

Minutes – Castle Primary School Academy Council Meeting

Version: Approved (Public Version)
Meeting Date: Thursday 2nd March 2026
Location: Online
Time: 16:45 – 17:45

Chair:	David Edwards (DE)	Chair (Sponsor Councillor)
Attendees:	Frances Abbott (FA)	Staff (Teaching) Councillor
	Michelle Harris (MH)	Sponsor Councillor
	Charlotte Middleton (CM)	Staff (Support) Councillor
	Carolyn Tayler-Webb (CT-W)	Parent Councillor

In attendance:	Steve Morton (SM)	Principal
	Laura Liddell (LL)	Senior Vice Principal and SENCO
	Tracy French (TF)	Executive Principal
	Tessa Clark (TC)	Clerk

Apologies:	Samantha Williams (SW)	Parent Councillor
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Minutes

		Action
1	Introduction, Administration and Apologies	
1.1	The chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.	
1.2	Apologies were received from SW.	
2	Declarations of Interest	
2.1	No declarations of interest were made.	
3	Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising	
3.1	The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.	
3.2	All actions had been completed with the exception of including clear greater-depth targets within future reporting, which will be carried forward. ACTION: SM to ensure greater-depth targets are clearly included within future reports.	SM
3.3	It was noted that a revised report format, including a glossary, has been introduced to support clarity for Academy Councillors going forward.	

4	Chairs Update	
4.1	The Chair provided an update following attendance at a recent scrutiny (review) meeting and a subsequent visit to the school, which included engagement with staff, parents and safeguarding oversight.	
4.2	The Chair reflected that the scrutiny process felt different in format to previous sessions and raised questions around clarity of roles and time available for responses. Feedback has been shared with leaders.	
4.3	SM confirmed that the revised scrutiny process is understood to be a useful exercise in preparing for external review, and that feedback has been discussed with TF to further refine the approach.	
4.4	TF confirmed that the scrutiny format has recently changed, with greater emphasis on governors/panellists leading questioning based on pre-shared information. It was noted that panel experience may have influenced the session.	
4.5	A further scrutiny meeting has been scheduled for 4 June. It was confirmed that the session duration will remain the same.	
5	Academy Council Report:	
	The Academy Council report had been circulated to Academy Councillors prior to the meeting.	
5.1	Student Outcomes	
5.1.1	SM presented a summary of current pupil outcomes, noting that the Academy Council report had been simplified to provide a clearer snapshot. Updated mock assessment information (including Mock 4 analysis) indicates current predicted outcomes of: • Reading: 68.4% • Writing: 74% • Maths: 69% • Combined: 68.4% SM highlighted that there are a small number of pupils who remain a key focus and who have the potential to positively impact overall outcomes. While current combined figures remain below aspirational targets, there is confidence that outcomes will improve further, moving closer to national averages and demonstrating continued year-on-year improvement.	
5.1.2	Q: Does the progress seen align with Autumn term predictions?	
5.1.3	SM confirmed that outcomes are broadly in line with expectations and reflect the trajectories identified earlier in the year. SM reported that robust systems are in place to track individual pupil progress. Targeted support includes tailored teaching approaches, structured interventions, and adapted classroom practice to address gaps in learning. A particular focus remains on pupils achieving across all subjects, as differences between reading, writing and maths outcomes are currently impacting combined attainment.	

5.1.4	Academy Councillors were offered the opportunity to observe elements of the SATs process as part of their monitoring role and to provide assurance regarding the administration of statutory assessments.	
5.1.5	An update was provided on Multiplication Tables Check (MTC) outcomes. SM reported a trend of improved average scores over time, demonstrating positive progress. However, attainment remains slightly below that of comparator schools. Actions in place include: • Increased opportunities for daily practice • Targeted support for pupils requiring additional practice • Use of adaptive approaches and reasonable adjustments to enable pupils to demonstrate their knowledge effectively FA emphasised that, while progress is evident, there remains further work required to ensure consistency in delivery and maximise attainment across the cohort.	
5.1.6	FA acknowledged that there is scope to strengthen consistency in practice both in school and at home. Adjustments to timetabling are being considered to ensure daily practice is consistently embedded, particularly where pupils are not taught together.	
5.1.7	Q: How effective are the links between home and school in supporting pupils' learning?	
5.1.8	FA reported that engagement with Times Table Rockstars had declined across the school. In response, weekly in-school competitions have been introduced to increase motivation and participation. Early indications suggest improved engagement from pupils. Leaders recognised the need to further strengthen communication with parents, particularly in Year 4, to ensure clarity around expectations and the importance of regular practice at home.	
5.2	Quality of Education (Personal Development)	
5.2.1	LL led on Personal Development. The school is marking its 150th anniversary, with a wide range of activities planned. FA has been leading work with the History Group, including pupil involvement in interviewing former members of staff and working with the wider community. A street party is planned for later in June.	
5.2.2	LL provided an update on Forest School provision. Following staffing changes, provision has been successfully maintained through external support. Pupils have responded very positively and the offer remains a strength of the school. External staff have integrated well into the team.	
5.2.3	LL reported on pupil voice work led by the Pupil Parliament, including the completion of wellbeing surveys. Headline outcomes include: • 98% of pupils feel safe in school • 94% report positive relationships with their teacher • 89% feel a sense of belonging • 85% feel valued	

	Analysis is ongoing now that the survey is complete, with further detail to be shared at the next meeting. ACTION: LL to provide a more detailed analysis of pupil wellbeing survey outcomes at the next meeting.	LL
5.2.4	LL outlined ongoing work to improve the school environment through sensory audits, supporting inclusion and accessibility for all pupils. Improvements to outdoor provision have been enhanced by favourable weather, enabling greater use of play resources and equipment. Pupils are demonstrating increased creativity and engagement in play.	
5.2.5	LL noted that pupils have recently participated in Comic Relief activities, successfully raising funds for charitable causes.	
5.2.6	LL and SM provided an update on “Castle’s Got Talent”, a pupil-led initiative developed following pupil voice. SM highlighted that the event was initiated by a Year 4 pupil to celebrate creative skills across the school, with pupils taking an active role in planning, organisation and delivery. The event has been postponed and will be rescheduled at a later date to ensure pupil leadership and participation can be fully supported. SM emphasised the importance of this initiative in promoting creativity, pupil leadership and ownership of school activities.	
5.2.7	Q: The Chair asked whether Academy Councillors would be invited to attend upcoming events.	
5.2.8	SM confirmed that invitations and newsletters would be shared more consistently with Academy Councillors going forward.	
5.2.9	LL reported on further plans for community engagement, including the development of a sensory garden in partnership with a parent volunteer. This will be supported through local donations. The project will contribute to the school's wider focus on inclusive and reflective spaces for pupils.	
5.3	Attendance	
5.3.1	LL led the discussion on attendance.	
5.3.2	Attendance remains in line with the national average. The number of pupils classified as persistently absent has reduced from 12 to 10, although this remains higher than desired. Of these pupils, 5 have improved, 2 remain unchanged and 3 have declined. Leaders have a clear understanding of the pupils in this group and appropriate support plans are in place. Attendance is reviewed regularly, with ongoing follow-up where required. Analysis shows that attendance is lowest on Mondays and Tuesdays. In response, the school is trialling scheduling enrichment and themed events at the beginning of the week to encourage improved attendance. This will be tested during the summer term.	
5.3.3	Q: Is this attendance pattern specific to the school?	

5.3.4	Lower attendance at the start and end of the week is seen more widely, although the school's Tue/Mon pattern is a local feature.	
5.3.5	Q: Has persistent absence increased over time?	
5.3.6	Persistent absence has increased nationally since COVID-19. The school is working closely with trust and regional attendance networks to address this, using tailored approaches for individual families. Leaders are confident appropriate plans are in place for all pupils identified.	
5.3.7	Q: Can an update be provided on the impact of these strategies? ACTION: LL to provide an update at the next meeting on the impact of scheduling enrichment events earlier in the week on attendance.	LL
5.4	Quality of teaching and learning	
5.4.1	FA led on this item.	
5.4.2	FA reported on curriculum development, highlighting a recent Year 6 visit to the Tank Museum linked to their Autumn term learning on World War II. The timing of the visit, following completion of the unit, enabled pupils to revisit and retain key knowledge. Pupils demonstrated strong recall and engagement, reflecting the impact of prior learning and wider community links, including Remembrance activities.	
5.4.3	FA provided an update on additional provision to support learning, including a weekly SATs booster club. Attendance has been high, with the majority of pupils attending regularly and others supported through work provided at home. Sessions focus on targeted gaps identified through assessment. FA also reported on a successful Easter workshop, which supported pupils and families by providing structured opportunities to complete project work in school.	
5.4.4	FA outlined enrichment opportunities, including a visit from Stanchester School's drama department for Key Stage 1 pupils. Due to availability, the offer for a wider whole-school experience fell at a point in the academic year where it was considered more appropriate to prioritise continuity of core learning. This has therefore been rescheduled to a later point to ensure maximum benefit for pupils. Transition support has also been strengthened through visits from former pupils ("Primary Pals"), helping Year 6 pupils prepare for secondary school.	
5.4.5	FA reported on the ongoing work of Reading Ambassadors, who meet weekly and support younger pupils with reading. This continues to promote a positive reading culture across the school.	
5.4.6	FA highlighted enhancements to lunchtime provision, supported through external funding. New resources have increased pupil engagement and supported creative play. Adjustments have also been made to the structure of adult-led sports activities, with smaller, targeted group sessions improving participation and behaviour.	
5.4.7	FA provided an update on community-linked curriculum work through the History Group. Significant progress has been made in preparation for the school's 150th anniversary celebrations, including:	

	• A planned exhibition (29 June – 1 July) and street party • Collaboration with local historians and community groups • Pupil involvement in selecting historical materials and themes • Digital archiving of historical photographs and creation of a legacy album Recorded interviews with former pupils and staff to be shared as part of the exhibition This work was highlighted as a strong example of meaningful curriculum enrichment and community engagement.	
5.4.8	FA reported that outdoor learning continues to be a strength, with increased opportunities across year groups, including nursery and reception pupils accessing wider school facilities. Forest School provision continues to have a positive impact.	
5.4.9	FA outlined recent curriculum development work, including staff visits to other schools to share practice and build professional networks. Feedback from staff has been positive, with opportunities to reflect on current practice, identify areas for development, and share effective approaches.	
5.5	Behaviour and Exclusion	
5.5.1	This item was covered in the AC report. No further questions were raised.	
5.6	Pupil Premium and LAC	
5.6.1	SM introduced this item, noting that the focus was on how ring-fenced funding is being used. SM summarised the Pupil Premium strategy, including key challenges, priorities and areas of expenditure. Additional narrative had been provided in the report to demonstrate how funding supports disadvantaged pupils in accessing the curriculum, while also having a wider positive impact on other pupils.	
5.6.3	Q: The Chair commented that the strategy and supporting information were clear and well considered. SM acknowledged this feedback.	
5.6.4	SM presented an attainment snapshot for pupils eligible for Pupil Premium funding. Outcomes indicate that the majority of disadvantaged pupils are on track in reading, writing and mathematics, with leaders reporting continued improvement over time. Academy Councillors noted the positive impact of targeted support and agreed that this information should continue to be reported regularly.	
6	Safeguarding	
6.1	SM introduced the safeguarding section of the AC report. It was noted that the report had been structured to provide Academy Councillors with a clear overview of safeguarding arrangements, including the school's culture, leadership, systems and processes, in line with current Ofsted guidance. SM explained that, rather than focusing solely on individual cases or general assurances, the intention was to provide a more meaningful snapshot of how safeguarding operates in practice and how decisions are made by the DSL team.	

	Academy Councillors were invited to review the information and raise any areas where they would welcome further detail or clarification.	
7	Areas of focus identified in agenda planning – Partnerships (Including a lens on creative arts and collaborative work with Stanchester).	
7.1	SM introduced this item, providing an overview of current partnership work, particularly links with Stanchester School and wider community groups. It was noted that the school continues to benefit from strong collaboration with external partners, including the local History Group and Castle Kids Patch, supporting both curriculum enrichment and wider initiatives such as environmental work. SM highlighted the positive relationship with Stanchester School, particularly within the performing arts. The Head of Drama is a strong advocate for the school and facilitates a wide range of opportunities, including workshops, pupil collaboration and access to performances. While opportunities are more limited at this time of year due to GCSE commitments, pupils benefit from regular engagement across the year, including interaction with older students and alumni. SM noted that leaders are exploring how these partnerships can be further developed, particularly in strengthening the role of performing arts within the curriculum. It was recognised that, while elements exist within current provision (e.g. through English), there is not a discrete performing arts offer aligned to the trust curriculum. This is being considered at a wider trust level, with leaders working collaboratively to identify how this could be enhanced moving forward.	
8	Staffing and wellbeing	
8.1	The Academy Council received an update on staffing changes and recruitment activity. Leaders confirmed that appropriate arrangements are in place to maintain continuity for pupils and recruitment is underway for several posts.	
8.2	SM reported that recruitment is underway for key posts, including an Early Years Lead and a Key Stage 2 teacher. There has been strong interest in these roles, and shortlisting and interview processes will take place shortly.	
8.3	SM provided an update on work to review and develop the school's leadership structure. This is being undertaken in collaboration with trust leaders and is aligned with ensuring sustainable leadership capacity across both schools. It was noted that the current model is working effectively and has strengthened leadership capacity, including the integration of FA into the senior leadership team.	
8.4	SM advised that proposals for the future leadership structure are still under development. Academy Councillors will be informed of the agreed approach ahead of wider communication to staff and parents. ACTION: SM to update the Academy Council on the agreed leadership structure and decision-making process once finalised.	SM
9	Policies	
9.1	The Complaints Policy was circulated to governors via GovernorHub for review and approval outside of the meeting.	
10	Link Reports	
10.1	No formal link reports were shared at this meeting. The Chair noted that he had visited the school since the previous meeting.	

11	Any Other Business	
11.1	No other business was raised.	
11.2	The meeting concluded earlier than scheduled due to access issues at the venue for some councillors.	
12	Date of Next Meeting	
12.1	Thursday, 18 th June 2026	