

Full Governing Board Meeting 2025/26

Meeting Minutes			
Date	Wednesday 17 September 2025	Time and Location	4.00 p.m. PPA Room
Attendees	Initials	Attendees	Initials
Di Hunt (Chair)	DH	Andrew Hunter	AH
Viv Aloy	VA	Sam Kashmiri	SK
Linda Anderson	LA	Mark Longley	ML
Matt Ashdown	MA	Nicci Lorusso	NL
Jennifer Barker	JB	Diana Marsland	DM
Colin Brace	CB	Kimberley Nelson	KN
Clare Brittain	CB	Chris Runeckles (item 6 only)	CR
Eva Field	EF	Jake Terrill	JT
John Godley	JG	Laura Bryant (Clerk)	LB

Apologies	Initials
Sue Hatton	SH

	Agenda	Led by
1.	Welcome and Apologies for Absence	Chair
2.	Declaration of Interest	Chair
3.	Minutes of Last Meetings – Wednesday 9 July 2025	Chair
4.	Matters Arising	Chair
5.	Urgent Matters	Chair
6.	Pupil GCSE results analysis – Chris Runeckles	CR
7.	Register of Business Interests & Governors' Code of Conduct	Chair
8.	Instrument of Government	Chair
9.	Co-opted Governor Election	Chair
10.	Budget Monitoring and Delegation of Financial Powers	Chair
11.	Safeguarding and Child Protection Update	Chair
12.	Federation Update	Chair
13.	Headteacher's Report	MA
14.	Chair's Report	Chair
15.	Policy Reviews: - Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy - Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy	Chair
16.	Chairs of Committees reports – items arising from Committee minutes	Chair
17.	Reports: - Lead Governor visits - Link Governor visits - School website information - Governor training - DSA	Chair

Diana M. Hunt
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18.	AOB	Chair
19.	Date of next meeting: Wednesday 3 December 2025 at 3.30 p.m.	-

Item no.	Discussion	Action	Due Date
	The meeting started at 4.00 p.m.		
1.	Welcome and Apologies for Absence - Apologies for absence were received from and accepted for SH. - DH extended a warm welcome to MA attending his first FGB meeting as Headteacher, CR attending as new Deputy Headteacher, and LB as new Clerk.		
2.	Declaration of Interest None		
3.	Minutes of Last Meetings – 9 July 2025 The minutes of the FGB meetings held on 9 July 2025 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.		
4.	Matters arising 9 July 2025 None		
5.	Urgent Matters None		
6.	Pupils GCSE results analysis by Chris Runeckles - CR showed a video celebrating the students' successes including footage of students collecting their GCSE results at school and commented that it was a heartwarming reminder of why school staff do what they do. The results day was very well attended with over half of the cohort attending to open their results with their peers and school staff, perhaps a record number in recent years. Overall results this year were excellent. CR reminded that the Year 11 cohort that have just left and our current Year 11 students are the years for which we have no SATS data, so we are measuring on attainment rather than progress. CR ran through a few highlights: - Unconfirmed, but likely we are highest attaining school in West Sussex. Also comparing well regionally and to different parts of the sector. - Across all subjects, those that achieved grades 7+, nationally is 21.8%, at Downlands it is 35% - Across all subjects, those that achieved grades 4+, nationally is 67.4%, at Downlands it is 87%. - MA clarified that we are attaining same performance compared nationally to the private sector.		

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	- Some of the more technical data was presented: - CR explained that using the Attainment 8 score (this takes into account a student's top 8 GCSE marks) we had a score of 5.7 - In the FFT rankings (compared to the other c.1200 FFT users) we are in the top 12% - In English and Maths, sometimes called the 'basics', the number of students achieving a 4 in both subjects was 86% and the number of students achieving a 5 in both subjects was 67%. - A list was shown of the highest attaining subjects, although this is difficult to compare. In Computer Science, 20 students got a grade 9. - CR & MA are meeting Heads of subjects to review exam results, discuss key successes, areas for improvement and changes to curriculum/teaching practices/assessment models etc going forward. This will continue over the next few weeks and is providing valuable insight for CR. - Focus moving forward is to achieve high attainment for all, and narrow the gaps between FSM and non-FSM and SEND and non-SEND students where our attainment gap sits slightly higher than the national average - There was a brief discussion around why the SEND and FSM cohort may achieve lower grades and CR clarified that the focus was about closing the gap, and not about changing our school so that our highest attainers will still continue to achieve excellent results. - CR introduced the 'Our vision and school priorities' slide, with MA explaining that the SLT team had been working over the summer to work out what the drivers are to making a difference to every student. There is currently a working school vision, which has had input from SLT and school staff, will next go to the students via the School Council, and the SparC committee. It will then be discussed again with the Governors. - Key challenges at the moment are: - Students entering Y7 with low reading ages - Low attendance leading to lost learning hours - Gaps in attainment levels between different cohorts. - School Development Plan is the plan for the next four years, to outline where we are taking Downlands. Q: The word 'belonging' what does it mean and what does it look like at Downlands? Is there a plan for this? - Yes, it's one of our key development plans to focus on inclusive culture and belonging. We are currently exploring and gathering evidence to work out the key action for the way forward. - DH confirmed that the School Development Plan will be discussed again at the December meeting. Q: Will we have copies of this in advance, and will it go to individual committees? - Yes, MA and CR are looking at the framework and the SLT are working with leaders to establish first points to focus on. Q: Is there a gender gap in the results? - A slight one but this varies depending on the subject. Overall girls achieve slightly higher than boys, but nothing that we are concerned about. - CR left the meeting at 16.30		
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7.	Register of Business Interests & Governors' Code of Conduct - LB advised that several Governors still needed to complete the Register of Business Interest form. Hard copies were distributed to facilitate prompt completion. - The Governors approved the NGA model Code of Conduct for maintained school governing bodies. DH signed the Code of Conduct accordingly.		
8.	Instrument of Government The Board agreed to re-adopt the Instrument of Government as it stands.		
9.	Co-opted Governor Election - DH has circulated details of a potential candidate for the co-opted governor vacancy to all Governors. DH and JG have met with the candidate. - The candidate was unanimously elected to fill the remaining Co-opted Governor vacancy.		
10.	Budget Monitoring & Delegation of Financial Powers - MA explained that teaching staff costs slightly high as currently have two members of the teaching staff on maternity leave. - Payrises have been factored in for both teaching and support staff. - Apprentice levy came in slightly higher than Government estimations. - Small overspend on premises costs due to additional rubbish disposal during renovations. - Although transport costs look high for this point in the year, all vehicles have had annual services and MOT tests, so this will level out. - During the heatwaves, fans were bought for classrooms, and an air conditioning unit has been installed in the reception area. - Rationalised the midday meals for duty staff reducing pressure here. - There is a significant spend showing under CPD, this is due to the Federation Inset Day, costs are to be shared between all four schools but Downlands paid costs initially and are reclaiming costs from the other Federation schools. Q: There have been ongoing issues with Bromcom, is there any improvement with this? - There were significant capacity problems at the beginning of term. MA attended a meeting at WSCC last week where it was discussed whether Heads could combine to put pressure on Bromcom to improve performance, but WSCC advised that this was already being done. Q: With the Bromcom problems, is there a chance that budget figures are not correct? - No, the problems are operational only, nothing to do with the financial system. - CBR clarified that it is West Sussex that have the SLA with Bromcom, so there is little we can do. We really have no alternatives. - DH advised that we have been selected for a Governor Financial Audit with Hampshire County Council acting as Independent Auditors. The deadline for submitting information is 13th October, but we may ask to extend the deadline due to having a new Headteacher and new Business Manager in		

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	post. There will be a Teams meeting scheduled with the auditors attended by DH and CB. DH advised that there were no changes to the Delegation of Financial Powers since last year. The Board unanimously agreed that the Chair could sign the Delegation for a further year on its behalf.		
11.	Safeguarding and Child Protection Update - DH met with Kate Stodart, Assistant Headteacher and DSL this morning. Kate confirmed that all DBS checks were complete and up to date and she is working with HR to ensure that our Single Central Record remains complete. Her focus last year was to update processes, and this year she is focusing on e-safety and alternative provision. Q: How long are DBS checks valid for? - They don't have an expiry, and as we are all subscribed to the update service, we do not have to resubmit them. Q: Following the news that a missing lady was later found deceased in Hassocks, has this had any impact at school? - No, we have checked and as far as we are aware the lady had no relatives at Downlands. Pastoral Support teams will support any students that are impacted. Q: Is there any concern about the safety to students, is there any suspicion of foul play? - We only have the information that police have issued which is that they are investigating but that they believe the death to be non-suspicious. - All Governors were reminded to complete the National College safeguarding training as soon as possible.		
12.	Federation Update - Currently Headteachers and Chairs of Governors meet half termly. As two of the Chairs of Governors are standing down at the end of this academic year, Chairs and their vice-chairs are meeting separately on 16th October. - The next meeting for Headteachers and Chairs 8th October.		
13.	Headteacher's Report MA spoke to his Headteacher's report filed with these minutes. - The year has started exceptionally well, a fantastic set of GCSE results, and a successful transition into Year 7 for all students. - MA extended his thanks to Mark Wignall (MWi), previous Headteacher, and acknowledged that the success of this school is down to his hard work, and that of the whole school community and all of the input and intervention from teaching staff and support staff. MA thanked Governors for all their contributions to the success of the school. - Year 7 transition is overseen by Kate Stodart and this year only one student was absent on the first day, so a very successful start. - There is a rise in the number of students with SEND in Year 7 from 42 last year to 70 this year. Vicky Cornish, Assistant Headteacher and SENDCo and		

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	her team have been instrumental in making the transition for these students so successful. MA extended his thanks to the whole learning support team. • We had an unplanned fire drill very close to the start of term, but students and staff responded well. • Year 7 Forest School days are starting this week led by Matthew Stokes. • Ellie Dickinson, Assistant Headteacher in charge of Teaching & Learning is leading a new initiative, Accessible Teaching by Design, aiming to ensure success for every child in every lesson. • Link meetings are starting to take place, focus on inclusive practise within each department and across the whole school. • MA has been undertaking a culture coding project with all staff looking at our values, priorities and behaviours. All feedback has more or less aligned with the school vision, but a few tweaks have made and this will continue over the next few weeks. • MA welcomed new staff and acknowledged staff that have left. • The SLT member responsible for Pupil Premium students will now be CR. • Thanks to Sophie Fairbank, Business Manager and the site team who have successfully delivered several projects over the summer holidays. All work was completed on schedule. • Refurbishment of the DT rooms was funded by the DSA. • MA attended the new Year 7 information evening which was a success with very low numbers of worries or concerns being fed back. MA noted that after SK spoke about reading, an Educational Psychologist approached them to say that they had recently attended a conference on this subject, and it was aligned with everything that SK had spoken about. • Federation Headteachers met at the end of last term and MA attended with MWi. There were some collaborative events last year including a dance show, sporting and public speaking events, which are planned to continue this year. • At the Federation INSET day last year, there was a very high profile speaker on Inclusion which ordinarily we would not be able to provide, but as cost was split between four schools, this became possible. • MA thanked all Governors for their support, and extended thanks to MWi for his supportive and detailed handover, and acknowledged that where we are now as a school is down to his hard work. • Q: There is a raised number of SEND students entering Year 7, how many of those have an EHCP? • Two or three, which is slightly higher than the national average. • Q: Was the intake lower or higher than previously? • We are currently full in Year 7. • Q: Is there any chance we will be asked to take any more bulge classes? • Possibly in the future. The new school that was planned to be built in Burgess Hill has been postponed. • Q: Did anyone in our catchment area not get in to the school? • There may be, this will be dependent on distance from the school.		
14.	Chair's Report • DH advised that there is a Stage 2 complaint brought forward from September as this was received too late to set up a panel before the summer holidays.		



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	- DH reminded Governors that following department visits, the new forms should now be used. Exam meeting report forms remain unchanged. - West Sussex have approached us to see if any Governor would be willing to assist with a complaint in a Burgess Hill school, which would involve visiting the school, interviewing staff and writing a report. There were no volunteers for this. - Open Evening is on Thursday 2nd October, DH requested volunteers to attend the event. VA is able to attend. - DH reminded all Governors to check school emails regularly.		
15.	Policy Reviews Equity, Diversion and Inclusion Policy - DH noted that there were three minor wording amendments. - There was a brief discussion about the word ableism and whether it should be referred to in Appendix 1. Q: Do we as a Governing Board get feedback on any prejudicial incidents in school? - Yes, this would sit under the Pupil Outcomes and Wellbeing committee. Q: Do we positively promote diversity in hiring? - Yes. - A brief discussion took place around research showing that there is a difference between male and female response to the wording of job advertisements. It was noted that AI can be a useful tool. Q: There is recent article about Danish schools teaching empathy from the ages of 6-16. Is this something to consider? - Yes, this would fall within inclusion and character education. JT noted that there was new PSHE guidance referring to this. - The policy was approved unanimously. Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy - It was noted that page 67 of the Policy still referred to Mr Graham Odlin, who was no longer the Designated Safeguarding Lead. This is to be updated to Ms Kate Stodart. - It was noted that there are several point numbering and minor typographical errors along with mismatched formatting. Amendments will be sent to LB who will make the relevant amendments and send to DH for distribution to Governors. - JT noted that there had only been very minor amendments to KCSIE guidance this summer, so there may be more updates in the near future.		
16.	Chairs of Committees reports – items arising from Committee minutes None as no Committees had yet met in this school year.		

DH

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17.	Reports: Lead & Link Governor visits, School Website Information, Governor Training & DSA Visits – Lead Governors - No visits have been completed this term. Visits – Link Governors - No visits have been completed this term. Q: Will MA still be the link for Disadvantage/Inclusion? - No, this will now be CR. It was agreed that there will be a settling in period of half a term before a link visit is arranged. School Website Information - DM has completed an audit and all required information is on our website. Q: Will all policies be updated immediately to reflect the change in Headteacher? - No, these will continue to be updated when they are due as previously. - There was a brief discussion about the accessibility plan and whether it was due for renewal. DH confirmed that the most up to date version was on the website and it is due for renewal in October 2025. This will be discussed at the next Pupil Outcomes and Wellbeing meeting scheduled for 15th October. Governor Training - All Governors were reminded to complete the National College safeguarding training as soon as possible and send their certificates of completion to DH and JG. Q: Is financial training required for all Governors? - No, not unless part of the Finance and Buildings committee. - It was clarified that all members of Finance & Buildings committee must undertake the financial training regardless of any professional qualifications. - Any Governors wishing to undertake any additional training were advised to check National College website. DSA - KN advised that the next DSA quiz night will be held on Friday 14th November, it was hoped that there would be a Governor team. - There is a 'meet the DSA' event for all parents and carers on Wednesday 24th September, which hopes to attract new members as some parents of Year 11 pupils will be leaving at the end of this year, and there is currently a vacancy for a secretary. - The Downlands Christmas Market will be held on Saturday 29th November.,		
18.	AOB None		
19.	Date of Next Meeting FGB meeting on Wednesday 3 December 2025 at 3.30 p.m. The meeting closed at 5.40 p.m.		