

**Approved informal notes for the meeting of the Capella House School Local Governing Body held on 9 July 2025 at 5.00pm virtually via Teams**

[Link to Teams Meeting](#)

Link to Papers [CAP-24-5 080725](#)

Key:- ➤ Note; ⦿ Discussion; ☑ Discussion and Decision; **XX** Sponsor/Lead; **X mins** allotted time.

Items in square brackets are references to documents related to this agenda found in the folder CAP-24-5 080725.

**Members of the Governing Body in attendance virtually:** Peter Bailey, Kirsty Craik Simon Gordon (Chair), Kate Nepstad, Seçil Ozkan and Dominic Sunderland (Headteacher).

**Members of the Governing Body absent:** Niale Cleobury, Meredith Hamilton, Sue Holt, Kate Nepstad and Claire Richmond

**Also in attendance virtually:** Julie Adams, Governance Professional, Asif Mullan, observer and Andy Whiteside, Trustee.

## **1. Welcome, apologies, declarations of interest and items from the Clerk**

- 1.A The Chair **welcomed** attendees to the meeting. The Governing Body noted apologies from Meredith Hamilton, Sue Holt, Kate Nepstad and Claire Richmond and agreed to consent to their absence. The Governance Professional **advised** that the meeting was not quorate. This meant that no formal decisions could be made.

The Chair **noted** thanks to Roger Mills, Niale Cleobury and Michele Coleman, who had taken a decision to step back from the LGB. The Governance Professional **requested** that governors reach out to their networks to assist with recruitment of more governors.

**(ACTION)**

- 1.B The Chair reminded that members of the Committee must abide by the Auriga Academy Trust Declarations of Interest Policy and should **declare** if they have an interest in any matter that comes before them. Dominic Sunderland **advised** of his recent appointment as Trustee of a local charity, Last night a DJ saved my life, which had previously supported the school. The Governance Professional **advised** him to also inform the Auriga Academy Trust Chief Operating Officer. **(ACTION)**

## **2. Presentation**

The Governing Body **received** a presentation from the Headteacher to review the School Development Plan for 2024-25 and plans for priorities for 2025-26.

The Headteacher **introduced** the School Development Plan (SDP), noting that the 2024-25 plan was now closed and that many elements, particularly around teaching and learning, are cyclical and lead naturally into the next plan. He **asked** governors to spend time studying the proposed 2025-26 SDP ahead of a strategy meeting in early September. This would enable them to

understand it better, formulate insightful questions, and assist in allocating governors to specific priorities.

The Governing Body **asked** if the School Improvement Partner (SIP) report would provide further points for governors to consider. The Headteacher **confirmed** that the SIP report would be useful and explained that the proposed SDP was the result of a long process involving meetings with the SIP, the Trust, and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). He **described** the governors' review as the final piece of the jigsaw, which would allow them to add to the plan and, importantly, hold him to account for its delivery.

The Governing Body **asked** for clarification on the timeframes of the plan. The Headteacher **clarified** that he prefers to work with one-year plans as it keeps the focus sharp, although he acknowledged that some objectives are part of larger, multi-year projects.

Andy Whiteside **expressed** his support for the one-year plan format. He then **enquired** about the proposed partnership with Richmond upon Thames College, asking about external dependencies on Achieving for Children (AfC) and how the Trust could support the initiative, noting it was not entirely within the school's own gift to deliver. The Headteacher **responded** that the plan for the partnership is deliberately vague at present, as they are waiting for AfC and Richmond College to finalise their aspects before the school can detail its own responsibilities. He **noted** that progress had been delayed as the two lead contacts at AfC left in February and were not replaced until the end of May. He **added** that the school's current responsibilities include the link teacher, pastoral support, and therapies, but this will be expanded upon once the project begins in September. AW **agreed** that the SDP should focus on Capella's specific responsibilities and that any requests for additional resources from the Trust would be a separate conversation.

The Governing Body **asked** for more detail on the cohort of ten young people for the partnership, specifically where the seven students not from Capella were coming from. The Headteacher **explained** that the majority were from mainstream schools and specialist resource provisions. He **mentioned** that four were from a specialist resource base for autism and one was from Clarendon School, who was considered an outlier for that school's typical student profile. He **shared** a parent's description of the provision as helping to 'wean' students off a special school environment to access mainstream education. He **advised** that Kirsty Craik would be appointed the link teacher for the resource at Richmond College.

The Governing Body **asked** if the SDP priorities had been assigned to members of SLT decided. The Headteacher **confirmed** that roles had been provisionally assigned during an SLT strategy day, but it would be a team effort, and roles may evolve over the year. He **clarified** that the named lead for each priority would remain the consistent point of contact for the corresponding link governor.

The Governing Board **noted** that as formal approval for the School Development Plan for 2025-26 could not be given, governors would revisit them at the September meeting, where more detail would also be included. **(ACTION)**

Supporting papers: [CAP-24-5-02 Capella House SDP - Spring 25 \(23\\_6\\_25\).pdf](#) and [CAP-24-5-02 Capella House SDP - 25\\_26.pdf](#)

### 3. Minutes

- 3.A The Governing Body **received** the draft minutes of the meeting held on 7 May 2025 [CAP-24-5-03A Previous Draft Minutes 070525.pdf](#) and noted they would be **approved at the next quorate meeting of the Governing Body**.
- 3.B The Governing Body **noted** all actions from the previous meeting are complete.
- 3.C The Governing Body **noted** the latest published Board meeting minutes and other updates from the Board.
- 3.D The Governing Body **noted** that there were no matters arising that are not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Supporting Papers: [Trust Board Minutes](#), [Capella House School Minutes](#)

### 4. Headteachers Report

The Governing Body **received** a report from the Headteacher CAP-24-5-04 Capella House School Headteacher Report.pdf\_ to include Items **A-K**.

#### 4.A General Update and key risks

The Headteacher **reported** that the plan for a demountable classroom for the next academic year had been cancelled. He **explained** that AFC had altered the proposal to a joint Capella-House and Clarendon School unit for pupils they had been unable to place, which the headteachers and the CEO vetoed as it would have been detrimental to existing pupils and staff, though the idea may be re-examined in the future.

Andy Whiteside **noted** that based on AFC's performance with the demountable project, the Trust now views the planned delivery of two new sites for Clarendon and Strathmore Schools, due in just over a year's time, with heightened concern and had moved the matter up the risk register. The Headteacher **concurred**, stating that the Trust's headteachers are resolute in maintaining their specific educational offer to ensure pupils make the best progress, describing the situation as a timely reminder to adhere to their principles.

#### 4.B Pupil Numbers for 2024-25 and Attendance ]

The Headteacher **stated** that for the next academic year, the primary school is completely full, and the secondary school is also effectively full. The school continues to receive a high number of consultations for places.

The Headteacher **highlighted** that the school still has a high number of persistent absentees, which is much higher than desired, particularly among pupil premium pupils. He **noted** this is consistent with local and national trends in special schools and that addressing this will be a key priority for the next year. A Family Support Worker is now working with the school one day a week on a trial basis. A key priority for them will be to work with families on improving attendance by providing a less formal point of contact to discuss barriers.

The Governing Body **commented** on the difficulties with persistent attendees and suggested the early morning club could provide a 'soft start' for some children as this might encourage pupils to come in earlier and make parents feel more supported, recalling a historical practice where staff would collect pupils from their homes. The Headteacher **agreed** with the point about the breakfast club, confirming they reserve spaces for targeted pupils with poor attendance. He **acknowledged** that staff have collected pupils in exceptional circumstances, such as parental ill health for those who could get to Twickenham Station, but explained it is logistically difficult for most due to the distances involved.

The Governing Body **asked** whether the school bus, for which there was a funding grant, could be utilised to help with attendance issues. The Headteacher **clarified** that the school shares a bus with Clarendon and does not have its own, meaning a dedicated bus would be under-utilised. He **explained** that for many pupils, the long journey time is a barrier to attendance and can exacerbate anxiety, so a bus would not be a simple solution. The Headteacher **confirmed** other strategies employed, such as amending start times (e.g., to 9:30 am) for a limited period to build pupil resilience.

#### 4.C Safeguarding and behaviour

The Headteacher **provided** a safeguarding update, noting that one child on a child protection plan had been taken into care and moved to a different borough. The school will continue to provide support during the transition, working with social services and the virtual school, despite no legal obligation to do so.

The Headteacher **commented** on behaviour data, noting that while there were expected spikes towards the end of term, there were no surprises. He **pointed** to a link between behaviour incidents and pupils who are either pupil premium or known to mental health services, and the school is exploring ways to identify and link these pupils to support services earlier.

#### 4.D Pupil progress and achievements

The Headteacher **reported** that the exam period went very smoothly, with students seeming more relaxed than in previous years. He **noted** that Year 11 students had completed their work experience, had a leavers' assembly, seemed well-prepared for their next steps, and that positive feedback had been received from parents about the difference staff had made.

In response to a question, the Headteacher **confirmed** that academic progress is monitored continuously through regular pupil progress meetings, so there are no surprises. He **explained** that if a pupil is identified as not making progress, they are placed into interventions with specialist teachers or receive 1-to-1 support. He **elaborated** on the flexibility of grouping pupils, particularly at the primary level, to better meet their developmental needs. He **noted** that this allows the school to address learning gaps and to explore whether the issue lies with the quality of education or a change in the pupil's needs, which may require an Educational Psychologist (EP) review and a potential redesignation of their Education Health and Care Plan.

The Headteacher **stressed** that raw data does not tell the whole story due to pupils' 'spiky profiles' and that a holistic view is taken by looking at behaviour, engagement, and

attendance data to avoid any 'red flags'. The Governing Body **asked** how the school nurtures pupils' specific talents or 'spikes'. The Headteacher **explained** that pupils' talents are nurtured naturally through an adapted curriculum and ability-based grouping for English and maths. He **added** that enrichment activities, such as Capella Town, are used to foster specific strengths, which boosts pupils' self-confidence and personal development.

*Seçil Ozkan left the meeting.  
Kate Nepstad joined the meeting.*

A Governor **reflected** that this approach is particularly evident in art, where pupils who may struggle academically often demonstrate exceptional natural ability. It was observed that many primary pupils are already showing the potential to be successful at GCSE level in art. The Headteacher **agreed** crediting the school's culture where all subjects are treated with equal importance, which pupils understand and embrace. He **highlighted** the phenomenal quality of the Year 11 GCSE art exhibition, which he felt was on a par with, or even surpassed, work from mainstream schools.

The Headteacher **reported** on personal development activities, including numerous trips and visits. He mentioned an upcoming school barbecue where pupils will have the opportunity to DJ, and noted the positive impact of a recent visit from a charity film crew. He also **confirmed** that pupils will perform at a future council event, providing them with real-world experience. In addition, the school offers a 1-week work experience placement in both Year 10 and Year 11. The Governing Body discussed the unwillingness of employers to engage with work experience for pupils especially with additional needs.

#### 4.E Receive School Development Plan and Self Review

#### 4.F Visitors Reports

The Governing Body **discussed** the positive reports from the School Improvement Partner (SIP), Marie Newman. DS **confirmed** the relationship is positive and challenging. The Headteacher highlighted that the SIP holds both the school and AfC to account, demonstrating a good understanding of the school's context and challenges the school to justify its practices.

- [CAP-24-5-04F 2025 Summer SIP Report Capella.url](#)
- [CAP-24-5-04F Capella 11\\_06\\_25 NOA Maths.pdf](#)

#### 4.G Partnerships and community links

The Governing Body **raised concerns** about the government's policy of placing all pupils in mainstream schools. The Headteacher **concurred**, reporting that at a recent heads' conference, mainstream headteachers stated they were 'buckling' and lacked the physical capacity, skills, and funding to support more complex pupils, viewing the government's proposal for greater inclusion as 'nonsense'.

The Headteacher **explained** that he had introduced a positive initiative for a staff swap and secondment programme with mainstream primary and secondary schools. He **explained** the aim was for both teaching and support staff to spend a week or two in each other's settings to share strategies, allowing mainstream staff to learn from Capella House and Capella staff to upskill their curriculum knowledge and observe mainstream practices. The Governing Body

**applauded** this as a 'brilliant idea' and enquired about the logistical planning for the staff swaps. The Headteacher **clarified** that he would meet with locality heads to agree on topics, dates, and staff, with potential themes including speech, language, communication, and behaviour management. The Headteacher **noted** that these conversations were already prompting mainstream schools to reconsider policies, such as uniform, to better accommodate pupils with sensory needs.

The Governing Body **asked** if CPD from outreach from the Therapy Team would be involved and whether the service would be chargeable. The Headteacher **responded** that while some aspects might be charged, the main priority was forming partnerships over recouping money, as financial transactions could create difficulties. The Governing Body **observed** that this initiative also supported the school's objective for research-informed improvement.

#### 4.H Staffing

##### 4.I Learner, Family and Community Voice

The Governing Body **asked** for examples of how the school incorporates the views of parents. The Headteacher explained that feedback is gathered more effectively through day-to-day interactions rather than formal surveys. He **provided** an example of collaborating with a parent and a private tutor to support a secondary pupil with science tuition, ensuring the curriculum was shared and the pupil was not overwhelmed.

The Governing Body **noted** that this approach was more ongoing than systematic and recalled previous conversations about low response rates for parent surveys. The Headteacher **cited** general 'survey fatigue' and stating that ongoing, informal conversations with parents often yield more honest and useful information.

The Governing Body **enquired** if a similar method was used for gathering student views. The Headteacher **stated** that the school was changing its approach to student surveys for the next academic year. He felt that current surveys produced unhelpful binary responses, such as 'I don't like school'. The new method will involve the School Council holding conversations with classes to understand the nuances behind issues like behaviour and safety. The Governing Body **suggested** that it would be useful for them to be made aware of these views. The Headteacher **clarified** that this more formalised process for the School Council would be implemented next year.

##### 4.J Finance Commentary [Final Budget and 3 year budget forecast](#)

The Governing Body **asked** about the financial stress caused by agency fees and what measures were being taken to reduce the impact on the budget. The Headteacher **explained** the situation had improved this year, with more cover being managed in-house, although some agency use was unavoidable to ensure correct and safe staffing levels.

The Governing Body **enquired** about the associated risks and whether the reliance on agency staff could be avoided in the future. The Headteacher **explained** that in the current financial climate, it was a cost that had to be accepted. He outlined that employing an additional member of staff for cover was a financial gamble, as they would be an expensive and under-utilised resource if staff absence was low. He **identified** that a significant risk would be an event like a pandemic or a serious virus outbreak, which would be very expensive if two or three staff members were absent simultaneously.

#### 4.K Health and Safety / Premises Update

The Headteacher **confirmed** that funding for the sensory room had been agreed. He **reported** that pre-work had already started, and the room would be ready for the next school year. In addition, work on the new sports pitch at the secondary site had also begun ahead of schedule. He **noted** that the pitch would be shared with Clarendon and would be ready for the next school year.

The Governing Body **enquired** about any plans to generate revenue from the new facilities. The Headteacher **responded** that while there were no plans to generate revenue from the sensory room, it would make the site more appealing to after-school club providers. He **explained** they were exploring revenue options for the sports pitch, such as use by a local netball team, but acknowledged competition from the larger facilities at the co-located Richmond upon Thames School. The Governing Body **asked** for clarification on the location of the new pitch. The Headteacher **explained** its location and mentioned the school was initially surprised when work began, as they had not been notified it was starting.

Supporting Papers – [P9 Management Accounts](#).

#### 5. Governance

- 5.A The Governing Body **noted** the membership overview and the earlier discussion regarding appointing new governors CAP-24-5-05A Governor Overview inc. Training.pdf
- 5.B The Governing Body **noted** that progress on the Governance Development plan would be reviewed in September.
- 5.C The Governing Body **noted** there were no other Link Governor Visit Reports since the last meeting.

#### 6. Election / Appointment to key LGB roles for September 2025-26

- 6.A **Noting** that formal elections could not be held, the Governance Professional **advised**
- 6.B that the current Chair and Vice Chairs had advised that they were willing to remain in post and that as no other candidates had come forward, this would be proposed to the Board of Trustees at their meeting on 16 July 2025. **(ACTION)**
- 6.C The Governing Board **discussed** the urgent need to appoint a new Safeguarding Link
- 6.D Governor, as the position was vacant. The Headteacher **highlighted** a forthcoming local authority safeguarding audit in December, adding to the urgency. Following discussion, it was **agreed** that a candidate would be sought before the start of the new term, rather than deferring the appointment until September. Similar activity would be undertaken to recruit a Finance Link Governor **(ACTION)**
- 6.E Appointment to other link roles were deferred to the September LGB meeting.
- 6.F The Governance Professional **proposed** the appointment of Asif Mullan as a Co-opted Governor, highlighting his relevant experience and background. As the meeting was not quorate, a formal decision could not be made. She **advised** she would request the Board of Trustees to make the appointment on the LGB's behalf at their meeting on 16th July. **(ACTION)** [CAP-25-5-06F Prospective Governor Profile.pdf](#)

## 7. Planning for an early September Strategy / Training Session (Planning for 2025-26)

- 7.A The need to schedule a Strategy Day for early September was discussed to avoid delaying the school's leadership team. It was noted that the current Chair and Vice Chair were willing to continue for another year. However, succession planning for these roles was agreed as a key area of focus for the Governance Development Plan 2025-26, which will also inform future recruitment.
- 7.B The Governing Body noted the [calendar of 2025-2026 meetings](#).

## 8. Approval of Policies / Statements

The Governing Body **noted** there are no policies or procedures for approval.

## 9. Review impact, planned actions and agree feedback to the Board of Trustees

The Governing Body **discussed** the value of the meeting noting that despite being inoperative, it was still highly beneficial. The significant work involved in preparing the high-quality papers was recognised. The discussions and information shared provided a valuable opportunity for governors to learn about the school, enabling them to better fulfil their roles.

Supporting Papers – [15. Committee reporting template.docx](#)

## 10. Confidentiality

The Governing Body **agreed** that the discussion at the meeting, the background papers, and the reports identified as confidential above should remain confidential and therefore excluded from the published minutes and papers.

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 30 September 2025.

*Asif Mullan*

Asif Mullan (Oct 14, 2025 12:13:31 GMT+1)

Chair of the Capella House Local Governing Body

14/10/25






# CAP-24-5-00 Approved Informal Notes 080725

Final Audit Report

2025-10-14

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|-----------------|--|
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