THE CRYPT SCHOOL
Meeting of the Board of Trustees

Monday, 24 March 2025, 4.00pm – 6.21pm
The Crypt School, Room 24

MINUTES: Part 1

Present: Lee Hill (Chair), Sheila Bradburn, Sonia Macleod, Suzanne Aspden, Virginia Crellin (attended online), Ray Fish, Ahmed Goga, Ciaran Hollywood (attended online), Dare Owatemi, Nicholas Dyer (Headmaster); Gordon Taylor, Kate Williams (Associate Trustees)

Attendees: Phil Stanlake (Senior Deputy Head) (to item 6), Joanne Hitchings (Finance Director & Company Secretary), Nicola Donlon (Clerk)

Apologies: None

Absent: Amit Ray

	ITEM	ACTION
1.	**Apologies - none.**	
2.	**Declarations of interest and confirmation of entry on Register of Interests** As per the register. Suzanne Aspden declared a personal interest in item 7 (creative and Performing Arts Centre), as her partner was helping the School on a pro bono basis to develop a fundraising strategy for the Centre.	
3.	**Agree minutes of meeting held on 10.2.2025 (parts 1 and 2)** Agreed without amendment and signed by the Chair.	
4.	**Matters arising from previous minutes (paper 1)** Update was noted.	
	Key reports for scrutiny	
5.	**Finance Director's report:** **a) Management Accounts to February 2025 (papers 2a&b)** The Finance Director Jo Hitchings (JH) reported that the position was slightly better than budget and the current forecast was for a surplus of about £68k. The Anthony Iles Fund had donated £75k towards the Sixth Form refurbishment and had agreed to provide some £35k-£40k per annum in future from its income and an element of capital growth. Quotes for planned capital and estates works were being assembled for presentation to the next Resources, Staff & Pay Committee meeting in May and then the Full Board. The Board noted the update. **b) Benchmarking information (paper 3)** The paper contained comparative information from the Department for Education's benchmarking website for a group of local schools selected by JH. She said there were no areas of particular concern. Crypt was significantly higher for	

	exam fees because this included approximately £50k for the 11 Plus entrance test costs administered by Crypt on behalf of all the Gloucestershire Grammars; this was reimbursed by the other schools. Crypt 11 Plus costs were also higher because both boys and girls could choose to sit the test at the school. Trustee commented that energy costs were quite high. JH said this was because the School was locked into an expensive contract at the time; costs have reduced since October. Trustee also noted that staff continuing professional development and training costs were comparatively high; JH said she would investigate what elements were included under this heading, but costs were not over budget (**<u>action</u>**). Trustee asked what the budget for 2025-26 was looking like. JH said she had only recently received some details, but it was not looking promising and there was no commitment yet to meet pay increases. Income from bank interest would also fall next year because of falling interest rates and having spent some funds on capital development. The School would get a grant to cover the National Insurance rise for employers' contributions. Trustee asked about the difficulty in forecasting the costs of shared parental leave. JH said that the software had not properly accounted for the fact that teachers can break up their leave and return to paid work during the school holidays, so they can get paid for over 12 months. This was a statutory requirement and the School could not alter the arrangement, but JH will adjust assumptions in future to better reflect the true cost. Trustees noted the report.	JH
6. (part)	**Strategic Plan 2024-2029:** a) **Confirm vision, values, mission and strategic priorities (paper 4)** Trustees confirmed the School vision, values, mission and strategic priorities set out in the Strategic Plan 2024-29. Trustees also praised the appearance of the document, but suggested updating it to highlight the 2024 Ofsted outstanding judgement and quotes from the Ofsted report (**<u>action</u>**). **b) Implementation priorities 2025-26 (paper 5)** The Headmaster (HM) said that the draft School Improvement Priorities set out in paper 5 reflected the intention to have greater continuity and ensure new practices are fully embedded before moving on. *(part in confidential minutes)* Ciaran Hollywood joined the meeting. **Behavioural expectations** The HM said that the Pastoral team was becoming overwhelmed by safeguarding, wellbeing and inclusion challenges for individual cases; it was increasingly difficult to find space to deal with lower-level challenges. Associate Trustee described the new classroom expectations for Years 7 and 8 and the positive effect that these had had in managing behaviour. Trustee asked for more detail about the challenges being faced. The HM said there were many mental health issues, problems of low resilience, and wider societal challenges presenting in schools. The pastoral team was set up to deal primarily with behaviour but now had to deal with many more issues. The Senior Deputy Head (PS) added that there was now also more pushback from parents. The Board agreed that the Deputy Head (Safeguarding, Wellbeing and Inclusion) should be invited to give a presentation to the Board at the next meeting (**<u>action</u>**).	**Clerk**

	Trustees asked if the School collected data from students to explore their views of where the main problems are. The HM said that the School conducted student surveys and these could be reviewed for relevant data. PS added that the Wellbeing Student Parliament would meet in the next couple of weeks and could be steered to look at this issue. Trustee welcomed this but was concerned about selection bias, i.e. whether those volunteering to serve in the Parliament were truly representative of the wider student body. PS said the Gloucestershire Healthy Living and Lifestyle Pupil Wellbeing Survey might be useful, it was not happening in 2025 but he would circulate last year's results to the Board (**<u>action</u>**). Trustee said the School should tell parents about the new Y7&8 behavioural expectations and educate them about the challenges, trigger points, etc. The HM said lots of information was sent out to parents through newsletters and external materials. Trustee noted the intention to continue addressing issues such as racism, misogyny and disadvantage, and asked if there was prejudice against disadvantaged students in school. The HM said he did not believe so, but there was an attainment gap to address. **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital learning** The HM said that AI had been raised by parents at the recent open day. Future work needed to look at not only AI's ability to reduce workload but also at the teaching and delivery of learning about AI, and the School's digital strategy group had already been working on this. Trustee suggested it was important to help students not just to use AI but to understand its origins and how it works, which in turn would help students to use the technology effectively and safely. Trustees noted the data protection concerns about use of AI and the potential to use localised generative AI to help overcome these concerns. The Board **<u>agreed</u>** to the proposed priorities set out in paper 5. The HM said these were not yet fixed and would be discussed by the Senior Leadership Team and then staff before going into the School Improvement Plan for Board approval. He reminded the Board that there were external changes, including local admissions policies and the national curriculum, that the Board would need to monitor and reflect in strategic planning, and said he would talk about the new Ofsted framework at the May meeting (**<u>action</u>**). Trustee asked about the recent changes to UCAS forms. The HM said the changes were more administrative than a wholesale change in approach and did not need to be included in the SIP. The School this year had sent off around 146 UCAS forms and around 40 students were applying for apprenticeships. Trustee noted that the number of apprenticeships was declining, especially at higher and degree level and in non-engineering subjects; the School would need to be aware of this. Trustee said there was a risk of taking on too much and the School would need to ensure it could deliver what it decided to do.	**PS**

	Objectives and success criteria for the outreach programme The HM introduced section 4 of paper 5, noting that Paulina De La Fuente (who oversaw the programme) was leaving at the end of this academic year. The ATOM Learning online 11 Plus support system used with local primary school students was currently provided free of charge, but this was unlikely to continue next year; the expected cost would be some £50-£60 per month. The programme also included Y12 students going out to help in local primary schools and staff giving talks; it was hard to track the impact of this support. The break in leadership provided an opportunity for the Board to review its objectives and desired outcomes from the programme. Trustee asked if the leadership role had to be undertaken by a teacher. The HM said no, but support staff were also very stretched. Trustee asked how many primary school students sat the test. The HM said all participants were registered to sit the test, but he didn't know how many went on to do it. All the Gloucestershire grammar schools were seeking to attract the small number of economically disadvantaged students who pass the test. Pates Grammar School was intending to ring fence 15 places for Pupil Premium and Looked After Children and students from deprived postcode areas; this might simply draw in the same students and not increase the overall number who apply successfully. Trustees asked about the less quantifiable benefits of the programme and how these could be measured, e.g. by consulting the parents and the Y12 students. Trustee said there was a discrepancy between the figures for the number of students involved set out in the Trustee review of the programme (paper 6) and those in paper 5; the Clerk was asked to clarify with the programme lead (**<u>action</u>**). Trustees discussed whether the programme should also include Y4 pupils. The HM said there was insufficient space in school to extend the programme significantly and to do so would also double the cost. Trustees asked whether the school provided feedback to the primary schools on students' progress and whether those schools also tracked progress; the HM said he didn't know about the latter, but the School did not have access itself to the ATOM Learning results. Trustee asked whether it was helpful to focus on the admissions test as a measure of success. The HM replied that the programme was delivering other benefits, but these were not measured. The Chair summed up that there appeared to be broad support on the Board for an outreach and community engagement programme, but there needed to be a sharper focus for the intended outcomes and success measures, which would require further work. It was agreed that the HM should submit a paper on the future of the programme and its leadership to the next Board meeting (**<u>action</u>**). **c) Estates plan 2025-30: update** The HM said that the incoming Year 7 comprised a higher proportion (nearly half) of girl students; if that trend continued, the School would need to review the balance of toilet facilities provided. The girls toilets would be extended this summer and it was planned to refurbish the boys toilets the following year. More generally, the School struggled to find facilities space.	 **Clerk** **NCD**

	Phil Stanlake left the meeting.	
7.	**Creative and Performing Arts Centre (paper 5)** *In confidential minutes* Ahmed Goga left the meeting.	
8.	**Evaluation of Board effectiveness (paper 8)** The Clerk had circulated the list of questions for the evaluation exercise to the Board before the meeting for comment and input, and one response had been received. The meeting focused on two areas (Stakeholder Engagement and Communication, and School Performance and Impact). Trustees made the following points in discussion: ● A clear statement of the School's stakeholders would be useful in planning future engagement ● Could we engage better with parents? Does the increasing number of girls affect how the Board should engage? ● There is a list of school events for Trustees to attend, but less certainty about how Trustees should engage with parents at these events, and feedback forms are not being completed ● The Board should increase its visibility and outreach to parents to increase awareness of the range of its functions and responsibilities ● Engagement/visibility with staff also needs to be strengthened - the upcoming meetings between link Trustees and Departments in Term 6 should help with this ● How effective are the School's partnerships with the wider community? This term needs a tighter definition - who do we want to reach? Trustee suggested there would be benefits in getting the Gloucestershire NHS Foundation Trust more involved in the school; it was agreed the Chair should write to the Trust Chief Executive to show support for this (**action**) ● Engagement with students: the HM and Associate Trustee reminded the Board about the three student parliaments, each chaired by a member of SLT and the Student Executive and with a representative from each form. The parliaments provided good experience for the students and had led to some positive outcomes ● How can the School get early warning of wellbeing issues - are all students asked about wellbeing? Trustee said that the Deputy Head (Safeguarding, Inclusion and Wellbeing) conducted lots of surveys/questionnaires. ● How should we define student achievement? The Board is good at monitoring academic data but is less strong on other aspects. The HM said that the weekly school newsletter captured many of the other aspects of school life and enrichment activities. The Board could monitor and respond to data on wider achievements. ● Trustee strategic reviews could be used in a more targeted way to help evaluate the impact of Board decisions. Review areas could be linked to the Ofsted framework. The Chair invited Trustees to submit any further comments to him after the meeting to inform next steps.	**LH**
9.	**Skills Audit (paper 9)** The Clerk thanked Trustees for completing the audit. The audit showed that the Board scored highly across all aspects, with three areas showing improvement	

	from the previous year. The audit did not reveal any specific gaps to address through recruitment or training.	
10.	**Succession Planning** The Chair reported that he had spoken to individual Trustees about their intentions regarding Board membership and that the Board was in a good position going forward. Adverts for the appointment of a further two Trustees had been sent out, with the aim of appointing by the summer.	
11.	**Any other business** - none.	
12.	**Agree confidential items** – Item 6 (part), item 7	
13.	**Date of next meeting:** Monday 19th May, 4pm, The Crypt School	

Signed:

Date: