MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CMAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
HELD ON MICROSOFT TEAMS
ON 19TH MARCH 2025 at 17.30

Name	Designated Role	Attendance
Ann Kowalska	Chair	Present
Amanda Mellor	Vice Chair	Present
Maria Stelmach	Vice Chair	Apologies
Louise Gohr	CEO	Present
Chris Bell		Apologies
Ros Caulfield		Present
Louise Gibson		Apologies
Anna Russell		Apologies
Simon Varo		Missed
Julie Richardson	CFO	Present
Jenny Whiston	GCL	Present
Sue Lambeth	Clerk	Present

PART ONE – NON-CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

	Item
1.	**Welcome, Apologies and Any Other Business** Amanda Mellor welcomed CMAT Trustees and the CFO to the meeting which was quorate and started at 17.35. Apologies received from Louise Gibson, Maria Stelmach, Chris Bell and Louise Gibson were accepted. Simon Varo was not in attendance. No additional items of Part One business were requested.
2.	**Working with families to improve outcomes** The Chair joined the meeting at 17.38. Helen Sehne gave an overview of her work which formed an element of the Trust Development Plan and which aimed to work with families to improve outcomes. The following points were highlighted: • From the project base at The Berkeley Academy (TBA), close work was underway with the local Family Hub in Crewe to ensure valuable information was reaching the correct parents. Some other Chancery schools were also now directing parents. Information had been shared on the parent noticeboards, the school website and via parent communications. Excalibur and Willaston School also had links for parent support on their websites. • A parent group, Berkeley Bouncing Babies, had been established comprising a one-hour session to allow parents and grandparents to

	chat. Ultimately parents would lead it themselves and consideration was being given to widen it to other local families. Other trust schools had bought into the project. • TBA had organised half-termly Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) marketplace events which were well attended by expert professional groups such as physiotherapists and speech and language experts. Parents were welcomed to discuss issues at home. • Work had taken place with Visyon (Congleton) on a 6 week programme of resilience workshops for all Year 3 pupils at TBA. A parent workshop was scheduled to help parents to help their children deal with big emotions. Classes at other schools were having one off workshops. • Baby and child first aid training was being offered to parents at TBA and other schools. Mini First Aid were to deliver the training at minimum cost to parents. • Referrals to a six-week Supporting Parents and Children Emotionally (SPACE) parenting course were possible. • Parents were given support with the completion SEND paperwork, and directions to health care professionals for parents suffering with their own mental health were available. • Home visits to support a parent around a child's school attendance had been made in conjunction with local authority staff. • The Family Hub was promoting the Solihull Approach (CE online parenting courses for all CE residents) which provided access to courses and professionals. Certificates could be downloaded for pursuing SEND pathways. • Teaching Assistants (TAs) at Willaston had completed professional courses around child development, trauma and development. • TBA and Pikemere were taking part in the Henry III (Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young) trial, a 8-week parenting programme to improve outcomes and lifestyles for children and families. Families had been recruited, with TBA as the intervention school and Pikemere as a control school. Data would be collected and parents were incentivised by food vouchers. • The Bread & Butter Club at Underwood West School, a weekly charitable Food Club which allowed parents to buy surplus food, had been visited. It was felt that something similar would be beneficial to parents in the school's area and would help parents avoid the need for food banks. Community Voluntary Service (CVS) had been contacted who had advised the need in Alsager where there were no food clubs. The HTs of Excalibur and HS were working on the logistics. • The multi-generational project underway at TBA was bringing together young people and elderly people in the local community who taught and learnt from each other. A group of the most disadvantaged TBA pupils now visited the local Belong care home monthly. From autumn 2025 Elworth Hall pupils would visit Turnpike Court in Sandbach and Willaston were working with Richmond Dementia Village. Pikemere and Excalibur were seeking a care home located between the two schools.

	The project was working extremely well, with a disadvantaged child matched to a non-disadvantaged pupil. Trustees agreed this was an exciting project which would impact positively on families. **Q: Was the home visit well received by parents?** A: Yes, the drop in with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and Cheshire East staff was welcomed during which there was a discussion around the impact of keeping pupils off school. Following the visit some improvement in attendance was noted. • Support was now in place for school staff to signpost parents, and a streamlined system was in place for parents to be guided to the first steps. As a result, staff were now more confident. **Q: When will information be available on all school websites?** A: No specific requirement or deadline has been set and a further update and discussion will take place at the next Headteachers' (HT) meeting to ensure support is signposted to parents. Parents will be able to ask for help if required. ACTION: To investigate the impact and take up of communications around the working with families project. (CEO) Helen was thanked and left the meeting at 17.59.
3.	**Conflicts of Interest** Trustee declarations were up to date on GVO, and no other interests or conflicts with the business of the meeting were declared.
4.	**Chair's Action** The Chair reported no actions on behalf of the Board.
5.	**Membership** The board noted the resignations of Jo Morrow from 25th February 2025 and Anna Russell from 19th March 2025. Further recruitment would be required, and the best allocation of link trustees would be considered. Maria Stelmach was unable to continue in the link trustee role due to work commitments. Consideration would be given to the appointment of any governors currently at local level, particularly any with expertise in finance and risk.
6.	**CEO Report – Part One** • One of the most difficult areas for schools currently was the increased complexity of families with SEND needs. The trust stood slightly below the national for pupils with SEND support plans but in line with national

	figures for pupils with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs). Some Chancery schools were significantly above national figures. The issue of the identification of SEND pupils at TBA had now improved. A SEND network meeting with another trust had revealed identical patterns, with a very large group of children sitting slightly below those deemed to have significant needs. Chancery SEND group were actively investigating how staff could be appropriately trained to meet the needs of the pupils and training was taking place at TBA in staff meetings. The Cheshire East Autism Team had advised the school to develop classroom environments to be accessible for pupils with SEND needs who were neuro diverse. Not only would this be a long term project but funding for pupils did not match the challenge. The SEND group would continue its work. • Two Ofsted inspections had taken place with outcomes very positive for the reputation of the trust. The school improvement model had been shown to work, and improvement at Elworth Hall (EH) since joining the trust had been acknowledged by CE. • Work on the Trust Development Plan (TDP) continued with other HTs taking responsibility for elements to hold leaders to account and build • The Family Hub work was progressing well; however, it was not possible for The Berkeley Academy (TBA) to fully fund it. Schools could repay the cost of Helen's time through expertise. • The Computing Hub was no longer in existence; however, Chancery had offered to hold the resources. • HTs and DHTs visited each other's schools allowing the opportunity to review standards and encourage open and honest conversations. • The Raising Attainment for Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY) project was working well with network meetings and schools held to account externally. CE had approved a second year of support. • The ambition of leaders had been discussed with Helen Gorst and further work would be undertaken.
7.	**Finance and Audit committee report** The Chair of the Finance & Audit committee reported that the minutes of the Spring 2 meeting had been shared. The following points were highlighted: • The committee required additional members. • Discussion of the ratio of staffing costs to General Annual Grant (GAG) had taken place. • The CFO confirmed that the internal audit had taken place and the report was awaited. The visit highlighted that two schools were not pursuing bad debts in line with the trust policy. **Q: Are the debts short term or severe?** A: One is historic and currently reported to be due to a change of staffing and systems. After consideration the school is to pursue them further rather than write off.

	• Plan were in place for the continuation of support for the Chancery CFO. • The risk register had been reviewed and the greatest risk was continued to be cyber security. The trust would remain alert and updated. **Q: Does Chancery have confidence in its IT provider?** A: A meeting has been arranged with the provider to discuss concerns. **Q: Is the trust confident that firewalls and cyber protection are in place?** A: Yes. The system has been tested. Trustees learnt that discussion of IT licences had taken place at Pikemere LGB. However, as schools purchased different products, alignment would be difficult. Apex appeared to view the schools as separate entities, and changes would be considered once there was greater certainty in the development plans for the trust. Reconsideration of the Scheme of Delegation could allow alignment.
8.	**Finance Matters** The CFO confirmed that the following deadlines had been met: • Submission of audited financial statements and auditors' management letter to the DFE by 31/12. • Publication of the above by 31/01 • Submission of Accounts Return by 31/01 Discussion ensued on the union proposal for increases to support staff pay scales and an additional days' leave. Amounts for the increase had been included in financial planning and trustees agreed that consistency around leave across the trust was vital. Grants were to be made available to cover national insurance (NI) increases from April 2025 to August 2026. Greater support for schools and their budgets was being considered including a half termly budget meeting to allow presentation to the central team and explanation of differences. Staff at Pikemere had been made aware of their current budget position.
9.	**Premises, Health & Safety** <u>Significant issues</u> • There had been an incident at EH in January when a child had been able to leave the premises and a Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) was to be made to increase security arrangements. Whilst the improvements were likely to be eligible for CIF Funding this would not be until Summer 2026. The school had had a leaking roof light for

	some years resulting from work completed before conversion and therefore involved CE. • Willaston and Pikemere both had failing boilers. Willaston was currently obtaining three quotations and were considering funding it themselves or applying for a CIF bid. Pikemere were to wait a further year and either apply for a CIF bid or build up a reserve to fund it. Trustees discussed the incident at EH, and it was agreed the CEO would visit to carry out a safeguarding walk to review the risk assessment, the level of supervision in place, the route taken by the pupil and possible mitigating actions e.g. closure of the car park gate. A loan from the trust for improvements could possibly be considered. Trustees felt it important that schools took responsibility for managing their budget. ACTION: To respond to EH to confirm receipt and discussion of the information shared about the security of the school site and request of sight of the risk assessment and identification of the immediate action required to prevent pupils leaving the site. (CEO) Supportive H&S audits by Entrust were ongoing at schools currently. All reports would be collated and common elements would be identified and shared with trustees at the next meeting. Feedback from schools on the new provider was recommended.
10.	**Compliance** Spring 1 Termly compliance checks were detailed in the meeting pack and most checks were now in place.
11.	**Risk Register** The meeting considered the full risk register as per section 2.35 of the Academy Trust Handbook. Finance and audit points had been considered at the February meeting. Cyber security and IT, both red, had been discussed earlier in this meeting. Governance was also rated red due to the need for further recruitment of trustees. All risks were still valid and each school had its own more operational risk register which was presented to LGBs. Trustees agreed to continue to consider the risk register based on review dates.
12.	**Trust Governance** Arrangements for annual trustee reviews Informal half hour sessions would be scheduled with all trustees over the summer term either in person or online. TASK: To carry out individual review meetings with trustees. (Chair)
13.	**Local Governance** New LGB appointments

	Ian White, a former Chancery Member, had become a Co-Opted Governor at Excalibur with effect from 3rd February 2025 and Jo Greenall, former teacher at the school, had become a Co-opted Governor at Pikemere from 12th February 2025.
14.	**Policies** Trustees approved the Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedures, the Grievance Policy and the Low Level Concerns Policy (all re-written in light of Cheshire East documentation) subject to the receipt of feedback from John Cook Lawyers.
15.	**Cheshire East (CE) Director of Children's Services Report** Trustees received confirmation that: • the uniform at all schools complied with the required number of branded items from 2026. • All school had received the new guidance around the division of recycling. • The links to the live consultations around Ofsted inspections and school accountability reform for stronger approach to intervention remained open until 30th April. • Information on the Children's Wellbeing and Support Bill was included in the report. Trustees received confirmation that work was ongoing with the HTs around an AI (Artificial Intelligence) Policy. Schools were currently testing the capacity of AI and a simple approach to a policy was being taken which would then be developed. Trustees felt this was a sensible approach.
16.	**Minutes of the previous meetings / matters arising and actions** The meeting **confirmed** that the Part One minutes of the meeting on 15th January 2025 on GVO were an accurate account and had been approved on GVO. There were no matters arising. The list of incomplete tasks was reviewed. The CEO confirmed that tasks allocated around CFO support and link governor roles were ongoing. Outstanding governor training would be pursued.
17.	**Board Impact** The trustees had considered the role of the schools within Chancery Trust and the membership of the trust board, had received an informative presentation from Helen Sehne on ongoing work with families to improve outcomes and had discussed SEND from a national perspective and safeguarding at Elworth Hall School.
18.	**Any Other Business**

	Trustees agreed that the new format and structure of trust board meetings worked well and ensured more board members were aware of wider information. It was felt important that trustees had sufficient understanding of all areas to be able to provide the necessary level of challenge.
19.	**Date of Next meeting** The date of the next meeting of the Chancery Trustees was confirmed as 21st May 2025 in person at The Berkeley Academy at 18.00.

Part One of the meeting closed at 19.02.