

**Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 4 March 2025 at 5pm**

**Present physically:**

**Present virtually:** N Kellett, **Chair**  
G Abbott, Chalk Hill parent member  
K O’Connell  
L Sutherland, Priory parent member

**In Attendance:** A Whatley, Group Partnership Director  
E O’Hara, Head of Welfare and Safeguarding for SEMH  
G Cowles, Deputy Governance Professional  
N Jennings, Head of School – Chalk Hill Academy  
N Savvas, Chief Executive Officer (part)  
S Chesterton, Head of Welfare and Safeguarding (SEND Cluster)  
S Gales, Governance Professional  
S White, Head of School – Priory School

**Apologies:** A Friend  
A Miti  
L Chapman – Director of SEND and Outdoor Learning

**Absent:**

**1. Welcome and Apologies for absence**

The Chair welcomed members to the Academy Council and introductions were made by all members and attendees present. Apologies for absence were received from A Friend, A Miti, and L Chapman.

The Governance Professional informed that P Rana has resigned.

**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 20 January 2025**

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

Members discussed the importance of ensuring that the Single Central Record (SCR) checks carried out by the Heads of School are reported back to the Academy Council at each meeting. S White replied that Karina Brown, Senior People Lead for Recruitment and Talent, has been assisting the work on the SCR for all SEND schools. S White informed that when the Ofsted inspection for the Residential offer is due, K Brown would be informed to gain access to the SCR.

The Governance Professional clarified that, in EEG, governance members do not need to check the SCR as part of their role, but are to check that it has been completed and is up to date.

**4. Matters arising from the meeting held on 20 January 2025**

One of the matters arising from the previous meeting was complete.

Members discussed the function of the Standard Three report. It was explained that as part of the residential offer staff from a different special school come to inspect the residential setting according to the National Minimum Standards for Special schools, which are reported back to the special school involved.

**Action**

MA2 is to be discussed later in this meeting.

Members queried the terminology of Gatsby benchmarks, used in MA2. N Jennings responded that Gatsby Benchmarks are set regarding careers advice at school. N Jennings explained that these benchmarks are used for best practice to enhance student outcomes.

Members queried several acronyms used in the Heads reports, such as MTP. N Jennings explained that this referred to the Medium-Term Plan and that EWO refers to the Educational Welfare Officer.

The Governance Professional circulated a document listing all acronyms for governance members to familiarise themselves with terms used.

The Governance Professional clarified that Chalk Hill is designated as an Alternative Provision (AP), rather than a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

**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.

**6. Update on Executive structure**

A Whatley presented the information on behalf of L Chapman. The document "Update on Executive Structure" was circulated in advance of this meeting to governance members.

A Whatley informed of the changes to the Executive structure, including that L Chapman has taken up the role of Executive Head for all SEND schools, The School Improvement Leads (SIL) are stepping back from also being executive heads and will report directly to Rob Bamford, Group Vice Principal – Quality.

A Whatley informed that the Safeguarding Team will be led by Sarah-Louise Neesam, with Sarah Chesterton acting as Head of Welfare and Safeguarding (SEND Cluster) and Emma O'Hara acting as Head of Welfare and Safeguarding (SEMH – Social, Emotional and Mental Health) for the SEND schools and students.

A Whatley informed that former SENDAT staff's systems are being integrated to work with EEG systems and ensure a smooth transition of support for staff and students.

Members queried the role of the School Improvement Leads. A Whatley explained that SILs support the quality of teaching and learning at the SEND school and provisions and drive improvement for student outcomes.

**7. Update on quality improvement action plans**

A Whatley presented the information on behalf of L Chapman. The document "Update on quality improvement action plans" was circulated in advance of this meeting to governance members.

A Whatley informed that R Bamford is leading on the quality improvement review of the SEND schools to ensure that Ofsted self-evaluation judgements are accurate and consistent. A Whatley informed that R Bamford will be outlining plans for ensuring the schools' Ofsted readiness and a timeline for all expected upcoming Ofsted inspections of the special schools.

A Whatley informed that with S-L Neesam will oversee the safeguarding arrangements with S Chesterton, to ensure training of Designated Safeguarding Leads and staff is carried out to safeguard the students in a highly effective and complaint way.

Members recommended the quality update as a way to improve Ofsted readiness plans being implemented.

**8. Update on complaints and investigations**

A Whatley presented the information on behalf of L Chapman.

The document "Update on complaints and investigations" was circulated in advance of this meeting to governance members.

A Whatley informed that the document presents a list of the complaints across all SEND schools, with actions being taken to address each of the complaints.

A Whatley informed that the document highlights compliance with the Complaints procedure in the Trust, which is to be followed and focuses on the chain of escalation.

Members discussed the Priory complaint. S White informed that some informal feedback has been received from the complaints independent investigator. S White explained that all reporting and recording of incidents has taken place, but over separate systems and that the parent concerned has seen all paperwork involved in the tracking of incidents for their child.

A Whatley informed that EEG's complaints system is now in place for all staff to use. Complaints are to be received by executive assistants, then escalated if deemed necessary.

Members queried if the link to complaints placed in the document is to be shared via newsletters to parents. The Governance Professional explained that staff should encourage parents to raise informal concerns with school staff, before taking the official route to manage a complaint to build trusted relationships with families, so that the school and Trust are seen as a supportive structure.

**9. Priory School – half-termly report**

Members received and considered the report provided and S White summarised the report.

The members noted the contents of the agenda and requested that the Heads focus on the points detailed to ensure appropriate challenge.

**Attendance and persistent absence**

The document "Persistent absence" was circulated in advance of this meeting.

Members queried the reason for the drops in student attendance at certain points, as shown in the document. S White explained that students may lessen attendance over the colder months, but that generally irregular attenders are being monitored and well cared for. S White also replied that where a parent refuses to send their child to school due to their feeling it's an incorrect placement, the student stays on the school's roll until the local authority places them in a more appropriate setting, which may take some considerable time.

Members queried if the school has the percentage data on severe absence and asked how the school tracks and manages their attendance. S White responded that the Family Support Workers monitor attendance early and arrange meetings before a 10-day attendance lapse has occurred. S White explained that visits are then made to deduce the reasons for the student's absence.

Members asked regarding how the free breakfast club trial that is due to start in Primary school in April would benefit students. S White replied that Priory already has a breakfast club, but the main benefit will be more highly funded by Government.

Members queried how the school will measure the impact of monitoring attendance and students' accessing the curriculum. S White replied that the school leadership are working with the Family Support Worker (FSW), who is able to target individual students to examine their attendance and absence. S White explained that the FSW speaks to families in a coordinated effort with a shared understanding of the importance of attendance in promoting the child's learning and progression. S White gave two examples of students who were being proactively followed up on with regard to their absence, with the result being an increase in their attendance.

#### [N Savvas joined the meeting at 5.45pm](#)

N Savvas informed that the aim for the Heads' reports is to increase the information that shows what the school is doing to improve student attendance and engagement. N Savvas further informed that what is needed are detailed reports on the specific students' background and what benefits are seen by the work being done.

N Savvas informed that the question of whether the intervention is making a difference to the student and if not, why not and what is being done to correct the situation needs to be asked. It must be documented that all measures are being made to increase attendance and help the student progress, with a willingness to try new methods if there is little or no impact in the student's attendance and engagement.

S White informed that those students with persistent absence have welfare data, such as home visit details or meetings with the families, logged on the Child Protection Online Management System (CPOMS). N Savvas replied that governance members want to know the impact of the intervention. If there is no impact, the intervention will need to change to impact the student's attendance and progress.

N Savvas informed that the general assumption is that if a student is not in school, they are not learning, but if the school informs the Local Authority of alternative provisions being used, as well as the positive impact it is having, it will be evident that the student's needs are being met. N Savvas added that this thinking needs to be all through, from governance members to be able to challenge the executives, and for the school leadership to be able to challenge their staff.

Members queried the child protection data differences between the Chalk Hill and Priory schools. Chair explained that the two schools vary according to the profile of need of the students enrolled. N Jennings informed that she will explain the persistent absence data in agenda item 10, which would address the point being made.

N Savvas queried the reasoning for Chalk Hill Academy and Priory School being grouped together in the Local Academy Council. S White replied that as both schools have a residential offer, they were paired in the Local Academy Council.

The Governance Professional informed members of the document "Half termly report on absence and persistent absence", shared with the members at this meeting, which showed the schools in the Trust grouped according to type, with expected benchmarks set out for each school. The Governance Professional informed that the DfE benchmark for special schools sector attendance is 87.2%, whilst attendance benchmarking for Alternative Provision schools have a benchmark of 58.4%. The SEND schools in EEG were shown against those benchmarks, with Chalk Hill taken as an example of the lower benchmark, as it is designated as an Alternative Provision.

The Governance Professional further informed that the DfE does not separate benchmarks for persistent absence data according to special school type and that this is currently set at 18.6%. Data shown in the document showed that the persistent absence for the schools is high, but measures are being focused in for

effectiveness in lowering student absence and ensuring they are engaging with teaching and learning at all the SEND schools in the Trust.

### Exclusions and Suspensions

S White informed that one student was suspended for one half day in the last reporting period, due to the student damaging property. S White informed that the school has been working hard with the family and residential department, to which the student has access, to improve. S White informed that alternative health care for the family has been sourced, and that strategies and boundaries are being used to remedy the behaviour.

S White informed that at the student's latest annual review, the school has contacted the local authority to source another more appropriate provision setting for the student to maximise their learning opportunities and positively affect their behaviour. S White informed that the strategies are having a more positive impact with the student's behaviour already showing improvement and their learning has improved in the same timeframe.

Members queried if the school leadership performs an internal exclusion method to moderate negative student behaviour. S White confirmed that internal exclusion strategies are used as a first approach to reduce negative behaviour, but as SEND students require a lot of support, and that the parents are involved in reintegration with the class

### Ofsted readiness

S White informed that Priory School leadership are working on two areas: one being the residential offer leadership. S White informed that the annual Ofsted inspection window for residential offers begins 1<sup>st</sup> April. S White informed that both residential childcare officers are currently off work, but that one of the residential staff, Pasha McDougall, is stepping up to fill the workload gap, but is not fully qualified to lead.

S White informed that for the day-to-day duties, such as management of staff, carrying out family liaison work S White, Lisa Andrews and Tabatha Kinnair fill the duties of the role.

S White informed that she has performed residential staff supervision, in line with the national minimum standards and leading on staff updates and training. S White informed that T Kinnair has carried out the role of supervising medication for the residential students.

Members queried if it was practical for P McDougall to attend head of care meetings. S White informed that she, L Andrews and T Kinnair oversee the residential, so that P McDougall does not need to attend the head of care meetings.

S White informed that the second area for Ofsted readiness focus is the curriculum and the measurement of student progress against their Individual Learning Plans (ILP) and addressing persistent absence.

Members queried whether the school leadership has been drilling down into those areas. S White confirmed that leadership is positively impacting those areas by continuous personal development (CPD) and specific training, such as meetings with staff and assessment scheduling.

### Safeguarding

S White informed that the safeguarding audit began today – 4 March 2025. S White informed that T Kinnair has assessed forty students successfully, and has been following up on all professional referrals, such as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) referrals.

Members requested a list of glossary of terms used as acronyms. The Governance Professional shared these on GovernorHub for all governance members to view.

The Governance Professional queried the high level of child-on-child abuse, listed as being 28 incidents. S Chesterton replied that the schools across the trust recorded incidents differently according to category. S Chesterton informed that the Safeguarding team are checking and will be changing the categories to more accurately reflect the type of abuse encountered, such as verbal bullying or physical abuse.

The Governance Professional queried how staff would deal with genuine abuse cases. S Chesterton replied that the action depends on what the type of abuse would be. S Chesterton informed that some types would require simply a verbal intervention where the child is challenged to understand and strengthen healthy relationships, or for other abuses it could mean involving the police, where sexualised behaviour may be involved. S Chesterton informed that all these types of incidents and interventions are discussed at Safeguarding meetings.

S White informed that Priory staff place cases where an imbalance of power between children is noted on CPOMS. If the child-on-child abuse shows no imbalance of power, it should be placed on Arbor. S Chesterton informed that the safeguarding team will investigate the differences across the trust to ensure that cases are recorded on the appropriate system to ensure continuity, and thus effectively safeguard the students.

Quality of Education (focused on expected exam entries)

*Not discussed*

Behaviours and Attitudes

*Not discussed*

Personal Development incl. careers

*Not discussed*

Staffing Issues

*Not discussed*

Admissions

*Not discussed*

Staff training and professional development

*Not discussed*

**10. Chalk Hill Academy – half-termly report**

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

Attendance and persistent absence

N Jennings informed of updates to several cases shown in the document detailing Chalk Hill's persistent absences.

N Jennings informed regarding student denoted 204, that they are not suitable in a mainstream setting due to their emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA). The student was due to leave after a two to three term placement. N Jennings informed the student is being held back a year to improve their attendance until Year 11 with additional support to improve his learning and attendance.

N Jennings informed regarding student denoted 324, that they were a non-attender, also due to EBSA. N Jennings informed that the students' school attendance was at 14% prior to joining Chalk Hill, but was up to 76% while at Chalk Hill, until the recorded spate of non-attendance due to a disrupted sleep pattern. N Jennings informed that after investigation the student was up at night playing online games. N Jennings informed that after a successful next steps meeting with the parents and

Graham Alcock, the School Improvement Lead for attendance, the student has been booked into a workshop. N Jennings informed that, as the student likes football, the parents' refusing to let him play has positively impacted his attendance at school since the meeting.

N Jennings informed regarding student denoted 209, that these absences are due to parental responsibility in booking multiple holidays in term time.

Members queried that as there are multiple unauthorised absences, whether the school would be issuing fixed penalty notices. N Jennings replied that issuing penalty notices was not in the school's policy, but that letters have been sent to all parents reminding them of their responsibility in sending their children to school with support from the EEG Safeguarding Team. N Jennings further informed that G Alcock has contacted Angela Coote, the Head of the School Attendance Service in Suffolk County Council. who may start charging families for student non-attendance. N Jennings informed that the student has other siblings in another trust that allows term time holidays, so all the family go together.

N Jennings informed regarding student denoted 207, who has increased absence after the Early Help safeguarding support was withdrawn. The teacher has contacted the parents and letters have been sent. As Chalk Hill has no onsite Family Welfare Officer the EEG Safeguarding Team have been supporting this case.

N Jennings informed that as Chalk Hill student numbers on roll are low, a few absent students impact more on all student attendance data. N Savvas informed that percentage data is not as important as the need to discuss individual learning plans for each student. N Savvas informed that this was recently done for the Sunrise Ofsted inspection, where staff could show that they are monitoring the learning journey of individual students, by putting the students into the school's context and were able to explain individual student's learning experience in detail to Ofsted inspectors. N Savvas informed that this method shows that staff know the child's circumstances well and can provide reassurance to His Majesty's Inspectors that students are safe, well cared for and engage strongly in learning.

N Jennings informed that students that reach over 95% attendance receive a reward as an incentive for continued attendance and engagement in learning.

#### Exclusions and Suspensions

N Jennings informed that no exclusions or suspensions have been reported for this reporting period.

#### Ofsted readiness

N Jennings informed that support for both Ofsted preparations and Safeguarding is being received currently from N Savvas and R Bamford, to ensure data evidence is ready to be inspected.

N Jennings informed that the school leadership has begun working on KPIs to provide the evidence required by Ofsted and that the school leadership have taken their first steps in strengthening weaker points and in redesigning how the school staff approach and Ofsted inspection.

N Savvas informed that all SEND schools are being given the framework to successfully implement to advance the schools' aim of providing meaningful and productive education for its students, as well as demonstrate the impact by data systems.

#### Safeguarding

N Savvas informed that the high level of detail of communication, accountability, and systems is required to demonstrate positive changes and improve outcomes for students. N Savvas informed that while recording of the data on the systems is

taking place, there is a lack of accountability in communicating this to those who need to use the information to impact the students and families **positively**.

N Savvas informed that EEG leadership will work with the Heads of schools to develop a detailed action plan to run the schools correctly and to meet the EEG standard, where they can ensure that the aspiration for all schools to be graded outstanding is realised.

Chair requested that Chalk Hill residential action plan have a completion date for each action needed. N Jennings confirmed that the completion dates for actions would be added to the action plan, as suggested.

The Governance Professional informed that the action plans for each school are a work in progress but will address all points raised in the Ofsted inspection reports and provide the necessary level of information to fully ensure that improvements are being made in terms of quality of education and welfare of the students.

#### Quality of Education (focused on expected exam entries)

*Not discussed*

#### Behaviours and Attitudes

*Not discussed*

#### Personal Development incl. careers

*Not discussed*

#### Staffing Issues

*Not discussed*

#### Admissions

*Not discussed*

#### Staff training and professional development

*Not discussed*

### **11. Update on Governance induction, training and support**

The Deputy Governance Professional informed that induction training has been arranged by the Governance Professional and includes meetings with the Heads of Schools and other governance members and Trustees.

The Deputy Governance Professional informed that further training will be conducted on an ongoing basis to ensure governance members are effective in their role, with both mandatory and non-mandatory short courses being provided for their participation.

The Deputy Governance Professional informed that all governance members are welcome to contact the Governance Professional or Deputy Governance Professional to discuss training and support needs.

### **12. Update from Trust, and items of concern to escalate**

The Chair informed that the schools progress is heading in the right direction with the support of the Trust leadership as discussed in detail at this meeting and thanked the Chief Executive and Governance Professional for joining the meeting to provide the details of support and action plans to improve student outcomes and raise the governance to a high standard.

### **11. Any other business**

N Savvas informed the Academy Council that it was a pleasure to work with the teams. N Savvas informed that the Heads of School are proactively working to do a good job in caring for the needs of the students and that all staff involved are working together to improve the schools, systems and student outcomes.

**The meeting concluded at 6.40pm**

Date of next meeting – Monday, 28 April 2025