Ripon Grammar School Governors

Full Governing Board Meeting - Minutes

Wednesday 16 July 2025
Bishopton House

1. Attendees and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting

Present: Matthew Bean (MB), Tom Cavell-Taylor (TCT), Adele, Laurie-Wilson (ALW), Eric Medway (EM), Rob O'Hare (ROH), Amy Tweddle Bray (ATB), Vikki Barton Brown (VBB), Peter Von-Hovan (PVH), Barbara Brodigan (BB), Ian Charlton (IC), Jonathan Webb (JMW), Elizabeth Jarvis (EJ) – Chair of Board

In attendance – Graham Livesey (GL) – Clerk to the Governors

Apologies were received from Dave Winspear, Sinay Jayan, Victoria Pang and Josh Stott

No new declarations of interest were made.

The Chair reminded governors of confidentiality, especially regarding one sensitive agenda item. She confirmed that minutes would be made public after necessary amendments.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes from the meetings held on 26 March and 13 May 2025 were approved as accurate records, proposed by TCT and ALW respectively.

3. Matters Arising

The Chair reported on the Parental Engagement Meeting. Despite invitations to all Year 9 parents, no attendees were present. Governors discussed possible reasons and proposed returning to targeted invitations and offering hybrid formats (in-person and Teams) to improve engagement.

4. Headmaster's Report

The Headmaster presented a comprehensive report covering admissions, curriculum, teaching and learning, pastoral matters, sixth form, estates, finance, and strategic development.

Key highlights included:

School Roll: At the end of summer term the school role is at the highest ever, with 944 students, including 93 boarders. Demand remains high, especially for Year 12 and Year 9 entry. Governors asked of the impact of this – for staff and students – JMW confirmed that there were no concerns at the moment. ATB noted the potential impact on staff in terms of class size and the workload associated with this. JMW was asked to monitor for ipact so on staff wellbeing and confirmed feedback through the staff forum and by regular engagement. Appraisers were also to be asked to provide feedback on this aspect to the SLT.

Admissions: The September 2005 Year 12 is projected at 165 students. Year 9 and Year 7 entries remain strong. The number of boarders applying for year 7 entry is disappointed. JMW confirmed the projected boarding numbers for September to be 97. He was asked about his confidence in this number and of any risks. He confirmed that the presence of the admissions coordinator and the work to maintain engagement with families of potential students to be robust. Risks for year 12 are mainly related to failure of applicants to meet the entry criteria.

-Staffing: The school is fully staffed for September, with strong recruitment for vacant positions. Following failure to recruit to the Head of Boarding position, the post has been filled on an interim basis by Tania Davidson, recent Assistant Head of Boarding at Queen Margaret's School York. EJ commented that whilst the process for her appointment was not in parity to the process undertaken for a substantive position, they had been interviewed by all members of SLT and she had represented the FGB with the head.

Curriculum: The curriculum committee had approved changes to the way combined science if delivered at GCSE with a plan to initiate this in Year 10 for students who would benefit from this program of study.

Similarly in line with national standards, the core RS has been increased to two periods per week, with a reduction in French by one period to enable this.

Teaching & Learning: Inclusive teaching principles are being strengthened across the school, and the AI strategy under review.

Safeguarding & Pastoral: The head reported progress in this area – there have been positive student results from surveys. Exclusion numbers have continued to fall, and there has been a notable decline in the use of vapes within school. The head was asked if there was any concern about students using alternative methods of nicotine replacement (eg nicotine pouches)? There has not been detection of this so far. Governors asked about bullying incidents – there has been an incident in boarding relating to one student, which has been investigated. IC asked about a culture of bullying in School House – and was provided with assurance of processes being firmed up to ensure this is not the case. The Head reported that there had been no other concerns raised relating to boarding. As part of the action plan relating to the bullying incident earlier in the year, the Head has been asked to oversee the development of standard procedures relating to the investigation of pastoral concerns.

From September 2025 there will be a ban on smart phone usage for year 7 students, as well as increased enforcement of rules relating to phone usage in school Governors were supportive of these principles but asked for feedback on the implementation at the next meeting, particularly relating to the matters of confiscation and the potential safeguarding impacts of this (students not having their phones when travelling from school).

Estates: Upgrades have been completed in boarding accommodation, using our in house teams. IT work has also been completed. In school, work is underway to refurbish the toilets in areas. Governors asked about the provision of private toilet facilities – the new facilities will ensure privacy for all users, with floor to ceiling walls and doors.

TCT asked about the Section 106 funding which has been allocated to RGS following the recent residential developments. Concern was expressed by governors that the process by which this is to be allocated to RGS is not transparent; the funds are currently being held by LA, and there has not been any indication of how these are to be released.

ACTION BB confirmed that she will pick up this item with NYCC and report back to the FGB

Finance: Projected deficit of £6,500. Budget resilience remains low. Strategic development plan under review.

Curriculum – the Head described the ongoing trajectory of boys performing less well than girls throughout the school. Governors asked how this was being addressed and heard about strategies including role modelling. Governors asked about teaching strategies to improve engagement and assessment methods. This will be picked up by the curriculum committee. The new literacy strategy will be launched in September 2025 and in anticipation of a new Ofsted Framework, the strategic development plan will be reviewed in September along with the SEF.

The Chair thanked the Headmaster for the comprehensive report.

5. Financial Matters

a. **Budget Monitoring Report and Update on Financial Position**

The report, supported by papers submitted in advance of the meeting was presented by ROH. Budget monitoring projects a small 6.5k deficit at the end of the year.

The financial situation remains fragile, due to complete erosion of all reserves and a deficit budget.

There is a significant threat to any form of financial recovery unless the school is to receive sustained increased funding. Expenditure remains high due to high staff costs (an experienced staff group), and energy costs, whilst central funding remains low.

The financial recovery plan has been approved, and governors were supporting the principles by which the F+P committee are overseeing financial management and monitoring the recovery plan.

b. **Capital Expenditures**

There was no capital expenditure projects for approval.

6. Safeguarding

The safeguarding governor was not present at the meeting, and no formal report had been submitted. The Chair confirmed she had received a verbal update. A review of processes around sharing of information between boarding and day school ongoing in response to concerns raised. This will be reported back to the committee.

8. Governing Board Membership

a. **Co-option to the FGB**

Governors unanimously approved the co-option of Robert O'Hare to the board, recognising his financial expertise and leadership of the Finance Committee.

b. **Election of Vice Chair**

Eric Medway was unanimously re-elected as Vice Chair. Governors expressed deep appreciation for his dedication and historical knowledge.

c. **Committee Structure for 2025/26**

Committee memberships reviewed. Vacancies noted due to governor departures. Governors were asked to notify the Chair and Clerk of changes or preferences.

8. Committee Reports

Summaries were provided by committee chairs. Key points included:

a. **Admissions Committee 25/06/2025**

EM presented a summary of discussions which had focused on

- An update that there was increase in number of candidates for Y7 testing from in catchment for September 2025 which may be related to the use of the online resource FROG. The funding of this from the GSHA is being reviewed.
- An update on appeals and admissions for Y7 and Y9 September 2025 – noting that 14 students have accepted places for Y9.
- A review of L6 entry criteria will be scheduled for September so that any change can be approved in time for the next recruitment cycle.

- There has been an agreement reached with the Cathedral to sponsor two choral scholarships in each of Y7 and Y8 – an addition to the oversubscription criteria for borders was approved to enable this.

08b Boarding Committee 21/05/2025

- MB summarized the minutes for the meeting including
- Staffing changes for September 2025 – new Heads and Deputy Heads of Boarding have been recruited and are undergoing induction and orientation processes
- There have been ongoing improvements to the fabric of School House which has received positive feedback
- The marketing efforts for boarding continue – with the admissions officer and also the relationship with an external company. Numbers for September are projected to be 97 – for which there is sufficient accommodation
- There has been an increase in number of termly boarders – with a focus on developing robust programs for weekend activities.
- The safeguarding issue relating to events in School House – a review of process is being undertaken with a planned boarding review involving governors for the autumn term.

08c Curriculum Committee 04/06/2025

A summary document of key issues was reviewed.

- Governors noted that the home learning policy has been embedded and has been well received by parents, students and staff.
- EM confirmed that at every meeting the committee reviews the attendance registers taken during curriculum time to ensure this process is fully embedded to support the safeguarding of students. Compliance has improved significantly, and the Head is asked to reinforce and take action for any staff members who are not engaging in this mandatory requirement.
- The committee had reviewed in detail the proposals for curriculum changes and asked for the Board to approve the following changes based on a recommendation from the committee
  - Combined science curriculum to be delivered from Y10 for those students who are taking this rather than separate science subjects
  - RS lesson time to be increased to two periods from September 2025
    This was approved.

08d Estates Development Committee 11/06/2025

The committee discussion focused on
Discussion around summer works – the program has been reviewed and approved (no capital funding approval required)

- Solar for Schools – governors are frustrated at the lack of progress with this – relating the request from NYC for a formal tendering process to be undertaken (despite the program being unique with no competitors). Governors noted that in other areas of the country this had not been required.
- There was discussion around the allocation and use of Section 106 monies.
- <u>BB agreed to assist with the resolution relating to both these issues with NYC</u>

08e Finance and Personnel Committee 07/05/2025, 09/07/2025

ROH summarized key points relating to the documents shared with governors prior to the meeting.

- Further discussion occurred around the issues relating to budget monitoring and the ongoing strategic risks relating to central funding not matching the expenses – with ongoing risks to expenditure particularly relating to staff costs (including costs for agency staff to cover sickness), unpredictable energy expenditure and fluctuating numbers on role. ROH also reinforced to governors the risks associated with a decline in boarding numbers to the viability of boarding in terms of costs.

- Governors were asked to note the savings accrued by the processes around contract renewal and contract management, and the contract review processes.
- Boarding outstanding fees continue to be review – we have currently one case with NYC legal, after an unprompted exit from boarding of one student without payment of the terms' fees in lieu of notice.
- Governors were asked to note that the catering contract re-tender process is underway. Training for committee members with a focus on financial management is planned for the autumn term.

08f Pastoral Committee 18/06/2025

TCT summarized the minutes that were available for Board members to review.
Points of note included

- Evidence of very strong cohesion within the pastoral team, which provided assurance to governors of the functionality of the team and the shared vision and accountability as well as mutual support; all resulting in increased effectiveness.
- The continuity of Heads of Year from years 7 to 11 (heads of year moving with the year group) has been successful and received praise from students and parents. Previous issues relating to handover have been mitigated, and this continuity ash provided stability for more vulnerable students, where notable progress in terms of behaviour, wellbeing and academic performance has been evidenced.
- The committee reviews metrics relating to pastoral matters at every meeting and within these are reports relating to behaviour and safeguarding. Governors have been pleased to see the continued improvement of these metrices.
- The committee are concerned that reliance on one individual for data oversight and have asked the Headmaster to address this – not only for the wellbeing of the individual, but also for the safety and sustainability of processes within school.

08g Committee Chairs

The chairs nominated for 2025/26 were unanimously approved (Eric Meday, Tom Cavell-Taylor, Matthew Bean, Robert O'Hare, Dave Winspear). The Chair extended her thanks, on behalf of the committee to them.

9. Governors with Specific Responsibilities

a. **Inclusion Governor**

EM submitted a comprehensive report which was available to governor prior to the meeting. Within this he has shared recommendations which have been agreed by the curriculum committee including

- Governor visibility on SEND funding and how this is being spent
- Written reports for SEND students to include SEND reports
- Departmental reviews by SLT should all include specific sections about the effectiveness relating to SEND provision
- The curriculum and pastoral committees should review and scrutinize data sets relating to SEND students separately as a potential vulnerable group
- When funding allows, the pastoral centre layout will be reviewed to address the issues of dual functionality.

This was unanimously supported by the Board. The Head was asked to prioritise this within the SDP and the progress against the these actions will be reported back to the Board.

b. **CEIAG Governor**

TCT updated the committed on the recent events involving students and parents which had attracted hugely positive feedback, and the extensive careers program that his being delivered.. A formal report will be prepared for the next meeting.
Governors were asked to note that students had been supported in applications to degree apprenticeship schemes which had been successful.
Governors were asked to note again the concerns regarding the lack of resilience – relating to the reliance on a single staff member to deliver this work. Staff Welfare Governor: No specific update.

10. Health and Safety

DW had submitted a paper in advance of the meeting. 118 incidents have been logged and all appropriately investigated. There have been no significant concerns and processes in school to enable learning as well as proactivity are supporting a culture of this being 'standard businesses'..

11. Complaints

Governors reviewed a confidential item regarding a student exclusion. An action plan was presented and approved. Assurance to be monitored via relevant committees, with a full report due in spring 2026.

12. Policies for Approval

Lost Property Policy was approved, subject to minor amendments.

13. Off-site Visits and Activities

Governors approved, subject to usual processes around risk assessments the following trips

- Art trip to Paris
- History Trip to Berlin
- Geography Trip to Sorrento

The Chair asked the Head to share our thanks to all the staff involved in trips, noting the high number that have been delivered through the year, many involving overnight stay. The Committed acknowledged the commitment from staff to enable this and the benefits this afforded our students in many ways.

14. Governor Training

Governors were asked and agreed to undertake the NGA safeguarding training

A strategy session will be held in the Autumn Term – during which there will be a focus on strategic priorities, financial resilience, governor visibility and assurance processes. The date will be confirmed.

15. Calendar

The Chair thanked EM for producing the meeting calendar. An updated calendar (version 2) was approved, subject to final checks with the SLT regarding any clashes.

16. Any Other Business

The chair recorded her thanks to Josh Stott, who has come to the end of his tenure as a parent governor. She thanked the Board for their efforts over the year.

17. Date of Next Meeting

Confirmed: Wednesday, 15th October 2025

18. Meeting Closure

The meeting closed at 20:20