

Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 6 February 2025 at 4.00pm

Present virtually: J Finch, Committee member
M Cadman, Committee member
N Kellett, EEGT Trustee – **Vice Chair**
R Inman, EEGT Trustee
S Daley, EEGT Trustee
S Snowdon, EEGT Trustee – **Chair**

In attendance: A Whatley, Group Partnerships Director (part)
C Shaw, Group Sixth Form Principal and senior DSL
G Alcock, School Improvement Lead
L Chapman, Regional Director SEND and Outdoor Learning
N Savvas, CEO
R Bamford, Group Vice Principal Quality
S Gales, Governance Professional
S Chesterton, Head of Welfare and Safeguarding (SEND cluster)
S Gaskins, School Improvement Lead
S Graham, Chief People Officer
S-L Neesam, Group Head of Safeguarding and Welfare

Apologies: G Cowles, Governance Professional of the Academy Councils

Absent:

Action

1. Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence

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

The Chair welcomed Josie Finch and Mike Cadman to the Committee and explained that we have appointed the Academy Council Chairs to this Committee to improve communication and coordination between the governance layers and wound down the half-termly Academy Council Chairs meetings.

The Chair welcomed Sue Daley to the Committee and welcomed her vast experience as chair of the Group's Post-16 Educational Excellence Committee, which oversees circa 500 students with SEN studying at our Group's three Ofsted Outstanding colleges.

The Chair informed that John McCourt has resigned as a member of this Committee and as an Academy Council member.

The Chair also welcomed members of the Group's senior team: Colin Shaw, Sarah Chesterton, Sarah-Louise Neesam and Simon Graham.

Members introduced themselves.

The Chair informed that as a result of the Ofsted inspection at Stone Lodge Academy, we took the decision to reschedule and refocus the Committee meeting to inform the Committee of the Ofsted findings and to coordinate our plans to rapidly address the areas for improvement.

The Chair apologised to members for the late circulation of papers and confirmed the Executive would thoroughly introduce the papers. The Chair thanked the Executive for the rapid preparation of the papers provided.

The Chair informed that following the extraordinary Board meeting on 3 February 2025, the Trust Board has delegated authority to this Committee to oversee and monitor progress against the improvement plans for each of our specialist SEN schools, and to report back progress to the Trust Board.

Apologies were received from G Cowles.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2024

Members reviewed and **agreed** the minutes of meeting on 28 November 2024 as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising from the meeting on 28 November 2024

Six of the matters arising from the last meeting were complete, three were in progress and one was incomplete/closed. The matters arising that were in progress and incomplete/closed were further discussed below:

MA2 and MA3: The Governance Professional informed that, following the Ofsted outcome, the Risk Register is being further updated and will be scrutinised by the Audit and Risk Management Committee. The associated risk register extract will be provided to this Committee at its meeting in March.

MA6: Due to John McCourt's resignation this could not be completed and is therefore closed. Members discussed the need to meet with the Local Authority to find ways to improve student transitions and ensure student admission placements are appropriate so we can meet their needs, was discussed as part of agenda item 7 below due to the intrinsic link to safeguarding.

MA10: The Governance Professional confirmed that the Trust Board delegated authority to this Committee to review and approve the Pupil Premium and Sport/PE Premium Strategy Statements of each of the specialist SEN schools, at its meeting in December. The Governance Professional to add to the Committee's Terms of Reference.

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4. Update on complaints reported to Ofsted

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the recent complaints made to Ofsted about Sunrise Academy and Stone Lodge Academy and the outcomes of the associated investigation.

L Chapman summarised the nature of the first complaint concerning Stone Lodge Academy, where the complainant raised concerns about incidents of bullying and insufficient and inappropriate interventions by staff in response. L Chapman explained that we believe this complaint relates to another Stone Lodge in Kent and was sent to us in error.

L Chapman summarised the nature of the second complaint concerning Stone Lodge Academy, noting the complainant raised concerns about the appropriateness of the use of physical restraint by staff. L Chapman explained the context of the complaint and informed that, following the incident, the school disclosed and escalated the incident to the LADO, who determined no further action was required, and to the Local Authority who were satisfied with the school's action. L Chapman informed that the student in question is still enrolled at the school and that ongoing relations with the student and family are good.

L Chapman summarised the nature of the complaint concerning Sunrise Academy, noting the complainant raised concerns about safeguarding, bullying and behaviour management, the school's ability to meet the needs of the student and the effectiveness of the school's response to addressing complaints. L Chapman explained the context of the complaint and summarised the actions taken by the school to support the student and family, and to resolve the complaint.

Members discussed the seriousness of these complaints and queried whether our complaints policy was followed and whether it is usual for the Local Authority and Ofsted to receive and respond to complaints in this way. R Bamford informed that both the Local Authority and Ofsted have a duty of care and therefore, if the complaint is of a serious and qualifying nature, they receive and consider the complaint. If they determine the complaint is of a serious and qualifying nature they will retain the complaint as additional context, when they next inspect the school to ascertain if there are broader systemic issues which could endanger the safety of students.

Members discussed the complaints concerning Stone Lodge Academy and queried whether the complainants concerns about the school would have been known by the Ofsted inspectors. R Bamford advised that as Ofsted considered it to be a 'qualifying complaint' it would have led to additional scrutiny of our safeguarding arrangements by inspectors, and that for the same reasons inspectors at Sunrise Academy would be aware of the concerns raised in the complaint.

L Chapman informed that SENDAT (the Trust which both schools were part of in 2024/25) had taken steps to independently assess the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements by commissioning an external safeguarding audit in February 2024, which returned only minor recommendations. L Chapman informed that, following the complaints, EEG's highly experienced safeguarding team undertook a further full safeguarding audit of Stone Lodge Academy and Sunrise Academy in February 2025 to identify any areas requiring improvement (see agenda item 7 below).

Members discussed the seriousness of the complaints and identified the need to consider the effectiveness of safeguarding, staff's training in behaviour management and their understanding of our complaints policy. Members asked that this Committee receive regular and detailed updates on any complaints received and the actions taken, and assurance that our complaints policy has been adhered to. The Governance Professional informed that the schools will adopt EEG's Complaints and Compliments policy and procedure, which is overseen by R Bamford's quality team, and informed we will train staff to follow the stages within the policy and work with parents and stakeholders to ensure they are aware of the policy and feel empowered to raise concerns and confident that the complaint will be investigated fairly.

L Chapman informed that we been notified of a further complaint concerning Priory School which is being investigated. R Bamford informed that the complainant raised concerns about safeguarding, record keeping, the school's communication with the family and the effectiveness of the school's response to addressing complaints

R Bamford advised that these complaints raise serious concerns about the robustness of recording, monitoring and of the safeguarding arrangements within our specialist SEN schools, and so we are undertaking a root and branch review to ensure everybody understands what their responsibilities are, our policies are adhered to, and our recording and monitoring is robust and precise. N Savvas agreed and added that the welfare and safeguarding of our students is essential, so we are taking these complaints very seriously and are investigating each complaint thoroughly as well as looking beyond the complaints to assess what further actions are needed to strengthen the culture of safeguarding at our specialist SEN schools.

5. Update on Ofsted visits:

- **Chalk Hill residential visit**
- **Stone Lodge Academy graded inspection**

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the findings of recent Ofsted inspections at Chalk Hill's residential provision and at Stone Lodge Academy.

L Chapman 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**.

L Chapman summarised the context of Ofsted's findings and voiced confidence that, now that the school is part of EEG, there is sufficient capacity and capability to rapidly address the areas for improvement.

Members reflected that the inspection of Priory School's residential provision ran concurrently to its overall school inspection and queried if this practice has been discontinued. L Chapman confirmed that it has, the school inspection is now separate from the residential provision inspection.

G Alcock noted the rigor of the Ofsted inspection and commended the school's residential provision was in full compliance with the National Minimum Standards.

Members discussed the requires improvement grade of leadership and managers, and requested a detailed action plan, with dates for implementation, to address the areas for improvement identified.

G Alcock

R Bamford informed that Stone Lodge Academy was inspected on 28 and 30 January 2025. The findings were:

- Quality of Education: **inadequate**
- Behaviours and Attitudes: **inadequate**
- Personal Development: **requires improvement**
- Leadership and Management: **inadequate**
- Safeguarding: **ineffective**
- **The school has serious weaknesses**

A Whatley joined the meeting at 4.45pm

R Bamford summarised the context of Ofsted's findings and the evidence of serious weakness underpinning Ofsted's judgements.

R Bamford informed that Ofsted recognised that the poor standards at the school and the serious weakness of safeguarding arrangements were longstanding and had been in place under the leadership of SENDAT.

R Bamford informed that Ofsted recognised that the short period of time which the school had been part of EEG and felt assured that EEG had identified and started to implement actions to improve quality, safeguarding and governance arrangements, and that Ofsted had confidence in EEG's ability, capacity and experience to rapidly address the areas for improvement. R Bamford explained that this confidence in EEG resulted in the judgement of 'serious weaknesses' rather than 'special measures'.

Members challenged that previous reports to this Committee had self-assessed Stone Lodge Academy as 'good' and queried whether there will be a review of the self-assessment practices to ensure they are accurate and appropriate in the future. R Bamford confirmed that he (drawing on his experience as an His Majesty's Inspector for Ofsted) is working with the Heads of School and School Improvement Leads to review and challenge the schools' self-assessment judgements. The school self-evaluations will be underpinned by rigorous evidence and fully documented alongside a quality improvement plan, to allow full transparency and accountability by governance.

Members reflected that a grade of 'serious weaknesses' is deeply concerning and queried what impact the Ofsted findings will have on Stone Lodge Academy's and EEG's reputation, and on the likelihood the Ofsted will bring forward re-inspection of our other specialist SEN schools. N Savvas informed that both the DfE's Regional

Director and Local Authority are aware of Ofsted's findings and are rightly concerned about whether these are systemic issues across the other four schools which transferred from SENDAT. N Savvas reflected that while EEG has established a very strong reputation for excellence the DfE Regional Director and Local Authority, understandably, want to see what action will be taken to address the concerns both at Stone Lodge Academy and across the other four schools to raise standards and ensure safeguarding is effective. As such, we will regularly update them on our plans, progress and impact. R Bamford informed that Ofsted will be aware of the link between Stone Lodge Academy and the other schools which transferred into EEG from SENDAT and of the 'qualifying complaints', and so future inspections will seek assurance that the serious weakness found at Stone Lodge Academy are isolated to that school.

N Savvas confirmed that EEG's expectation is for all our schools and colleges to be Ofsted 'Good' or 'Outstanding', and informed that EEG is investing time and resources to make improvements as quickly as possible.

Members commended the Executive's ambition for all our specialist SEN schools to be Ofsted Good or Outstanding, and to meet EEG's standards, but queried what is the realistic timeline for this improvement. N Savvas reflected that wide-spread changes are needed, and that it takes time to fully embed a high-quality and safeguarding culture. N Savvas outlined how this would be expedited by drawing on EEG's highly experienced team to provide leadership and support, to redistribute responsibilities to central teams with the knowledge, experience and capacity to implement the changes, and through establishing forums for staff to monitor and analyse KPI data, oversee progress against the improvement plans, share best practice to improve the quality of education, and review/enhance staff's ways of working to be consistently appropriate.

N Savvas informed that both the Trust Board and its Finance Committee are fully informed of the Ofsted findings and are aware we may need to reallocate resources to implement the improvement plans.

Members discussed the need for improved reports for both this Committee and the Academy Councils, with robust KPIs, analysis of intent/implementation/and impact, sufficient detail and commentary on trends/concerns, and regular updates on the school improvement plans. R Bamford confirmed that this is a priority and is part of the action plans (see agenda item 6 below).

Members discussed inspectors finding that Stone Lodge Academy staff were unclear (post-merger) as to the systems to use and frequently referred to SENDAT, which raises concern about the culture within the school and queried how staff will be supported to integrate fully into EEG. N Savvas informed that we were honouring our pre-merger agreement that we would use the autumn term (first three months post-merger) to assess the existing practices before making significant changes within the schools; and confirmed that from January (start of the spring term) we have started to make changes to embed the schools into EEG systems and practices. N Savvas informed that school staff are very supportive of the change and of the support provided by EEG. The Academy Council Chairs fed back that this reflects the school staff voice who have conveyed that they are excited by the extensive support offered by EEG.

Members reflected that Duke of Lancaster School (another school formerly part of SENDAT) was inspected by Ofsted in March 2024 and was judged to **requires improvement** overall and for Quality of Education, which indicates there may be systemic issues across the schools which transferred from SENDAT and asked that this be investigated as part of the action plans.

Members queried if the Ofsted findings would adversely impact admissions to Stone Lodge Academy. N Savvas informed that the Ofsted grade will negatively influence parent's opinion of- and confidence in- the school, which may affect prospective

R Bamford

parents school preference and may lead to some parents withdrawing their children from the school. N Savvas informed that part of our action plan is to carefully communicate with the school's stakeholders to help them feel confident in EEG's action to remedy concerns. L Chapman added that if we can sufficiently assure parents the school is likely to remain at capacity.

6. Action plans arising from complaints and Ofsted findings

Members received and considered the report provided which showed the draft specialist SEN school cluster action plan and the school-specific action plans.

R Bamford presented the live draft action plans and informed how the Executive will monitor progress against the action and improvement plans, which will then be further monitored via this Committee and escalated up to the Trust Board.

Members noted EEG includes a primary school which has a specialist SEN unit (which was Ofsted Outstanding pre-academisation) and queried if there will be best practice sharing which could support vital improvements to the curriculum design and Quality of Education at our specialist SEN schools. R Bamford confirmed that this best practice sharing forum is being established and C Shaw informed that there will also be best practice sharing with EEG's post-16 specialist SEN provision which is Ofsted Outstanding.

R Bamford also informed that we have arranged for Stone Lodge Academy's Head of School to be mentored by an experienced primary Headteacher of an Outstanding school, to further develop her leadership skills.

Members reiterated the need for accurate, clear and concise reports from the Executive and targeted KPIs to ensure the appropriate level of information is reported to governance via the Academy Councils, SEND Educational Excellence Committee and to the Trust Board. R Bamford confirmed that this is being developed and confirmed that we will replicate the tried and tested EEG practices to track improvements – e.g. reports showing progress against the areas for development identified by Ofsted.

7. Update on Safeguarding arrangements

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the findings of EEG's audit of safeguarding arrangements and outlined the associated improvements needed to ensure safeguarding arrangements are effective.

S-L Neesam summarised the core findings of the audit which included a need to:

- review policies and procedures, and safeguarding information provided to stakeholders,
- improve/update training for staff and designated safeguarding leads (DSLs),
- improved recording and monitoring e.g. PREVENT action plans, KPIs, etc.,
- improved support and supervision,
- review the staff structure/their roles and responsibilities, and perhaps create additional posts to support student welfare and safeguarding

and explained the rationale for- and importance of- the improvements outlined.

S-L Neesam presented her vision for the leadership structure for welfare and safeguarding and her plans to replicate the tried and tested 'Safeguarding top 10' practice at EEG where the DSLs meet with other professionals to discuss students with complex and high-risk safeguarding concerns to agree the plan of support for the student.

Members thanked S-L Neesam for the thorough and rigorous approach to the audit, and voiced support for the actions proposed and their confidence that the systems and processes being introduced (such as the introduction of Safeguarding top 10 meetings) will have a positive impact for students.

Members discussed the leadership structure proposed and queried what will be put in place at Sunrise Academy given the DSL has resigned. S-L Neesam informed that we are in discussion with the DSL to ascertain if they are able to continue in post. Members and Mike Cadman (as Chair of the Academy Council overseeing Sunrise Academy) voiced support for this approach and the continuity it would provide to the school.

C Shaw informed that our safeguarding audit flagged the need to continue to work very closely with the Local Authority during the school admission process to ensure that placements are appropriate (i.e. the school is able to meet the students needs), as incorrect placements are a safeguarding concern. Members agreed with this approach.

8. Update on Governance arrangements and training

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the membership, experience and skillset of the Committee and of the Academy Councils and outlined how governance of the specialist SEN school provision has been structured and strengthened.

The Governance Professional informed that in addition to appointing new members to this Committee, we have filled five of the six parent vacancies and have appointed additional Academy Council members, so the Academy Councils now have local parental voice and greater diversity of membership which should help to strengthen the support and challenge of school leadership.

The Governance Professional outlined the induction, onboarding, and training for governance members, and the actions taken to improve members understanding of their roles and responsibilities (both as individual governance member and as part of this Committee and/or the Academy Councils) e.g. role descriptions, the terms of reference, scheme delegation, etc.

The Governance Professional summarised how the use of GovernorHub has improved transparency between the layers of governance and the steps taken to improve communication/coordination between the layers of governance, and to improve the quality of reporting and minutes and to enhance governance's connection to- and discussion of- the experience within our specialist SEN schools.

The Governance Professional informed that she continues to support governance members to access governance guidance and training, to help establish a common and shared understanding of the requirements of education sector regulation relating to curriculum, quality and safeguarding – so they can effectively hold Executive leaders to account.

Members discussed the need for this Committee to be made aware of how Ofsted inspections are conducted in readiness for future inspections of the schools. Members agreed that this Committee needs to first review each school's updated self-evaluation and quality improvement plan, then to convene extraordinary meetings of this Committee to examine them.

The Governance Professional informed that as part of the action plans (agenda item 6) we are working to clarify our internal notification process so that we can rapidly coordinate governance members to support future inspections.

9. Update on attendance and persistent absence

Members received and considered the reports provided which summarised the attendance and persistent absence data for Priory School, Sunrise Academy and Stone Lodge Academy.

L Chapman explained how persistent absence is calculated, the absence by category (e.g. children in care, gender, disadvantage), trends and comparison to previous

R Bamford
Gov. Prof.

years, information on individual cases and intervention actions taken to support improved attendance.

L Chapman informed of plans to review and update the behaviour and attendance policy used within the specialist SEN schools, to better align to the latest DfE guidance and support school staff to challenge poor attendance.

Members reflected that persistent absence at Sunrise Academy is unacceptably high and attendance has declined monthly since September 2024. Members queried what actions will be taken to improve attendance. N Savvas challenged that the level of detail in these reports are insufficient, as is the level of attendance. As a result, we are working with the teachers, Heads of Schools and safeguarding teams, to improve reporting and expedite interventions where there is absence. Moreover, where there is high persistent absence for students in receipt of Pupil Premium, we need to re-consider if we have structured their provision using this premium to appropriately meet their needs, and if not, we need to consider changing how we deliver their provision as part of our intervention. N Savvas confirmed that we are training school staff to better understand the DfE's expectations in relation to attendance, so we have confidence that we understand our data and make appropriate, timely and informed interventions which support the student to attend and engage.

Members agreed to participate in similar improving attendance training and asked the Governance Professional to arrange.

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10. First Hand Feedback

Members received and considered the feedback resulting from governance members visits to the specialist SEN schools.

N Kellett and M Cadman summarised the feedback from their visits.

11. Items of concern escalated from Academy Councils for Leadership team and/or Governance

The Academy Council Chair's fed back on discussions at the Academy Councils and noted these reflect the discussions of the above other agenda items.

J Finch fed back concerns about the time to hire for replacement staff. S Graham summarised how HR staff are working with Heads of School in relation to recruitment and fed back that the matter is now resolved.

J Finch fed back that many school staff are unable to join the weekly Comms calls, due to their scheduling at 8.30am when staff are supporting students to enter the school and queried if these calls could be made more accessible. S Graham informed that, after half-term, school staff will have EEG emails and so will be able to fully access EEG systems and our intranet (MyEEG) where they will be able to watch the recording of the calls, comment and contribute.

M Cadman voiced frustration with the complexity of the old SENDAT systems and asked for support. The Governance Professional to provide support. N Savvas informed that we are expediting the roll out of new ID badges and emails to school staff, as well as training and support to support them to access EEG systems to hopefully address the frustrations with the systems used by SENDAT.

12. Any Other Business

- Date of next meeting

The Chair confirmed that the Committee will meet on Monday 10 March 2025 at 1.30pm until 3.30pm and that the Governance Professional will seek to set up extraordinary Ofsted familiarisation meetings.

Gov. Prof.

The meeting closed at 6.15pm

