



Minutes from the Full Governing Body Meeting Held on Tuesday 25th March 2025 at The ACE Centre Nursery School

Present	Catherine Hayward (CH) – LA Governor & Chair Rob Horsfall (RH) – Co-opted Governor & Vice-chair Sarah O’Leary (SOL) – Co-opted Governor Sasha Gruhn (SG) – Parent Governor Lynn Jenkins (LJ) – Headteacher Zoe Wakefield (ZW) – Staff Governor Lisa Waters (LW) – School Business Manager (SBM) – <i>items 1-7 only</i>
Apologies:	Phoebe O’Donnell (POD) – Parent Governor Rachel Caseby (RC) – OCC Governor Services Officer
Absent:	
In attendance	Hazel Sheridan (HS) – Governance Professional

The meeting started at time 5:56pm and was quorate.

1. Apologies for absence

- 1.1. Apologies were received and accepted from Phoebe O’Donnell and Rachel Caseby.
- 1.2. Governors were informed that Sally Purssell and Tia Ouma had resigned from the Governing Board.

ACTION: HS to remove SP and TO from Governor Hub and send emails regarding maintaining confidentiality and deleting any ACE Governance information from their electronic devices. LW to remove SP and TO from Get Information About Schools (GIAS).

2. Notification of any urgent business

- 2.1. Financial approval for fencing to be installed: LW informed Governors that the school would like to pay for fencing to be installed to zone an outside area relating to the forest school. Checks have been made and planning permission is not required. Nicky Jones, Health and Safety Officer Schools for Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) had queried if a 900mm high fence would be high enough and LJ responded that as the fence is only to create a zone and not a perimeter fence 900mm should be sufficient. The contractors are responsible for making checks when digging the area to ensure no utility supplies are damaged or disturbed and will start work in the Easter holiday.

Decision: Governors agreed to this expenditure and CH and LJ signed the self-financed approval form that will be sent to OCC.

- 2.2. Strategy Plan Group: CH informed Governors that now the school’s vision has been determined, a Strategy Plan Group needs to be established to discuss and formulate how the vision will be made into reality. It was suggested and **agreed** that a three-year Strategy Plan was needed that will be reviewed on an annual basis and to use the National Governance Association (NGA) format. All other action plans will relate to and

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sit under the Strategy Plan. The first meeting needs to take place before the end of the term 5 so next year's Governance Action Plan and School Development Plan (SDP) can be linked to the Strategy Plan.

- 2.2.1. RH and SG volunteered to be members of the Strategy Plan Group, together with CH and LJ. It was also suggested that consultation with stakeholders should be undertaken.

ACTION: HS to set up Strategy Plan Group on Governor Hub and folder for documents.

ACTION: CH to arrange a date for the Strategy Plan Group to meet during term 5.

3. Election of Chair of Governors and Vice-char

- 3.1. Chair of Governors: CH was nominated and elected to continue as Chair of Governors.
- 3.2. Vice-chair of Governors: RH was nominated and elected as Vice-chair of Governors.
- 3.3. Both roles will be for a period of 18 months, until September 2026, to bring election to these roles in line with the start of a new academic year.

ACTION: HS to update Governor Hub accordingly. CH to update the school website

4. Welcome to new parent governor

- 4.1. Governors welcomed SG to the meeting and SG informed Governors of her employment background and the skills she will bring to the Governing Board. CH will be meeting SG next week for her induction.

5. Declarations of pecuniary interests

- 5.1. There were no declarations of pecuniary interests specific to this meeting.

6. Minutes and confidential minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2025 and matters arising

- 5.1 The minutes and confidential minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2025 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

ACTION: HS to send approved minutes to CH for signature and then to LJ for school records.

Previous actions were:

- 5.2. Item 2.8 (confidential minutes) LJ to speak to the charity about their future intentions - completed.
- 5.3. Item 2.9 (confidential minutes) CH to speak to SP re possible conflict of interest – SP has resigned as a Governor.
- 5.3.1. **Governors queried** if there should be a Link Governor, who is not a Trustee of The ACE Centre Ltd, to act as communication liaison between FGB and the Trustees of the charity. Although the nursery school and charity are two separate entities, the visions and actions of one can affect the other.

ACTION: HS to ask for a volunteer Link Governor via Noticeboard on Governor Hub.

- 5.4. Item 4.1 HS to send approved minutes of 28th November 2024 to CH for signature and filing at the school – completed.

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- 5.3. Item 5.3 LJ to ask LW to input projected pupil numbers into financial system to see how this impacts on the financial viability of the nursery school - completed. Please refer to item 7 below.
- 5.4. Item 6.1 LJ to set up system for procurement card holders to declare any pecuniary interests - completed.
- 5.5. Item 6.1 CH to change wording in the comments of item 4 of SFVS to say a system will be set up. CH to submit form to OCC by 14th February 2025 - completed.
- 5.6. Item 7.2 CH to publish Pupil Premium Strategy Statement 2024-25 on the school website - completed.
- 5.7. Item 13.1 CH and LJ to meet and update risk register for next FGB meeting – on agenda, item 11.
- 5.8. Item 15.1 HS to amend Scheme of Delegation and send to CH for publication on the website. HS to note SoD for detailed discussion in September 2025 – completed.
- 5.9. Item 15.3 HS to complete summary of Clerks' briefing and circulate to Governors via the Noticeboard – completed.
- 5.10. Item 16.2 HS to send approved policies to CH for signature and update the policy register – completed.
- 5.11. Item 19.1 HS to circulate new FGB date to meet before 31st March 2025 – completed.

7. Finance

- 7.1. **P11 reports:** P11 budget reports and monitoring notes are filed on Governor Hub and were circulated to Governors prior to the meeting. LW stated that under normal circumstances by the end of Period 11 the nursery school should have a clear idea of how finances will look at the end of the financial year, however this is not the case. The current prediction is for a £9,298 deficit in the 2024-25 financial year. The main factors making the end of year finance totals uncertain at present are:
 - i) the spring term funding statement was incorrect with funding for some children missing;
 - ii) no SEN funding statement or Spring Term payment has been received and LW is chasing this;
 - iii) fees have been received but some need to be paid to ACE Ltd;
 - iv) interim payment from insurance claims was less than expected, remaining balance should be received in the next financial year;
 - v) brought in professional services very over budget due to underestimation of grade to be paid at and an additional month that will not be covered by insurance;
 - vi) SBM costs were more than anticipated.

Full details can be seen in the report.

- 7.2. LW explained that there is now a contract in place for her SBM services between her company and OCC.
- 7.3. **Governors asked** a series of questions that were answered to their satisfaction.

Q1. Are there any down sides to having this contract between your company and OCC?

A1. LW answered that there were no down sides for the school.

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Q2. Are there other people in your company that may be able to help the school and does the contract change anything?

A2. LW replied that nothing has or will change with the contract. There are other people at the company who may be able to assist and this would need to be discussed if such help is required.

Q3. Can the exceptional items be removed from the 2024-25 budget figures so that Governors can see if, in general, finances are moving in the right direction?

A3. LW stated that this can be done. OCC will want to see that the school is doing all it can to pay back some of the deficit. CH added that she has contacted the insurers to see what can be done following the legal costs incurred after a complaint was pursued through the courts.

Q4. Is there a possibility of another legal claim from the same complainant?

A4. CH clarified that it was agreed with the complainant that legal costs would not be pursued by the school if they dropped the case. The complainant dropped the case and there are no further legal claims expected.

Q5. Does there need to be a certain level of capital funds before a transfer can be made from capital to revenue?

A5. LW answered that whether or not funds can be transferred from capital to revenue depends on what other nursery schools have done or plan to do. OCC may agree to a transfer if other nursery schools have transferred from revenue to capital (so OCC total capital funds at schools are not depleted). It was further clarified that nursery schools receive capital funding per pupil and it is only a small amount. Many nursery schools let capital funding accrue if it does not need to be spent, however it still needs to be spent within approximately three years and OCC can request any accrued funds to be returned to them.

Q6. Has the ACE nursery school requested a capital to revenue transfer before?

A6. It has not been requested before but it could be done for the next financial year.

7.4. Budget 2025-26: Four budget scenarios (one using current staffing levels and three with staffing changes), budget construction notes and estimated income and expenditure figures were circulated to Governors prior to the meeting and are filed on Governor Hub. LW informed Governors that some money is expected to be received towards employer National Insurance contributions for 2025-26 and that the budget using current staffing levels shows a small in-year surplus. LW also highlighted the following risks:

- i) DfE recently changed its guidance with regards to maintained nursery schools charging for lunch during the delivery of 30-hour free entitlement. However OCC are looking into this and have indicated that further guidance will follow. The ACE nursery school currently charges for lunch and this is forecast to generate an income of approximately £8K. LJ added that children are free to go home for lunch and return for the afternoon session.
- ii) The estimated income from recharges to ACE Ltd is reliant on the 24% contributions for the Caretaker and business rates being agreed with the charity.
- iii) The estimated income from recharges to HV Sunshine Suite assumes that the new lease will be agreed.
- iv) Receipts from insurance claims are made on the assumption of £150/day x 5 days x 7 weeks.

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- v) There is only a small budget of £3K for supply staff costs so any cover required would have to be on an absolutely essential basis. LJ confirmed that she is happy with the £3K budget and stated that in the past supply staff have only been used to ensure the ratio of adults to children is maintained in the spring and summer terms if the number of children attending increases.

7.5. **Governors asked** the following questions which were answered to their satisfaction.

Q7. ZW is 'wearing a lot of hats' at the nursery school; how can we improve the budget and still maintain the quality of teaching?

A7. LW responded that in some nursery schools the Headteacher has a teaching commitment and may also be the SENCo. This can help to avoid the need for supply staff. **Governors commented** that the quality of education must be maintained without putting any more pressure on staff and it must ensure that the deficit is not allowed to grow. LW added that the size of the building is a big issue compared to the space required by the nursery school.

Q8. Is the school allowed to use the fencing outside near the mini-roundabout as paid-for advertising space?

A8. The nursery school is allowed to advertise itself and its facilities but not for other organisations to advertise there. Banners have been placed there in the past to advertise the availability of nursery school places.

7.6. Scenario 2 would mean an in-year deficit that OCC would not approve. Scenario 3 shows a break even budget and Scenario 4 would mean a profit but with less teaching hours.

7.7. **Decision: Governors agreed the budget for Scenario 1 which maintains the current staffing level and is forecast to mean a small surplus.**

ACTION: CH to complete deficit budget request form for submission with the budget to OCC for approval.

8. **Headteacher's report**

8.1. The Headteacher's report is filed on Governor Hub and was circulated to Governors before the meeting with a request for questions to be submitted in advance.

8.2. At the last Strategy Group meeting, OCC acknowledged the progress that is being made at The ACE nursery school and LJ reported that the progress action plan is working well. An application was made to extend the Forest School area and this, thanks to ZW's hard work, was successful. This facility will have a huge impact at the school, improve the quality of provision and could possibly generate an income stream if other schools were able to pay to use it.

8.3. The questions that were answered prior to the meeting can be seen in Appendix 1 to these minutes. **Governors requested** further information regarding two questions that were raised prior to the meeting.

Q9. How do all the action plans link together?

A9. CH answered that a piece of work was conducted earlier in the year to dovetail actions from the various action plans to avoid any duplication. The Governance Action Plan is purely for Governors to improve governance at the nursery school and is strategic; the Progress Action Plan is only for school use to monitor actions and their completion and is operational. **Governors added** that they have a strategic responsibility for the well-being of staff and need to be mindful of how many actions staff

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are responsible for, the inclusion of staff actions on the Governance Action Plan and that action plans do not grow and become unwieldy.

Q10. Is there a set of descriptors for the term 'effective' (when it is used to evaluate an action plan)?

A10. LJ replied that there are no descriptors. **Governors queried** if the Ofsted gradings should be used when evaluating an action plan as they need to be clear in their knowledge of where the school is at and how it is performing when speaking with Ofsted inspectors; they need to know exactly what 'effective' means in this context. LJ further clarified that effective means that what is in place is working well and the intended outcome is being achieved. After a brief discussion on terminology, it was **agreed** that the use of the word effective should remain.

- 8.4. LJ informed Governors that the priorities for the summer term include developing the forest school, focusing on rapid improvement for boys in prime areas (identified through assessment data), staff training and CPD.

9. Health and Safety (H&S) update

- 9.1. The last H&S visit from OCC took place on 16th May 2024 and although clear progress had been made on the items to be actioned, there were still some key issues to be completed and additional items were noted. OCC are due to visit again on 24th April 2025 and RH stated that as H&S Link Governor, he would like to do another monitoring visit before the OCC visit takes place. The visit also needs to take place when LW (SBM) is at the school. LJ confirmed that a visit can be arranged for next week, i.e., before the Easter holiday.
- 9.2. LJ stated that the personnel are now in place to deal with H&S matters in a more timely fashion than previously.
- 9.3. **Governors commented** that it was good to see so many items are now marked as 'green' (completed) on the H&S action plan. LW (SBM) has made a big impact on driving H&S matters forward and **Governors expressed** their concern that with LW reducing the number of hours she is at the school in the future, that everything is kept up to date and running smoothly. **Governors suggested** that LW is asked to visit the school on a monthly basis to ensure everything is on track. LJ added that the school needs to have a SBM or Finance Manager.

Q11. Are the costs for another SBM in the 2025-26 budget?

A11. LJ replied that costs for a SBM two days per week at the school have been included in the budget.

- 9.4. **Governors requested** that a meeting is held before the Ofsted inspection to ensure everyone has the information they require so questions can be answered confidently.

ACTION: SOL to arrange a MS Teams/Zoom meeting between FGB members and a colleague who can inform them what to expect at an Ofsted inspection.

10. Safeguarding update

- 10.1. SOL informed Governors that there is no safeguarding update for this meeting and a visit is planned for next term.

ACTION: SOL to arrange safeguarding visit with LJ for term 5.

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11. Risk register

11.1. An updated risk register was made available to Governors before the meeting and is filed on Governor Hub. CH highlighted that there are a number of risks associated with governance, including recruitment and retention of Governors, managing monitoring and visits.

11.2. **Governors questioned** that a specific risk is not noted on the register for the county-wide surplus of nursery places for three and four-year-olds that currently exceeds demand.

ACTION: CH to amend the risk register to include a specific item on the supply of places exceeding demand in the county.

ACTION: All Governors to inform CH of any risks they believe are not yet included or of any scores that need to be changed.

12. Link Governor reports

12.1. Leadership Report: CH's Leadership Report is filed on Governor Hub and was circulated to Governors' for information only.

12.2. Monitoring visit schedule: Link Governor monitoring visits were reduced during the spring term to allow LJ to settle back at the nursery school following a period of absence. However, visits now need to resume and monitoring visit reports submitted to FGB.

12.2.1. To catch up on visits that should have taken place in the spring term, as well as the forthcoming summer term visits, would mean 10 monitoring visits in the remaining 11 weeks of nursery school for this academic year, which would place huge pressure on staff time. It was therefore suggested and **agreed** that visits for spring and summer term visits are combined and CH will meet with LJ and ZW to discuss this further.

ACTION: CH to meet with LJ and ZW to discuss combining monitoring visits.

12.2.2. LJ requested that a monitoring visit proforma is completed, including questions that wish to be raised, and sent to her prior to arranging the visit. A mutually convenient date can then be agreed and LJ can schedule the relevant member of staff to be available and collate any necessary information to answer the questions raised. It was recognised that governors use a template that identifies the focus and key questions. These have previously been included in the body of the email to LJ rather than attaching the form.

ACTION: All Governors to send monitoring visit proforma with focus and questions completed with the email to LJ to arrange a monitoring visit.

12.2.3. CH confirmed that she will arrange a SEN monitoring visit and also discuss the rapid improvement for boys in prime areas (please refer to item 8.4 above). SG requested to shadow a Link Governor monitoring visit when it takes place.

13. Governance

13.1. Updates: The Governance Action Plan for 2024-25 was set by OCC. **Governors agreed** that a new plan should be written by Governors for 2025-26 and a meeting will be held to discuss this.

ACTION: CH to look at dates for a Governance Action Plan meeting.

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- 13.2. Governor training: SOL confirmed that her Governor Induction Part 1 and 2 were completed when she was a Governor at another school. CH and RH will be attending a H&S training course on 26th March 2026.

ACTION: HS to update Governor Training Record.

14. Policies

- 14.1. Disciplinary Policy: The nursery school uses the model policy supplied by OCC and this has not yet been reviewed by them (review due July 2024). The school will continue to use the current policy until OCC have reviewed the model policy. This is noted on the policy register.

- 14.2. There was a brief discussion about how Governors can be easily informed whether or not a reviewed policy has had changes made or not. It was **agreed** that 'no changes' or 'changes made' could be included in the electronic policy title until it is approved.

ACTION: LJ to note the additional words to a policy title to indicate any changes.

Q12. How are updated policies shared with staff and how is this monitored?

A12. LJ answered that staff were asked to read all policies and confirm they have done so at the beginning of the academic year. However, the number of policies now makes this unmanageable and not all policies are relevant for staff (e.g., Premises Hire). Staff have access to the policies via Google Drive.

Q13. Are staff alerted when a new / revised policy is available?

A13. LJ replied that they would not be automatically alerted. **Governors suggested** that policies are added to Smart Log for staff to read and confirm they have read it. This will also mean that whether or not a staff member has read a policy can be monitored.

ACTION: LJ to add policies that staff must read to Smart Log and monitor going forward.

15. Any other business

- 15.1. Governors' WhatsApp group: The WhatsApp group is only used if all Governors need to be contacted urgently (otherwise emails, phone calls or Noticeboard on Governor Hub should be used). Following changes in FGB membership it was requested that all Governors send their up-to-date mobile number to HS to ensure everyone can be contacted.

ACTION: All Governors to send their mobile number to HS. HS to amend membership of the WhatsApp group accordingly.

16. Next meeting date

- 16.1. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 13th May 2025 at 6pm at the school.

- 16.2. Future meeting dates are as follows:
Tuesday 24th June 2025 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 8:01pm

Hazel Sheridan
27th March 2025

Sent to Chair on 27th March 2025 and FGB on 2nd April 2025

Signed (by Chair): *Catherine Hayman* Date:.....



APPENDIX 1

Questions and Responses to the Headteacher's Report (item 8) prior to the meeting.

Q14. With action plans for the strategy group, Ofsted, Governors, school development plan etc, how does the new Firm Focus on Progress action plan sit within these? Also, how are these action plans impacting on workload for you and Zoe?

A14. Firm focus on Progress Action Plan is linked and referenced to School Development Plan - we have drilled down into aspects of the School Development Plan that are going to promote rapid progress. The Action Plan spreadsheet has been a very effective tool that we now use in our SLT meetings for us to assess actions and discuss any barriers in a really clear and efficient way. A thank you must go to RH as he introduced me to using the spreadsheet as an effective tool for tracking progress on actions in this way. At the end of each week I review each action plan that I have (SDP/Progress Action Plan/ H&S Action Plan) to plan out the next weeks actions - ZW has clear sight of the actions she is working on from SDP/Progress Action Plan and she uses this to prioritise her actions and feeds back during our SLT meeting on Mondays.

Q15. Safeguarding - what progress has been made towards the areas marked 'requiring work' in the section 175/174 safeguarding audit?

A15. 5 completed; 3 to do (2.4/4.3/4.5).

Q16. SEF - how does 'effective' relate to Ofsted gradings? Where do you feel we are if evaluated against descriptors for Good/Outstanding?

A16. Most aspects of our practice and provision are good; some are outstanding - to use the Ofsted term 'good' would not recognise the aspects that are 'outstanding'. Using the term 'effective' was recommended by other nursery school Heads and by Julien Grenier who is chief adviser to DfE on Early Years (he was the lead in writing the non-statutory for DfE 'Development Matters'). We use the Ofsted grade descriptors to evaluate where we are in relation to the Ofsted framework; this informs the school Self-evaluation Form (SEF) - I am due to review our SEF at beginning of next term.

Comment: Noted on two risks that drew my attention: end of SBM contract with risk to continuity on Finance and H&S actions; nursery school supply exceeding demand in the area in the near future.

Response: There is a risk regarding finance and health and safety when SBM contract ends. Nicky Jones, Health and Safety Officer has also raised this as a concern as H&S at Ace Centre will continue to need to be prioritised due to a build-up of issues historically - it is not something that will be fixed by the end of the year ! I think this is definitely an aspect that needs further discussion around identifying strategies going forward. I will update you on information on school supply and sufficiency at the meeting.

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ACE Centre FGB minutes 20250325

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Final Audit Report

2025-06-02

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