

Minutes – CPS Academy Council Meeting

Version: FINAL
Meeting Date: 15th May 2025
Location: Castle Primary School
Time: 16:00 - 18:00 PM

Chair: David Edwards (DE) Sponsor Councillor

Attendees: Carolyn Tayler-Webb (CT) Parent Councillor
 Lee Churchill (LC) Parent Councillor
 Francis Abbott (FA) Staff Councillor
 Michelle Harris (MH) Sponsor Councillor
 Gemma Whitehead (GW) Staff Councillor

In attendance: Steve Morton (SM) Principal
 Tessa Clark (TC) Clerk

Apologies:

Minutes

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| 1 | Introduction, Administration and Apologies | |
| 1.1 | SM opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Academy Council. | |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest | |
| 2.1 | There were no declarations of interest made | |
| 3 | Academy Council Membership | |
| 3.1 | Staff member has stepped down, only person keen to do it was a parent, but parent slot is already filled. | |
| 4 | Minutes of Previous Meeting | |
| 4.1 | The minutes of the last meeting were approved. | |
| 5 | Matter arising | |
| 5.1 | No matters arising. | |
| | Academy Council Report | |
| 6 | Behaviours and Attitudes | |
| 6.1 | Attendance continues to improve, with gains made since January, now above the national average and close to the CLF average. Persistent absences have decreased from 15.8% to 12%. SM explained that they persistently challenge | |

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| | absence, engaging parents in discussions on illness, suggesting alternatives such as administering Calpol rather than keeping children off school. | |
| 6.2 | SM shared that the current enrolment projections indicate a potential cohort of 20 children, with 18 confirmed and 2 late applications pending. Previous years had a maximum of 9, making this a significant improvement. The 20th family, living slightly further away, chose Castle Primary School after hearing positive feedback from a current parent. | |
| 6.2.1 | SM reported a positive shift in behaviours and attitudes among the families. They have ceased advertising, as word of mouth has significantly contributed to the school's success. | |
| 6.2.2 | SM shared that there is a shift in attendance and new parent perspective of the school, because they take ownership when they are doing something that is not working well. | |
| 6.3 | Q: Is the Year 6 gender imbalance a weird anomaly? | |
| 6.3.1 | Year 6 consists of 6 boys and 20 girls, reflecting a notable gender imbalance. Year 3 has a majority of boys. Overall, the school's demographics are balanced, with no need for facility changes. | |
| 6.4 | Q: Do you do parent surveys? | |
| 6.4.1 | Yes, we do. Overwhelmingly every single category was in the high 90s. | |
| 6.4.2 | SM reported strong participation in the staff survey, with 20 out of 26 staff members contributing. The average score was 3.9, with well-being, time management and values rated at 4. Overall, responses indicated a positive outlook on behaviours and attitudes throughout the school. | |
| 7 | Safeguarding | |
| 7.1 | SM attended a face-to-face network meeting that emphasised equality and inclusivity. He highlighted the importance in ensuring the consideration of individuals from various age groups, including those returning from maternity and pre-menopausal women, urging the necessity of opening dialogue to identify any additional support they may require, as they are often overlooked. | |
| 7.2 | Q: Do you have any pupils that are considering their gender? | |
| 7.2.1 | SM explained that no specific pupils were currently considering their gender, acknowledging that some children may take time to understand their identity. The academy's gender-neutral uniform policy allows pupils to choose attire that promotes comfort and self-expression. | |
| 7.3 | Q: Do you use general neutral language? | |
| 7.3.1 | FA explained that there is no necessity to refer to students as boys and girls; instead, the class is addressed as a whole. During lessons, particularly those concerning character, the use of pronouns is always emphasised. Furthermore, the curriculum includes celebrations of Pride, History Month, and LGBTQ+ awareness, ensuring that children are informed about various charities. It was also noted that the children feel safe and empowered to speak to adults when necessary. | |
| 7.3.2 | SM shared a recent session, where pupils discussed diverse family structures following an incident where a student wrote the word 'gay' and stuck it to another pupil's back. The class revisited their NSCEP curriculum, looking at | |

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| | images that showed different family types. This sparked a conversation, including a mention of a teacher's sexual orientation, helping students understanding of the term "gay," moving it away from any negative connotation. A CLF log has been completed to record this important learning moment. | |
| 7.3.3 | ACTION: DE to go through safeguarding audit with SM. | DE |
| 8 | Quality of Education | |
| 8.1 | SM shared the focus is on writing, which is not considered poor but rather slightly inconsistent in approach. The Trust's English lead conducted clinics, providing targeted support for teachers over an hour, engaging in mini moderation and reviewing planning to assess comfort levels with the content. | |
| 8.1.1 | FA shared that the clinics were really useful. | |
| 8.1.2 | Q: What is the one take away? | |
| 8.1.3 | FA shared that her main takeaway was the guidance she received when the English lead helped her with books she was unsure about. She noted that having the English lead just a phone call away was invaluable; whenever she sent over her plans and outcomes, assistance arrived promptly. Although writing assessments were initially daunting, that hour spent with the English lead was particularly helpful, allowing her to pose questions and gain confidence. | |
| 8.1.4 | It was noted that writing is now in a strong place with delivery; everything's set for everyone to roll with it. | |
| 8.2 | SM shared that the next focus will be on science, having met with the science lead yesterday. It was really good to have their thoughts quality assured, as his insights were exactly in line with theirs. The teaching of science was commended for being great; however, it was highlighted that they can simplify their vocabulary a bit. "I am a scientist" is the new phrase to adopt. | |
| 8.2.1 | Q: How much science do students do a week? | |
| 8.2.2 | In their weekly schedule, students typically engage in about one and a half to two hours of science classes. The school embraces flexibility in its curriculum, allowing staff to structure lessons in various ways. Some choose to dedicate a full day to science at the end of a unit, while others creatively integrate science into English lessons, promoting cross-curricular writing. Over the academic year, science is generally taught across five terms, with one term occasionally set aside when it is not on everyone's calendar. | |
| 9 | Student Outcomes | |
| 9.1 | SM commented on the SATs, noting that they finished today. The little ones worked incredibly hard! Additionally, the post-mock paper showed marked improvement, edging closer to their goal of 62-66 percent. The team is confident they have set them up for success! | |
| 9.1.1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FA noted children felt confident in their SATs, thanks to GW and LC's intervention work. LC spent each afternoon addressing gaps in understanding, which improved confidence. LC observed a notable increase in student confidence. SM emphasised that GW, LC, and FA championed the children, empowering them to take charge of their learning. | |

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| 9.1.2 | FA shared that the children had been diligently practising arithmetic, which had alleviated their worries. They ended the year by revisiting the paper completed in October, and it was truly heartening to compare their scores. Every single child had doubled theirs, with some even quadrupling their results! They put their papers face down, then all revealed them together—a gorgeous moment. Now, the children are eager to tackle even more maths! | |
| 10 | Teaching and learning framework | |
| 10.1 | SM shared that they haven't had a culture conversation yet. It's not just about pedagogy; every staff member is part of their culture. They've decided to pause and will address this at staff meetings—possibly during inset time. | |
| 10.2 | Active ingredients – Not yet complete as it's a collective input. Once finalised, SM will share the completed document with everyone. | |
| 11 | People Premium | |
| 11.1 | SM noted that tracking progress has become much easier now, allowing staff to identify which pupils are catching up. However, they still do not classify these pupils as greater depth children. There is also a significant shift towards engaging the wider community; this is not just a challenge faced by this school. SM shared It is crucial for the school to work with families, especially those who may not have had the same contextual opportunities outside of school. For example, organising visits for children to see a body of water or doing some pre-teaching before writing about it would be an excellent step forward. | |
| 11.2 | SM has shared that they consistently provide wrap-around care for these families at no cost. While some are eager to contribute, the school believes in inclusivity; if a family can't pay, that's simply the way it is – everyone is welcome! The school prioritises morning provision for PP children, dedicating just 15 minutes each day. With one adult supporting two or three children, remarkable progress has been made. These little ones, who once struggled to settle into learning, are now flourishing, especially in Reception. One child who wasn't on track for Good Level of Development is now thriving, all thanks to those extra morning minutes! | |
| 12 | Staffing and Well-being | |
| 12.1 | The school has welcomed a brilliant new teacher covering maternity leave. With ten years of experience, she arrived prepared with a list of questions to help her settle in. Her calm, passionate, and professional demeanour is a great asset as she dedicates herself to the children. Once settled in September, she will take on a subject lead role, helping the school connect with more networks and grow its capacity more rapidly. | |
| 12.1.1 | The school interviewed three candidates and nearly tossed a coin for two, as they were both brilliant! The children knew they were part of the process and sighed when the third teacher finished; they were bursting with passion for writing after her activity! | |
| 12.2 | The school has filled a two-day-a-week vacancy with a teacher returning from an English-speaking Canadian school in Italy, keen to establish her forest school business. | |
| 12.3 | SM reported that the school is all set for September with a full complement of teachers. Any changes can be discussed up until May, but there are no major shifts in staffing structure for next year! | |

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| 12.4 | SM discussed class arrangements, highlighting that all parents are happy with the decision to split the children into different classes. They also noted the importance of the morning half-hour pressure sessions and the focus on pure Year 6, identifying the needs of the 3/4 and 4/5 cohorts to ensure the children flourish. | |
| 12.4.1 | Q – How are you splitting years 3 and 4? | |
| 12.4.2 | SM noted that there are two sets of twins in the class and mentioned that both sets of parents were consulted. They would like to propose placing one twin in each class, considering their differing learning styles. Parents were in full agreement. He shared that the aim is to enhance engagement and focus on classroom dynamics rather than simply age or academic ability. For certain group activities, Years 3, 4, and 5 may be taught in different rooms to maximise benefit for all students. | |
| 12.4.3 | Q – When you have decided on the split, is it worth trialling it? | |
| 12.4.4 | Really good idea, the plan is to have a transition day, possibly before that day they may do trial runs. | |
| 12.4.5 | SM shared that the real strength, if they move the room, is that all children will have a new classroom, in a space that is different. Nobody will be left behind which is good for their wellbeing. | |
| 12.4.6 | FA shared that it is nice that year 6 will be in the centre of the school. | |
| 12.5 | SM also shared that they are proud to announce that their home-grown TA is doing teacher training next year. They will also be a skip training school too, and they've offered her a place. | |
| 12.5.1 | Q - Are you allowed to take on a TA who has no qualifications? | |
| 12.5.2 | SM advised that she joined as a TA and successfully became a HTA. She's one of the calmest teachers, and the kids absolutely adore her! If she works more than one day a week, they will ensure she gets the support she needs. | |
| 12.5.3 | Q – Are you confident you will get a TA when she does the course? | |
| | SM mentioned that once she hands in her notice, her hours will become available internally, which could pique some interest. The real challenge is finding applicants with the necessary GCSEs. | |
| 13 | SATS | |
| 13.1 | DE led a discussion on SATs, keen to grasp the impact on the school and how staff manage the pressures they bring. | |
| 13.2 | FA shared how they manage SATs pressure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FA highlighted her and Gemma's shared passion for children's mental health, which is central to their approach. • The focus for the first half term involves a project titled "All About Me," where children reflect on their inspirations and differentiate between what they can control and what they cannot. • Throughout the year, discussions about friendships have been integral to the curriculum. • Notably, the children have thrived in a nurturing environment this year, fostering a mutual respect among peers. • Regarding the pressure of SATs, a decision was made to increase exposure to the format; by familiarising students with the 40 questions, the aim is to alleviate anxiety. | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's emphasised that the competition is personal—children are encouraged to focus on their own progress rather than comparing themselves to classmates. • FA models vulnerability by discussing her own mistakes openly, which sets an example of growth and laughter that encourages children to critique their own work. • Peer marking has proven effective as the children are now less sensitive due to the groundwork laid throughout the year. • The implementation of post-it notes for marking allows students to feel secure in their learning journey. • There is a strong sense of trust from parents, with improved communication noted, particularly from one parent who has begun engaging through SeeSaw. • Celebrating children's achievements remains a priority, helping them end the day on a positive note. | |
| 13.3 | LC shared that they are so resilient as a class which is very different from the last 4 years. He went on to say how ZEN the class is. | |
| 13.4 | Q – Do SATs significantly impact the wider curriculum? | |
| 13.4.1 | No, while they do take a breather for SATs practice, they ensure that all necessary topics are covered afterwards, and the children are well aware of this plan. Most of the Year 6 curriculum builds on what they've learned in Years 4 and 5, allowing them to concentrate on those areas. Their flexible timetable ensures nothing is missed. This year, they opted out of a SATs club, transforming the perceived threat into a superpower! | |
| 13.4.2 | CPG books were set early in the year as homework. Parents were told if they are struggling with helping their children, FA would support those children at lunch time. | |
| 13.5 | Q- How much pressure do you feel from the trust making sure numbers are as they are? | |
| 13.5.1 | SM shared that he does not feel pressured at all. He advised that the trust indeed has high expectations for all children, and their conversations have centred around delivering their best in line with those aspirations. SM shared that when TF visited to discuss raising attainment, she highlighted their progress against the entire list of objectives, concluding that they've met each one successfully. TF also shared that, if asked, she would undoubtedly choose to send her grandchild to CPS! | |
| 13.5.2 | SM advised that all data serves as the start of a conversation—when the data arrives, it's all about reflecting on what went well and what they can improve for next time. SM shared that he feels supported to support FA, knowing that their efforts are driven by the right intentions. Naturally, there's a desire for every child to succeed, but it's all about reflecting and refining their approach for the future. | |
| 13.6 | Q – Do you feel the school is working on a constructive framework? | |
| 13.6.1 | SM replied that he does, everything they have been asked to consider has been approached collaboratively. He also feels it's a really robust way to develop the school. | |
| 13.7 | Q – How do children find out how they have done with the SATs? | |

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| 13.7.1 | FA explained that she will take each student out individually to tell them how they have done. It will also be sent out to parents. | |
| 13.7.2 | The transition documents have been sent to the secondary schools by FA. All children are now aware of which school they will be attending. A notable change this year is that, rather than choosing friends they'd like to be with, they must indicate whom they would prefer not to be with. | |
| 13.8 | Q – Do secondary schools come back and say anything about the SATs? | |
| 13.8.1 | It was noted that secondary schools often provide feedback on SATs, particularly when it comes to re-testing children. Statistically, those who take the SATs tend to achieve better GCSE results. Michelle mentioned that secondary schools rely on SATs for predicting grades; however, inconsistencies remain in how various schools approach these assessments. Children who miss SATs are assigned zeros, relying solely on teacher assessments. | |
| 14 | Policies | |
| 14.1 | PSHE – page 12, spelling mistake. Year 5 section said thunking, which should have said thinking. ACTION – Rectify spelling errors in the PSHE policy document. | NO |
| 14.2 | MH expressed her appreciation for the PSHE policy, noting its relevance. FA informed the group that the policy is derived from NSPCC's SCARF resources, which align well with the school's ethos and are not overwhelming. In Year 6, discussions about periods include modern solutions like Wuka's reusable pads, enhancing the curriculum with eco-friendly and comfortable options for students. | |
| 14.3 | All Policies signed off. | |
| 15 | Any Other Business | |
| 15.1 | Jenny emphasised the importance of support staff, particularly those who work one-to-one with students. She mentioned that on challenging mornings, it might be worthwhile to implement a supervision system where staff can discuss their experiences and offload any concerns. Additionally, Jenny suggested that some Teaching Assistants could benefit from regular check-ins. | |
| 15.1.1 | SM expressed how it is a really good idea to put a supervision in place for TAs as there is never a part in the day where they can break off and check in when they are on-to-one with a child, sharing that it is intense. ACTION – Put supervisions in place for support staff. | SM |
| 15.1.2 | Jenny mentioned that SM regularly checks in with all staff. | |
| 16 | Date of Next Meeting | |
| 16.1 | Thursday, 17th July from 4-6 pm | |
| 17 | Meeting End | |
| 17.1 | 17:50 | |

ACTIONS

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| 7.3.3 | ACTION - DE to go through safeguarding audit with SM. COMPLETE. | DE |
| 14.1 | ACTION – Rectify spelling errors in the PSHE policy document. COMPLETE. | NO |
| 15.1.1 | ACTION – Put supervisions in place for support staff. | SM |