MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CMAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
HELD AT THE BERKELEY ACADEMY
ON 8TH JULY 2026 at 17.30

Name	Designated Role	Attendance
Ann Kowalska	Chair of Trustees	Present
Maria Stelmach	Vice Chair of Trustees	Absent
Louise Gohr	Trustee & CEO	Present
Amanda Mellor	Trustee	Apologies
Chris Bell	Trustee	Present
Karen Fuller	Trustee	Present
Ros Caulfield	Trustee	Apologies
Louise Gibson	Trustee	Present
Simon Varo	Trustee	Present
Adrian Veale	Trustee	Present
Katy Jodrell	CFO	Present
Jenny Whiston	Governance & Compliance Lead (GCL)	Present
Sue Lambeth	Clerk	Present

PART ONE – NON-CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

	Item
1.	**Welcome, Apologies and Any Other Business** Lou Gibson welcomed CMAT Trustees, the Chancery CFO and GCL to the meeting. The meeting was quorate and started at 17.36. Apologies received from Amanda Mellor and Ros Caulfield were accepted. Maria Stelamch was not in attendance. No other items of Part One business were requested.
2.	**Conflicts of Interest** Directors confirmed there were no conflicts of interest with the business to be discussed in the meeting.
3.	**Chair's Action** No actions had been taken on behalf of the board since the previous meeting.
4.	**Membership** The membership of the board was confirmed to be as shown on this document.

	The CEO and GCL had met with four suitable prospective trustees whose areas of expertise included project management, secondary school business and computing teaching, HR and one with a former military (including sustainability) background. All were parents of pupils at four of the Chancery schools. The meeting agreed the skills sets were those required, and **the board approved the appointment the four prospective trustees.** **Q: Which other skills would be beneficial to the board?** A: A trustee with skills and expertise in primary education would be welcomed. Consideration would be given to the appointment of link trustees for 2026/27 over the summer break. Trustees agreed the role of link trustees was an important one and should continue.
5.	**CEO Report – Part One** The board acknowledged the receipt of the latest CEO report. The CEO highlighted the following points: • Schools' demographics from November had been added to the report. Noticeable was the increased number of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs). This reflected the considerable delays in Local Authority (LA) processing of applications rather than changing pupil needs. Demographics remained constant. The LA had been unable to meet its statutory obligations for the issue of EHCPs. • Pupil intake numbers remained positive with a watching brief on falling birthrates. • Health checks had taken place at Pikemere and Willaston in preparation for being in the Ofsted window from September 2026. Early Years provision at Pikemere remained a little vulnerable; however, it was a focus of leaders' work. Willaston would be receiving their re-visit in the autumn term. Feedback from schools had been positive, and external input and working through the new framework had been welcomed and helpful. • The high-quality Whole Education SEND Conference had been attended by the CEO and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and ideas had been discussed and shared. Final government information was awaited and SEND / inclusion (in its broadest form) would continue to be examined in trust schools as part of the self-evaluation process in 2026/27. **Q: Are there pupils with high needs on EHCPs?** A: This is reported termly and was included in the previous report. High needs funding doesn't match the needs of the pupils and each school is running at a

	large deficit. SENCOs were endeavouring to creatively match resources with needs. • The outcome of stakeholder surveys had been positive with some areas for exploration. Drilling down in pupil and parent surveys can indicate pupils with significant needs and this will be examined. Further work on the inclusivity agenda and investigation around the perception of behaviour would take place. The CEO confirmed there were no concerns. • Details of data outcomes had been delayed due to the non-publication of the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2) results which were now expected on the last day of term. All known data had been included in the report. Early Years data was very positive and the LA target of 78.2% would be achieved by 2028. The trust-wide picture with a breakdown by schools was highlighted, and the strengths of the top performing schools would be a focus for all schools. Trust schools were working well within or close to national figures; however, in light of the demographic, schools should work above the national figures. • Phonics screen check results were consistent across all schools; however, the outcome of the multiplication check at Excalibur was not in line with other schools. Discussions with the HT had taken place and assurance had been given that such results would not be repeated. School categorisation meetings based on full data would take place during the first week in September after leaders had had time to consider data in detail. Phonics had been a trust journey over the previous three years. Trust Development Plan The document would be discussed in detail by the Heads at their forthcoming meeting, particularly identifying impact and its evidence. Trustees agreed that overall data was positive and consistent across schools. An English Hub audit of Little Wandle would take place and areas would be strengthened based on the outcome. Currently two schools used Read, Write Inc and three used Little Wandle. Schools were under no pressure to change.
6.	**Finance and Audit committee report** The CFO reported that the summer 2026 Finance and Audit committee had: • reviewed the May month end figures, the detailed budget for the Chancery central team and a summary of Chancery schools' budgets. The LGB of each school with the exception of Elworth Hall, had approved its budget. Discussions with the Chair and some governors at Elworth Hall had taken place, and no amendments were anticipated. Outstanding debts had been discussed with all LGBs, and a conscious effort was being made to recoup debts from parents of Year 6 leavers. • approved the Reserves Policy which would be re-examined over the next two years.

	• discussed the areas covered by the internal audit provided, in particular specific Safeguarding Children in Educational Settings (SCiES) and IT audits. Trustees and the CFO would work together to avoid any unnecessary duplication.
7.	**Budget** <u>Approval of the consolidated budget for 2026-27 and 3 year forecasts</u> Trustees' attention was directed to the document containing all school budgets scrutinised and approved by individual LGBs (other than Elworth Hall whose LGB meeting had been postponed due to illness) together with the Chancery budget. The CFO highlighted: • Two schools were setting deficit budgets, The Berkeley Academy (TBA) and Willaston Academy. At TBA this was a large spend on ICT to bring the school closer to the required DfE standards for 2030 and at Willaston for the contribution to the successful Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) project. • Elworth Hall was under scrutiny due to the anticipated low level of carry forward. However, the senior leadership staffing structure was to change to a HT and Deputy Headteacher (DHT) from a HT and two Assistant Head Teachers (AHTs) which would have a positive impact. • Later years after 2026/27 showed schools consistently needing to use reserves for meet assumptions for pay rises. Details of the teachers' pay rises had now been received. A School Support Grant had been issued which would, in theory, meet the additional cost of the teachers' pay rises. Final budgets would be calculated. It was anticipated that 1% of pay would be unfunded, which was similar to expectations. **Trustees had no further questions and approved the CMAT budget for 2026/27.**
8.	**Finance Matters** <u>No letters had been received by the Accounting Officer</u>. Any received would be shared with trustees on GVO. <u>Support staff pay from April 2026</u> The Chancery Pay Policy, the appendix of which contained mention of the support staff pay rise, was not due for review at this point. The last and final pay rise had been put forward by the National Joint Council (NJC) at 3.3% which had not been accepted by the unions. The ensuing ballot was due to close on 6th or 7th August. Currently no staff pay rises had been paid. The CFO requested approval of the payment of 3.3% to support staff from September 2026 salary to avoid any difficulties for staff. Staff would be alerted to the reason for and amount of the payment, and any owing back pay from

	April would be paid once agreement had been reached. This decision was approved. Ann Kowalska and Simon Varo joined the meeting at 18.06. **Murray Smith were confirmed as Chancery external auditors for 2026/27.**
9.	**Premises, Health and Safety** There were currently no <u>significant Health and Safety issues.</u> <u>Outcome of CIF bids</u> The <u>Excalibur</u> bid had gone to appeal. **Q: What is the likelihood of being successful at appeal?** A: It is a long process, and bids are ranked in terms of priority of need and urgency. The reason for the lack of success had been the administration of the bid, namely a lack of detail on cash flow, surveys and other areas which had been the remit of E3Cube. The roof situation is high priority for the school, and alternatives could be an urgent capital grant from the DfE to cover the most severe areas or alternatively a loan from within Chancery. Trustees would be kept updated around the roof situation at Excalibur. <u>Willaston School</u> had received agreement in principle for a ground source pump and the replacement of the heating system. Time for the completion of the project was expected to be two years, with survey work to start in the coming weeks. This bid from <u>Elworth Hall</u> for work relating to safeguarding and fencing had been approved, and work was to take place by the end of January. Trustees received confirmation that bids were considered on an individual not a trust basis.
10.	**Estates Vision and Strategy Update** <u>Assurance aide-memoire</u> The estates vision and strategy had been produced in autumn 2023 and was now due for review. From the autumn term the trust would be required to provide the DfE with an additional estates report, the format of which was currently unknown. The change was anticipated to be a shift from compliance to assurance at board level e.g. the inclusion of elements such as trust sustainability. A return via a portal would be required. CIF funding would cease to exist 2027/28, and it was thought that the preparedness demonstrated on the portal, budgets, compliance and the safety of sites could determine funding. The document presented was the work of a company working with trusts around compliance and estates and contained questions for boards to ask. The CFO and GCL had begun work on the document to

	identify areas of focus for Chancery. Discussion outcomes could feed into estates strategy for the autumn term. Other reforms were imminent but detail was currently scarce. Trustees felt that the many areas denoted green and the absence of red areas was positive. **Q: Should the trust have an Asset Management Plan?** A: This will be a focus over the summer. Some IT asset registers sit with Apex currently, there is a Fixed Asset Register and schools have inventories. **Q: Should the trust consider greater centralisation?** A: The balance of autonomy versus centralisation is under consideration as are links to the Reserves Policy. Key priorities identified could become a strand on the Trust Development Plan. Trustees learnt that this would remain a working document until autumn 2026 when the estates strategy and vision would need to be reviewed. **Q: Is a sub-committee / working party required?** A: This will be considered over the summer and will be brought to the autumn board meeting. A focus on what will make the biggest difference could be taken. Currently, trusts comprising five or more schools with 3000 pupils qualify for school capital allocation for distribution within the trust. The situation was very uncertain.
11.	**Compliance** A summary of the compliance checks completed over the last term had been included in the meeting pack. The trust had moved to Smartlog which had been welcomed by schools and staff. Schools less advanced with the move were an area of focus currently. Smartlog was monitored by the GCL, and a formal deadline was under consideration. Schools would be made aware of areas for focus. Jenny was thanked for her excellent compliance work.
12.	**Risk Register** There had been few changes to the document detailing risks assigned to the Full Board. The following areas were highlighted: • Work on AI was ongoing and the trust approach to smartphones would be added into the risk register. Secondary schools had clear policies with phones to be placed in cases when in school, and parental education would be necessary, particularly around the need for primary

	pupils to have smartphones. Discussions would take place with HTs. Trustees agreed the education of parents would be necessary, and the message of pupils not needing smartphones, as delivered by the Cheshire Crime Commissioner, would be crucial. • Trustees with experience recommended that steps towards greater cyber security should be taken at an increased pace in light of the possible consequences of a cyber-attack. **Q: Do external penetration tests take place?** A: They can be considered. Apex are the company who handle IT across all schools. ACTION: To investigate the existence of backups in place for Apex. (GCL) Trustees requested regular review of the document and consideration of items and mitigations. The CEO confirmed that the trust used the Microsoft Copilot Education AI brand and training across the trust on Copilot was scheduled for the autumn term. Other systems could be explored. Trustees expressed concern about potential sustainability issues around AI use.
13.	**Local Governance** The allocation of link trustees to schools was to be reviewed in September and trustees were currently expected to attend two meetings per year. It was proposed that the CEO should attend and take a lead on HT performance management in 2026/27. Representation from the central team at LGB meetings was being considered. There had been many changes in staff and parent governors. Pikemere currently had a vacancy for a parent governor and Willaston had a staff governor vacancy. Three expressions of interest in becoming a governor had been received, two of which were to be taken forwards. The number of governors at Elworth Hall, Willaston Academy and The Berkeley remained low and new applicants were still sought. Many applicants had wished to become a governor at their child's school and the balance of parents on each board had been considered.
14.	**Policies** **Trustees approved the Complaints Procedure.** The Code of Conduct (governance) contained one minor change only and now included reference to confidentiality of papers and electronic systems.

	The document would be re-signed in September by all governors and trustees. **Trustees approved the Code of Conduct.** The new Governor Recruitment and Induction Procedure would be brought to the September meeting for approval after changes had been made. The Scheme of Delegation for 2026-27 included a small number of minor changes e.g. the required attendees at HT performance management meetings. **Trustees approved the amended Scheme of Delegation for 2026/27.**
15.	**CE Directors report** The document had been received late in the term. The Best Practice for Governors document, whilst good, was highly detailed. Based on feedback, further work by the CEO and GCL over the summer would be done to identify a Chancery way of working with it, to deliver the level of accountability needed. Whilst the content was valid and relevant, management of the document was required.
16.	**Minutes of the previous meetings / matters arising and actions** The meeting **confirmed** that the Part One minutes of the meeting on 20th May 2026 on GVO were an accurate account and approved them. There were no matters arising and any incomplete tasks would be addressed. Trustees were requested to continue to share governor recruitment information. The Chair confirmed that she, the CEO and the Chair of the LGB at The Berkeley Academy had met to discuss the continuation of the CEO's dual role as CEO and HT of the school. A letter had subsequently been sent to apologise for the tardiness of the review, and also to request the continuation of the dual role subject to a twice yearly review. The CEO's pastoral care was a priority.
17.	**Any Other Business** There was no further business to discuss.
18.	**Meeting dates** It was agreed that a poll would be carried out to ascertain the best day / dates for meetings in 2026/27. Finance & Audit Committee meetings were proposed as: • 25 November 2026 • 24 February 2027 • 30 June 2027

The Part One meeting closed at 18.53.