Minutes – Castle Primary School Academy Council Meeting

Version:	Approved (Public Version)
Meeting Date:	Tuesday, 30th September 2025
Location:	Castle Primary School
Time:	4-6 PM

Chair:	David Edwards	Sponsor Councillor
Attendees:	Michelle Harris	Sponsor Councillor
	Frances Abbott	Staff Councillor
In attendance:	Steve Morton	Principal
	Tracy French	Executive Principal
	Tessa Clark	Clerk
Observer:	Charlotte Middleton	
Apologies:	Carolyn Tayler-Webb	Parent Councillor

Minutes

		Action
1	**Introduction, Administration and Apologies**	
1.1	The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all attendees.	
1.2	Apologies were noted as listed.	
1.3	The Principal welcomed the newly appointed Support Staff Academy Councillor and provided an overview of the Academy Council (AC) process. The AC Report is shared with councillors two weeks prior to each meeting to allow time for review and submission of questions, which are then discussed during the meeting.	
2	**Declarations of Interest**	
2.1	There were no declarations of interest made.	
3	**Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising**	
3.1	The minutes of the last meeting were approved.	
4	**Chairs update**	
4.1	There are currently three Sponsor Councillor vacancies.	
4.1.1	The Principal suggested exploring potential candidates among school volunteers and community groups supporting the school.	

	Action: Principal to approach potential candidates and include a call for interest in the school newsletter. **Action:** Clerk to circulate the recruitment leaflet.	
5	Election for Vice Chair	
5.1	Expressions of interest were invited, with a decision to be made at the next meeting. **Action:** Clerk to arrange the Vice Chair election.	
6	Appoint/ confirm link roles	
6.1	**Action:** Link roles to be confirmed at the next meeting when more councillors are in place.	
7	Training	
7.2	Q: If someone has completed safeguarding training at another school, is that acceptable?	
7.2.1	A: Yes; however, where individuals are regularly involved, it is expected they complete trust-specific training. All individuals must have appropriate training before being on-site or involved in visits.	
7.3	All councillors present completed their mandatory training.	
8	Academy Council report	
8.1	The AC Report was shared prior to the meeting. It included the top sheet, SEF, risk register, and performance data.	
8.1.1	SM shared key updates: • A detailed review of Pupil Premium (PP) data was conducted, with a focus on supporting disadvantaged pupils. • The report provided a snapshot of the school's current position, future goals, and evolving risks related to pupils, staff, and the wider community. • Last year's primary risk was staff absence. • Current efforts include supporting a number of families with children who have additional needs. Pupils are increasingly able to access learning and feel safer; however, this has required significant time and resources, raising concerns about sustainability. • Collaboration with three other families has improved, with shared responsibilities and stronger connections. • Teachers are off to a strong start, and pupils are actively engaged—singing confidently in assemblies and demonstrating strong map-reading skills.	
8.1.3	FA and CM recently returned from a trip to Pinkery, where pupils effectively applied their map-reading skills, showing a clear understanding of the curriculum.	
8.1.4	SM noted that while the term has started positively, staff are currently giving more than is sustainable in terms of family support. The school has reached out to the local network and council office for additional SEMH support, funding, and shared timetabling.	
8.1.5	Q: Will you update us on how the team is feeling at the end of the term? **ACTION:** SM to provide wellbeing update at the end of term to maintain a sense check on staff capacity and morale.	
8.2	**Attendance**	
8.2.1	Attendance is currently strong at **97.1%**, which is notably higher than both last year and two years ago.	

8.2.2	SM shared that the school continues to work proactively with families where attendance concerns may indicate wider vulnerabilities. Staff are engaging with external agencies, including health professionals, to ensure appropriate support is in place. These collaborative efforts have led to improved attendance in several cases, and the school is seeing positive engagement from families.	
8.2.3	SM explained that the school is using an attendance tracker to monitor patterns and identify pupils who may be at risk. This tool enables early intervention and supports safeguarding by highlighting emerging concerns. A new letter has been introduced to communicate with parents when attendance begins to decline, offering a supportive challenge before issues escalate. Feedback from families has been positive, with appreciation for early communication, regular check-ins, and staff presence at the school gate. There has also been an increase in term-time leave requests, which the school continues to monitor and address in line with policy.	
8.2.4	Q: Do you keep a record of families who arrange holidays during term time?	
8.2.5	A: Yes	
8.2.6	Q: You mentioned using the tracker to identify persistently absent pupils—what interventions are in place to support them?	
8.2.7	A: The school takes a multi-agency approach to supporting pupils with persistent absence. This includes meetings with families, safeguarding discussions, working with outside agencies. Strategies are tailored to individual circumstances and aim to build trust, promote positive attendance, and reduce barriers to learning. Celebrating attendance and maintaining open communication with families are key elements of the school's approach.	
8.2.8	Q: Do you offer remote learning for pupils who struggle to attend school?	
8.2.9	A: Remote learning is not offered as a general alternative, as it may discourage physical attendance. However, in cases where a pupil is unable to access school due to specific circumstances, remote learning would be considered as part of a wider support plan	
8.3	**Personal Development**	
8.3.1	FA shared an update on the school's approach to promoting democracy and pupil leadership through the annual parliamentary-style elections. In the summer term, Year 6 pupils take part in an election process to select a Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, replacing the traditional Head Boy and Head Girl roles. Staff nominate four pupils who consistently uphold the school's values. Each class prepares and delivers speeches for their chosen candidates, followed by a whole-school vote held in a polling station-style setting. FA recently attended training at Parliament and has used this experience to further embed the principles of democracy and the rule of law within the school's values and curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to understand democratic processes and how to challenge appropriately within a respectful framework. FA noted that pupils demonstrated increased resilience during this year's elections, with a noticeable shift in emotional maturity compared to previous years.	
8.3.2	TF commented that, given the current political context, it would be valuable for pupils to write to the Prime Minister. Receiving a response would help reinforce their understanding of civic engagement and the role of government.	

8.3.3	FA confirmed that training with the team is ongoing and that the school will soon receive educational resources, including props representing the House of Commons and House of Lords, to support learning.	
8.3.4	Pupils elected through the process receive bespoke badges and take part in a formal ceremony. The announcement of the election results was described as a celebratory moment, with pupils showing pride in their achievements and being recognised by their peers. SM expressed thanks to FA for the significant work involved in organising and delivering this initiative	
8.4	**Quality of Education**	
8.4.1	The school has been engaging with the CLF's "I am a…" curriculum framework (e.g., "I am a historian"). Staff have taken time to collaborate meaningfully, including attending Trust-wide development days, to ensure the curriculum is implemented effectively across the 3-, 2-, and 1-year programme. Work is ongoing with CLF subject leads in English, Maths, Science, and now Geography. A recent staff meeting focused on how the curriculum meets pupils' needs, using strategies such as "zoom in" and "zoom out" to explore physical and political geography. Staff are reviewing planning structures to replicate successful approaches used in Science and Geography, with an emphasis on reducing cognitive load for pupils. Teachers are encouraged to use external resources where appropriate, provided they align with the "I am…" curriculum and are fact-checked. Staff have noted that the CLF curriculum is closely aligned with current practice at CPS, and that the shift is more about refining delivery rather than introducing significant changes.	
8.4.2	FA noted that reviewing plans has helped staff focus more clearly on objectives and reduce unnecessary content. The phased rollout has supported manageable change.	
8.4.3	The first Academy visit is scheduled for October, with the Senior Executive Principal and CLF Geography Lead invited to observe practice and review pupils' work. Staff are also focusing on tier 3 vocabulary and oracy, supported by dedicated teams. **Action:** DE to attend the Academy visit in October.	
8.4.4	Q: How is pupil voice being captured in relation to curriculum changes?	
8.4.5	A: Pupil voice is gathered through panels, book looks, and informal discussions. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on expectations and outcomes beyond lesson delivery. A pupil survey is planned, though a geography-specific version is still being sourced. Pupils are responding well to simplified marking and live feedback, and are able to articulate their learning, indicating readiness for targeted feedback collection.	
8.5	**Results Review**	
8.5.1	SM confirmed that the results data was included in the Academy Council (AC) report circulated prior to the meeting. He briefly presented the Year 6 headline data, noting a positive increase in attainment across subjects, with combined	

	scores rising from 24 to 36. This reflects the impact of strengthened systems and processes aimed at supporting pupil progress.	
8.5.2	Reading showed a slight dip, but there was a notable increase in the number of Pupil Premium (PP) pupils achieving combined outcomes and registering at greater depth. This improvement is attributed to more targeted teaching and better understanding of scaffolding and adaptive strategies.	
8.5.3	DE commented that the data was extensive but difficult to interpret without national benchmarks. He asked whether national data had been published and suggested presenting the school's data in a graph format to show trends over time. This would support clearer analysis and enable more effective challenge and questioning. **Action:** Data team to produce comparative graphs showing multi-year trends. SM to liaise with the central data lead and Black Box team to support this.	
8.5.4	SM noted that while results remain below national average, they have improved compared to last year. Further analysis will be undertaken to determine how far above or below national benchmarks the school currently sits.	
8.5.5	A focused lens on PP pupils across all year groups (excluding Year 6) shows stronger progress, particularly where SEND support and adaptive teaching strategies have been embedded. Staff understanding of scaffolding and differentiation has contributed to this improvement	
8.5.6	SM highlighted that the school is seeing positive trends in pupil resilience and readiness to learn, particularly among those who have been supported consistently over time. This is evident in Year 6 pupils who have benefited from sustained intervention.	
8.5.7	The PP strategy is being finalised and will be shared at the next meeting. It will also be published on the website as part of the school's rolling programme. **Action:** PP strategy to be shared before the next AC meeting.	
8.6	**Top Sheet**	
8.6.1	SM talked through the Top Sheet, which outlines priorities aligned with the 2030 vision. Each section draws on Edurio survey data, teacher feedback, and Black Box analytics to assess progress. Key priorities include: • Strengthening collective working (90% positive feedback) • Improving staff workplace satisfaction. • Increasing CPD participation (targeting a 5% annual increase) • Raising KS2 standards closer to the national average (currently at 70%)	
8.6.2	Some data is still being collected, including assessments led by FA and CM. All relevant documents and links are included in the AC report.	
8.6.3	The OST (One School Target) planning document outlines goals for the year, key partnerships, and strategic connections. This will inform the Academy Improvement Plan (AIP) and evolve throughout the year. **Action:** Councillors to review the OST document.	
8.7	Focus Areas: • Maths: Embedding continues, with the Maths Lead working alongside Trust and Bullaven lead to tailor strategies to the school's context. • Oracy: Focus on Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary and sentence stems. Staff are exploring best practice from similar schools to shape a bespoke strategy.	

	• Raising Attainment: Led by FA, with a focus on embedding strategies across KS1 and KS2.	
8.7.1	FA confirmed that the additional responsibility is manageable. She receives half a day every fortnight, alongside weekly PPA time, and is already engaged in much of the work. There is no expectation for additional classroom observation.	
8.7.2	Curriculum work is ongoing, with the goal of aligning English, Maths, Science, Geography, and History by Christmas. Adjustments are being made where needed, including consideration of additional units.	
8.7.3	Staff meeting time is being used to support planning and collaboration, with an emphasis on practical clinics rather than new information delivery.	
8.8	The SEND strategy document is in progress. The Trust SENCo has met with the school early in the term to share approaches and build collaboration. Work previously led by SENCo has been shared with other schools. The next step is to develop this into a shared experience and formalise the strategy.	
9	Agenda Planning for year	
9.1	The Academy Council agreed that raising attainment and a focus on children experiencing disadvantage will be key themes embedded in every meeting.	
9.1.1	Q: Can we include a focus on creative arts?	
9.1.2	A: this will be incorporated through discussions on people, disadvantage, and partnership.	
9.1.3	Planned thematic focus for upcoming meetings: • AC2: Investing in People • AC3: Disadvantage • AC4: Partnership (including a lens on creative arts and collaborative work with Stanchester) Curriculum development will be woven throughout each agenda, with opportunities to highlight progress and impact. **Action**: Include a focused item on creative arts within the AC4 agenda under the theme of Partnership.	
10	Policies that require review	
10.1	It was noted that the Safeguarding Policy requires updating to reflect the latest *Keeping Children Safe in Education* guidance from September. Although the policy has recently been reviewed, the version currently published on the website still shows a July review date, which needs to be corrected. **Action:** SM to meet with DE to review and update the Safeguarding Policy, ensuring it reflects current statutory guidance and the correct review date.	
11	Matters for the attention of the Board/COAC	
11.1	No matters for the attention of the Board.	
12	Any Other Business	
12.1	No other business.	
13	Date of Next Meeting	
13.1	Thursday, 27th November 2025 4-6pm	

ACTIONS

4.1.1	SM to approach these individuals and include a call for interest in the school newsletter.	**SM**
4.1.1	Clerk to circulate the recruitment leaflet.	TC

5.1	TC to arrange election for Vice Chair.	TC
6.1	Link roles to be confirmed at the next meeting when more councillors are in place.	ALL
8.1.5	SM to provide wellbeing update at the end of term to maintain a sense check on staff capacity and morale.	SM
8.4.3	DE to attend the Academy visit in October.	DE
8.5.3	Data team to produce comparative graphs showing multi-year trends. SM to liaise with the central data lead and Black Box team to support this.	SM
8.5.7	PP strategy to be shared before the next AC meeting.	SM & TC
8.6.3	Councillors to review the OST document.	ALL
9.1.3	Include a focused item on creative arts within the AC4 agenda under the theme of Partnership.	TC
10.1	SM to meet with DE to review and update the Safeguarding Policy, ensuring it reflects current statutory guidance and the correct review date.	SM & DE