

**Minutes of the virtual meeting held on 10 March 2025 at 1.30pm**

**Present virtually:** K Points, EEGT Trustee  
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  
C Shaw, Group Sixth Form Principal and senior DSL  
E O'Hara, Head of Welfare and Safeguarding (SEMH)  
G Cowles, Governance Professional of the Academy Councils  
J Wakelam, EEGT Trustee and WSC Governor (*observing*)  
L Chapman, Regional Director SEND and Outdoor Learning  
N Savvas, CEO  
R Bamford, Group Vice Principal Quality  
S Gales, Governance Professional  
S Graham, Chief People Officer

**Apologies:** J Finch, Committee member  
S Chesterton, Head of Welfare and Safeguarding (SEND cluster)  
S-L Neesam, Group Head of Safeguarding and Welfare

**Absent:**

**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 Karen Points to the Committee and welcomed her experience as former Trustee Lead for Safeguarding 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 welcomed Julia Wakelam as an observer.

Members introduced themselves and the Chair informed members of the planned changes to this Committee which were agreed by the Trust Board.

Apologies were received from J Finch, S Chesterton and S-L Neesam.

**2. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2025**

Members reviewed and **agreed** the minutes of 6 February 2025 as an accurate record.

**3. Matters arising from the meeting on 6 February 2025**

Five of the matters arising from the last meeting were complete and three were in progress.

MA4 – Members commended the action plan relating to areas for improvement identified as part of Chalk Hill's residential inspection and asked for regular updates at these meetings.

MA8 – The Chair noted an extraordinary meeting was called to prepare members of this Committee to support the recent Ofsted inspection of Sunrise Academy.

**4. Update on Executive structure**

**Action**

R Bamford

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised recent changes to leadership and systems to support integration into EEG and quality improvement.

Members queried how the changes will result in intended improvements. L Chapman explained that the restructuring of safeguarding replicates the successful and proven structure in place at our post-16 provision. L Chapman explained that removing the Executive Head layer and bringing together the Heads of Schools and senior leaders at the SEND Curriculum and Quality Board should improve communication and coordination across the schools.

Members reflects that the Executive Heads formerly would provide cover for the Heads of School in the case of absence, and queried how cover will be provided going forward. R Bamford explained that the cover model is still being considered.

Members queried how the School Improvement Leads will work in the new structure. R Bamford explained that they will join the Group's quality team and fulfil a role akin to the quality managers we have in our post-16 provision, which are tried and tested (all our post-16 provision is Ofsted Outstanding).

Several members reflected that they had recently observed the Post-16 Educational Excellence Committee, and queried if this Committee will replicate and benefit from the best practice of our post-16 provision. The Chair confirmed that that is the aim.

Members queried who has over-arching responsibility for attendance under the new structure. L Chapman confirmed that the Heads of School have responsibility for their school but explained that over-arching responsibility is still being considered.

Members asked that an update on Executive structure be presented to the Trust Board.

CPO

## 5. Update on Ofsted

- **Stone Lodge Academy's final Ofsted outcome letter**
- **Feedback on Sunrise Academy's Ofsted inspection**

Members received and considered the report provided which shared Stone Lodge Academy's outcome letter and key findings, the letter of assurance the Trust sent to the DfE in relation to the concerns arising from Stone Lodge Academy's inadequate Ofsted, and the feedback from Sunrise Academy's recent inspection.

The Chair commended the clarity of the report and the success of Sunrise Academy's inspection.

Members queried if there were lessons learned from Sunrise Academy's inspection which could be used to support future inspections at our other specialist SEN schools. R Bamford reflected that the outcome of Sunrise Academy demonstrates the positive impact of a joined-up approach to inspections, e.g. involving the Trust specialist staff throughout, rather than a school-staff only approach. R Bamford explained that we learnt lessons from Stone Lodge Academy's inspection, and had been working with the Heads of School to develop key documents (using tried and tested templates from our post-16 provision) so that leaders were prepared and could readily share required information with inspectors. Moreover, we are continuing to develop wider team working, so that school leaders have support and Trust leaders have assurance that our schools are making timely improvements.

Members reflected that staff at Sunrise Academy are very happy with the inspection findings, and queried how staff at Stone Lodge Academy have responded to the inspection findings. L Chapman explained that staff are saddened by the findings and are still trying to process what it means but are really committed to making improvements to the school.

M Cadman, as chair of the Academy Council for Duke of Lancaster School and Sunrise Academy, thanked the central Trust team for their extensive support and attributed the inspection outcome to joined up approach.

Members queried whether staff at Stone Lodge Academy accept the inspection findings. L Chapman explained that there has been a mixed reaction by staff - some acknowledge and accept the findings, and some do not. L Chapman explained that we are working with school staff to establish a common vision with high aspirations and an understanding of the need for change. L Chapman informed that senior school staff are visiting outstanding special schools to share best practice and raise awareness of other approaches.

Members queried when Stone Lodge Academy is likely to be reinspected. R Bamford explained that the school could have a monitoring visit any time within three months of the publication of the outcome letter and that, given the judgement of ineffective for safeguarding, there monitoring visit will likely be expedited.

Members queried what actions have been taken to strengthen safeguarding at Stone Lodge Academy. C Shaw summarised the actions taken to date and those planned to be implemented by Easter. C Shaw reflected that there are significant improvements still to be made due to staff and senior leaders lacking understanding of core principles of safeguarding, and explained the structured support being put in place to provide training and support. R Bamford signposted to the information in the letter of assurance we sent to the DfE, as evidence of the actions taken and impact.

Members queried whether there are areas of strong and effective safeguarding practices across the specialist SEN schools. C Shaw commended the strength of the safeguarding team at Sunrise Academy and explained how this informed our structural changes.

Members reflected that if some staff do not accept the inspection findings it could be difficult to create the culture changes needed to establish a robust safeguarding culture, and queried how we will measure the impact of our interventions to improve the culture of safeguarding. C Shaw explained that we are already starting to observe positive signs which indicate a strengthening of understanding and an appreciation of the importance of safeguarding and gave examples of the positive signs. C Shaw added that school staff are becoming more self-reflective and are recognising where and why changes are needed. C Shaw reflected that the systems we use to record safeguarding incidents needs further refinement and staff need training to use the systems and explained that this will help us to work in a consistent manner and be able to analyse robust safeguarding data to monitor the effectiveness of the safeguarding culture.

## **6. Update on complaints and investigations**

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the recent complaints concerning our specialist SEN schools and the outcomes of the associated investigations.

Members queried what is defined by a 'qualifying complaint'. R Bamford explained the term and how qualifying complaints are treated by our regulators. R Bamford noted that at both recent inspections the Ofsted inspectors were aware of the complaints and explored the themes of the complaint as part of the inspection work.

Members queried if the complaints relating to Sunrise Academy are from different complainants. R Bamford informed that, as the complaints were not made directly to us, the complaints were anonymous so we cannot be certain, however advised that we believe they are distinct and separate.

Members queried why the complainant raised the complaint with Ofsted, rather than via our complaints process. R Bamford explained that all complainants are able to raise complaints with our regulators (though this does not ensure they will be

investigated or upheld) and noted complainants are not required to follow our complaints process. R Bamford reflected that some complaints reference their prior communications with the school, which indicates that they complained directly but did not feel that the school's response was sufficient and/or that the complaint remained unresolved.

R Bamford and C Shaw summarised the findings of the investigations into the complaints and the actions taken to resolve the concern with the complainant and learn lessons to improve to prevent future complaints.

Members reflected that the escalations of complaints raise the need for the specialist SEN schools to strengthen relationships with stakeholders, so that complainants feel confident in our complaints process and ability to resolve issues.

Members reflected that complaints raise the importance of working with parents and families, so that they feel assured by the actions being taken by school staff will meet the needs of their children.

Members discussed whether this Committee should review the entire complaints log or only the qualifying complaints. Members agreed that oversight of all the complaints is helpful to identify emerging themes and impact of efforts to improve quality and relationships.

Member reflected that the recent Standard 3 report for Chalk Hill's residential provision raised that the complaints record was not available, and queried how this issue will be resolved. N Kellett, as Trustee Lead for Safeguarding (specialist SEN schools and residential provision) confirmed that the new Head of Care is undergoing training to ensure they know how to access all records. The Governance Professional explained that all Standard 3 reports are now stored on GovernorHub so are accessible to governance members, and the Executive are reviewing the process for Standard 3 visits (who conducts them, when, who supports them, who reviews the draft reports, etc.) so that they are conducted in the right time frame and any actions identified are put in place. The Governance Professional informed that any actions from the Standard 3 reports will be shared with the Audit and Risk Management Committee to be added to their recommendation's tracker.

L Carroll

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

- **Quality**
- **Safeguarding**
- **Mandatory training and SCR compliance**

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the progress on actions being taken to improve quality, safeguarding and mandatory training and single central record compliance.

R Bamford explained that we have developed the key performance indicators (KPI) we will monitor to evaluate impact and introduced a SEND Curriculum and Quality Board to bring together the senior leadership teams of the specialist SEN schools as forum to review these KPIs and share best practice. R Bamford explained that we have also established a weekly school project meeting which is a Trust wide forum where we discuss progress against the broader action plans relating the specialist SEN schools.

Members asked for training on understanding the KPI data.

R Bamford

Members queried how senior leaders are responding to the changes. R Bamford explained that school senior leaders have responded positively and support the changes.

Members commended the rapid introduction of the new systems and structures and reflected that it will take time before we can monitor the impact of these. Members

R Bamford  
L Chapman

asked for KPI data to be benchmarked and for milestones associated with future actions so we can measure impact.

E O'Hara explained the work underway to improve safeguarding across the specialist SEN schools including safeguarding audits of each school to identify areas for improvement.

The CPO explained the work underway to ensure mandatory training is complete and to check each school's single central record to ensure they are complete and compliant.

Members queried what types of issues are being found in the single central record audits, and the actions being taken. The CPO explained the variety of issues and how these are being addressed.

Members commended the move to digitising the single central records.

Members queried whether the schools have effective practices for collecting evidence linked to DBS checks. The CPO explained that there are mixed practices and summarised plans to improve this, and to regather evidence where needed.

Members queried what 'iTrent' is. The CPO explained that iTrent is our HR platform.

Members asked for an update on training attendance and single central record compliance at the next meeting.

CPO

#### 8. **Half-termly report on attendance and persistent absence**

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the attendance and persistent absence at each specialist SEN school compared to appropriate benchmarks, and the intervention strategies used to improve attendance.

Members queried why Chalk Hill and Sunrise Academy are benchmarked to the PRU/AP sector average. R Bamford explained that the benchmark is more appropriate given that Sunrise Academy is an SEMH school and Chalk Hill is an Alternative Provision school. R Bamford confirmed that during the recent inspection at Sunrise Academy, the Ofsted inspectors accepted this.

Members noted that persistent absence levels across all our specialist SEN schools is unacceptably high, especially at Sunrise Academy, and queried the reasons for this. L Chapman noted there are multiple reasons including absences for term-time holidays, the school being deemed as an unsuitable placement by families, so they do not encourage their child to attend, medical care, etc.

Members challenged that the report is not effective as it does not analyse and explain why students are persistently absent nor whether the interventions are having the intended impact. Members asked future reports to include greater analysis of the absence reasons and student EDIM, and the impact of intervention strategies.

L Chapman

The CEO thanked the Committee for the challenge and reflected that we also need to be critically analysing the impact of using external alternative provision.

L Chapman

#### 9. **Half-termly report on behaviour (inc. suspensions and exclusions)**

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the suspension data of each specialist SEN school.

Members noted the report has some typos and inconsistencies which make the report difficult to interpret.



Members challenged that the report is not effective as it does not help identify trends, strategies taken to improve behaviour to avoid suspensions and exclusions, nor to analyse whether the behaviour policy has been adhered to and applied fairly. Members asked future reports to include greater context on the suspensions and exclusions, student EDIM information, and the actions taken by the school linked to our behaviour policy.

Members challenged that the report should also report on behaviour at the schools, how school staff are working with children and their families to improve behaviour, and how school staff are supporting children to develop behavioural skills to help them in the future. Members suggested that case studies could also be helpful to evidence this impact.

#### 10. **Half-termly report on safeguarding**

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the safeguarding data of each specialist SEN school.

E O'Hara summarised the key information.

Members queried whether the reporting categories are complete and fully align to the expectations of Keeping Children Safe in Education. R Bamford explained that we are working to update the categories in C-POMS to ensure they are appropriate and consistently used for reporting safeguarding concerns across each of the specialist SEN schools.

Members challenged that there were too many 'open cases' and reflected that this could indicate a poor safeguarding culture. Members asked that future reports shows comparison data for the previous term to help identify trends, and analysis /commentary on what is being done to close/resolve open cases.

Members discussed the high amount of LADO referrals and queried what is being done to improve staff awareness and reduce further referrals. R Bamford informed that S-L Neesam is working with the Head of School and school staff to embed 'professional standards' training and compliance. Moreover, we are working closely with the Local Authority to provide reassurance about the actions being taken.

J Wakelam, as Trustee Lead for Safeguarding (Post-16 provision), reflected on the effective practice in our post-16 provision and queried if, in future, the specialist SEN school's safeguarding data will be reviewed by the Student Services Board or equivalent, and Trustee Leads before being presented to this Committee. R Bamford confirmed that it will be.

N Savvas left the meeting at 3.30pm

#### 11. **Half-termly report on school performance**

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised the self-evaluation judgements of each specialist SEN school against the Ofsted criteria, and the planned priorities for the next term.

K Points left the meeting at 3.39pm

Members commended the quality of Sunrise Academy's report on the priority areas for further development.

Members queried how the Heads of Schools will be supported to develop their self-evaluation judgements to ensure these are accurate and effective, and to share best practice between the Heads of School. L Chapman explained that our internal quality of education reviews are used to help develop accurate self-evaluation judgements. R Bamford explained that the SEND Curriculum and Quality Board will help develop leaders' ability to interpret data and self-evaluate against the Ofsted framework in a

more forensic, objective and precise way. It will also serve as a forum for best practice sharing and skills development.

S Daley, as Chair of the Post-16 Educational Excellence Committee, reflected on the effective self-evaluation practices used in our post-16 provision and queried if this practice will be replicated for our specialist SEN provision. R Bamford confirmed that it will be and that future reports will provide contextual evidence to underpin the self-evaluation judgements, to provide assurance to the Committee that the judgements are objective and fair.

**12. Annual report on Priory School's residential provision**

Members received and considered the report provided which shared the Standard 3 reports for the residential provisions at Chalk Hill and Priory School, as well as a detailed annual Residential Review for Priory School.

Members commended the thorough report.

**13. First Hand Feedback**

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

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

None.

**15. Risk Register Extract**

Members received and considered the risk register extract which included **2 red**, **9 amber** and **3 yellow** risks, which included six new risks (EEGT004, EEGT003, EEGT005, EEGT006, EEGT007, and EEGT008).

Members discussed EEGT006 (relating to safeguarding) and noted that as we know there are issues and **proposed** that the risk name should be amended to clarify the risk relates to not addressing those issues quickly enough.

A&RMC

Members discussed and **proposed** that two new risks be added – one relating to high-levels of persistent absence not being addressed quickly enough, and one relating to issues with the curriculum not being addressed quickly enough.

A&RMC

**16. Policies**

Members received and considered the following policies:

- Job description DSL policy
- Child protection and safeguarding policy – Chalk Hill
- Child protection and safeguarding policy – Duke of Lancaster School
- Child protection and safeguarding policy – Priory Academy
- Child protection and safeguarding policy – Stone Lodge Academy
- Child protection and safeguarding policy – Sunrise Academy
- Fitness to study policy
- Prevent in school settings
- Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children and young adults
- Social, emotional, mental health strategy (SEMH)
- Suicide safety amongst students policy
- Young carers policy

The Governance Professional thanked members for identifying typos ahead of the meeting and confirmed that these have been amended. Member **approved** the policies and **agreed to recommend them to the Trust Board**.

**17. Any Other Business**

None

The meeting closed at 3.57pm