

**THINKING SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST**  
**COMPANY NUMBER: 7359755**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Meeting of the Board of Directors</b>	<b>Date</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<b>Room</b>	Medway Boardroom, Paignton Academy, The Portsmouth Academy & Via Teams	<b>Time</b>	4.30pm
<b>Present</b>	Gerard Newman (GN) (Chair), Peter Martin (PM), Stuart Gardner (SG), Kaye Bettey (KB), Steve Geary (SGY), Derek Morrison (DM), Ashley Hall (AH), Andy Minchin (AM), Krysia Butwilowska (KBA), Lurette Mill (LM), Clive Star (CS), David Glassey (DG)	<b>Clerk</b>	Abigail Pannell
<b>Apologies accepted</b>	N/A	<b>In attendance</b>	Lee Miller (LMR), Mandy Gage (MG), Michelle Smith (MS), Jay Davenport (JD), Daniel Botting (DB), Kelly Denton (KD), Jennifer Coates (JC)

<b>Key Points Discussed and Action Items</b>				
<b>No.</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Action/Discussion</b>	<b>By whom</b>	<b>When</b>
1.	<b>Declaration of Business Interests</b>	No additional declarations of business interest were declared.		
2.	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>	The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. No apologies received. DG will be leaving the meeting at 7pm.		
3.	<b>Minutes and Matters Arising</b>	Governors reviewed the minutes from the <b>2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025</b> and unanimously agreed they were an accurate record of the meeting.  The Board acknowledged the remote decisions made since the last meeting: - Procurement of 3G Pitch SCA Project at PAA		

		<table border="1" data-bbox="568 227 1825 798"> <thead> <tr> <th>Action</th><th>Update</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Action KD to circulate details about Trustee Vacancies on the Little Thinkers Board (LTB).</td><td>Completed.  The Chair confirmed that they would be joining the LTB from September.  KD noted further recruitment was underway to strengthen Board membership.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Action MG to address the number of schools able to attend the Pupil Voice Committee meetings.</td><td>Completed.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Action MG to discuss engagement with the KCC initiative regarding phones in schools with regional directors</td><td>Ongoing.</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The Chair noted that one section of the CEO report, concerning the <b>Executive Structure</b>, would be taken under <i>Confidential Business</i> at the end of the meeting.</p>	Action	Update	Action KD to circulate details about Trustee Vacancies on the Little Thinkers Board (LTB).	Completed.  The Chair confirmed that they would be joining the LTB from September.  KD noted further recruitment was underway to strengthen Board membership.	Action MG to address the number of schools able to attend the Pupil Voice Committee meetings.	Completed.	Action MG to discuss engagement with the KCC initiative regarding phones in schools with regional directors	Ongoing.		
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4.	<b>CEO Report</b>	<p>SG presented the CEO Report which contained the following key information:</p> <p><u>Trust PMI – <b>discussion</b> on leadership changes, complaints process, RISE, and TSfE update:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appointment of a new HT at BRI through a competitive process.</li> <li>- HT at NHO leaving at end of the summer; interim leadership structure in place.</li> <li>- The Board noted the resignation of MG, Deputy CEO, effective Jan 2025, and recorded their thanks for their significant contribution.</li> <li>- SG and JD reported on discussions with the DfE regarding support through the RISE programme. Initial feedback was positive, and further updates will be brought to the Board once details are confirmed.</li> <li>- LM provided a verbal update, referencing the recent CJK Review, which provided a positive assessment of TSfE's current position. The Board received assurance that TSfE remains in a strong and sustainable position, with measures from the review to be used going forward.</li> </ul>										

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Gov Comment:** Parents appeared to have significant influence over events at the school, and the Head felt unsupported during the complaints process.

**MS Response:** The complaints policy has since been reviewed, with training rolled out to Headteachers and further training planned for support staff.

**SG Response:** The complaints process must be fair and evidence-based. While difficult for the HT, the panel acted appropriately.

**Chair Comment:** Nationally, schools are experiencing an increase in detailed parental complaints, some generated using AI, which adds to workload.

**Trust Strategic Improvement Plan – verbal update**

- Final update for 2024/25 showed most objectives completed.
- “Coaching culture” strand to continue into 2025/26 plan.
- SG identified key risks, including Executive Structure post-MG’s departure, which would be considered under *Confidential Business*.

**Key Issues – discussion on TPA performance risk**

- DB gave a detailed update on actions at TPA, highlighting:
  - o Significant improvements in attendance following a whole-school drive.
  - o Safeguarding audit completed with an action plan underway and a follow-up scheduled for September.
  - o Behaviour drive in Term 6, supported by colleagues from across the Trust; AGB described the school as “calmer and safer.”
  - o Restructuring of leadership roles to align with the School Improvement Plan.
  - o Staffing restructure to achieve a balanced budget, moving from a projected £430k deficit.
  - o Renewed focus on professional standards, alongside the relaunch of the staff wellbeing committee.
  - o Cultural change required among both pupils and staff to embed improvements.
  - o Ongoing risks remain in relation to outcomes, behaviour, and safeguarding.
  - o Proposal to form a *Support and Challenge Group* including Trustees and AGB members to review progress twice per half-term.

**Chair Comment:** We welcome this proposal. The Board are willing to support, but the process must be proportionate, so it does not create unnecessary reporting burdens. SG or I will confirm

	<p>group membership with you by the end of the week.</p> <p><b>SG Response:</b> Alongside Board support, it is important that DB has the right capacity and expertise from across the Trust, including executive and school-to-school support.</p> <p><b>MG Comment:</b> The Regional Education Reviews are underway. I will work with DB to agree specific Trust-level support.</p> <p><b>Gov Question:</b> Have you raised these challenges with your RAB? Is the local governance structure strong enough to provide the right support?</p> <p><b>DB Response:</b> There have been recruitment challenges at AGB level, but steps are being taken to strengthen membership. It will require a balance of local governance and strategic trustee input.</p> <p><b>Chair Comment:</b> This is important enough that the Board will want to be directly involved in supporting the school.</p> <p><u>Outcomes and Results – <b>discussion</b> on KS1 Phonics and Y4 Multiplication Check</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SG presented papers on Trust outcomes, highlighting strong performance in KS1 phonics and Y4 multiplication checks, with concerns at KS2 requiring further scrutiny.</li> <li>- Phonics outcomes improved significantly across the Trust, with KAA achieving 84% despite high deprivation.</li> <li>- Multiplication Tables Check results were also well above national levels, with 75% of pupils achieving 20+/25, reflecting the strong trust-wide focus on early maths foundations.</li> </ul> <p><b>Gov Comment:</b> These are excellent results - congratulations to staff.</p> <p><b>SG Response:</b> Thank you. We will ensure formal recognition is sent to Heads.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- KS2 results were mixed. Several schools, including AFS, CSA, FPS, GCA, and KAA, achieved outcomes above expectations given deprivation levels. PEN's outcomes were lower but proportionate to its 70% PP cohort.</li> <li>- Concerns remain for NHO (where writing weakness capped combined scores) and NHP, which has remained in the high 40s for three consecutive years.</li> </ul> <p><b>Gov Question:</b> What happens when school leaders consistently underperform?</p> <p><b>SG Response:</b> Those schools receive enhanced Trust support, and leadership accountability is addressed through pay and professional growth reviews.</p> <p><b>Gov Question:</b> Can we be confident those conversations are already taking place?</p> <p><b>MG Response:</b> Yes. Regional Education Reviews are underway to set expectations and assess implications for leadership.</p> <p><b>DB Comment:</b> I have spoken with the HT at NHP about next steps, including deploying subject leaders and shifting monitoring to sustained impact.</p>	
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5.	<b>Reports from Committees</b>	<p>Committee chairs presented the one-page reports from the Board Sub-Committees which contained the following key information:</p> <p><b>5A. Curriculum &amp; Quality Assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TPA performance discussed in detail, with emphasis on the role of Regional and Deputy Regional Directors in addressing barriers and sustaining improvement.</li> <li>- Positive progress reported at KS5, and KS2 writing identified as a Trust-wide priority.</li> <li>- Strong practice seen during visits to MWF and NHP.</li> <li>- Attendance continues to impact outcomes. SG confirmed only two schools (GWA and MAR) are significantly below expected cohort averages, though MAR's DfE data contains anomalies under review.</li> <li>- Board agreed that monitoring pupil premium gaps should be a feature of this committee's reporting.</li> <li>- MG outlined the Trust-wide attendance strategy for 2025, focused on belonging and culture change, with regional education reviews embedding this work.</li> </ul> <p><b>5B. Operations Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ongoing monitoring of risks with cleaning contractor; invoices adjusted to recover unpaid pension contributions.</li> <li>- Review of utilities procurement using a flexible basket approach to reduce costs.</li> <li>- Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has issued a fourth notification of contravention relating to asbestos management. Issue being rectified; however, reputational risk noted.</li> <li>- Board expressed concern at repeated HSE notices and stressed reputational risks if they continue. Noted confidence in action taken, including disciplinary measures at central staff level.</li> <li>- LM confirmed the breach related to a failure in training log records rather than operational safety.</li> </ul> <p><b>5C. People Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Removal of performance-related pay from 2025/26 cycle, with pay decoupled from the professional growth model.</li> </ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ending of TES subscription as jobs board; new recruitment advertising approaches being trialled, with cost savings expected but some risk around effectiveness.</li> <li>- Ongoing and increased union challenge, including strike action and recent NASUWT balloting in the South Regional schools. Early engagement and consultation with unions considered essential to mitigate risk.</li> </ul> <p><b>5D. Governance &amp; Compliance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- DfE concerns regarding attendance at PLM, PAA and BRI have now been resolved; all are at or above national levels and no longer under monitoring.</li> <li>- MAR and GWA remain red for safeguarding, with actions underway to address issues.</li> </ul> <p><b>5E. Finance Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three-year plan demonstrates reserves returning to target by September 2028.</li> <li>- Budget for 2025/26 projects surpluses in both Academy and central budgets.</li> <li>- Risks identified: pay assumptions, utilities, and future funding levels.</li> <li>- Approval sought for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o 2025/26 Budget</li> <li>o Pooling of end-of-year deficits to the centre, with internal payback mechanism</li> <li>o Central recharge policy</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Decision: All three approvals agreed unanimously.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Catering contract tender completed. Board delegated authority to LM to sign final contract subject to no material changes.</li> </ul> <p><i>Decision: Delegated approval granted unanimously.</i></p> <p><b>5F. Audit &amp; Risk Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No further comments.</li> </ul> <p><b>5G. Culture &amp; Development Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Committee suspended until further notice, with oversight of existing initiatives transferred to Education Provision Committee.</li> <li>- Transition of CRG into Trust progressing positively, with a working group established to monitor process.</li> </ul> <p><b>5H. Pupil Voice Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Committee continues to grow, with strong student engagement and positive feedback.</li> </ul>	
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		<p>Students noted they feel listened to and involved in Trust decision-making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Successful student involvement in catering contract procurement process.</li> <li>- Board praised engagement and impact on reading initiatives (e.g. World Book Day, wider literacy focus).</li> <li>- New journalism project launched as a result of Student Voice, giving pupils experience in publishing.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Proposal tabled to restructure Board Sub-Committees:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curriculum &amp; Quality Assurance Committee extended, renamed <i>Education Provision Committee</i> with wider remit (including safeguarding, attendance, and behaviour).</li> <li>- Governance &amp; Compliance Committee disbanded. Compliance items to move to Audit &amp; Risk; governance items to Board.</li> <li>- Culture &amp; Development Committee suspended until new schools join.</li> </ul> <p><i>Decision: Unanimous approval of revised committee structure.</i></p>		
6.	<b>Trustee Appointments</b>	<p>In line with the annual cycle, the Board was asked to confirm the appointments of Chair and Vice Chair for 2025/26.</p> <p><b>Chair of the Board:</b> Nomination received for GN.</p> <p><i>Decision: Unanimous agreement by show of hands. GN appointed as Chair for 2025/26.</i></p> <p><b>Vice Chair of the Board:</b> Nomination received for PM.</p> <p><i>Decision: Unanimous agreement by show of hands. PM appointed as Vice Chair for 2025/26.</i></p> <p>The Chair expressed thanks for the Board's continued confidence and noted two points for the year ahead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A review of the role of Chair and the support provided, including consideration of Trustees taking on or sharing aspects of the current Chair's duties.</li> <li>- Succession planning for both Chair and Vice Chair roles, with further discussion to take place in the coming months.</li> </ul>		
7.	<b>Communication from the Board to the Trust Community</b>	<p>The following key messages were agreed for communication to the wider Trust community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Celebration of Outcomes:</b> A message of congratulations to schools which achieved particularly strong phonics, multiplication, and KS2 results. Draft communication to be prepared by SG on behalf of the Board.</li> </ul>		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Outstanding Governance Recognition:</b> The Chair will write to the Chair, HT, and Clerk of TVA AGB, to congratulate them on being the first within the Trust to be graded as Outstanding in its inaugural year.</li> <li>- <b>Annual Board Communication:</b> GN, SG, and KD will finalise content for the annual recorded message to governors and Trust leaders, highlighting priorities for 2025/26 including attendance, Ofsted readiness, and strategic focus areas.</li> </ul> <p>No further items were raised for communication.</p>	GN, SG	ASAP
8.	<b>Any Other Business, Correspondence to the Chair &amp; Chair update</b>	<p><b>Correspondence to the Chair:</b> The Chair confirmed that no correspondence had been received since the last meeting.</p> <p><b>Chair's Update:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflected on the recent Trust Leadership Conference, describing it as the most successful to date with strong engagement, optimism, and positive feedback. Thanks were extended to the organisers within the Thinking Creative department.</li> <li>- Chair confirmed that trustees will receive more periodic updates on material matters between meetings, where appropriate, to improve communication and awareness.</li> </ul> <p><b>Scheme of Delegation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- KD reported that the updated Academy Trust Handbook requires the Chair of each AGB to sign off the PE and Sports Premium. A minor amendment to the Scheme of Delegation was therefore proposed.</li> </ul> <p><i>Decision: Unanimous approval to amend the Scheme of Delegation accordingly.</i></p> <p>No further items of business were raised.</p>		
9.	<b>Items for Next Agenda</b>	To review prior to next meeting.		
10.	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>	<p>Date of next meeting: <b>Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> October at 5pm.</b> The formal meeting closed at <b>6:47pm.</b> One confidential item recorded in Confidential Minutes.</p>		

Action Log				
No.	Agenda Item	Action	By Whom	By When
4.	CEO Report	SG to draft congratulations letters for GN and SG to send to high-performing Heads.	SG	ASAP
7.	Communication from the Board to the Trust Community	GN and SG to write to TVA AGB congratulating them on Outstanding grading.	GN and SG	ASAP
7.	Communication from the Board to the Trust Community	GN, SG, and KD to finalise content for the annual recorded message to governors and Trust leaders	GN, SG, KD	Sept 2025