Minutes of CAST Board Meeting held on Friday 6th March 2026
in person at the Ockment Centre, Okehampton from 10.30am

Attendees:	Ruth O'Donovan (RO)	-	Foundation Director (Chair)
	Deacon Nick Johnson (NJ)	-	Foundation Director
	Steve Hole (SH)	-	Foundation Director
	John Cosgrove (JC)	-	Foundation Director
	Nick Baldwin (NB)	-	Foundation Director
	Ingrid Quaife (IQ)	-	Foundation Director
	Alison McDonald (AM)	-	Foundation Director
	Graham Briscoe (GB)	-	Co-opted Director
	Alison Nettleship (ALN)	-	Co-opted Director
	Matt Richards (MR)	-	Co-opted Director
In Attendance:	Zoe Batten (ZB)	-	CEO
	Karl Murphy-Barnes (KMB)	-	CFO
	Rose Colpus-Fricker (RCF)	-	COO
	Kevin Butlin (KB)	-	DoE
	Leah Paiano (LP)	-	Clerk
	Helen Brown (HB)	-	DSC

Decision /Action

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer

RO welcomed all to the meeting and led with a prayer.

2. Apologies and Confirmation of Quorum

JA. Quorum met.

3. Declarations of Interest

NJ Governor at St Edward's.

4. Minutes of previous meeting 05.12.2025 (Part I and Part II)

Minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

Minutes 05.12.2025 approved

5. Actions Summary - December 2025

Updated on the Actions Summary

24.50 Further work required. Link Director Protocol is the agreed current process but note that future changes will be required.

Q. When will that happen? Will fit into the strategic discussions going forward.

Directors discussed the LCB having responsibility to arrange meetings with Link Directors.

6. Chair's Business and Chair's Action (if required)

- Annual meetings with Directors

RO will arrange further meetings with Directors.

- Whistleblowing Policy

To the Joint Consultative Committee meeting (JCC) in March, implementation from 1st April. Summary on GovernorHub. Q. What if the meeting isn't quorate on the 18th March? Will have to implement as recognising the change in law. Q. A 3-yearly review, but an annual review would be better to allow time to carefully review the Policy. Directors approved this action. Directors discussed and approved the amendment to the whistleblowing, RCF will provide any feedback or comments raised at the JCC meeting.	Whistleblowing Policy to be reviewed after a year
● AGM date HB will follow up with the Bishop's office. Directors discussed the need to hold the AGM within the required timescales.	HB to liaise with the Bishop's Office for AGM

7. **CEO Report**

Q. White Paper - How likely is this to come to fruition and can we expect to be part of Mission Coastal? Published in February 2026, a long-term vision to 2035. ZB provided an overview of the White Paper for Directors and timescales. Mission Coastal is the DfE focus on place-based planning for Trusts and LAs to collaborate to improve outcomes designed to tackle deprivation in seaside communities. There are schools within CAST that will fall into this scope for potential additional funding, but further information is required.

Q. Will promised development opportunities for teachers give them the time to study and not just add another thing to their burdened lives? Release time will require additional funding which is a challenge.

Q. Do we respond to the consultation as an organisation? ZB will respond.

Q. Is there a calculus which determines how much time and funding is required for staff? The DfE metrics of Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning (ICFP) can be used to set budgets and structures, not mandated but CAST is starting to use. KMB is attending the Institute of School Business Leaders (ISBL) where metrics will be discussed. Always trying to make prudent decisions on funding and budgets without having the full funding information.

Q. Employment Law changes - probation - I noted the proposed four-month cap but wonder how a probationer's progress is monitored from day one to ensure any shortfalls may be picked up promptly and corrected, or the role terminated? The six-month probation period is only a problem if our scrutiny of the employee happens at six months and a day. Even with the SAMpeople system, it will require a human being to do something. Option to move from manual tracking processes to a system-based process, which will allow for central oversight. Reduction to four months would provide a buffer to allow support to be arranged for the final two months.

Q. If live support is in place, what is the point of four months? SELT will consider Director comments.

Q. When goes to JCC, please make the point that it is being applied to all staff, not just staff in schools, including the senior team is something to be proud of.

Q. HT recruitment - is this an example of a non-Catholic Head being moved out of a role because of that alone? Trying to navigate employment law, a fixed term contract is coming to an end so a full recruitment process would take place, Bishop's law and mission, Equalities Act to be considered, balance Catholic ethos, full dialogue with the Diocese during the process.

Q. Senior leadership is reserved for Catholics? Yes, Bishop's mission.

Q. Any deviation from that? Only in certain circumstances.

Q. Capital challenges - currently I understand we have use of Diocese schools free of charge and have responsibility for upkeep in lieu of lease fees. Have we ever calculated whether paying rent and returning the maintenance to the landlord, would be a more cost-effective option? Would require a national conversation as the Church Supplemental Agreement mandates the Trust takes on the capital responsibility.

Q. A potential discussion with the Diocese? HB reminded Directors that we are all working for the Bishop and this is the same framework that applies to the Church of England.

Q. From the estates side, the Diocese has invested £220m of capital estate to deliver education.

Q. DP and GDPR 117 - how feasible is a policy on AI with things moving so fast? Given this will not be read for several months and against the pace of growth, will it still be valid? Policy doesn't stand as a technical manual but non-negotiable rules and ethics. Feel a termly review would be prudent. Clear processes and systems are in place.

Q. Governance record keeping at LCB - do all schools use the same template of layout and numbering for this purpose to maximise common understanding? Suite of template agendas and documents for LCBs to use.

Q. Attendance - Can you explain the attendance statistic e.g. at 4 Secondary schools - ND - 90.1% with 27.4% persistent - is the second a fraction of the first, or if not, if that group were excluded would the rest be at/above attendance target? KB explained the attendance figures.

Q. SG4 - What happened at the school which failed to submit, despite reminders? An ongoing challenge at the two schools. Both DSLs have been spoken to, there is context but not acceptable. There is compliance issues linked to increasing workload and discussions are taking place as to the level of need rather than perceived need.

Q. Is there a consequence of this? These are internal forms, always reference the SG forms in any letter received from DfE seeking assurance. One external form was not completed until it was chased by the Trust. We have systems in place to protect children.

Q. It is serious, what assurance can you give the Board to reduce the risk of this happening? Returns are tracked, reported to SIOs and KB who will chase. Management letters will be sent where required. Putting a lot in place to ensure compliance in all areas, e.g. Managing Allegations and Low-Level Concerns Policy - have set up a Google form return for all schools which details any red alerts which are emailed to SIO for follow up. AI is supporting compliance.

Q. Are schools congratulated for submitting these returns? There is an acknowledgement option on completion.

Q. Layout of SG data - I am seriously struggling to read text on red and orange backgrounds - can the colours be 'flagged', rather than occupying the whole space as elsewhere? KB will review this when producing his reports.

Q. P36 CEO report - The Trust has already seen "Needs Attention" judgements, despite strong cultural improvements — reinforcing the need to accelerate standards outcomes, attendance, and teaching consistency". What targets are we setting to ensure we meet this challenge? It is Requires Improvement as less than expected standard, but the bar has been raised. The previous inspection framework was built around best fit judgements but is now absolute fit. Need to be further into the old 'Good' judgement. Schools are facing the challenge of a reduction in pupil numbers which brings a reduction in funding, schools are being asked to do more with less. Continue to work with increased precision. Less resource within the system, precision gets harder, higher levels of SEND and EHCP pupils which adds greater challenge. Important for school and Trust leaders to know the school.

Q. Is there enough capacity in the Team to achieve everything? Everyone is working at maximum capacity, need to balance with the finances, and at all layers within the organisation.

Directors felt the Board needs to find solutions to support Trust leaders and should be part of the strategy going forward. ZB welcomed the Board's consideration of this. Need to consider the wellbeing of staff and the potential for fixed-term projects to support leaders. A point to discuss at the Board's Strategy Day.

GB highlighted the challenge faced by the Trust working with six different LAs, and to align with their own processes.

KB thanked Directors for their concern, working in education has never been tougher but that also applies to the schools. If we put more resource in the centre, it takes from the schools. New inspection framework has been produced following the death of a Headteacher elsewhere in the country and a listening process but is now a harder and more challenging framework than before, along with the new additional challenge and pressure of the RISE project.

'It is right for our schools to be inclusive', News Week article - highlights how inclusive schools are punished within the system, but it is right for our schools, and is a key part of our Catholic mission. Always trying to be creative to address barriers to learning for example setting up internal alternative provision.

Directors highlighted the offer provided by the Trust to CAST schools - which supports and reduces the weight on individual schools more than a lot of other Trusts.

8. Review of One Year Operational Plan

Internal plan with key areas of focus linked to Trust Strategic Goals. Directors monitor through the Heat Map.

9. Articles of Association Update

All proposed changes have been incorporated into the latest draft by legal advisors. Process: Directors propose changes, share with Members for review and comment, on AGM agenda, following feedback from Members the Board will seek permission from the Secretary of State via lawyers to approve. Members approve the revised changes via Special Resolution which is logged with Companies House.

RCF's paper summarises the proposed changes. RO thanked RCF for her continued attention on behalf of Directors.

10. Safeguarding Report (incl in CEO report)

KB advised Directors there is further work required on Evolve approval for off-site activities and trips, providing an update following a recent trip and future expectations.

Q. What training do staff receive for school trips? EVC (Educational Visits Co-ordinator) has specific training. Trips have not always been planned well enough in the past; chosen staff are not always appropriately experienced in leading trips. Safeguarding briefings need to be taking place beforehand.

Q. Devon is the H&S Lead, discussion on a new contract? SLA will be due in September. Outdoor Education Service advisor is included within that SLA.

Q. In a position where there should be a halt on adventurous activities? SELT has already taken this decision for particular schools. KB has reviewed RAs and has directed school leaders on the requirements. Don't want to disadvantage children.

Q. Impact on insurance? Yes, it would.

Q. Did the school invite you to look at the assessments? Wouldn't routinely be involved, the schools were focussed on children with extreme needs, the RAs were not good enough. There wasn't enough focus on other areas with the trip which were identified on return. This has been discussed previously at Audit and Risk, shortfalls do not only sit with the Headteacher, EVC training is in date with the exception of a small number of schools. There will be whole Trust training for EVCs in the summer term, and a refresher for HTs scheduled for the autumn term. There will be a review of policy and process around the trip leader's planning, experience, and ability to deal with events on the ground. The EVC focuses on procedural compliance but is not necessarily knowledgeable of the details.

Q. Historical court case, the Diocese Safeguarding Team alerted by KB, great cooperation and daily updates from the CAST team, - reactive processes in place for staff, students and parents. Thanks for the collaboration and support during this process.

11. Estates Report Update and Timescales

Estates reporting timescales were approved by the Board

Needs-based approach focussing on emergency works. Statutory compliance is attended to.

Strategic meeting in February. Proposing the following reporting structure:

May - standalone retrospective paper

Autumn term (Oct or Dec) comprehensive estates report.

Directors were happy with this approach.

12. RE and Catholic Life Update

HB to check if networking newsletter is still produced

HB report provided to the Board. RO thanked HB for her positive report.

Q. Networking newsletter still produced? HB will check. There is a website.

Proud of all schools in the Diocese, despite lack of funding, Christ at the centre starts at the door, the care of the staff is a huge reason to celebrate our schools.

Q. How will the RED be worked when there are class changes? Dawn Potterton (DP) contacts every school and she will provide 1:1 support on how best to deliver the curriculum.

13. Education and Standards

13.1 Update from Chair of Education and Standards

Impact statement provided to the Board along with the draft minutes.

Termly Safeguarding meetings take place between ALN, KB and LP. ALN will provide an impact statement.

Q. What are the barriers to learning that the SEND and Pupil Premium pupils are experiencing, and what are we doing to address them? Forensic analysis around meeting need, investment in Atom and Quest to identify gaps in learning. Significant number of pupils who are classed as SEND and PP. Highly experienced SEND Lead appointed by the Board, SEND Pathways to guide schools, pedagogical learning suite of documents to support with mentoring and monitoring of pupils, Insight data tracking system includes small steps assessments to enable fine steps in progress to be captured and measured. Challenge LAs to support HTs to receive funding and expertise support, transition funding for pupils when schools identify need is supported by the CFO, the SEND Trust Lead supports with best ways to spend the funding. Framework and standards for internal alternative provision created. Three provisions inspected by Ofsted and have been celebrated.

Directors recognised the huge amount of work and the life changing offer for SEND pupils.

Q. Are we using indicative dyslexia assessments for pupils that are struggling to meet age related expectations, to see if that's a barrier? Yes, through LAs but also internally. Don’t wait for support. Internal AP are not primarily for dyslexia but included in the documents and support for diagnostic needs.

Q. How do we ensure that lessons are delivered in a manner that meets the individual learning needs of each pupil? For example, I learn through listening, not by reading or repetition - what do we mandate teachers to do in order to meet all learning styles in each lesson? A lot of gaps but this area is something we are good at, Principles of Teaching and Learning (PoTL) documents produced and launched. Leaders use alongside teachers to strengthen and monitor progress. Atom Quest is an assessment system which manages intervention work but at individual pupil level, the PoTL increases pedagogy to support all pupils. There is a relational approach that all schools apply, knowing your pupils and families.

RO highlighted the Impact Statement which is very helpful to Directors.

Meeting paused at 1pm
Meeting reconvened at 1.29pm

MR introduced himself to the Board.

14. Finance and Resources Committee

14.1 Update from Chair of Finance and Resources

Impact statement provided to the Board along with the minutes.

KMB's paper to F&R was included in the CEO report. There is no update to the pay review discussions.

- Reasons families are leaving schools
- Quality of learning in schools with a lower headcount

KMB will liaise with KB and bring back to F&R.

- Changes to employment rights

RCF paper provided to the Board. Discussed earlier in the meeting.

KMB and KB to liaise on reasons why families are leaving schools and the quality of learning in schools with a lower headcount

14.2 Management Accounts to December 2025

KMB action - January 2026 accounts have been produced and will be shared on GovernorHub along with the February 2026 accounts.

In line with the planned budget position, just below the 1% target. Monthly budget monitoring between months 4-9. Despite the challenges, it is positive to be returning a surplus.

SEND funding. Schools are continuing to apply for EHCPs, some LA response times are improving. Increased in SEND income compared to the budget. This income is off set by the expenditure in providing support.

Q. Being driven by the LAs but what of the forthcoming changes? CST briefing focussed on SEND funding and that LAs could potentially approve EHCPs as the DfE will then become responsible.

Continuing focus of supply costs; absence cover and supporting SEND pupils. The Supply Register (TSR) used across the Trust has a better day rate for supply costs.

Management accounts for January 2026 to be uploaded to GHub with Feb 2026

14.3 Mid-Year Budget Review

Expecting 8 schools to have an in-year deficit. Anticipate that some schools will return a surplus at the end of the year. Constantly monitoring these schools and reasons for the deficits.

Q. How do we expect to reduce "leadership structure" across the secondary schools, when the Director of Education report states that predicted outcomes are "a significant concern"? Will need to be reviewed. KMB is meeting with the secondary schools to identify budget scenarios for 26/27 and beyond, based on pupil numbers which are lower than forecasted.

Q. ND operating profitably and SBC not, or are both schools in deficit? SBC has a surplus now, and ND has a deficit. With agreement from F&R have viewed the two schools together due to leadership and staffing arrangements but do have to report as two separate schools.

Q. Do we bill LAs when providing support for pupils without the income, is it backdated? When the EHCP is agreed at a set period in time, the expenditure has already occurred when the income is received. Each LA sends through a monthly statement of pupils funded through an EHCP, schools will challenge when the identified support is not matched to the EHCP funding and can track this information.

Q. Do you know the EHCP funding that would be due whilst waiting for EHCPs to be considered? Yes, have that information. 151 LAs and the vast majority have overspent due to SEND funding; the money is not in the education system. Capital and SEND are the biggest funding shortfalls nationally.

15 Audit and Risk

15.1 Update from Chair of A&R (incl. Minutes 06.02.2026)

The focus of the A&R Committee is internal, external audit, risk management and compliance outside of educational business.

GB provided an overview of the discussions at the last meeting:

Fixed asset register has always been noted in the external audit. Now have Asset Tiger in place.
School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool (SRMSAT).
Staff being injured is increasing despite pupil numbers decreasing.
Martyn's Law was discussed.
Harvey Wildgoose's death. Confirmed no incident of a child carrying a knife.
Pupils transferred and schools received information in advance.

15.2 School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool (SRMSAT)

SRMSAT approved for submission

Considered by A&R and F&R committees.

Have to annually report to DfE and this is the 25/26 reporting cycle.

RCF provided an overview of the SRMSAT. Directors approved the submission of the SRMSAT.

15.3 Risk Register Review

RCF to check formulas on RR26 and 27

Q. Is the Risk Register Update being tabled at the meeting?

RCF advised the Board:

Two increased risks and the wording. Confirmation that an external safeguarding review has been procured since the report was written. PLMR media consultants are supporting.

Two reduced risks. Pay awards are backdated.

Removed Covid risk and considered a new risk for pandemic.

Q. 26 and 27, formulas do not work. RCF will update.

16 Trust Board Governance

16.1 Link Director Reports

Received.

HB thanked for the inclusion of the canonical inspection grade in the report.

16.2 Lead Director Reports

Lead Director reports to be looked at

Q. Impact statement? Action to look at this.

17. Policies

17.1 Finance Policy

Finance Policy approved

KMB provided an overview of the change. The Board approved the Finance Policy.

17.2 Safeguarding Policy v8 Addendum

KB provided an overview of the change, to align with the Managing Allegations Policy.

Will be a complete rewrite in light of the major changes coming in September 2026 through KCSiE. Good to contribute to the DfE consultation. LP to share link with Directors. P14 query.

The addendum was approved by the Board.

Board approved the addendum to the Safeguarding Policy

17.3 2027-28 Admissions Policies

The determination was secured by the Board, in line with required timelines, and policies are updated to the Trust and school websites. RCF thanked Directors for their support.

Q. Any discrepancy with LA dates for approval? National deadlines.

Admissions Policies updated

17.4 Modern Slavery Statement

No proposed changes. Hyperlink to be updated.

Modern Slavery Statement approved

HB left the meeting at 2.20pm

Meeting moved to Part II Confidential Item.

RO thanked all for attending.

18 Close of Meeting - 3.46pm

2025-26 Board Meeting Dates – All to be held in person.

Day	Date	Start Time	Location
Friday	15th May 2026	10.30am	Ockment Centre, Okehampton*
Friday	**Strategy Day** – 12th June 2026	9.30am	Buckfast Abbey
Friday	17th July 2026	10.30am	Ockment Centre, Okehampton*