



**Draft minutes of the Governing Body (GB) meeting
of Archbishop Runcie First School
Wednesday 9 April 2025**

Present:

Sarah Pickett (Chair)
Molly Allan, Paul Baker, Fatima Begum, Diana Lavin, Rae Lowe, Sarah MacRae,
Kate Massey (Headteacher), Cecilia Pacitti, Lonie Sebahg and Andrew Shipton

Quorum

Governors in post: 13; quorum: 7; governors present: 11

In Attendance:

Claire Hepple ~ Clerk, Governor Services

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed governors to the meeting at 5.34pm. Rev Andrew Shipton offered an opening prayer.

There were no apologies received. Greg Farrell and Katie Hogg were absent.

2. Declaration of interests.

Circulated:

- Declaration of business and pecuniary interests form 2024 - 2025

There were no declarations of interest in the business of the meeting.

3. Identification of any additional / urgent items not on the agenda.

The Chair informed governors that arrangements to handle a recently received complaint would be covered at Item 17, Any other business.

The Headteacher hoped to arrange permanent exclusion training for governors; this would be discussed later in the meeting, Item 7.

4. GB membership and appointments update

Local Authority Governor vacancy

The Chair would contact someone who may wish to join the GB as an LA Governor. It was noted that James Lewis from the Diocese may become the school's new School Improvement Partner and it would therefore be inappropriate for him to join the GB.

Action: Chair

Foundation Governor

Sarah Pickett's term of office as a Foundation Governor would end on 8 September 2025. Sarah advised that after twelve years as a governor and with a busy work schedule she was unable to commit the time to continue as a governor. Sarah would chair the summer term GB meeting; it was hoped that a new Chair would be elected at that meeting which would enable time for handover during the summer. Governors were invited to speak with Sarah Pickett or Sarah MacRae if they wished to be considered as a future Chair or Vice-Chair.

Co-opted Governor

Lonie Sebagh would relocate to Switzerland in September and advised that she was happy to step down or continue to attend meetings virtually. Governors **agreed** that they were happy for Lonie to trial a virtual approach which would be reviewed after six months. It was noted that committee meetings were, in any case, held online.

Succession planning

Governors had been asked to consider whether they wished to step up as Chair or Vice-Chair.

5. Draft minutes of the previous GB meetings

Circulated:

- GB draft minutes, 20 November 2024 and 17 February 2025

Draft minutes of 20 November 2024 and 17 February 2025 were **approved** as true records. A confidential item from 20 November 2024 was tabled and **approved** without further update.

Matters arising from the above minutes

GB membership and appointments update (page 2)

It was previously noted that the Chair would contact a prospective LA Governor.

Draft minutes of the previous GB meetings (pages 2 and 3)

- Governors confirmed that they had registered on the Clennell Education Solutions website; F Begum would register.

Action: F Begum

- A SEND governor monitoring visit report would be circulated for the GB meeting in July.

Action carried forward: Headteacher, M Allan and S MacRae

- Rae Lowe, School Business Manager, confirmed that all governors had returned completed confirmation of safeguarding forms.
- The Clerk advised that approval for offset requests may be made at committee level, via email to the full GB or at a GB meeting.

Reports from committees, link visits and training (page 6)

Rae Lowe had sent Greg Farrell a link to safeguarding refresher training and Greg had informed the Headteacher that he had watched the training.

Policies (pages 7 and 8)

All actions for this item had been completed.

6. Headteacher's report and school improvement

Circulated:

- Headteacher's report to the GB, spring 2025, report date 27 March 2025
- Diocese Jet Secondment: Attendance
- School Development Plan 2024 – 2025
- Inspection Data Summary Report (IDSR), 2023 – 2024
- Local Authority Data Check 2023 – 2024
- School Improvement Partners report, 28 January 2025
- Education Gateshead Note of Visit, 25 March 2025
- Church of England, Jet Secondment, Attendance
- All Saints' Annual Report Contribution from ARFS, March 2025

Headteacher's report

The Headteacher drew governors' attention to the following points:

- A tabled updated version of the Headteacher's report which included admission numbers.
- The budget for 2025 – 2026 was very tight and a staff member whose fixed term contract had ended had left the school.
- A Higher Level Teaching Assistant post advertised in the autumn term had attracted no applicants. The post would be readvertised for recruitment for September.
- Another class teacher was required and reorganisation of current staff was being looked at.
- The school is currently full and Nursery was full. Forecasted pupil numbers for Reception, September 2025, are low due to a low birth rate. The upcoming Nursery was a potentially a higher high birth year as Nursery is almost full for Sept 2025.
- Only 15 first choice applications had been received. It was noted that the latest Ofsted report had not been published until after the Reception application deadline. The budget had been set for 28 pupils in Reception. Rae Lowe advised that the budget for the next financial year would be based upon the October census pupil numbers.
- Extra-curricular activities were detailed on page 5 of the report. As the weather improved, school hoped to organise more external activities as there was demand for this. **The Chair asked about contingency plans for rainy weather** and was advised that activities may take place in the hall and After School Club (wraparound) could use the library or other areas of school.
- Next academic year, only Year 4 pupils would attend swimming lessons, budget allowing. Parents had not been pleased by the cessation of swimming for Year 3 pupils. It was noted that Year 6 pupils should be able to swim a distance of over 25 metres competently, confidently and proficiently but that GCMS do not take pupils swimming so it falls to first schools to offer this opportunity
- Attendance data was provided on page 6. An asterisk denoted figures that included a pupil who had been permanently excluded from the school.
- Referring to the Jet Secondment report on attendance, the author had stated that 'effective relationships are pivotal to the work of the school.' The Headteacher had spoken of the usefulness of different approaches and how the school offered a nurturing approach whereas Clennell Education Solutions made home visits and brought pupils into school. It was very helpful to have separation of roles. The Chair commented upon the powerfulness and impact of those strategies on attendance rates which were clearly working.

- A first permanent exclusion of a pupil had taken place this term and the Headteacher noted that whilst there was training available for Headteachers from the LA, practice had been very different. The Headteacher advised that the Diocese had been supportive and had delivered training for Headteachers and senior leaders which she felt would also be useful for governors. The Chair agreed that the Diocese had been very helpful and had offered free legal support. Much work had been required of the governor panel convened to review the permanent exclusion and governors were thanked for their participation in this difficult task. The level of questioning needed to be carefully documented. It was noted that Governor Services had provided good support to the panel.

Parents had requested that an Independent Review Panel be held; this would take place the following day attended by Sarah MacRae (a member of the governor panel), the Headteacher and SENCo.

The Headteacher advised that she had fed back to the LA and had met with the LA Head of Educational Development and Inclusion and the LA Social Emotional and Mental Health team regarding the experience. The Clerk would contact the LA Service Improvement Lead to arrange governor training on the process.

Action: Clerk

- A Diocesan package for school improvement had been purchased at a cost of £1,500 for three visits which was significantly cheaper than the SLA offered by Gateshead. This was felt to be a sensible option given the tight budget and the school was post Ofsted.
- Rae Lowe had organised a Mothering Sunday Cream Tea which had been much complimented.
- Complimentary comments from parents of prospective pupils had been received about the warmth of the school website and the feeling of love from the first interaction with school.
- News was awaited about a bid for £28,698 of School Condition Allocation (SCA) funding for fencing and paving.
- Lettings offered a potential income stream. A French school held on Saturdays had recently contacted Rae Lowe and investigations into the viability of holding language classes in school would take place. A Lettings Manager or Management Company may be required as this did not fall under the Caretaker's remit. The Headteacher advised that school premises would not be let for children's parties; it was important to be selective about use of school premises to ensure they were taken care of. **A governor noted lots of demand for dance groups and bridge clubs.** Rae Lowe observed that many locks on doors made it easier to secure the school. **A governor asked about insurance** and was advised that school had insurance and any groups using the premises would have their own insurance. The FSP Committee would explore lettings in greater detail.

Action: FSP Committee

- Numbers of children attending after school Wraparound had decreased which was linked to more parents working at home. Staggered pricing and collection times would be put in place after the Easter holiday.
- The cost of school meals had increased to £3. Schools received £2.58 for Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) which meant that schools subsidised the shortfall. The catering Service Level Agreement cost £67,000 and the Headteacher regarded menus provided as poor.

- The budget for 2025 – 2026 nearly balanced. Many SLAs had been cut including Governor Services clerking; only GB meetings and not committee meetings would be clerked. In the past, a member of the TLA Committee had clerked the FSP Committee and vice versa. In future, Chairs of each committee would be responsible for compiling agendas and documents. The ASK Educational Psychology service was unaffordable. The PE SLA had ended.
- A letter on behalf of schools in the Gosforth Schools' Trust (GST) had been sent to the LA Head of SEND and LA Head of Educational Development and Inclusion regarding the difficult budgetary situation and daily struggles faced by schools. Both LA representatives would attend the next GST Board meeting.
- The annual report sent to All Saints' had been included in papers circulated to governors.

Progress on School Development Plan (SDP) priorities

Areas for development identified by Ofsted and Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) had been incorporated into the School Development Plan. The school's former School Improvement Partner had advised that other than these additions, SDP content should remain unchanged.

IDSR priorities

The Chair observed that the IDSR recorded percentage of pupils with EHCPs as 4.1% (above average) and that the percentage of pupils categorised as FSM6 was close to average.

LA data check 2023 – 2024

The school had ranked third place for Good Level of Development out of 72 schools in the city in 2023 - 2024.

SIP report to governors

Two School Improvement Partner reports had been received this term. These were shared with governors.

7. Reports from committees, link visits and training

Circulated:

- Finance Staffing and Premises Committee meeting minutes, 13 January and 5 February 2025
- Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee meeting minutes, 5 March 2025
- Governor visit report on Worship Council by P Baker, 19 March 2025

a) Finance Staffing and Premises Committee meeting minutes

Lonie Sebahg, Chair of the FSP Committee, advised that the Committee had met in January to discuss the budget and hear broad messages. The Committee had met again in February, chaired by Sarah Pickett, and received more detail about SLAs. A further meeting would take place the following day. Rae Lowe advised that a balanced budget was required to be submitted by 31 May 2025. The Headteacher added that it had been hard to set a balanced budget this year. An extraordinary meeting of the GB would be held on 21 May to approve the budget.

b) Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee meeting minutes

Sarah MacRae, Chair of the TLA Committee, advised that the Ofsted report had been discussed. The SENCo had talked about work on careers and impact of this work on

pupils would be reviewed. Attendance, safeguarding and policies had been discussed. It was hoped to increase uptake of e-safety sessions by parents and different ways to engage more parents, for example, for ten minutes before a nativity play, were suggested.

c) Governor visit reports

Paul Baker had enjoyed meeting pupils who had articulated their views about the Mothering Sunday service. The Headteacher noted that this would help to give pupils a sense of purpose and it was lovely for pupils to have an audience. Pupils recorded what they had enjoyed and what they wanted to do in a book.

d) Feedback from training

Molly Allan advised that she had undertaken Safeguarding training. She had also attended Understanding school finances training on 6 February 2025.

8. Policies

Circulated:

- Overarching management of Health and Safety in school systems, v4, 2 September 2024
- Health and Safety Policy, v4, 6 November 2024
- Model Pay Policy for Teachers and Support Staff 2024 – 2025, January 2025
- School Complaints Procedure, November 2024
- Managing low-level concerns in relation to staff conduct, September 2023
- Policy for confidential reporting of concerns ('Whistleblowing') for staff employed in schools, v1.4, September 2024
- Safeguarding and child protection policy, 2024 - 2025
- SEN and Disability Policy, July 2024

Rae Lowe advised that most policies originated from Newcastle City Council. All above listed policies were **approved**. Equalities and equality objectives would be reviewed in the summer term.

The School Complaints Procedure, November 2024, was tabled. Rae Lowe advised that she had since undertaken training with the Diocese and there was a new Complaints Policy recommended (DfE model). Governors read the tabled policy and asked questions of Rae and the Headteacher. Governors **approved** the policy, although it would be reconsidered at the next GB meeting. Rae Lowe would insert appropriate numbers in the policy.

Action: R Lowe, Clerk to add to agenda for GB meeting in July

9. Financial items

Circulated:

- Annex D, period 11, 2024 – 2025
- Financial Report Headlines, period 11, 2024 – 2025
- PowerPoint presentation on SFVS
- SFVS checklist, January 2025
- Deployment plan 2024 – 2025
- Financial benchmarking and insights tool

a) Review budget and Annex D

Governors **approved** Annex D.

b) Financial forecast

A deficit of £56,560 for 2024 – 2025, a deficit of £9,360 for 2025 – 2026 and a surplus of £1,290 for 2026 – 2027 was forecast as at period 11, 2024 – 2025.

c) Approve Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)

Governors were required to ratify that the SFVS reflected discussions. The Headteacher advised that the benchmarking document had proved quite helpful and had honed where cuts were to be made. Rae advised that the school was benchmarked against other schools with similar numbers on roll rather than other First Schools. Governors **approved** the SFVS.

10. Gosforth Schools' Trust (GST) update

Circulated:

- GST board minutes, 17 October 2024

Sarah MacRae provided a verbal update on the meeting held in March 2025:

- Expiry of terms of office for directors of the Trust had not been observed.
- Low pupil numbers were of most concern. There were 700 fewer applications for places in Reception, September 2025.
- Risks around budgets and the impact of increased SEND needs had been discussed.
- On behalf of schools in the GST, a letter had been sent to the LA Head of Educational Development and Inclusion and LA Head of SEND. Many parents had expressed dissatisfaction with SEND provision and Headteachers experienced the brunt of their dissatisfaction.
- Sarah would raise training days to align with those of Gosforth Academy at the next GST meeting.

The Headteacher advised that the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Gosforth Group had visited all First and Middle schools. Headteachers had been very open and honest with her explaining that it had not been possible to align transition days and there was no communication about the curriculum. A good dialogue had taken place. The GST wanted a good relationship and there was hope going forward that there would be a new way of building that relationship.

11. Statutory responsibilities: safeguarding, health and safety, risk management, data protection, equality duty

Circulated:

- Safeguarding audit, spring term 2025

The Chair had attended the autumn term Safeguarding audit. A spring update had been completed. Governors were referred to page 55 for the action plan. The Chair and Katie Hogg would attend the summer term safeguarding audit.

Action: Chair and K Hogg

12. Governance items

Circulated:

- NCC Key Guidance, spring 2025
- NCC GoverNews, spring 2025

- NCC Governor priorities, spring 2025
- Newcastle Promise Board (NPB) sub-group summaries, autumn 2 and spring 1 2025

GoverNews featured accounts from governors of specialist schools and information about the role of the Staff Governor. There were suggestions for recruitment of governors, an article on cyber security and training available over the spring and summer terms.

Key Guidance included a link to 15 areas covered by the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill which was in two parts, one part focused on social care and the other on schools.

Priorities for governors highlighted high levels of SEND and the importance of early work with families and use of Community Family Hubs. The LA Head of Educational Development and Inclusion had advised schools to look at everyday universal provision rather than focus on individual pupils, adding that good provision for SEND was good provision for all. Partial timetables should only be used in exceptional circumstances and governors should monitor use in the same way attendance was monitored. Governors should ask about repeat suspensions as this could be an indication that a pupil's needs were not met. There should be a process for ensuring a balanced objective approach before a decision to permanently exclude a pupil was taken. Before any formalised request for Elective Home Education was received, best practice was for a professional, perhaps a SEND Advisor, to meet with the parent.

Elective Home Education and Partial Timetables would be added to the agenda of the TLA Committee. The Headteacher would also add data for EHE to future Headteacher reports.

Action: Chair of TLA Committee and Headteacher

13. School terms and INSET days 2025 – 2026

Circulated:

- NCC Community schools' calendar 2025 - 2026

Governors **agreed** term dates for 2025 – 2026 as shown on the calendar. 1 September and 24 October 2025 and 1 June 2026 were **agreed** as INSET days.

14. Offset requests

There were no offset requests for consideration.

15. Governor impact

Governors contributed the following thoughts about how their decisions had positively impacted outcomes for pupils:

- The Admission Policy had been reconsidered.
- Governors had offered support during the permanent exclusion process and had received support.
- Governors were very contactable. The Chair and Vice-Chair visited the school every other Friday; the Headteacher noted that this was a helpful forum to talk things through. The Chair and Vice Chair enjoyed visiting the school and were always aware of what was going on so that nothing happened unexpectedly.
- The Headteacher advised that she was more aware of the issues around permanent exclusion and of the role governors played in the process and need for readiness.
- Sarah MacRae had attended an appeal panel, representing school and governors.

- Governors had agreed funding for counselling of staff as a result of the permanent exclusion, the impact of which had been significant.

16. Future meeting dates

GB and Committee meetings would be held on the following dates:

GB meetings (starting at 5.30pm in school):

- 21 May 2025 (for approval of budget)
- 16 July 2025

Teaching and Learning Committee meeting:

- 4 June 2025 at 4.30pm via Microsoft Teams

Finance Staffing and Premises Committee meetings (at 4.30pm via Microsoft Teams:

- 10 April 2025
- 14 May 2025

17. Any other business

The Headteacher left the meeting at this point in the meeting.

A confidential item was discussed.

There was no further business. The Chair thanked governors for attending the meeting. The meeting ended at 7.21pm.

Action summary

Item no.	Action	Outcome
4	Chair to contact someone who may wish to join GB as an LA Governor	
5	F Begum to register on Clennell Education Solutions website	
5	Headteacher, M Allan & S MacRae to circulate SEND governor monitoring visit report for GB meeting in July	
6	Clerk to contact LA Service Improvement Lead to arrange governor training on permanent exclusion process	
6	FSP Committee to explore lettings in greater detail	
8	R Lowe to amend Complaints Procedure, Clerk to add to agenda for GB meeting in July	
11	Chair & K Hogg to attend summer term safeguarding audit	
12	Chair of TLA Committee to add Elective Home Education and Partial Timetables to agenda of TLA Committee. Headteacher to add data for EHE & Partial Timetables to future Headteacher reports	