RICHARD HUISH TRUST
BOARD MEETING

27th February 2026 at 11.00am

Cotford St. Luke Primary School, Taunton

Directors Present: Jade Renville (Chair)
Catherine Christie
Tim Duffen
Tina Wilkes
Stuart Hill

In attendance: John Abbott (CEO)
Paul Lonsdale (CFO)
Steve Chattell (CPO)
Richard Anderson (Director of IT & Facilities)
Roz Abbott (MIS Manager)
Jess Doyle (Finance Manager)
Adam Glover (Director of Behaviour & Interventions)
Heidi Screech (Director of Nurseries)
Matt Nolan (Trust DSL)
Bill Dunham (Observer)

Clerk: Helen Wells (Governance Specialist)

Directors present, plus observer Bill Dunham, attended a CPD session focused on early years prior to the board meeting.

Key points from the CPD session, led by Heidi Screech Director of Nurseries (who will be moving to a full-time role from September as Director of Early Years) and focused on early years included:

- Early years (birth to 5 years old, nursery and reception) is a key component of the government's priorities for education.
- All Huish primary settings have a pre-school from 2yrs old, but North Curry takes from 0-2 years.
- Early years forms the foundations of all learning.
- Communication and language are fundamental and must be sufficiently developed by the age of 5 to underpin lifelong learning.
- Governed by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory curriculum combining education and ensuring children feel safe and secure.
- Early years provision focuses on planned play and high-quality interaction with adults to facilitate play and expand language.
- High quality adult interaction is a key driver of a child's progress.
    - A key element of this is supporting children with their emotional regulation; to teach about feelings, to name them and have skills to handle them.
    - This looks like a very informal, talkative environment in the classroom with strong adult interactions.
- There is a known link between development of motor skills and learning development.
- Children are benchmarked as to whether they are at a 'good level of development' (GLD) based on the teacher's understanding, a broad measure of readiness.

Signed:……*Jade Renville*……………………………………….. Date:…14th July 2026………………………..

- The government have set an ambitious target of 75% nationally achieving GLD. The trust's baseline last year it was 67%.
- The role of directors was outlined which includes compliance with the EYFS framework, safeguarding, and welfare, qualified staff, staff ratios, aligned curriculum and assessment, equality and SEND.

Are summer-born children likely to catch up?
Statistically they do not achieve as well overall, this is something that the professionals need to be mindful of.

Is there some sort of data/tracking that can enable directors to understand the GLD and related data profiles?
These reports can be shared, but the new progress measures are being looked at by the government in the latest white paper that looks at progress over time, including from early years.

Is there a pack of information that moves with the children through their journey through early years?
There is always a jump between the EYFS to the Year 1 national curriculum, the handover of the information is present, but it doesn't always account for the jump in the formal approach to learning, which can be a challenge. Some practices are changing to address this, for example, with continuous play extending longer into the primary provision. Data is tracked termly for progress against GLD which is available to teaching staff.

Does GLD continue to be part of the continued level of attainment at KS1 and KS2?
There is no progress tracked through from GLD, there is a baseline assessment taken within the first 6 weeks of a child starting school in reception. This is not helpful in practice to class teachers as yet.

Is there any correlation between the age 2 health check and GLD?
This is the health visitors leading this addressing physical development and they work closely with teachers and will share any concerns to assist with early interventions. Some children may be missed as they may not participate in any type of education prior to starting school.

Do you see any difference from those who join school but have joined from a non-Huish nursery?
This has been tracked for some time. Identification of early needs is the most critical factor, knowing what their background is – if coming from other provision the practice can vary greatly with the amount of information they come with.

With many families and therefore children struggling, is the government target realistic to be able to achieve?
There is a staffing crisis in early years; recruiting staff is extremely challenging. The most important factor for children is to have enough high-quality adult interactions with enough adults to make this possible. The government needs to invest in a meaningful way to enable this target to be achievable.

For children who do not engage with preschool or nursery provision at all, what sort of ratio is this?
There will be a small number who have never engaged, anecdotally of a cohort of 60 there will be a handful. There are also an increasing number of children who have EAL (English as another language). There is a disparity between those who have never engaged with any formalised education, they tend to struggle most with the interpersonal skills, with suddenly dealing with many more children.

What would help you from directors?

Valuing early years and understanding this is a challenging area that requires investment to be successful and sustainable.

Is there a role for parent volunteers?
There is a role in some settings, but for early years and particularly nurseries this is limited as parents tend to work. Parent readers often help in reception class, but most important is the high-quality qualified staff.

The White Paper with the parent hubs seems to be a good development?
The focus for supporting parents from birth seems to be reassuring.

Directors reflected that they would be hoping to hear from the Director of Nurseries if there are any ways in which they can help or developing priorities they need to be aware of to influence decision-making

Finished at 10.48am.

The presentation from the session was made available for directors.

MINUTES

2.1 STAFFING DISCUSSION
This was taken as a confidential minute

RHT 25/128-146 *This was taken as the first item of the meeting.*

1. MEETING FORMALITIES
Staff attendees joined the meeting 12.15pm
This followed item 2.1

RHT 25/147 **1.1 Welcome and apologies for absence**
The chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Introductions were made, including welcoming applicant Foundation Director, Bill Dunham. There were apologies for absence from Andrea Marshall and Pat Flaherty.

RHT 25/148 **1.2 Minutes of the last meeting**
The minutes of the last meeting held on 9th December 2025 were agreed as an accurate record. The Chair agreed to her electronic signature being used to sign them off.

RHT 25/149 **1.3 Matters arising**
Directors discussed the matters arising paper and agreed they were either all completed or were satisfied they were in progress and had been brought forward to this meeting or a relevant committee.

RHT 25/150 **1.4 Declarations of interest**
Directors confirmed that the summary declarations of interest for publication on the website were accurate and no other declarations of interest were made for the meeting.

Signed:……*Jade Renville*……………………………………….. Date:…14th July 2026……………………….

RHT 25/151 **2. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS**

2.1 Strategic update

The non-confidential elements of this item followed 3.4

The CEO gave a brief strategic update, highlighted the exceptional achievement of the college in the latest DfE published performance tables for 2024/2025, which showed them consistently significantly outperforming other local and national providers across a range of measure, and highlighted areas of potential development in the latest White Paper.

RHT 25/152 **3. GOVERNANCE AND PEOPLE**

3.1 Board membership matters

The Governance Specialist highlighted current and upcoming vacancies. She asked directors to consider the upcoming appointment window for the Vice Chair and Chair of the Board roles to be made at the meeting in July ready for the next academic year.

RHT 25/153 The Nominations Committee recommended changing committee chairing responsibilities, for Stuart Hill to become Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee and Pat Flaherty to become Chair of the Governance & People Committee.

RESOLVED: Directors APPOINTED Stuart Hill as Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee and Pat Flaherty as Chair of the Governance & People Committee.

RHT 25/154 **3.2 LGB Chair and Governor appointments/updates**

Directors reviewed the recommendations and updates.

RESOLVED: Directors APPROVED the recommended appointments of new governors as listed in the related paper.

RHT 25/155 **3.3 SEND monitoring**

The CPO presented the SEND monitoring report, noting it was the first report of its kind giving directors a trust wide overview of SEND practice and compliance. He described the process the monitoring process took, which involved the SENCOs and link SEND governors from each school. He highlighted that the monitoring approach was the result of an external review of the SEND provision across the trust and which continued to build on the recommendations it had made.

RHT 25/156 He summarised that Huish was meeting the statutory requirements in the SEND Code of Practice. Any actions noted were where there were opportunities to go beyond the compliance remit, to achieve further improvements in the way in which SEND is addressed. Directors reflected it was very reassuring and useful to have this report.

RHT 25/157 **Were there any surprises in going through this process?**

There were no surprises during the process, which demonstrated that the systems and processes were robust.

RHT 25/158 **What is the support and relationship like for SEND with the local authority (LA)?**

There is a significant lack of resource in the LA, but statutory expectations to meet which is extremely challenging when trying to garner support from them.

RHT 25/159 **Has the LA sought to put in place a mechanism to engage with schools and trusts to look forward with regards to the White Paper and likely SEND reforms?**

There is no forum already in place that would naturally pick this up. Discussions would have been in place for months prior to the White Paper and for the LA not to have a response in place ready is unfortunate. Directors noted the challenges families are facing in accessing support services.

RHT 25/160 The next monitoring report will come to directors later in the year and will focus on progress in the actions reported on the monitoring visits.

3.4 Safeguarding monitoring

This followed section 1.

RHT 25/161 The DSL for the Trust outlined how the trust monitoring and reporting process has changed to enable a richer level of detail to be reported to directors. Visits will take a themed approach each term. Directors had previously requested more insight into the data and level of detail around safeguarding across the trust. The data currently shows that there was little change in the numbers of safeguarding incidents at the schools, but there was an increase at the college.

RHT 25/162 He confirmed that all schools have submitted their local authority safeguarding audits, where actions were identified these were being addressed.

RHT 25/163 He assured directors that appropriate checks were in place, staffing and training was in place, and that the key safeguarding compliance areas remained compliant. Actions were in place to address upcoming compliance requirements (namely Martyn's Law).

RHT 25/164 Feedback will be sought from the link governors to understand how they interact and understand the process.

RHT 25/165 Directors noted that it was very reassuring to hear this level of detail, and that having comparisons over time and feedback from local governors would be insightful.

3.5 Primary marketing strategy

RHT 25/166 The CPO noted this was discussed at the recent Governance & People (G&P) meeting, about how to proceed with the promotion of recruiting pupils to Huish schools. The marketing strategy is about celebrating and promoting what Huish can offer in line with its Objects and Values. This requires investment in the marketing resource for the trust to facilitate this. The key next step is to define a catchment for Nerrols Primary School, for which there is a public consultation process required. G&P members noted this was explored robustly at the meeting.

4. FINANCIAL MATTERS AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR INTERNAL CONTROL

RHT 25/167 **4.1. Oversight Report including Management Accounts – December 2025**
The CFO highlighted the school application preferences, noting opportunities to convert second place preferences for September. Other key points included the LGPS rates for April being positive with an impact on the current financial year and which will have a significant impact on the next financial year. Nerrols received a updated GAG statement from the DfE recognising the second reception class numbers for the September cohort. He noted the provisional payment and expected payments to Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership (MNSP) in relation to the transfer of Pyrland School.

RHT 25/168 **How is the boarding provision performing?**
The provision was performing as expected, recruitment looked positive for September 2026.

Is it possible to see a graph tracking progress with age related expectations (ARE) in English, Writing and Maths over time?
It was agreed this was possible.

CEO/

ACTION: To produce a graph showing the progress of meeting age related expectations (ARE) in English, Writing and Maths over time. **RAB**

RHT 25/169 **4.2. Strategic Risk Register**
The CFO confirmed that the risk register underwent a significant review following the transfer of Pyrland School out of the trust. This generally impacted positively on the risk profile of Huish. He noted progress with the carbon reduction related activities remains slow, but plans were underway.

RHT 25/170 **4.3. Budget update**
The CFO outlined discussions were ongoing the Sixth Form College Association (SFCA) regarding the parameters for pay awards, currently forecasting at 2.5% and 3%. Staffing represents a significant proportion of the budget. There was nothing specific to highlight from the budget update, which would be discussed in more detail with the Finance & General Purposes (F&GP) Committee at their forthcoming meeting. The numbers for school recruitment were planned for, to mitigate the impact of any schools recruiting under PAN.

5. MINUTES

RHT 25/171 **5.1 Minutes from recent Trust Board Committees**
Directors noted the recent minutes from the Trust Board Committees.

RHT 25/172 **5.2 Minutes from recent Local Governing Boards (LGBs)**
Directors noted the minutes from recent LGB meetings.

6. POLICIES AND OTHER MATTERS OF NOTE

RHT 25/173 **6.1 School Admissions Policies**
Recommendations were received from the related LGBs for the board to approve Admissions Policies for West Buckland, Nerrols and North Town Primary Schools.

RHT 25/174 Directors noted it may be worth schools reviewing their policies in the future to ensure that siblings outside of catchment are not prioritised over applicants within catchment.

RESOLVED: Directors APPROVED the Admissions Policies for 2027-2028 for West Buckland Primary School, Nerrols Primary School and North Town Primary School.

RHT 25/175 **6.2 Lyngford Park school grouping and headteacher salary range**
The Chair noted that this proposal had been reviewed in depth at the recent G&P committee.

RESOLVED: Directors APPROVED the proposal to adjust the salary range of the headteacher for Lyngford Park School.

RHT 25/176 **6.3 Data Protection and FOI Policy and Data Protection Complaints Policy**
Updates to the Data Protection and FOI Policy were noted, the new related complaints policy was also reviewed. It was confirmed the proposed documents were fully compliant with data protection rules.

RESOLVED: Directors APPROVED the Data Protection and FOI Policy and the Data Protection Complaints Policy.

RHT 25/177 **6.4 Trust website compliance report**
Directors received and noted the trust website compliance report, which provided assurance of compliance in all areas in relation to the DfE's published expectations about what academy trusts must publish.

Signed:……*Jade Renville*……………………………………….. Date:…14th July 2026……………………….

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

RHT 25/178 **7.1 Any other business**
There was no other business

RHT 25/179 **7.2 Consideration of confidential content of the minutes**
Directors confirmed the confidential content of the minutes and any papers marked confidential would remain so.

RHT 25/180 **7.3 Agenda for next meeting**
Directors noted the agenda for the full board in July, the arrangements for the Strategy Day in May would be confirmed in due course.

RHT 25/181 **7.4 Next meeting dates**
Directors noted the next meeting dates: 8th May – Board Strategy Day, 14th July – Full Board

There being no further business the meeting ended at 1.20pm

Signed:……*Jade Renville*……………………………………….. Date:…14th July 2026………………………….