



Harlands Primary School

Striving for excellence, valuing everyone and our world

THE TRUSTEES OF HARLANDS PRIMARY SCHOOL HAYWARDS HEATH

MINUTES

DATE: Tuesday, 2 December 2025 @ 9.30am in School

PRESENT: Charlotte Blake, Jennie Doyle, Frank Gainsbury, Russell Goodrum, Kim Lower, David McKeown-Webster, David Nisbet, Mark Pawson, and Michael Swiggs (Chair)

IN ATTENDANCE: Karen Michael (Governance Professional/Clerk)
Sally Nixey (Deputy Head) – unable to attend
Kate Binchy (Finance Manager, for item 4 and item 7 CIF bid)
Kristina Perry (Partner, Carpenter Box, for item 4)

NB. Agenda items 1-7 were not taken in order strict order, but are recorded that way for ease..

1 **Apologies for absence** had been received in advance from Abi Dudley, Will Durham, Debra Hollingum and Chris Robbins. Dave Brooks did not attend.

The following **declarations of interest** should be noted:

Jennie Doyle	Child at Harlands, but not a Parent Trustee
Russell Goodrum	Child at Harlands, but not a Parent Trustee
Kim Lower	Children at Harlands, but not a Parent Trustee
Karen Michael (Clerk)	Headteacher's PA/Office Manager
David Nisbet	Child at Harlands, but not a Parent Trustee

2 **White Paper/MATS** – nothing currently to report

3 **Administration** – it was confirmed that Sumer Auditco (the audit arm of the Sumer Group, which includes Carpenter Box) should be re-appointed to carry out the audit for the academic year 2025/2026, with Kristina Perry continuing to act as the lead partner, this being her second year in this role for Harlands.

4 **Annual Report and Accounts for Academic Year 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025**

Kristina Perry presented the accounts, concentrating particularly on the Letter of Comment on the audit findings. Points to note included:

- There were no material errors, but two technical issues, one relating to how the receipt of pupil premium was recorded, and the other relating to the receipt of the devolved capital funding, would both be adjusted this year. Both related to timing of funds, financial year versus academic year. Pupil premium was funded in arrears April to March, but historically recorded in advance. The issue around pupil

Harlands Educational Trust

premium in particular was becoming more apparent as the school now had a greater number of pupils in receipt of the extra funding. The developed capital funding was received and recorded in advance in line with DfE, but financial standards stated it must be recorded in the period in which it was received, so this has been adjusted as of October 2025.

- In respect of management control, the audit used data analytics to risk rate all transactions, all of which were clean, with no evidence of fraud (as also evidenced by internal auditor procedures)
- Checks had also been made in respect of related parties, hence why there had been a request to all Trustees to provide further information for the Register of Business Interest. The information on close family members was not for publication.
- The audit confirmed that Harlands remained a going concern, with a good Ofsted, sufficient reserves and an appropriate 3-year budget. In response to a question from Trustees, Kristina confirmed that the company were seeing other schools consistently needing to eat into reserves. It was also noted that should a school project an unmatched loss, the DfE would have to be advised, and the likely outcome would be for the school to be made to become part of a MAT.
- Looking at the qualitative aspects of the audit, Kristina noted it would be helpful to have an earlier draft of the Trustee report.
- Looking at systems and control weaknesses, the school website was now fully compliant, and issues around the Register of Business Interests (ie related parties) and whether Associate Directors should be registered with Companies House had been satisfactorily resolved.
- In conclusion, the audit was clean and much of the credit for this lay with Kate Binchy for maintaining good records.

Turning then to the Letter of Representation, Kristina advised that most of this was totally standard, the only issue being around the school's account with Santander where, despite best efforts, the auditors had been unable to obtain an independent confirmation of the account balance (though they had seen the account statement).

Turning to the accounts themselves, Kristina noted that everything was as would be expected; indeed Harlands was among the "better performing" schools of those the company looked after.

Looking at the national educational situation, Kristina noted the increase in the minimum wage announced in the recent budget, but with no indication of how it would be funded. She also drew attention to the white paper due on SEN funding, with implementation planned for 2028. Other national education issues included the general school financing situation, and its impact on the morale of senior leadership; problems (elsewhere) in getting good trustees; and a forthcoming change to one of the accounting standards (FRS102) around accounting for the value of leasehold property, though she thought that Harlands would probably be exempt from this.

In response to various questions from Trustees, Kristina confirmed that most schools were needing to use reserves, but were maintaining a typical reserves position of 2/3 months running costs. Asked about whether a school could borrow money in anticipation of future funding (ie receipt of the lag funding relating to a bulge class), she advised that this would need DfE approval.

The accounts were then signed off, with Trustees wishing to record their thanks to Kristina, whilst also noting – and thanking – Kate Binchy for all the hard work put into the preparation of the accounts.

5 **Urgent matters** – following on from the recent Resources Committee meeting, Trustees were asked whether they would be willing to approve an increase in the budget deficit for the year 2025/26 by a further £60k to £120k, this to fund additional SEN teaching assistants, with money taken from reserves. Noting that the school had no

option but to support children who had/needed EHCPs, a brief discussion was had about how the situation could be managed (reduced timetables, taking general TAs out of class, a special SEN unit), plus the possibilities for extra funding (eg the receipt of the delayed bulge class funding, charges etc). It was agreed that the long-term strategy for SEN support needed a much wider discussion, and therefore it would be helpful to have a separate board meeting in the new year to discuss this. However, in the meantime Trustees AGREED that the deficit could be increased to £120k to provide additional SEN TA support. **ACTION: Governance Professional/Chair to organise extra meeting early in new year.**

6 The **Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 17 September 2025** were agreed.

7 **Matters arising** – with regards to a guided assessment meeting, some data had been shared at the recent SIC, but final data was not due until later in December. However, the school had shared recent year group projections which fed into where there was a need for support. **ACTION: Headteacher to share final data, and also provide information on trends (including for eg EAL, SEN) to SIC members.**

The new Ofsted areas had now been linked to either Resources or SIC, but would need to be looked at again once new trustees were on board.

Turning to the CIF bid for the life-expired roof, and perimeter fencing, a decision needed to be made on what the school's contribution should be towards the latest estimated cost of £940k for the roof. Frank Gainsbury briefly explained how the scoring system worked. He noted that the new consultants had analysed recent successful bids and found that 70% of bids up to a 10% funding level had proved to be successful, of which 29% were up to the 5% funding level. Bearing in mind that the roof was in poor condition, but not likely to suffer a catastrophic failure in the next year, though noting that increased insulation would also be helpful, Frank recommended that the school should fund 10% ie £97k of the cost. This was AGREED.

Whilst it was noted that CIF loans were available at a rate of 5.19% over ten years, it was felt that there would be no point in paying interest unnecessarily.

With regards to the perimeter fencing, there was another potential source of funding, with no school contribution required, via the Urgent Capital Support Fund.

Frank requested that the thanks of the Trustees be recorded in respect of all the work that Kate Binchy had put into preparation of both bids.

8 **Reporting to the Trustee Body**

Resources – the minutes of the latest meeting had been shared, with issues arising already covered in the full board meeting,

Audit – the minutes of the latest meeting had also been shared, with the main points of interest being the lower than originally anticipated (deficit) outturn for 2024/5, mainly due to PTA funding. It was agreed that there should be an informal meeting between the PTA, Trustees and senior leadership team to discuss future PTA funding support. **ACTION: Headteacher.** Issues around the increasing risk related to cyber security had also been discussed, with additional steps being taken in school to make staff aware of such risks.

School Improvement – had focussed on looking at data, as well as well-being. Noting the issues the school was facing in particular on SEN, the Board had a general discussion around the question of staff well-being. It was felt that there needed to be greater recognition on the part of parents of the limitations of what school could do, and this needed to be communicated to parents. This could potentially lead to more complaints

being raised (one previous complaint around SEND provision that had initially been dropped had resurfaced recently, and was in process with the Chair and another Trustee).

Noting the advice to staff that if any meetings with any parents became difficult, they had the right to stop and reconvene at a later date, with a member of SLT present, Trustees also expressed concern about the impact on the Head and Deputy.

Other Updates

- *Performance Management* – an initial trustee meeting with the Headteacher had taken place
- *Safeguarding* – covered under School Improvement/Headteacher's Report
- *SEND* – covered under School Improvement
- *Community matters* – the link with Borde Hill for their new design project was noted.
- *Training* – Trustees were reminded that this was mainly self-led, with all trustees having access to resources on The Key for Governors

9 **Headteacher's Report** – noting that a full report would be shared before the end of term, highlights included the following:

- The report would follow the new Ofsted framework.
- Numbers on roll stood at 454, of which 25% now had some sort of SEN need, and 15% were EAL. There had been 12 new starters since September, of which seven were EAL. In response to a question it was noted that SEN levels had risen from around 10% in 2000, but the higher proportion might be reflecting greater awareness on the part of parents, and/or issues arising post-covid/lockdown.
- On safeguarding there had been several referrals to MASH; the school was also very conscious of potential racial tension in the local area.
- Cyber security was a major issue for everyone
- On inclusion, the school had four children with EHCPs, one new one had been submitted and five were in the process of being written, with potentially up to five further EHCNA/EHCPs needed for children in EYFS. The school had also been awarded a Bronze Autism Award by WSCC
- Teachers' projections for end-year data for Y6 showed that writing was now in hand, but maths needed further support. Projections for all other years had also been shared with the Headteacher, and it was noted that 46% of Y4 had some sort of SEN.
- Attendance remained high, although there were some issues around EAL families.
- Behaviour incidents remained low, though there had been a number involving the same child. There had been one suspension, though a couple of younger children had also been taken home early by agreement with parents as a way of defusing situations
- Pupil well-being seemed good, with active involvement in Harvest, sporting events, children presenting at assemblies, being tour guides for various Open Days, and involvement in PTA events
- On staff well-being, there had been challenges over recruitment.
- There had been one formal complaint (also linked with WSCC, who were being very supportive).

Looking at potential risks, Trustees noted that these stemmed mainly from SEN, though eased somewhat by recent recruitment. However, the lack of staff for KS2 interventions could have an impact on reputational risk if results started to fall back.

10 **Trustee Recruitment** – noting that both Will Durham and Abi Dudley were standing down at the end of their terms of office (on 6 December 2025), the Chair advised that he would be writing to both of them, to thank them for their service.

One new Trustee (Kim Lower) had been appointed in November, along with one associate (Carl Phillips).

Yasmin Shepherd had resigned as Parent Trustee earlier, and as a result of an invitation for nominations, four people had stepped forward; as a result, a Parent Trustee election was now in progress.

It was noted that with four people expressing an interest in being trustees, the Board needed to consider whether the unsuccessful candidates should be invited to an interview (with the idea of one more trustee being appointed, so that the full board remained at 14, with one vacancy being held as was the usual custom), or should they be invited to re-apply via an "open advert". It was noted that the Board demographic was not currently particularly representative of the school, but the priority was individuals who could commit the time and energy. It was also noted that using an agency such as Governors for Schools to find external trustees would incur a charge of £950 per appointment. **ACTION: Chair and Governance Professional to look at situation once Parent Trustee election closes**

11 **Policy update** – none to approve

12 **Chair's Action/Part II items** – nothing to report

13 **Dates of next meetings** (all at 7.00pm at Harlands)

Monday, 12 January 2026 @ 7.30pm – AGM with Members

Thursday, 19 March 2026

Thursday, 9 July 2026

The meeting closed at 11.30am

Signed:

Chair of Governors

19 March 2026