# Minutes – Castle Primary School Academy Council Meeting

| | |
|---|---|
| **Version:** | Approved (Public Version) |
| **Meeting Date:** | Thursday 27 November 2025 |
| **Location:** | Castle Primary School |
| **Time:** | 16:00-18:00 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Chair:** | David Edwards (DE) | Sponsor Councillor |
| **Attendees:** | Michelle Harris (MH) | Sponsor Councillor |
| | Carolyn Tayler-Webb (CTW) | Parent Councillor |
| | Frances Abbott (FA) | Staff Councillor |
| | Charlotte Middleton (ChM) | Staff (Support) Councillor |
| **In attendance:** | Steve Morton (SM) | Principal |
| | Tracy French (TF) | Executive Principal |
| | Tessa Clark (TC) | Clerk |

**Apologies:**

**Minutes**

| Item | | Action |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Introduction, Administration and Apologies** | |
| 1.1 | DE welcomed all attendees to the meeting. | |
| **2** | **Declarations of Interest** | |
| 2.1 | No declarations of interest were made. | |
| **3** | **Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising** | |
| 3.1 | Previous minutes were agreed | |
| 3.2 | Item 5.1: Michele has now been elected as Vice Chair – all agreed. | |
| 3.3 | Item 10.1: David queried the safeguarding policy process and whether he could view the signed-off version.<br>SM explained that the policy is approved at Trust level, with schools adapting local and contextual information.<br>**ACTION:** TC to share the Safeguarding Policy with councillors. | **TC** |
| **4** | **Chairs Update** | |
| 4.1 | A brief update on Academy Council membership was provided:<br>• New Parent Councillor– checks still in progress | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • New Support Staff Councillor: Charlotte Middleton – now confirmed as full councillor<br>• Sponsor Councillor Vacancies: Three vacancies remain. A poster has been circulated to families and the community. One person has expressed interest and is currently going through the application process.<br>**ACTION**: TC to amend the poster to reflect that there are five meetings per year, not six. | **TC** |
| **5** | **Academy Council Report:** | |
| **5.1** | **Ofsted Preparation and School Evaluation** | |
| **5.1.1** | The Assistant Principal and SM have been working with TF to rewrite the SEF, incorporating new Ofsted terminology. The aim is to have the first draft completed by the end of December and ready to share at the next meeting.<br>**ACTION:** SM to include the new SEF in the AC Report for the next meeting. | **SM** |
| 5.1.2 | Ofsted Mock Call<br>A meeting was held to conduct a 30-minute Ofsted mock telephone call using a grid format. This exercise helps schools familiarise themselves with the inspection process. CLF has started a series of training sessions on preparing for Ofsted, ensuring that while current practice is strong, preparation supports school development. | |
| 5.1.3 | SEE (School Evaluation Evidence)<br>The Assistant Principal and Principal will spend the year populating and updating the SEE document. This provides a comprehensive overview of school performance, including areas for development, trust contributions, individual support plans, and strengths. | |
| 5.1.4 | **New Ofsted Five-Point Grading Scale**<br>SM explained the new grading scale:<br>• **Exceptional** – Highest quality provision<br>• **Strong Standard**<br>• **Expected Standard** – Meets legal requirements and professional standards<br>• **Needs Attention**<br>• **Urgent Improvement**<br>SM compared inspections to an MOT: if something "needs attention," it is not a failure but an indication that additional focus is required. For example, if a year group has higher needs, and processes are in place, it simply requires more attention.<br>SM noted that **Expected Standard** is an improvement on the previous "Good" rating.<br>Discussion included:<br>• Current data does not fully reflect the quality of work with children and personal development, which is stronger than data suggests.<br>• The need to shift parental perception if the school receives a "Needs Attention" rating. This is not a critique but an opportunity for improvement, and parents should be reassured accordingly. | |
| 5.1.5 | Number of Areas Assessed<br>There are 7 areas, including safeguarding: | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Leadership and Governance<br>• Curriculum and Teaching<br>• Achievement<br>• Attendance and Behaviour<br>• Personal Development and Wellbeing<br>• Inclusion<br>• Safeguarding | |
| 5.1.6 | The team is working to ensure the SEF document is concise, accurate, and demonstrates clear evidence of practice. Curriculum and leadership sections are straightforward, and safeguarding is complete. Work is ongoing on behaviour, which is a strength but fluctuates. The challenge is finding time to collaborate and write these sections effectively. | |
| **5.2** | **Student Outcomes** | |
| 5.2.1 | Year 6 end-of-year data for the past three years was included in the report for comparison against Term 1 mock predictions for 2026.<br>SM reported that Year 6 data shows a positive start to the year, with strong performance from the teaching team and significant input from the Raising Attainment Lead.<br>Current projections indicate that combined outcomes are likely to meet the national average, with an aspirational target in the 80% range. While this is achievable, some pupils require additional support due to varying challenges. Overall, pupils are well-positioned to achieve the best possible outcomes. | |
| 5.2.2 | **Q: Can we see Term 1 data for the previous three years?** | |
| 5.2.3 | SM confirmed that data is available from last year, as the school joined the Black Box data system in 2025. TF noted that last year's first mock was significantly lower compared to this year's first mock.<br>SM explained that one mock is completed at the start of the year for benchmarking and another at the end of Term 1.<br>**ACTION:** Include all mock data from 2025 onwards in future reports. | **SM** |
| 5.2.4 | **Q: What has been done differently?** | |
| 5.2.5 | Previously, the curriculum was robust but lacked focus on essential skills. Last year, the approach was revised to ensure alignment from Year 3 through Year 6, creating a more cohesive progression.<br>Test anxiety has also been addressed through increased exposure to SATs-style assessments and changes to the testing environment—moving from the hall to classrooms for a quieter, more suitable setting. | |
| 5.2.6 | **Should we expect Term 1 results to improve over time?** | |
| 5.2.7 | Yes, Term 1 mocks should now provide a reliable indicator for final outcomes, although some questions cover content not yet taught. | |
| 5.2.8 | **Q to FA: What percentage of Year 6 learning is new?** | |
| 5.2.9 | FA advised that the percentage is small. For example, new content includes algebra in maths and semi-colons in writing. Most learning is consolidation with some new elements. | |
| 5.2.10 | FA outlined SATs preparation strategies: pupils complete papers weekly, review incorrect answers, and identify strengths. On Fridays, they complete a paper, then review it together using a visualiser and a "walking, talking mock" approach, narrating thought processes in real time. Pupils mark their own | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | papers, track progress weekly, and gain confidence through repeated exposure. This reduces anxiety and fosters enthusiasm for learning. | |
| 5.2.11 | **There is still scope to review earlier year groups.** | |
| 5.2.12 | SM confirmed that from September, all year groups (Years 3–6) have age-appropriate papers and participate in walking, talking mocks. | |
| 5.2.13 | **Q: Why was this introduced?** | |
| 5.2.14 | Based on EAF guidance, which recommends modelling feedback and pupil self-marking to reduce stress. | |
| 5.2.15 | **Q: Why expand this approach?** | |
| 5.2.16 | Data interpretation showed a spike in Year 6 performance linked to FA's methods, prompting replication across all year groups. | |
| 5.2.17 | **Q to FA: Have you predicted next week's mock results?** | |
| 5.2.18 | FA confirmed expectations have been set following discussions with the Raising Attainment Lead. Spotlight pupils receive targeted support through weekly papers and one-to-one interventions. Pupils already meeting the standard are unlikely to exceed 110 until all content is covered. | |
| 5.2.19 | GLD (Good Level of Development) currently places the school in the lower half of the trust. Term 1 assessments focused on prime areas—communication and language, physical development, and personal, social, and emotional development.<br>The cohort is very young, with no pupils turning five before Christmas and some not until summer, which impacts early attainment. Despite this, indicators show pupils are broadly on track, with positive trajectories for those not yet meeting expectations.<br>The next data drop in two weeks is expected to reflect further progress as pupils mature. Early Years provision remains a priority, with targeted support and monitoring to close gaps and strengthen foundations for future learning.<br><br>**ACTION:** Review Early Years progress at the next data drop and report findings at the following AC meeting. | **SM** |
| **5.2** | **Curriculum Development** | |
| 5.2.1 | SM provided an update on strategies to empower children to speak confidently and engage actively in lessons. The "I Am" curriculum, developed under the lens of a curriculum lead, was highlighted as a key approach. This curriculum aligns with CLF standards and builds on previous strengths, incorporating the national curriculum plus local history and deeper scientific enquiry to support progression into secondary school. | |
| 5.2.2 | SM explained that visual icons have been introduced to clarify lesson objectives and banners to reinforce correct spelling, limited to six key words per lesson. These words are essential for learning and are supported by widgets for SEND scaffolding.<br><br>Additional scaffolding strategies include:<br><br>• Knowledge organisers (streamlined to show key expectations by the end of each lesson)<br>• Focus vocabulary and banners | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | • Structured sentence starters and blanks for pupils who need support<br><br>These resources are designed to promote independence rather than reliance and can be used flexibly by pupils. For some, this forms part of their Individual support plans, ensuring they have a voice in their learning needs.<br><br>Science, geography, and history were noted as core subjects for this approach. Knowledge organisers are currently stuck in pupils' books but will also be sent home as separate sheets to encourage parental engagement. This will help parents prompt discussions about learning with their children. Further details are available in the AC report. | |
| **5.3** | **Attendance** | |
| 5.3.1 | Attendance remains slightly above the national average, despite the usual slight dip this term. The school continues to promote daily attendance and has seen improvement among persistent absentees. Where possible, late arrivals have been encouraged over non-attendance, helping shift perceptions so that attending school every day is seen as the right choice.<br>Some parents still keep children home if siblings are unwell, but overall, engagement is improving. Yesterday, the school achieved 100% attendance, including 100% for pupils eligible for Pupil Premium (PP), which was celebrated.<br>Key priorities remain ensuring a strong curriculum and creating an environment where children feel safe. | |
| 5.3.2 | PP attendance is strong at 96%, compared to the national average of 92%, indicating positive engagement among disadvantaged pupils. | |
| 5.3.3 | SM met with the local authority liaison officer and confirmed alignment between CLF processes and county procedures. Both use the same tracking approach, and the same small group of pupils with low attendance was identified, demonstrating consistency in monitoring. | |
| 5.3.4 | The school has proactively offered wraparound care free of charge to families where attendance has dipped. Support includes offering breakfast club, assisting with morning routines (e.g., allowing pupils to arrive in pyjamas if needed), and, where appropriate, supporting pupils to attend school when parents are unable to bring them in, in line with safeguarding procedures. Where collection is not possible, work is sent home to maintain connection with learning. Parents are increasingly reaching out for support, reflecting improved trust and communication. | |
| 5.3.5 | FA reported that these strategies are making a noticeable difference in the classroom. Improved attendance is already contributing to higher attainment, particularly in Year 6. Parents now feel confident to share challenges, enabling honest and open dialogue. For example, staff have worked with families to plan strategies to support pupils experiencing separation difficulties, incorporating practical approaches into daily routines. These collaborative approaches ensure transitions feel seamless for pupils while being carefully planned. | |
| **5.4** | **Quality of teaching and learning** | |
| 5.4.1 | Personal development remains a key driver, enabling children to explore the world and develop as confident, articulate individuals. The school is proud of | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | its commitment to developing the whole child—encouraging courage, confidence, and responsibility. Year 6 pupils now lead WOW assemblies, demonstrating leadership and ownership. They challenge what is not acceptable and strive to make the school and wider community a better place, reflecting true citizenship.<br>WOW assemblies take place weekly.<br>**ACTION:** DE to attend next week's assembly. | **DE** |
| 5.4.2 | School values are embedded throughout teaching and learning, and pupils are actively developing these values. Examples shared included photographs from the Academy Council report: pupils digging a World War trench during Forest School, reflecting on the effort soldiers would have needed, and images from science lessons showcasing practical engagement. | |
| 5.4.3 | Conversations with pupils demonstrate strong understanding, retention, and ability to link back to prior learning, evidencing the refinement of the curriculum. Activities shown in photographs highlight that learning experiences are accessible and engaging without significant cost. Staff have worked hard to create an environment where children feel motivated and excited to attend school. | |
| 5.4.4 | The school continues to celebrate national and international events, including Black History Month, Children in Need, and Remembrance Day. Pupils read names of fallen soldiers and laid leaves as a mark of respect, representing the school in the local community. Year 6 pupils wrote beautifully composed remembrance poems, inspired by their English lessons. Pupils have also represented the school in the village shop twice this year, strengthening community links and promoting positive engagement beyond the classroom. | |
| **5.5** | **Behaviour and Exclusion** | |
| 5.5.1 | Behaviour was referenced in other discussions during the meeting. No significant concerns or changes were reported. Monitoring and current strategies remain in place. | |
| **5.6** | **Pupil Premium and LAC** | |
| 5.6.1 | The three-year plan has been updated to meet current pupil needs, while continuing to celebrate successes and embed effective strategies. Key actions include increasing feedback during lessons, upskilling sports staff through trust-led training and regular CPD sessions, and ensuring teachers release TAs for professional development.<br>Additional support is provided through after-school and breakfast clubs.<br>Pupil progress meetings prioritise PP and LAC pupils, identifying individual needs such as daily reading or targeted interventions to accelerate progress. Year 6 disadvantaged pupils are making strong progress, alongside peers who are not disadvantaged. | |
| 5.6.2 | **Why are disadvantaged pupils making stronger progress?** | |
| 5.6.3 | Many Year 6 disadvantaged pupils have been at the school for several years, benefiting from consistent support and interventions. Strong relationships with families have enabled trust and collaboration, ensuring pupils receive targeted help and parents engage with the school. In contrast, some non-PP pupils joined later and missed earlier curriculum provision, so they are catching up. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | This long-term approach, combined with tailored strategies and family engagement, has contributed to accelerated progress for disadvantaged pupils. Mock data reflects whole-class improvement, but PP pupils are showing particularly strong gains.<br>ChM noted that Year 6 confidence has significantly increased.<br>PP pupils are on a rising trajectory, and data trends (shown in the report) indicate continued improvement for all pupils. | |
| 5.6.4 | FA highlighted a major shift in mindset among pupils, particularly in self-belief. Pupils who previously doubted their ability now express confidence in their learning. When introducing new concepts, parents are advised not to intervene initially, allowing pupils to engage with the process. This approach reassures pupils that while they may not understand immediately, they will succeed over time. Revisiting questions after a week reinforces progress and builds confidence, particularly for those with low self-esteem. | |
| 5.6.5 | TF praised the classroom ethos created by FA, ChM, and CM, describing it as exceptional in fostering safety and belonging. FA explained the deliberate focus on psychological safety for pupils, promoting growth mindset while acknowledging that fixed mindset has a role in striving for best effort. Pupils are taught that it is acceptable not to know everything initially.<br>SM added that this balanced approach has proven effective across different cohorts. Work is ongoing to strengthen this approach across all year groups to ensure all children thrive. This focus has allowed other staff to take on additional responsibilities, supported by TF's guidance.<br><br>**ACTION:** Share progress on embedding psychological safety and growth mindset across all year groups, including impact on pupil confidence and attainment, with the Academy Council at the next meeting. | **SM** |
| **6** | **Safeguarding** | |
| 6.1 | Safeguarding remains at the forefront of all school activities. All staff are trained to log concerns using the school's safeguarding system and know how to access a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) for support when needed.<br>SM sends out a weekly "Question of the Week" email, designed to encourage reflection on current issues. These questions are provided as resources supported by the trust. Each email includes a short verse and accompanying resources, with an invitation for staff to discuss the topic and a simple thumbs-up response to confirm it has been read. Links for further guidance or signposting are included at the bottom of each email. | |
| 6.1.1 | A safeguarding report is due at the end of next month. The first term's report was included in the Academy Council report. There has been a minor spike in child-on-child incidents, largely due to improved logging following the introduction of a new safeguarding system. A small number of pupils have displayed aggressive behaviours, which are being addressed and recorded. The system allows the school to connect patterns and identify whether issues require deeper investigation. While this transition may initially show an increase in recorded incidents, it will provide better oversight and enable more effective interventions. | |
| **6** | **Risk Register** | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 6.1 | School risks remain unchanged since the start of the year, and there are currently no significant concerns. | |
| 6.1.1 | Discussion took place regarding aligning audits with Ofsted terminology. It was confirmed that adjustments will be made for finance and health audits, but education grading changes may not apply to these areas. | |
| 6.1.2 | Finance update: Recruitment of new staff has taken longer than anticipated, and efforts are underway to streamline staffing. The school is reviewing the budget to address costs that have arisen outside of its control, such as increased energy prices.<br>A portion of the principal budget previously allocated to hall improvements has been returned to the main budget to help reduce the deficit. The school is considering structural changes and building a case for sustainability, given its status as a small school with improving outcomes but a limited budget. | |
| 6.1.3 | Future planning: New housing developments are being built nearby, including a mix of family homes and social housing. This development is expected to bring new families into the area. The school currently has seven classes and the capacity to accommodate additional pupils, which could result in at least one extra class. Maintaining the school's strong reputation and community engagement will be key to attracting these families and supporting growth. | |
| **7** | **Areas of focus identified in agenda planning – Investing in People** | |
| 7.1 | The school is actively building links with local businesses and community organisations. Connections have been established with the Working Men's Club, which is supporting efforts to engage other businesses. | |
| 7.2 | Plans are underway to hold an Aspirations Fair to showcase local job opportunities and inspire pupils about future careers. The event will invite local businesses to speak to pupils about the roles available and pathways into employment. | |
| 7.3 | The school has strengthened its relationship with the community shop, which is run by volunteers. This partnership is helping to recruit additional volunteers for the school and further reconnect the school with the village community. | |
| 7.4 | Work is ongoing to develop links with Sanchester, particularly in computing, to leverage local IT talent and enhance creative arts and STEM opportunities for pupils. | |
| 7.5 | TF shared feedback from the recent ARM meeting. The top sheet referenced Edurio (not yet completed) but noted the positive feel within the school and the importance of strengthening external links. It also highlighted the need to clarify the Early Years network and consider longer-term development of Academy Council representation. | |
| *7.6* | The school's goal is to bring wider community representation to the Academy Council, including individuals outside education. One potential candidate has expressed interest and is exploring how much time they can commit.<br>**ACTION:** Follow up with the potential councillor to confirm interest and availability. | **SM** |
| **8** | **Equality and Diversity** | |
| 8.1 | The school's approach to Black History Month focuses on both historical figures and contemporary role models who resonate with pupils, such as Stormzy, individuals who challenge societal norms and are within pupils' cultural awareness. This perspective has informed curriculum development, ensuring that each subject includes significant figures from diverse cultural backgrounds. | |
| 8.1.1 | **Q: Who chooses these people?** | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8.1.2 | Selection is informed by consultation with the Somerset community and a collaborative poll identifying influential figures used in lessons (e.g., in science). These names are added to a large pool, from which the school selects to ensure diversity and relevance.<br>Each figure is accompanied by a one-page biography linked to the subject content, helping pupils understand global collaboration and the evolution of ideas over time. This initiative, embedded this year, also considers local representation—figures from the Stoke Sub Hamdon area that pupils express interest in learning about. | |
| **9** | **Policies** | |
| 9.1 | All policies were noted except the Remote Learning Policy. Policies reviewed include:<br>Castle Primary Nursery Fees Policy<br>CLF Accessibility Plan – Castle 2025<br>SEN Information Report 2025<br>Remote Teaching and Learning Policy<br>SEND Policy<br><br>**ACTION:** TC to remind Academy Councillors to note the Remote Learning Policy. | **TC** |
| **10** | **Link Reports** | |
| 10.1 | CTW (SEND Link) shared an update following her recent visit. She reviewed the AIP (Academy Improvement Plan) and outlined current term focuses, including universal support and identifying pupils at the lower part of the triangle. New methods for documenting barriers were discussed, with executive functioning as a key focus this term alongside oracy development.<br>CTW also attended a pupil panel, noting the quality of questioning and how confidently pupils spoke about their school experience. A walkaround demonstrated how SEND provision is embedded across the school, which was highly impressive.<br>**ACTION:** CTW to share her SEND Link Visit Report. | **CTW** |
| 10.1.1 | SM confirmed that the AIP for SEND is linked on the top sheet for easy access, so governors do not need to search for it. | |
| **11** | **Any Other Buisness** | |
| 11.1 | It was noted that all areas accessed by children have been refreshed and improved. Spaces are now bright and colourful, including the hall, with new signage reflecting school values. The aim is to create a welcoming and positive environment for pupils. | |
| 11.2 | The swimming pool will not be reopening. There is a proposal for the area to be repurposed as a multi-games space to enhance outdoor sports and physical activity. Children will be involved in the design process. This project will be grant-funded. | |
| **12** | **Date of Next Meeting** | |
| 12.1 | Thursday, 8th January 2025 | |

**ACTIONS**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3.3 | TC to share the Safeguarding Policy with councillors. | **TC** |
| 4.1 | TC to amend the poster to reflect that there are five meetings per year, not six. | **TC** |
| 5.1.1 | SM to include the new SEF in the AC Report for the next meeting. | **SM** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5.2.3 | Include all mock data from 2025 onwards in future reports. | **SM** |
| 5.2.19 | Review Early Years progress at the next data drop and report findings at the following AC meeting. | **SM** |
| 5.4.1 | DE to attend next week's assembly. | **DE** |
| 5.6.5 | Share progress on embedding psychological safety and growth mindset across all year groups, including impact on pupil confidence and attainment, with the Academy Council at the next meeting. | **SM** |
| 7.6 | Follow up with the potential councillor to confirm interest and availability. | **SM** |
| 9.1 | TC to remind Academy Councillors to note the Remote Learning Policy. | **TC** |
| 10.1 | CTW to share her SEND Link Visit Report. | **CTW** |