



Hilltop School Academy Council Meeting Friday 27 June 2025 at 10:00 Hilltop School

Those Present:	Role:	Initials:
Paula Williams	Executive Regional Director - Chair	PW
Dale Gordon	Staff Governor (for Item 3.2)	DG
Sam Macdonald	Executive Headteacher	SMc
Ruth Milburn (via Teams)	Community Governor	RM
Rachel Parkin	Community Governor	RP
Sandra Rosado (via Teams)	Parent Governor	SR
Also Present:		
Renata Robins	Governance Clerk	Clerk
Lisa Suter	Executive Regional Director	LS
Apologies:		
Sharon Biggin	Governor – Vice Chair	SB
Fiona Featherstone	Governor	FF
Emma Goult	Parent Governor	EG

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	Actions
1.1. To receive apologies for absence Apologies were received for SB, FF and EG.	
1.2. To accept apologies for absence Apologies were accepted for SB, FF and EG.	
2. BEST WE CAN BE AWARDS	

<p>2.1. Presentation to Staff Nominee</p> <p>SMcD gave a verbal update on how the new peer led nomination process was working and invited the member of staff who had received the most nominations from staff into the meeting. Alice Williams was the recipient and SMcD read out a few of her colleagues' glowing remarks. The academy council members also added their congratulations; and on her successful appointment to the position of Assistant Headteacher vacancy from September.</p> <p>SMcD, referring to EG's question at the last meeting, whether parents could be involved in the nomination process, updated the meeting that it was likely the school would do something alongside these nominations through the governor route.</p>	
3. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS	
<p>3.1. Chair to determine any items of urgent business</p> <p>None.</p>	
<p>3.2. Confirmation of new Staff (Teaching) Governor – Dale Gordon</p> <p>The academy council unanimously approved the confirmation of Dale Gordon (DG) as a Staff (Teaching) Governor.</p> <p>Action: Clerking Services to facilitate GIAS updates and DBS check as appropriate.</p>	<p>Action: Clerking Services ASAP</p>
4. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS-	
<p>4.1. Individual Governors to declare any personal, business or other governance interests on any item on the agenda</p> <p>None.</p>	
5. HILLTOP SCHOOL LOCAL GOVERNING BODY MINUTES	
<p>5.1. To approve the minutes of the following meeting:</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held 21 March 2025 were approved as a true record with no amendments.</p>	
<p>5.2. Review of Action Tracker</p> <p>The outstanding actions on the tracker were reviewed and updated.</p>	
<p>5.3. Matters arising from the Minutes</p> <p>SMcD requested Clerking Services check that ZS (Zara Skidmore) had been removed from the Hilltop AC email distribution lists and Governor Hub.</p>	<p>Action:</p>

<p>Action: Clerking Services to affect this check.</p> <p>Governors were reminded that the next meeting would be held at the Forest View site.</p>	<p>Clerking Services 28/06/2025</p>
<p>6. ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED</p>	
<p>6.1. Headteacher Report</p> <p>The Headteacher’s report had been shared with governors in advance and was available on Governor Hub.</p> <p><u>Leadership & Management</u> SMc continues to focus on improving leadership strength at Hilltop and Forest View.</p> <p>One of the main things worked on early was setting clear expectations with staff, with a lot of time making sure everyone understood their roles and responsibilities. This is now making a difference—staff say they feel much clearer about their work and what is expected of them.</p> <p>SMc is also putting in place strong policies and systems that will last over time and won’t depend on any one person. This will help make the school more stable and consistent in the long run.</p> <p><u>Staff Sickness Absence</u> Staff absence continues to present a significant challenge, and a comprehensive discussion was held to examine the underlying issues and potential strategies for improvement.</p> <p>RM sought further clarification regarding sickness absence, expressing concern that despite assurances last autumn that HR procedures were being rigorously followed, issues persist. She recalled that governors had previously been told the procedures were now firmly in place, following a period where they had not been consistently applied. RM questioned why, if the transition had already occurred, problematic patterns—such as frequent absences on Mondays and Fridays—were still evident. She also noted that the previously adopted 'softly-softly' approach had proven ineffective with some staff, and asked whether the school was reverting to leniency, which seemed inconsistent with earlier updates? PW explained that SMc had highlighted that the whole school needs work around roles and responsibilities which will have a knock-on effect to this. SMc explained one of the things he has done is bring back the Stage 1 sickness absence meetings, managed internally by the headteacher and deputy heads, all of whom have now received appropriate training and are following the Sickness Absence Policy rigorously. Previously meetings were led by HR. Although improvements in absence rates have currently been marginal, progress is being made and SMc explained some of the potential reasons for these absences including school setting and meeting pupils’ need.</p>	

LS added that she, along with PW, sit on the Performance Board where similar concerns are raised and addressed. She noted that the current approach is better coordinated than before.

Workforce Turnover Data

Governors received both the Hilltop and Forest View workforce staffing situation going forward into September.

Quality of Education. - Pupil Engagement in Learning

SMc advised that a report was to follow, as the school was experiencing a system issue with the Evidence for Learning app. Once retrieved the report will be forwarded to governors.

Action: SMc to forward Pupil Engagement in Learning report to governors.

The introduction of a Teacher's Handbook has further enhanced accountability lines. Ofsted had identified that the curriculum offer was developing into a stronger offer and work is underway to ensure that all staff understand that.

Forest View have gone through tremendous change and staff absence has played a part in the quality of continuous education as well as gaps in recruitment.

Behaviours and Attitudes

The focus is on systems and structures and work is underway on the escalated behaviour process.

The Behaviour SMART toolkit has been invested in, helps staff record unbiased comments and uses AI to gather key information about each pupil in one place.

SMc briefly discussed exclusions and confirmed that suspensions are only used as a last resort, with no permanent exclusions to report. It was noted that Hilltop must shift from a reactive to a proactive approach—systematically collecting evidence, recording meetings and tracking behaviour. This marks an important cultural change for the school.

PW added that this will contribute to the change needed regarding absence.

Attendance

Attendance remains below the national average but continues to improve year on year. The school is now addressing this more effectively by working closely with the Trust and the Attendance Lead from a partner school.

Personal Development

Pupil agency remains a key strength at Hilltop and is clearly visible throughout the school. Students are at the centre of all decision-making, and their voices are actively heard and valued. This is evident in daily practice and across school events. However, the school recognises the need to improve how this is captured and evidenced, and this will form part of a School Improvement Plan (SIP) priority for the coming year to better capture and showcase pupils' interests, talents and contributions.

Recent highlights include:

Action:

SMc
ASAP

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports Week was a major success, with high levels of pupil and parent participation. The event was shaped by the Pupil Parliament, who helped design activities and influence the structure of the week. • A Paralympian visit provided inspiration and motivation for pupils, rounding off the week with a memorable experience. • Sensory storytelling sessions, led by the Trust CEO and Chair of Directors, were well received and demonstrated the school's commitment to inclusive and engaging experiences for all learners. • Community Involvement - Students are actively involved in their communities through a wide range of activities including shopping, swimming, and life skills. Staff are highly committed to ensuring pupils feel part of their wider community. The school now aims to strengthen its links with the local community by inviting more community members into school events and activities. • Careers and HSC - Careers education and Health & Social Care (HSC) continue to be areas of strength, with pupils engaging meaningfully in both their learning and wider community roles. • 50th Anniversary Celebrations - Plans are underway to celebrate Hilltop's 50th anniversary. The original date has been revised due to building works, with a new date confirmed as Friday 25 July and shared with governors. Action: SMc to confirm and invite governors to attend Hilltop's 50th Anniversary celebrations. <p><u>6.1.1. Appendix 1 – Updated SIP</u></p> <p>Received.</p> <p><u>6.1.2. Appendix 2 – School SEF</u></p> <p>Verbal update received.</p>	<p>Action: SMc ASAP</p>
<p>6.2 Draft School Dashboard Summary</p> <p>The report was received for information. PW mentioned to governors that the school leadership team were fully aware of the areas in need of improvement, highlighted in yellow on the dashboard around the building and staff sickness.</p>	
<p>6.3 Budget Report</p> <p>Report received and the school is in surplus.</p>	
<p>6.4 Next Year's Budget and Staffing Structure</p> <p>Verbal updated provided by SMcD through referencing his headteacher report.</p>	
<p>6.5 Cabinet Member & MPs' Feedback from Pupil Parliament</p> <p>Governors were delighted to receive in-person updates from the Student Cabinet Member and local MPs, who shared feedback from the Pupil Parliament and highlighted their activities throughout the year. The students had overwhelmingly voted in favour of extra-curricular opportunities, with Sports and Science emerging</p>	

<p>as the most popular topics. Governors expressed their appreciation to the students for attending and providing such a valuable update.</p>	
<p>6.6 Skills Audit – Governor Self-Assessment</p> <p>The document was circulated in advance and was self-explanatory. The Chair noted that it was created to facilitate shared learning through Governor Hub, including web links to relevant training. Governor Hub portal continued to expand its resources and training opportunities. Governors were encouraged to visit the portal and engage in self-directed learning to improve skills in areas identified during the audit.</p>	
<p>7. TRUST MATTERS</p>	
<p>7.1. Trust Verbal Update of Key Issues</p> <p><u>Nexus Trust Update</u> LS informed the group that a Trust-wide letter was sent out regarding a consultation on a potential merger with Ebor Trust, proposed to take effect from September 2026. LS emphasised that there will be no changes to how the Trust currently operates. The merger is intended to enable greater collaboration and the ability to utilise expertise across both Trusts to benefit all schools involved.</p> <p><u>GDPR Update</u> Adam Cloney, Corporate Governance Manager, has circulated an email regarding GDPR. He has encouraged governors to refresh their understanding by reviewing the guidance provided. The update is brief and intended to support governors in maintaining awareness of current data protection responsibilities.</p>	
<p>7.2. Register of Interests – Annual Review</p> <p>Guidance notes were circulated in advance to help governors make their declarations of interest and other confirmations online via Governor Hub. Governors were encouraged to contact Clerking Services direct should they encounter any problems accessing Governor Hub to complete the process.</p>	
<p>8. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS</p>	
<p>8.1. To consider any other urgent business agreed by the Chair</p> <p>None.</p>	
<p>9. CONFIDENTIALITY & RISK</p>	
<p>9.1. To consider the confidentiality of any items discussed during the meeting</p> <p>None.</p>	

10. DATES OF NEXT MEETING

28 November 2025	10:00 – 12:00	Forest View Site
20 March 2026	10:00 – 12:00	Hilltop Academy
26 June 2026	10:00 – 12:00	Hilltop Academy

Minutes approved

CHAIR	SIGNATURE	DATE