress - The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB.
- Pupil Premium Grant Support Fund Policy – The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Restrictive Interventions – The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB
- Teaching and Learning – The policy was agreed and ratified by FGB

Action 8 – AH to file the agreed policies in the relevant paper file and on GovernorHub

9. Safeguarding Update and Signing of the Single Central Record

CW had provided a report which Governors had read prior to the meeting. CW confirmed that no changes to operations had been required following the introduction of West Berkshire's Families First Partnership and there was nothing of significance to report to Governors.

WA queried whether a policy was required relating to the new rules around the use of mobile phones in schools? JH confirmed that a policy was not required as details were set out in law. CW informed Governors that mobile phones were not allowed at Castle@Theale and were either locked away or kept in secure pouches.

10. Governance and Training

10.1 Confirmation of Committee Structure and Membership for 2026/27

Governors were asked if the new committee structure, as agreed last year was still fit for purpose. Given that there would be significant staff and Governor changes in the next six months it was agreed that the committee structure and membership of each Committee should remain as it currently was and as set out in the document contained in the agenda.

10.2 Ratification of Link Governor Positions

For the same reason as outlined in agenda item 10.1 it was agreed that the Link Governor positions should remain as they were outlined in the agenda document.

CF felt that his role as Link Governor for World at Work was just a box ticking exercise as he was not provided with any information about what was happening. JW confirmed that there used to be photos of the Link Governors around the School and if Katie had known you were the Link Governor she would have sent you relevant information. JW agreed to produce a sheet with the Link Governor information on it and asked the relevant Governors to send the Clerk their photos which he would then use.
Action 9 – All Link Governors to send AH their photos which would be passed to JW to produce a Link Governor sheet.

JS felt that Link Governors should be provided with a 'job description' setting out the expectations of the role. JH felt that the Link Governor role was something that needed to be discussed with the new Headteacher and the Clerk was asked to add an item to the Governors' Strategy Session.
Action 10 – AH to add an item to the Governors' Strategy Session on Link Governors, to include their role.

10.3 Review of Standing Orders for the Procedural Workings of the Governing Board 2026/27

The Clerk advised that the only changes she was proposing related to any new committee/committee membership or Link Governor appointments and the addition of the Pay Committee. As there were no new committees or appointments made the only change would be the addition of the Pay Committee and its membership. It was noted that the document would require a further review once any new Governors were appointed in November. The Standing Orders, with the addition of the Pay Committee and its membership were agreed by FGB.
Action 11 – AH to file the Standing Orders for the Procedural Workings of the Governing Board 2026/27 on GovernorHub.

10.4 Agreement of Meeting Dates for 2026/27

The meeting dates for the 2026/27 academic year, as set out in the agenda, were agreed by the FGB. AH explained that the Chair of Governors had asked for an informal Governors' meeting to be held on-line on 1st September in order that all Governors had the opportunity to meet the new Headteacher.

10.5 Process for Appointment to Forthcoming Parent and Staff Governor Vacancies, including appointment of Returning Officer

Governors were provided with a copy of a draft letter to parents relating to the forthcoming parent and staff Governor vacancies that were due to arise in November when a number of parents and the staff governor terms of office ceased. It was noted that it was proposed that the Staff Governor timings would be the same as those set out in the Parent Governor letter. Governors agreed the timetable for elections of Parent and Staff Governors as set out in the draft letter.

The Clerk advised that the Governing Board needed to appoint a returning officer to organise the conduct of the elections and it was agreed that Anne Hunter be appointed as the Returning Officer.

It was noted that the Governing Board also needed to decide on how the ballot paper process would be carried out in the event that more nominations were received than there were vacancies. It was agreed that if this did happen then decisions about the ballot paper process would be delegated to the Clerk in consultation with the Chair and Headteacher.
Action 12 – In the event of the vacancies being contested AH to be delegated authority, in consultation with the Chair and Headteacher to make decisions about the ballot paper process.

10.6 Upcoming Training and Training Needs

CF advised that he would be attending a Bite Size Ofsted training session next week. JH asked that CF mention the impact of Ofsted on special schools and try and ascertain the measures required to acquire an expected strong rating. CF was asked to feed back on the training session.
Action 13 – CF to feed back on the Bite Size Ofsted training session.

11. AOB items

Indira Hann joined the meeting at 5.45pm

As this was JH's last Governors' meeting JS read out a message from Helen Cabell, Chair of Governors, who was unable to attend this meeting. The message acknowledged how the School had grown under JH's leadership and vision and the warm and supportive environment that he had nurtured. In addition, the message recognised JH's work with the Ambition Institute and his role supporting SEND tribunals which had contributed to the wider education system. JH's dedication, integrity and belief in every child's potential had made a lasting difference.

Governors thanked JH for everything he had done for Castle School, wished him a long and happy retirement and provided him with some gifts.

As it was CW's last Governor's meeting JS stated that Governors greatly appreciated CW's work as Deputy Headteacher and particularly her amazing work setting up Castle @ Theale and making it what it was today. CW was thanked for her tremendous achievements and what she had done for young people.

12. Dates and Times of the Next FGB Meeting

Informal Governors' Meeting – Tuesday 1st September 2026 at 4.30pm on-line
Governors' Strategy Session – Tuesday 6th October 2026 at 3.30pm at Love Lane site
Full Governing Board – Thursday 19th November 2026 at 5.00pm at Castle@Theale.

The meeting closed at 6.00pm