

Minutes
Meeting of the Southport Education Group - Standards
Committee
College Corporation Committee Meeting



Date 26/11/2024
Time 15:00 - 17:20
Location King George V College (10 Grundy Close, Southport, England, PR8 6LR)

Governors Present Michelle Brabner - Principal – (Ex-Officio Member)
Kevin Burke (Independent Member)
Catherine Louise Durr (Staff Governor)
Roderic Gillespie (Committee Chair - Independent Member)
*Anita Holt (Associate Member)
*Kashfa Kalim (Independent Member)
Susannah Porter (Independent Member)
Elaine Small (Independent Member)
Katy Robinson (Associate Member)
Tracey Wood (Independent Member)

Invited Attendees Mark Burrows (Deputy Principal)
Lisa Farnhill (Dir. Governance and Compliance)
Vickie Hayes (Head of Student Support and Inclusion)
Shaun Hindle (Dir. Curriculum, Apprenticeships and Skills)
Stephen Musa (Vice Principal Curriculum and Support)

* Indicates attendance via video conferencing facilities.

Apologies

Absent

Agenda

1 - WELCOME & APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Item Lead: Committee Chair – Roderic Gillespie

The meeting commenced with a welcome to all attendees. The Dir. Governance and Compliance confirmed there were no apologies for absence, with two members attending via videoconference facilities with it confirmed they could hear and be heard.

Item 1: Accepted

2 - DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Item Lead: Committee Chair – Roderic Gillespie

The Chair requested attendees to declare any conflicts of interest. Standing interests were noted, emphasising the need for transparency due to their advisory roles. No other conflicts of interest were declared.

Item 2: Noted

3 - MINUTES / MATTERS ARISING

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 25th September 2024 were reviewed. The Chair noted that the minutes were comprehensive and did not raise any issues. The minutes were approved implied, and there was no further matters arising not addressed under item four.

Item 3: Approved

4 - ACTIONS SUMMARY

Item Lead: Committee Chair – Roderic Gillespie

The Committee Chair requested an update on the progress of actions arising from previous meetings. It was noted that most actions were either covered in the current agenda or not yet due. Members noted the progress made, with attention drawn to the slight change to how risks would be reviewed. The discussion highlighted the dynamic nature of the risk register and the ongoing efforts to update and review risks.

Item 4: Noted

5 - CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

Participated: roderic.gillespie

The committee confirmed that there were no minutes from the 25th September 2024, meeting that needed to be held as confidential. Additionally, it was determined that no items of business on the current agenda needed to be marked as confidential and discussed without the presence of staff.

Item 5: Approved

6 - Risk Movements

Item Lead: Deputy Principal - Mark Burrows

The committee discussed the changes made to risk ratings, descriptors, and mitigations since the last meeting. Attention was drawn to the updates, with some risk ratings having decreased due to effective mitigations. Members were advised that the latest review had been a thorough and in-depth review, with a focus on ensuring pre and post mitigation scores were accurate.

The Committee Chair provided an update on contextualised policy issues presented to be considered due to their potential to impact the risks faced by the College. This included the impact of potential funding changes and government priorities, including skills and resits of English and Maths GCSE's.

In response to questions around the impact of funding issues in the Higher Education sector, the Vice Principal Curriculum and Support outlined the potential impact widening participation initiatives may have on destinations, with it anticipated opportunities may increase rather than decrease as a result of universities drive to increase student numbers, particularly from underrepresented groups.

The Committee discussed ongoing issues relating to the teacher pay awards, highlighting the impact of the government decision to fully fund school and some sixth form teachers' pay awards, but not FE and non-academy sixth form colleges, widening the gap between school and FE teacher pay. They acknowledged that although the Committee was not responsible for discussing pay, the outcome of the negotiations and resulting pay gap had the potential to impact the quality of the student experience by affecting staff recruitment and retention.

Members sought assurance that the latest update to the risk register reviewed the wording around the Ofsted risk, with it confirmed this had been amended. Members asked about the potential changes to apprenticeships, asking about the impact on the college and if this and other changes were recognised in the risk register. The Principal assured the Committee that team was agile and resilient to the continually shifting priorities and new directions and policies in the education sector, with several senior staff strategically placed in a number of external forums and Boards to ensure they were well placed to be made aware of and influence the changes. The Committee agreed that the overarching risk relating to awareness, preparedness, possibility and impact of policy change suitably captured all potential policy changes.

The Committee considered the increasing rhetoric around AI, with the Committee reminded of the digital strategy as presented at the last meeting, with it noted that this would be supported by an organisational position on AI use, with a principle-based approach that would be mindful AI technology could increase the digital divide, with plans in place to mitigate this. The Principal confirmed there would be a collaborative approach to developing the guidance, to be supported by the wider SLT, ensuring the approach manages the opportunities and risks, with a focus on removing barriers and supporting ethical use. Members supported the balanced approach, endorsing the use of guidance, with it proposed staff and students would already be exploring the options, with members offering to share their research and experiences, particularly around accessibility issues.

The Committee Chair asked members to consider these and other key risks as they progress through the meeting, to enable reflection on the impact of the presentation of the key reports on the risk register at the end.

Item 6: Update noted.

Action: Members to share resources on AI use and impact on accessibility

7 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Item Lead: Vice Principal Curriculum and Support- Stephen Musa, Head of Support and Inclusion - Vickie Hayes

The Committee were advised that the updates to the EDI policy were minimal, as a thorough review concluded it remained relevant, with the Committee agreeing to present this to the Corporation for approval.

The EDI strategy update included progress against objectives and recent achievements. Highlights included achieving commended status for two AOC Beacon Awards, one for support for students and the second in mental health and wellbeing. Members were advised the College continued to seek external recognition for their student support, with it hoped this year would see the achievement of the Carnegie Award.

In reviewing the targets and long-term objectives, the Committee endorsed the approach to maintain focus where ambitious targets had already been reached to ensure consistency. The attention of members was drawn to areas where achievement gaps persisted, with an outline of actions provided. Members interrogated the data, asking whether issues were local or national, course specific, and if the number of students in the underperforming groups were increasing. Members indicated underperformance in some groups aligned with their own experiences and data from their own organisations, discussing the potential rationale and action plans, commending the targeted approach.

The committee discussed the ongoing efforts to improve retention and pass rates for care-experienced students and to narrow the achievement gap for learners receiving free college meals. Specific initiatives included targeted communication, outreach, and resource allocation. The committee also addressed the achievement gap for white males, with targeted interventions and performance monitoring at curriculum level. Members asked if behaviour was factor impacting achievement. In linking to issues highlighted within the contextualised safeguarding training, the Committee asked if there were issues relating to gangs. Members were assured by the work done to mitigate the risks of being drawn into gangs, and by the practical and supportive measures to address the underlying issues thought to be affecting the attainment of some groups.

Members commended the evidenced commitment and improvements, asking for the impact of actions to date, querying whether the team felt suitably resourced and if they felt there was anything additional they could do. Examples of measurable and cultural impact were provided, alongside details of feedback from stakeholders that indicated the college was exceeding expectations. The Committee noted that resources had increased in line with increased demand, with additional capacity created through a new safeguarding post, and careful consideration of roles and responsibilities to ensure staff skills were effectively utilised.

The Committee noted the intention to overhaul the EDI committee's terms of reference, ensuring close alignment with the policy and objectives. Members were informed data would be used within the Committee as a tool for action, being forward looking, initiating actions to positively shift the data, with this feeding through to the work of Performance Boards.

Members agreed this shift would ensure bringing support needs to the forefront, ensuring that teachers are well-informed and equipped with strategies to support these learners effectively.

Item 7: Approved

Action: Recommend the policy for approval.

Matter arising: Follow up on the updated EDI Committee Terms of Reference.

8 - LEARNER PERSPECTIVES REPORT

Item Lead: Vice Principal Curriculum and Support- Stephen Musa

Members were reminded of the updated format, aiming to capture a range of evidence in one report to triangulate learner perspectives, with this report summarising information from Semester 1, with formal feedback obtained through the student survey focusing on induction.

The committee reviewed the feedback, which included insights into student experiences, behaviour development, attitudes, complaints, attendance, and retention. The report highlighted several positive aspects, including high levels of student satisfaction with the start of the year and the overall learning environment. Students expressed appreciation for the support provided by the college, particularly in terms of academic guidance and pastoral care. The feedback also indicated that students felt well-prepared and supported as they transitioned into the new academic year.

Members attention was drawn to the identified areas for improvement, which included concerns raised about the consistency of feedback from tutors, particularly in relation to English and Maths. The committee acknowledged the need to standardise feedback processes to ensure that all students receive clear and constructive guidance on their progress. The report also addressed behaviour, development and attitudes, noting that whilst most students displayed positive behaviour and attitudes towards learning, there were some instances of disruptive behaviour that needed to be addressed. The committee discussed strategies to promote positive behaviour and ensure a conducive learning environment for all students.

A member asked if governors had the opportunity to attend feedback sessions, and if this was not in place, whether it should be considered. The Committee was informed that this had been discussed during the last Governance Committee meeting, with it agreed this would be built into the learning walk days. A member who had attended the latest Learning Walk Day was invited to comment on the feedback session, providing positive feedback of the opportunity, with students having been open and engaging, however, added that it had been difficult to meet with some of the larger groups due to limited space, so the governor had taken the opportunity to sit with and gain feedback from those in smaller groups or on their own.

Members considered the detail of the complaints, noting the report indicated that there had been a few complaints related to specific issues, such as the availability of resources and support services. The committee asked if there were any areas of concern or emerging themes, and were assured complaints to date were unrelated, however, there were a higher proportion of complaints from students with additional needs. Members discussed measures to address the concerns raised by students and their parents, and commended the flexible and adaptive approach, noting the extensive support had been further enhanced with the introduction of life skills for students that were not studying the foundation program.

Members were assured that attendance and retention remained a key areas of focus. The report showed that overall attendance rates had improved, however, remained below the target set with some variations across different programmes. The committee discussed strategies to improve attendance and retention, asking what the successes had been attributed to. Members were provided with details of plans to undertake a best practice visit to another college as well as utilising employer links to emphasise the importance of attending GCSE sessions. The Committee discussed how attendance was logged, with discrepancies between colleges on what would be authorised due to the lack of central guidance for colleges. Members asked if the targeted focus on English and maths attendance had a detrimental impact on other areas, asking if it had inadvertently diverted resources away from those not needing to resit. Members were advised of a risk-based approach, linked to KPI's with no evidence indicating it had a detrimental impact on other subjects.

In concluding, members discussed local and national changes in behaviour, commending the colleges inclusive approach, which ensured staff have the strategies and resources to provide targeted support to all learners, irrespective of any formal diagnoses.

Item 9: Noted.

9 - Audit Reports relating to Standards

Item Lead: Deputy Principal Mark Burrows

The committee noted that there were no new reports available at the time, with verbal updates provided for planned audits. The discussion focused on the importance of maintaining high standards across all areas of the college and ensuring continuous improvement. The committee was informed about the progress of current audits, which are aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of various programmes and processes. These audits are expected to provide valuable insights into areas that may require further attention and improvement. The committee emphasised the importance of using audit findings to inform decision-making and drive improvements. It was agreed that any significant findings from the audits would be shared with the committee in future meetings to ensure transparency and accountability.

Item 9: Noted

10 - Quality of Education Report

Item Lead: Deputy Principal Mark Burrows

Members noted the Quality of Education Report focused on two main areas: the Curriculum Performance Dashboard (KPI extract) and the Deputy Principal's Report (Focus 2 – Implementation (Nov-Apr)). The committee reviewed the key performance indicators and discussed the progress made in various curriculum areas. The Curriculum Performance Dashboard provided a comprehensive overview of key metrics, including student achievement rates, retention rates, and attendance. Members were advised the data showed significant improvements in several areas, particularly in terms of student achievement and retention, with members informed of one curriculum area that had brought the overall data down, with an overview of targeted actions to support improvement outlined.

In summarising the Deputy Principal's Report, the Deputy Principal informed the Committee of the successful implementation of key initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education. The report drew attention to several successful strategies, including targeted support for students, enhanced curriculum design, and ongoing professional development for staff. The committee discussed the impact of these initiatives and emphasised the importance of continuous improvement.

Members discussed at length the progress made in addressing the challenges across the apprenticeship provision. Members asked about the rebrand and acknowledged the efforts made to improve this area and discussed the need for ongoing monitoring and support to ensure sustained progress. Members asked about the engagement and feedback from employers, with this noted as positive, particularly around the consistency in approach and improved communication. A member asked if employers offering placements for T Level provision were given a similar induction, with it confirmed they were not, however, the Deputy Principal agreed consideration would be given to introducing a similar procedure. Following a discussion around the success of the tiered approach to employer engagement, a member suggested the report could be enhanced by providing an outline of the employer activities that had taken place across the three tiers, with it agreed this would be built into future reports.

The committee discussed the need for consistent and high-quality feedback for students, particularly in core subjects such as English and Maths. It was agreed that further efforts would be made to standardise feedback processes and ensure that all students receive the support they need to succeed.

In response to an outline of new initiatives and opportunities, including success with grants and projects, members asked about any potential opportunities from the devolved authority and whether resources were dedicated to exploring new funding opportunities. The Deputy Principal confirmed some colleges had a dedicated resource, however, as a smaller college, this would not be feasible, and this was built into his role. Members endorsed the College's approach, with them ensuring any opportunities were carefully considered to ensure success in delivery, with a focus on building positive relationships and strengthening the College's reputation through innovation and quality.

The item concluded with an overview of how the data would evidence impact when the College is next inspected, with an overview of recent Ofsted activity. Members discussed the likely timeframe for a monitoring visit and full inspection, with the impact of proposed changes to the framework considered.

Item 10: Noted

Action: include an overview of employer activities that have taken place across the three tiers in future reports.

Action: Consider inducting employers engaged in T Level Placements in the same way as apprenticeship employers

11 - SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT 2023/24 AND STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR 2024/25

Item Lead: Deputy Principal Mark Burrows

The committee reviewed the Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2023/24 and the Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) for 2024/25. The SAR provided a comprehensive evaluation of the college's performance over the past year, highlighting key achievements and areas for improvement. The report indicated that the college had made significant progress in several areas, including student achievement, retention, and overall quality of education.

The committee proposed the SAR provided a clear and honest assessment of the college's strengths and weaknesses and commended the transparency and rigour of the self-assessment process, having received an outline of the updated process. Members noted how the Improvement Plan outlined the key priorities for the coming year, focusing on areas that require further improvement, embedding a small number of actions carried forward from the previous Plan.

Members were advised the plan included high level actions to address identified issues discussed throughout the meeting, including enhancing feedback processes, improving employer engagement, and addressing

apprenticeship challenges, whilst continuing to ensure the highest standards and expectations for behaviour and outcomes.

The committee discussed the importance of setting clear targets and monitoring progress to ensure that the planned improvements are achieved. The committee also discussed the importance of external validation and the role of the Further Education Commissioner's (FEC) Office in providing additional scrutiny and support. It was noted that an external deep dive into the apprenticeship programme would be conducted in January for the FEC's team, which would provide valuable insights and help validate the college's self-assessment. In discussing how a positive outcome from this could be used as evidence in an inspection, members discussed the team's preparations for the monitoring visit and follow up inspection, seeking assurances regarding staff wellbeing staff when considering the increased pressure resulting from the last inspection and issues caused by Ofsted's process errors.

Item 11: Approved

Action: Recommended for Corporation approval

12 - MEETING REFLECTION

Item Lead: Committee Chair – Roderic Gillespie

The Chair asked members to reflect on the meeting, highlighting key points, asking members to consider if these resulted in any recommended updates to the risk register. The conversation highlighted the importance of ongoing monitoring and the need to remain vigilant in addressing any emerging issues.

The committee also considered which items should be reported to the Corporation. It was agreed that the key discussions and decisions from the meeting, particularly those related to the Quality of Education Report, the Self-Assessment Report, and the Quality Improvement Plan, should be highlighted in the report to the Corporation. The Committee emphasised the importance of keeping the Corporation informed about progress and any significant developments.

12.1 - Risk reflection

Item Lead: Committee Chair – Roderic Gillespie, Deputy Principal – Mark Burrows

The committee's attention was drawn to the risk profile for risks relating to the Committee's terms of reference and reflected on whether any discussions during the meeting had resulted in recommended updates to risk ratings, mitigations, or the wording of risks, with a particular focus on the risk relating to managing quality.

Specific issues discussed included performance in areas that had been identified as underperforming which had impacted the overall data, and the delivery of apprenticeships, with it agreed that the risks and mitigations were accurately captured.

Members discussed the risks surrounding inspection at length, concluding this was accurately captured, and well managed.

The importance of having a clear plan and ensuring that all team members were supported to deliver the necessary actions was emphasised. The discussion acknowledged the challenges faced, particularly in relation to local context and resources, needing to ensure multiple priorities were simultaneously managed effectively, with members drawing on evidence presented that highlighted improvements made with an accurate and honest reflection of areas that continued to need further improvement. Members agreed actions to address these were proportionate, with impact to be evidence based, therefore no updates were required to the risk register.

12.2 - Items To Be Reported to the Corporation

Item Lead: Committee Chair – Roderic Gillespie

The committee discussed which items should be reported to the Corporation. Key areas identified for reporting included the progress on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), particularly improvements in reducing the attainment gap for children in care and young people. Also considered to be important to highlight was the impact of the actions taken to improve attendance to resit classes for English and Maths. Members agreed the final item should be their work in ensuring the self-assessment process had been robust, highlighting the evidence based approach and improved timing to ensure that actions were implemented by the start of term.

The Committee were informed that there would be a presentation of the high-level topics from the self-assessment report during the training slot ahead of the Board meeting to ensure that all key areas were adequately covered and understood.

Item 12: Approved – The Committee approved the items for highlighting to the Corporation.

13 - DATE OF NEXT MEETING & CLOSING COMMENTS

Item Lead: Committee Chair – Roderic Gillespie

The next meeting was confirmed to be Tuesday, 11th March 2025, at the earlier time of 2.30pm.

Closing comments included expressions of appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the college staff, as well as a reminder of the importance of continuous improvement and maintaining high standards. The meeting concluded with a commitment to ongoing collaboration and support to ensure the best possible outcomes for students and the college community.

Item 13 - Noted