

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 20 January 2025 at 5pm

Present physically: N Kellett, Chair

Present virtually: A Miti K O'Connell (part)

In Attendance: A Friend, Primary Educational Excellence Committee member (observing)
G Alcock - School Improvement Lead
G Cowles, Deputy Governance Professional
N Jennings, Head of School – Chalk Hill
S White, Head of School – Priory School

Apologies:

Absent: P Rana

Action

1. Welcome and Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed members Alfred Miti as a new member of the Academy Council and Alexandra Friend as an observer, to the Academy Council. Members introduced themselves.

Apologies for absence were received from P Rana.

2. Declaration of Interests

Members recognised the standing declarations. No other conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2024

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

4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 11 November 2024

Two of the three matters arising from the previous meeting were complete: N Jennings updated on the Mash referral to police, and the Chair has informed the SEND Educational Excellence Committee of the status of inappropriate student referrals to the schools.

Regarding the third matter arising, the Deputy Governance Professional updated on the progress of parent Academy Council member elections and on the recruitment of non-parent members to this Academy Council.

Members queried the admissions process by which students are placed in the SEN school settings by the Local Authorities. G Alcock advised that the Local Authorities send a referral to our SEND services team who evaluate whether we are able to meet the students needs, as the profile of students referred are not always appropriate for the individual school setting. G Alcock explained the variety of needs associated with different SEN criteria e.g.:

- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD)
- Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH)
- Students at risk of permanent exclusion due to behavioural needs.

G Alcock explained how our SEND services team and school teams work with the student and their family to gain experience of the school before they start, to support their transition.

5. First Hand Feedback

Members received and considered the feedback forms from governance members First-Hand visits to Chalk Hill Academy and Priory School during the last half term.

N Kellett and A Friend fed back on their recent visits.

6. Quality Assurance Update

N Jennings informed that Chalk Hill's residential provision was inspected on 14-16 January 2025. The findings were:

- Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account: **good**
- How well children and young people are helped and protected: **good**
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers: **requires improvement to be good**

The boarding school provides effective services that **meet the requirements for good**.

N Jennings advised that the finding grades are currently provisional as they are under review.

Members queried why leadership and management was graded 'requires improvement', and what action will be taken to improve standards. G Alcock informed that there were concerns raised about the school's policy management and about the accuracy of our Single Central Record (SCR) – which stemmed from school staff not being sufficiently familiar with the new EEG system, however EEG's HR team were able to provide evidence of staff references when asked, which assured Ofsted. As an action the Head of School is now conducting regular SCR checks (as part of their standard KPIs) to ensure the SCR is complete and accurate.

G Alcock informed that Ofsted recognised our progress against the areas for development identified at the last inspection – such as, improved documentation, support by the Senior Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and safety measures.

G Alcock commended N Jennings and Byron Higgins (head of residential) for their hard work.

G Alcock thanked N Kellett and K O'Connell for their support during the inspection.

G Alcock (as School Improvement Lead) provided a verbal update of work currently underway.

- Work continues to support schools to prepare for Ofsted re-inspection. This involves checking progress against the Ofsted framework in the four key areas: Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitudes, Personal Development, and Leadership and Management.
- G Alcock carries out regular Behaviour and Attendance monitoring, with follow up visits as necessary.
- S Gaskins supports schools to develop their assessment framework.
- G Alcock informed that attendance at Priory School is at 91.4% which is 4.4% higher than the SEND national average; and attendance at Chalk Hill is 83% which is 28% higher than national average for Pupil Referral Units (PRU). The data shows that students want to come and learn at the schools, which is deemed a real achievement for the setting.
- Quality Assurance work continues, including learning walks which positively impact teaching and learning.
- Rob Bamford, as a former His Majesty's Inspector, is supporting our preparations for Ofsted, which has added a triangulation of scrutiny and has driven improvement of teaching and learning.
- G Alcock has led physical intervention training across the SEND schools.
- G Alcock and S Gaskins have also provided support for school staff disciplinarys.

Members queried how the staffing and training requirements vary depending on the SEN needs in each school. G Alcock explained the types of staff to student

ratios at each school linked to meeting the students' needs, and the specific types of training needed/provided to staff at each school and to ensure appropriate professionalism.

7. **Priory School – half termly report**

Members received and considered the report provided, which included a summary of the Quality of Education Visit on 20 November 2024. S White summarised the report:

3 highlights

- Students were fully engaged in the school's Christmas events, increasing their social interaction, and the Christmas tree festival in Stowmarket was well represented by families.
- Strengths of the school's Quality of Education Review were:
 - The school and all lessons visited had a warm, welcoming and positive atmosphere.
 - There are excellent relationships between staff and students meaning students are well behaved and engaged with tasks.
 - There is accurate teaching of phonics sounds and techniques to support reading in Key Stage 2 classes.
 - Learning objectives were seen in some classes.
 - Some evidence of adaptation in some classes, mainly through the level of adult support.
 - Communication lesson in Key Stage 2 was particularly well planned and executed, with all students working respectfully in groups or pairs.
 - Some staff need to progress, which is being motivated by school leadership setting lesson expectations for teachers.
- Weaknesses of the school's Quality of Education Review were:
 - Some lessons appeared to be loosely planned meaning students had nothing to do for periods of the lesson.
 - Adaptation was not as effective as it could be, relying too much on Senior Teaching Assistant support rather than bespoke adapted tasks.
 - Lots of reliance on worksheets rather than 'teacher-designed' lessons, meaning they did not always meet the needs of all students in the class.
 - Some lessons were too heavily weighted on completion of tasks rather than a focus on what students were learning.
 - While it is acknowledged that as part of school policy learning objectives do not need to be displayed, in some lessons it was unclear what learning should be taking place.
 - Stretch and challenge was not evident in many lessons.
- Recommendations of the school's Quality of Education Review were:
 - Address areas such as adaptation and stretch and challenge through CPD or individual feedback.
 - Think about how to standardise the expectations of lesson delivery at Priory. The Head of School has now implemented lesson expectations in training teachers
 - Consider how to limit the use of worksheets from platforms like Twinkl in order to promote more teacher-designed activities.
 - Consider using learning objectives in all lessons to focus students and teachers on the learning throughout the session.

Members discussed the progress in regard to curriculum development led by subject lead reviews with subject leads who are confident to support and implementing learning walks, review course documentation and feed back to the school leadership for input and discussion, for the school leadership to then agree the next steps for improvement.

G Alcock informed that he and S Gaskins have conducted Quality of Education reviews to evaluate standards of teaching and monitor student progress against the agreed benchmarks.

S White informed that the school has introduced lesson expectations to drive improvement and consistency of approach across subjects, with lesson observation feedback used to inform staff development plans.

Behaviours and Attitudes

Members commended the effective practice of the school's welfare team at following up students absences; offering family support, conducting home visits every 2 weeks, and sharing engagement plans with families and recording the visits to support students to attend.

Personal Development inc. careers

Members discussed how the school's leadership reviews students' Individual Learning Plans (ILP) and Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) to set appropriate learning objectives and identify support needed for students to develop independent learning skills. S White informed that linked to this the school leadership is reviewing the curriculum offer to better meet and reflect students' needs. S White informed that a Scouts programme has been launched to encourage student development and interaction, with some students already achieving badges, and a Residential Personal Development lead has been nominated to oversee the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education.

Staffing Issues

Members commended the school's Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTA) for their positive influence in the school, by their support of teaching staff and school leadership.

Members queried whether there are different requirements of staff training at the school and its residential provision. S White informed that all staff are qualified teachers and the residential staff, such as the Residential and Child Care Officer (RACCO) are appropriately trained and qualified for the student profile in their care.

K O'Connell joined the meeting at 5.30pm.

Admissions

S White informed there are 221 students on roll.

Attendance

S White informed that attendance is currently 93%, compared to 90.9% in the report, and confirmed absent students are followed up by regular home visits by the Welfare Team and Family Support Workers to ensure safeguarding and parents are engaging with the staff to improve pupil attendance.

Staff training and professional development

S White informed that 88 staff responded to a survey about following training about the difference between learning objectives and tasks, and this has informed staff's approach (linked to the findings of the Quality of Education review) towards developing and encouraging independent student learning.

Exclusions and Suspensions

There were no suspensions reported in this reporting period.

Ofsted readiness

Training for school senior leadership is facilitated by G Alcock and S Gaskins.

Safeguarding update and discussion

The Safeguarding Team met on 28 November 2024 and affirmed the importance of keeping up to date with Safeguarding policy compliance and addressing any potential issues promptly.

S White confirmed all school staff have read Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) information and undertaken Educare training, to strengthen safeguarding at the school.

S White informed that Beth Parkington, the Residential Lead, has had a baby girl. Residential and other school staff are prepared to cover whilst B Parkington is on maternity leave. Sasha Hunt has given birth to a boy.

S White informed that it has received the latest Standard 3 report and agreed to circulate to the Academy Council for review and scrutiny.

S White

Members discussed the residential offer at Priory School and S White explained that students are booked in to board overnight at the residence with supervision and activities planned by qualified residential staff.

8. **Chalk Hill School – half termly report**

Members received and considered the report provided and N Jennings summarised the report:

3 highlights

N Jennings informed that school staff have facilitated First Aid bleed training for all students, to raise student awareness of the dangers of knives and sharps.

Members commended S Chesterton, Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) at Chalk Hill, for leading on fundraising efforts in the community.

N Jennings informed that 11 Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) awards have been achieved by students, with certification awaited. The awards support students to progress to their next provision placement, demonstrating their efforts and learning engagement.

Quality of Education (focused on expected exam entries)

N Jennings informed that the school's broadened curriculum academic options bring students together who wouldn't normally be in the same class group, increasing interactivity and social mobility.

N Jennings informed that Chalk Hill teachers conduct peer-to-peer learning walks to share good practice, creating team bonding and increased sharing of practical teaching methods, which has positively impacted student progress.

Members discussed the changes to curriculum planning. G Alcock informed that medium term plans for all lessons were demonstrated as being thorough and sequenced. Members commended this as a positive move to ensure student growth and development.

Behaviours and Attitudes

N Jennings informed that enrichment has been added to lessons, to give incentive to students by rewarding good behaviour.

N Jennings informed that 'Golden enrichment' plans are underway, where achievements take longer but yield greater rewards. A 'Platinum' version is also planned to further encourage good behaviour among students.

N Jennings informed that the school's enrichment schemes are led by the students' input. All enrichment rewards are maintained and managed within the school's budget.

Personal Development inc. careers

N Jennings informed that the school is focussing on progress against the Gatsby benchmarks and agreed to share more information on this at the next meeting.

N Jennings

G Alcock informed that the school has introduced student accreditation, including ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) and AQA Awards, both of which are accessible for special needs students to obtain qualifications.

N Jennings informed that Chalk Hill is currently using a variety of external agencies for presenting lectures and special topics (such as Kooth, which supports mental health for young people) and careers advice (by the local fire and ambulance services, and the army).

Staffing Issues

N Jennings informed that one teacher broke their leg and will be off work, which may impact future school workload management. N Jennings advised that school staff are prepared to adapt to accommodate the workload and ensure continuity for students.

Admissions

N Jennings informed that Chalk Hill currently has 18 students on its roll. The Local Authority refers students to be placed in the school, as discussed earlier in the meeting.

Attendance

N Jennings informed that the school's overall attendance is 83.3%, with authorised absences at 11.1% and unauthorised absences at 5.6%. N Jennings advised that staff work to reduce absences by positive engagement with families and regular home visits.

Staff training and professional development

Members commended the CPD planner as working well and praised the staff, who are engaging with it to develop their careers in education.

N Jennings informed that staff are focused on Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), with staff mentoring and coaching underway to share best practice and ensure consistently high standards of teaching.

Exclusions and Suspensions

N Jennings informed that there were no permanent exclusions in this period.

N Jennings explained that 1.5 days of suspensions are reported for the Autumn 2 term, from 5th November to 20th December 2024.

Ofsted readiness

Training for school senior leadership is being facilitated by G Alcock and S Gaskins.

Safeguarding update and discussion

N Jennings informed that DSL training is up to date and a 'working together to safeguard children' update is planned to improve succession planning in the school's Safeguarding Team.

N Jennings informed that Chalk Hill school leadership will look at the action plan for safeguarding and remove old actions, then update with new action points for staff to work on, linked to the findings of its residential inspection.

K O'Connell informed that he attended the DSL Safeguarding meeting of 28 November 2024 where the Safeguarding Team discussed the data gaps. Members praised his input and experience in Safeguarding matters at the school.

G Alcock queried what PGL stood for and what the fundraised monies would be used for. N Jennings informed that PGL stood for "Parents get lost" and is to

support students to attend enrichment visits away from their families e.g. a recent visit to Bawdsey.

9. **Executive Head update**

G Alcock informed that he is Executive Head of the Chalk Hill, Priory and Stone Lodge schools and the Peile Specialist Unit. All three schools receive visits weekly, which are tailored to the unique needs of each school.

G Alcock has been reviewing the schools' action plans, sampling evidence for Ofsted inspections, and conducts follow ups to learning walks and class observations to monitor teacher training impact on students.

G Alcock and S Gaskins are conducting medium-term planning for all SEND schools.

G Alcock informed that staffing has been a challenge. G Alcock further informed that student absence management is being effectively managed by the Heads of Schools, G Alcock and S Gaskins.

G Alcock informed that both S White and N Jennings actively promote teaching quality at their schools and G Alcock supports the point that Heads are proactive in looking to improve their respective settings.

G Alcock informed that both schools are managing school budgets and embedding new processes under the new merged Trust.

10. **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 members that all chairs of the Academy Councils will be joining the SEND Educational Excellence Committee, so the Chairs' Committee meetings will no longer be required.

The Chair commended the Strategic Conferences as being beneficial for setting the Trust's vision and direction for all provisions going forward, including the SEND schools.

Members discussed how staff recruitment processes differ to those under SENDAT. The Chair noted that EEG has more capacity, but that it will take time for staff to adjust to the new ways of working.

The Chair informed that Elton D'Souza, Chair of Trustees, raised the need to for the school's Ofsted self-assessment under regular review within the reports and to monitor the school's progress.

11. **Any other business**

N Jennings updated on plans for the proposed new site for Chalk Hill Academy we hope to relocate the school to from September 2025.

Members discussed the possibility of staff governance members on the Academy Councils. G Cowles to discuss with the Governance Professional.

Meeting closed at 6.32pm