

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 14 January 2025 at 5pm

Present physically:

Present virtually: C Broad, parent member M Cadman, **Chair**
L Bennett

In Attendance: E Barneveld, Head of School – Duke of Lancaster
G Cowles, Deputy Governance Professional
P Hamilton, Head of School – Sunrise Academy
S Gaskins - School Improvement Lead

Apologies: J McCourt

Absent:

Action

1. Welcome and Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed members to the Academy Council. Introductions were made for the new governance members: Carrie Broad and Lynzi Bennett.

Apologies for absence were received from J McCourt.

2. Declaration of Interests

No conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2024

The minutes of the meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 13 November 2024

The three matters arising from the previous meeting were marked as ongoing:

MA1 - E Barneveld informed that the fencing at Duke of Lancaster school has since been installed, but the fire doors are in progress of being sourced and installed.

MA2 and MA3 - G Cowles will follow up with L Chapman, Director of SEND and Outdoor Learning, and provide an update at the next meeting.

G Cowles

5. First Hand Feedback

Members received and considered the feedback forms from governance members First-Hand visits to Duke of Lancaster School and Sunrise Academy during the last half term.

6. Quality Assurance Update

S Gaskins provided a verbal update from the last half term.

A Quality Assurance visit was conducted at the Duke of Lancaster School at the end of the last term. S Gaskins informed that the school has been working on points raised as recommendations at the visit, recorded in the Quality Assurance report.

Rob Bamford, as a former His Majesty's Inspector joined that visit, to provide a triangulation of scrutiny of teaching quality.

S Gaskins informed that G Alcock has been working on attendance with all Heads of Schools. S Gaskins informed that attendance at Duke of Lancaster School has increased over time and attendance at Sunrise Academy has increased by 10% compared to the same period last year.

S Gaskins informed that the School Improvement Leads produce half termly reports for each school which is presented to the SEND Educational Excellence Committee.

S Gaskins informed that the School Improvement Leads have reviewed the previous Ofsted reports for each school to showcase progress against the areas for improvement.

Members discussed staff sickness and absence and commended the Heads of the Schools for their work in managing staff levels during the challenging period of staff absence.

7. Duke of Lancaster – half termly report

Members received and considered the report provided and E Barneveld summarised the report.

3 highlights

E Barneveld informed that the school has been supported by EEG staff including the CEO, who are providing targeted support to the school. IT are scheduled to visit to provide infrastructure support. E Barneveld informed that all visits have proven supportive and beneficial for driving improvement across the school.

E Barneveld informed that one new teacher started work in Year 7 in January 2025. Staff induction processes have been carried out and the new teacher is working with the current agency staff for handover. E Barneveld informed that another new teacher is due to start in April 2025.

E Barneveld informed that positions for Specialist Teaching Assistants (STAs) remain vacant. E Barneveld to discuss with HR and Finance to agree how to improve these positions to support them to be filled.

E Barneveld
HR
Finance

E Barneveld informed that there is an increased focus on teaching and learning, with an implementation of practical, simple steps to improve quality of teaching and consistency. Improvements are noted between September to December 2024 by school leadership.

Quality of Education (focused on expected exam entries)

E Barneveld informed that the school's Senior Leadership are conducting a review of the curriculum offer to ensure it is suitable given the needs of students, and informed staff subject teams being involved in reviewing the offer for Key Stages 2,3 and 4.

Members queried what curriculum other local providers offer and whether there could be best practice sharing locally between providers. E Barneveld explained that the other special schools in Norfolk have a different student profile to that Duke of Lancaster School so the curriculum would not be appropriate and noted that the geographical spread of our students makes it difficult to arrange out-of-school support that is accessible and convenient for students.

E Barneveld informed that the GCSE pathway profile has changed since the school's inception to better meet the needs of the students enrolled.

Members discussed that admission to Duke of Lancaster School is led by the Local Authority and is led by student need, rather than limited to the specific SEN profile of the school. The Chair informed that this means the school accommodates students with more complex needs than originally planned, and noted this can lead to challenging behaviours, and commended the management of staff and EEG.

Members reiterated the aim that the schools work closely with the Local Authorities to ensure we have the right students and staff, in the right environment, so that the school can meet their needs.

Members queried the acronym 'SWOT', mentioned on page 3 of the Head of School's report. E Barneveld explained that it stands for 'Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats' and that it relates to an analysis for each subject in the curriculum performed by the subject leads.

Behaviours and Attitudes

E Barneveld informed that G Alcock produced a report on behaviour and attendance, which is comprehensive for the school and detailed and positive for senior leaders. The document notes the following points:

- At the time of writing, attendance at Duke of Lancaster is 9.9% below the national special school average and 1.7% lower than the overall Duke of Lancaster figure for 2023-24.
- Since the last report attendance has reduced by 0.9%, largely due to an increase in Authorised Absence. Persistent Absence (defined as attendance below 90%) is 6.3% higher, however is an improvement on 2023/24. S Gaskins confirmed that the Family Support Workers, the Assistant Head and G Alcock talk through the circumstances of every individual Persistent Absentee and found that the increase in authorised absences is partly due to student illness (which accounts for more than 25%) and that, of those, attendance is now improving. Moreover, for more than 10% of persistent absentees are new students on transition timetables, who are now attending full-time or working towards it.

Challenges are seen as:

- Inappropriate placements by the Local Authority, or other cases on students in transition.
- Parents or carers not meeting the need of the student.
- Parents who feel the school can't meet their child's needs.
- Unauthorised term-time holidays.

S Gaskins provided a graph to show improvement in student attendance, impacted by the temporary nature of many who are deemed persistently absent.

E Barneveld informed that the school's leadership team are working to implement the recommendations for improved behavioural changes detailed within G Alcock's visit report.

Personal Development inc. careers

E Barneveld informed that leadership changes have been made to the Personal Development curriculum to ensure the best quality of teaching and careers progression for students.

E Barneveld informed that evidence of good practice and impact on students is being highlighted, along with the planning of the Personal Development curriculum, which will all be monitored and checked for progress.

E Barneveld informed that staff's awareness of Motional has been a focus for training and will lead personal development going forward.

Staffing Issues

E Barneveld informed that EEG procedures have been implemented regarding staff absence. E Barneveld informed that staff now must call in if they are ill to speak to a member of Senior Leadership. E Barneveld informed that as a result, less staff have taken time off from work.

Admissions

E Barneveld informed that there are 102 students on roll and that admissions are managed by the SEND Services Team.

Attendance

E Barneveld updated that attendance stands at 75%.

Staff training and professional development

E Barneveld informed that leadership skills in non-senior staff are being enhanced by training to encourage career progression.

Exclusions and Suspensions

One day's suspension was reported by the Head of School in this reporting period.

Ofsted readiness

Ofsted changes are being embedded across the school, as evidenced by the G Alcock's comments in the report. Strengths noted on page 8 of the report were:

- Most students were settled in classes and displayed positive behaviour when completing tasks.
- Morning settling activities were embedded in most classes
- There were significant strengths in teaching and learning in KS3, across a range of subjects.
- In meetings, subject leaders for English and Maths presented with drive and enthusiasm, recognising weaknesses in the curriculum intent and suggesting workable improvements to develop further.
- Use of reading logs were an effective record of reading progress in Primary.
- Careers boards were in place in many classrooms meaning students were aware of the different career paths in various subject areas.
- Elizabeth and the two assistant heads have a clear understanding of the areas for improvement and are working with Scott Gaskins, Executive Head, to address them in a timely manner.
- Support will also continue to be needed from the Trust's HR department, as issues of staff attendance and performance must be challenged robustly moving forwards.

Safeguarding update and discussion

E Barneveld informed that she has a strong safeguarding team in the school, who are actively monitoring all measures to protect and safeguard the students. E Barneveld informed that the Senior Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Georgina Lewis recently retired, and that EEG's Safeguarding Team has filled in to support the school.

E Barneveld informed that both internal Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) referrals from the previous report have been closed internally.

E Barneveld informed that a new LADO referral is currently being investigated by the Head of School, S Gaskins as Executive Head and the Safeguarding Team. Members asked for an update at the next meeting.

E Barneveld

Members discussed the LADO referral process was discussed to ensure all governance members understood the terminology and procedure. S Gaskins informed that the LADO consider whether a meeting should be held with all relevant agencies to share information and decide if further investigation and/or action is needed.

8. Sunrise Academy – half termly report

Members received and considered the report provided and P Hamilton summarised the report.

3 highlights

P Hamilton informed that Suffolk County Council's Standards and Excellence partner, visited to focus on reading and phonics teaching, which led to a recommendation that there be more opportunities for primary students to read. P Hamilton informed that books were brought in by staff, and students were encouraged to read for 15-20 minutes each day and gave an example of how this led to increased confidence in reading.

P Hamilton informed that training for phonics was conducted to embed it across the school, which resulted in reports of improvement in teaching, including for Year 11.

P Hamilton informed that careers training was conducted by the Careers Officer and was supported by a visit from an ex-convict who talked to students about good choices and the consequences of poor choices. P Hamilton fed back that the visit was well received by students and staff.

P Hamilton informed that there was positive interaction by students at the recent Xtend Panathlon event was shared, where students mixed with other schools in the sports competition for children with special needs and disabilities. P Hamilton informed that the school's trophy cabinet is now being filled by students' achievements.

Quality of Education (focused on expected exam entries)

P Hamilton informed that Maths and Science are a strong focus for teaching staff on the curriculum. P Hamilton informed that he has requested a Quality of Education review by the School Improvement Leads with regards to Maths, which will be fed back at the next meeting.

P Hamilton

Members queried how Individual Learning Plan (ILP) training is being carried out. P Hamilton explained that information for ILPs is taken from the Education & Health Care Plan (EHCP) for each student, then provision mapping is carried out to project student progress against their ILP. P Hamilton explained that setting high staff expectations is part of this training.

Behaviours and Attitudes

P Hamilton informed that G Alcock gave bespoke training at the school in December 2024 on Behaviour and Attendance matters. P Hamilton explained that the training was focused on de-escalation techniques to prevent negative incidents.

Members queried if every member of staff receives behavioural training. P Hamilton explained that all student-facing staff (bar those exempt due to medical issues) receive the training. P Hamilton informed that training is done as soon as possible after induction.

G Alcock's Behaviour and Attendance visit was carried out on 21 November 2024. Highlights of points raised are:

- At the time of writing, attendance was 23.7% below the national special school average, though 9.1% higher than in 2023/24. This pattern of improvement is reflected in the proportion of students who are Persistent Absentees (below 90%) which has reduced by 7.1%.
- S Gaskins advised that the school's profile of need and measures of disadvantage, is comparable with that of Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Alternative Provisions (AP), and against these comparators, the schools' attendance is above the national average.

The downward trend in attendance can be attributed to illness and an analysis of Persistent Absentees shows the primary reason for absence as follows: 20% are mainly absent due to illness; 27% due to part time timetables; 40% due to refusal and/or lack of parental engagement. Over 10% of all students have taken unauthorised term-time holidays. It is expected that the improvement in attendance will resume as these situations are addressed by the school.

Personal Development inc. careers

P Hamilton informed that Trauma Informed (TI) practice is consistent and is reported as having a positive impact.

P Hamilton informed that offsite visits by students included a climbing wall, and that feedback from outside venues regarding students' behaviour, was good and students were described as being polite and respectful.

P Hamilton informed that the use of the Jigsaw Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) programme has improved the teaching quality for secondary students and will be introduced for primary students.

Staffing Issues

Members queried sickness and absence levels among staff at the school. P Hamilton explained that HR is working with one teacher to further develop their teaching skills and that staff are being held to account for their quality of teaching.

Admissions

Members queried referrals from other Pupil Referral Units (PRU), as some children have been out of education for over a year, impacting their attendance when they are referred to Sunrise. P Hamilton informed that improvement is slowly being evidenced in the learning environment.

Members commended the school leadership, and the School Improvement Leads for their work with the Local Authority to ensure that appropriate safeguarding measures are in place for off-site students.

P Hamilton informed that online education platforms, such as EDCClass, are being used to educate these absent students, with twice weekly visits by school support staff to maintain and improve student attendance.

Attendance

P Hamilton informed that there has been a 10% increase in attendance compared to the same period last year.

Members queried the status of remote students. P Hamilton explained that some students do not have the correct profile of need for the school to accommodate and are therefore being taught off-site to provide a safe environment for the other students, as the students with the wrong profile of need can be disruptive.

P Hamilton explained that some of the cohort come from a PRU and may not have been in education for a year or more.

Staff training and professional development

P Hamilton informed that G Alcock will deliver a Continuous Personal Development session for all staff, revisiting key themes and expectations for student behaviour, including:

- Trauma-informed approach
- Consistency
- Application of the school's agreed expectations, rewards and consequences
- Importance of engaging teaching and learning
- Duty of Care
- Clarification of legal rights and responsibilities relating to Physical Intervention

P Hamilton informed that he is building on the expectations for staff by supporting staff to follow the school's behaviour policy, ensuring that all staff take responsibility for applying it and pursue capability measures for staff that do not follow the policy.

Exclusions and Suspensions

P Hamilton informed that one exclusion is reported: a permanent exclusion was enacted by staff in accord with the Behaviour and Discipline and Safeguarding policies.

Ofsted readiness

S Gaskins informed that he leads on matters of training for preparation for Ofsted visits by deep dives and questioning based on the Ofsted framework.

S Gaskins informed that Quality Assurance visits by the SILs and Quality of Education reviews are carried out in line with the Ofsted framework to cover:

- Quality of Education
- Personal Development
- Behaviour and Attitudes
- Leadership and Management

S Gaskins informed that his comments in the Head of School's report show growth and a desire for improvement.

Safeguarding update and discussion

Members queried what action was taken following the instance of physical altercation between two students. P Hamilton informed that we investigated the instance, met with the students and their families, and that we are working with the student who instigated the altercation to support them to remedy their actions before being reintegrated back into the school. P Hamilton reassured the Academy Council that all safeguarding measures were followed by the staff involved in interventions.

P Hamilton informed that one student, noted on page 10 of the Head of School's report, has been in juvenile prison but is receiving alternative provision assistance. P Hamilton further informed that the child's education is presently being funded offsite by EEG.

Members commended school staff and P Hamilton for work being done to improve safeguarding and increase teaching quality and the curriculum.

Members queried the nature of two LADO referrals. P Hamilton explained that one referral was made for a member of Alternative Provision (AP) staff regarding their outside work, which was subsequently dropped by the Local Authority. P Hamilton informed that the second referral was made regarding an agency staff member, who was subsequently removed from being on site. The agency that supplied the staff member was informed of the referral. Safeguarding was kept as a priority in both cases, with assurances from P Hamilton that safeguarding is kept at the highest level of priority.

8. Executive Head update

The School Improvement Lead provided a verbal update, explaining that his role as Executive Head often overlaps with the School Improvement work being carried out.

S Gaskins informed that work is underway to prepare Duke of Lancaster School for a future Ofsted inspection, and to show the progress against the areas for development identified (e.g. curriculum and the curriculum design plan) at the last inspection.

S Gaskins informed that work is underway to prepare Sunrise Academy for a future Ofsted inspection, and to show the impact for students and the ongoing development of the school's curriculum. S Gaskin informed that we have also linked to Suffolk County Council's Standards and Excellence Partner to discuss ways to develop maths delivery and fed back that this has resulted in improved student engagement and teaching quality.

S Gaskins informed that the school assessment framework (to assess student progress, with English, Science, Maths, and Early Years) has been finalised. Members queried the nature of the assessment framework and asked that it be presented at the next meeting to explain its purpose and function.

S Gaskins

9. Update from Chair's meeting and Trust, and items of concern to escalate to Leadership team and/or Governance (via Gov. Prof.)

The Chair informed that training for governance members was discussed at the Academy Council Chairs meeting and the Governance Professional is arranging induction for new Academy Council members and the training for both Academy Council and Committee members.

The Chair informed that the Academy Council Chairs meeting has been wound down and the Academy Council Chairs have been appointed to the SEND Educational Excellence Committee to improve communication and coordination between the layers of governance.

The Chair informed that the CEO is keen to upgrade and improve the physical and virtual infrastructure at the schools and will be visiting each provision to review each school's environment and curriculum.

10. **Any other business**

G Cowles informed that the next Strategic governance conference is taking place on Friday 17 January 2025. G Cowles informed that all governance members are welcome to attend the conference to contribute to the development of the 2025-28 Strategic Plan.

Meeting ended at 6.28pm