David Ross Education Trust
Broadening Horizons

Risk & Audit Committee
12 March 2026 – 10:00 – 12:00
Rockingham Primary School/Microsoft Teams

Minutes

Chair: Nigel Langstaff	**Clerk:** Victoria Linthwaite
Attendance: Ben Brown – via Teams, Andrew Read, Rob Barnett (RSM) – items 1 – 5, 7 – 8 only – via Teams. **Invited Officers**: Simon Rose (Chief Executive Officer), Maria Maltby (Director of Governance), Jon French (Director of Operations), Jane Spencer (Chief Financial Officer), Ellis Jacklin (IT & Data Director) – items 1 – 5 only – via Teams, George Selby (Head of Data Protection and Compliance) - items 1 – 4 only – via Teams.	

Item No	Agenda Item
1.	**Welcome and Apologies**
1.1	Following a tour of Rockingham Primary School for those attending the meeting in person, the Chair opened the meeting at 10:37.
2.	**Register of Interests and Declarations of Business Interests relating to the agenda**
2.1	No declarations of interest were reported in relation to the agenda.
3.	**Minutes (Accuracy and Matters Arising) and Actions of the Committee meeting held on 4 December 2025**
3.1	The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting were a true and accurate record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.
3.2	***Actions:*** As relationship building activities would be incorporated into the broader Trust strategy, it was agreed that Action 34 could be closed.
4.	**Data Protection Officer's Report**
4.1	The Committee thanked George Selby (GS) for once again producing a comprehensive report.
4.2	***Bobby Moore Academy:*** Identifying that Bobby Moore Academy (BMA) were subject to a tighter control process similar to that implemented at Malcolm Arnold Academy (MAA) a number of years ago, the Committee asked GS to elaborate on this further. GS explained that following disappointing a spike in data breaches at BMA, tighter controls regarding email were introduced and GS had delivered training to all staff.
4.3	GS added that as BMA accounted for a quarter of all data breaches within the Trust these restrictions were necessary. Although only part way through the year, BMA had already exceeded the breach rate for the prior year for the entire Trust.

Item No	Agenda Item
4.4	When considered alongside the next highest school for data breaches, Thomas Middlecott Academy (TMA) both schools accounted for over a third of all breaches in the Trust.
4.5	Whilst it was too early to determine if the recent training and restrictions had proved impactful, GS was hopeful that no additional measures such as the removal of email autofill would be required.
4.6	*George Selby left the meeting at 10:41.*
5.	**IT Director's Report**
5.1	The IT Director's Report was taken as read and the Committee moved to questions.
5.2	***Chromebook Rollout:*** Following a question from the Committee, Ellis Jacklin (EJ) shared that an unexpected challenge in the project was the additional training needs of the new staff joining BMA in September 2025. Likewise, although storage lockers for the Chromebooks had been ordered in good time, a delivery delay resulted in Chromebooks initially being stored on trolleys. Whilst being a practical solution, the trolleys did not encourage the sense of ownership that came with the individualised lockers, and some Chromebooks were lost/damaged.
5.3	Despite initial setbacks, practice had improved since January 2026 following the introduction of a policy and training on how to integrate Chromebooks into the classroom and the arrival of the storage lockers.
5.4	Recognising that this project was a pilot, the Committee acknowledged that initial teething problems were to be expected and that learnings could be taken going forwards.
5.5	***Cyber Security:*** EJ reminded the Committee that cyber security threats were continually evolving, and the Trust was required to continually develop in order to keep pace with changes.
5.6	In line with the findings of both the DfE and the Cyber Security Centre, email remained the greatest threat to the Trust's cyber security.
5.7	The platform Boxphish had been procured to enhance the training offering for staff. Rather than generic penetration testing and training, Boxphish could be tailored to an employee's job role and would provide a more realistic simulation of a cyber-attack.
5.8	Boxphish had been launched in January 2026, and reporting dashboards were now available to help IT identify areas of risk.
5.9	Regarding central infrastructure, further work was required to maintain pace with changes that had arisen since Microsoft365 had relaunched their licensing.
5.10	On the whole, EJ felt that the Trust was in a strong position in relation to cyber security and was managing the risks well.
5.11	***Strategy:*** Noting the constantly evolving nature of IT and the required resource to maintain a strong baseline, the Committee asked whether they should be concerned that planned innovations were continuously postponed due to a lack of available resource. EJ replied that the road map for IT & Data innovation ran alongside basic maintenance. Whilst they had taken time to come to fruition, EJ was proud of the achievements of his team on innovative projects such as DRET Analytics.
5.12	The Committee clarified that when considering innovation, they were referring to the teaching and learning aspect of technology and its use in the classroom. EJ explained that AI was being introduced to students, but safety measures were being established, and students would be required to pass a course before they were permitted to use AI. EJ was also eager for AI to 'know' each student on an individual

Item No	Agenda Item
	level (if they had SEND needs, etc.) so that it could provide a bespoke response to them.
5.13	Developing this further, the Committee asked EJ for his assessment of the knowledge/skills of teachers, and the extent to which teacher led innovation was taking place. EJ shared that this formed part of the Digital Strategy and explained that the Digital Champions programme provided the opportunity for teacher colleagues to champion innovation and share expertise with colleagues in their school. Whilst this was currently at the grass roots stage, EJ expected this to grow and develop.
5.14	Recognising that the success of these innovations was reliant on the support of non-IT based colleagues, the Committee was eager to monitor the risks around this going forward.
5.15	Simon Rose (SR) advised that the IT strategy would be reviewed once the Trust 5-year strategy was developed. SR anticipated that this would have a greater impact on teaching and learning and suggested that the residual risk around this should be reassessed once the overall Trust strategy had been presented to the Trust Board in June 2026.
5.16	Further discussion took place whereby the Committee celebrated the strong foundations in place but remained concerned as to whether enough innovation was underway.
5.17	Developing on SR's proposition, the Committee was eager to understand what resource was required to best suit the needs of the Trust, e.g. whether every pupil needed a Chromebook.
5.18	In relation to the strategy, SR stressed that this would be longitudinal and would not all be achieved on day 1. Nevertheless, clear targets would be set in relation to what would be in place by the end of year 1, 2, 3 etc.
5.19	***Mitigations:*** Focusing on mitigations limited by financial constraints, the Committee requested that EJ provide the monetary cost of projects that were not taken up due to cost limitations.
5.20	In response to a question, EJ shared that there would always be 'nice to haves' and a next level of things the Trust could not afford.
5.21	To illustrate, EJ outlined the challenges in relation to Multi Factor Authentication (MFA) for students. At present, whilst there were platforms on the market offering this service, EJ felt none of them met the needs of the Trust in full and chose not to implement a flawed system. Whilst supporting EJ's decision not to implement a product with known flaws, the Committee questioned how much of a need there was for students to use MFA. EJ explained that whilst student accounts were limited to individual school settings which minimised risk, cyber criminals could be skilled enough to upscale pupil accounts and access wider Trust systems.
5.22	Following a question from the Committee, EJ provided assurance that the Trust was taking reasonable and proportional steps to mitigate against cyber risks. EJ acknowledged that alongside the wider sector, the Trust faced challenges such as the monitoring of systems outside of office hours and anticipated that the market would eventually respond by providing services that could cover this. In the interim, EJ was reliant on the goodwill of IT colleagues checking for alerts out of hours, and EJ recognised the risks surrounding this.
5.23	To help reassure the Committee it was agreed that EJ would present to them with a list of actions in relation to cyber security that were reasonable and proportionate and would also provide a clear rationale as to why a decision had been made not to take action in relation to a specific risk.
5.24	**ACTION: Risk & Audit Committee to be presented with a list of mitigations in relation to cyber security that are considered reasonable and proportionate alongside a clear rationale regarding why a decision has been taken not to take up a mitigation (Ellis Jacklin).**

Item No	Agenda Item
5.25	*Ellis Jacklin left the meeting at 11:10*
6.	**External Audit**
6.1	*As discussion was commercially sensitive Rob Barnett (RB) was asked to leave the meeting for item 6 and left the meeting at 11:10.*
6.2	Jane Spencer (JS) outlined the tender process that had been undertaken to appoint an external auditor.
6.3	Based upon the results of the scoring criteria, JS suggested that the Committee should recommend Crowe UK LLP to Members for appointment.
6.4	Following discussion, it was agreed that JS would seek informal feedback from Trusts that currently used Crowe and that this feedback would be shared with Nigel Langstaff (NL).
6.5	**ACTION: Informal feedback to be obtained regarding Crowe UK LP and shared with Nigel Langstaff (Jane Spencer).**
6.6	*Rob Barnett returned to the meeting at 11:28.*
7.	**Internal Audit Programme Update**
7.1	***Data Quality:*** RB had nothing of concern to flag in relation to the Data Quality internal audit, and the Committee was pleased by the result.
7.2	The only action for the Trust was housekeeping in nature. RB shared that strong performance in this area was unusual in the wider sector and commended the Trust for their performance.
7.3	***Progress Report:*** RB confirmed that the Trust remained on track to complete the audit plan in full and on time.
7.4	Thanks were extended to management for their quick turnaround of draft reports so that they could be finalised.
7.5	***Thematic Overview of High Actions:*** When asked by the Committee, JS provided assurance that the Trust covered the high-level actions outlined on page 7 of the internal audit benchmarking report.
7.6	***Emerging Risks:*** As an emerging risk RB shared that some Trusts were considering whether to record the risks around misinformation on social media platforms. JS explained that this had been considered at a recent Risk Management Group, but that she needed to discuss this further with Denford Associates. The Committee noted this risk, but to gain a better insight they looked to understand the scale of misinformation online and whether this was a conceptual or a real risk with significant impact.
7.7	**ACTION: To understand whether this presented a conceptual or real risk, further exploration to take place regarding the scale of misinformation on social media (Jane Spencer).**
7.8	***Bobby Moore Academy:*** Whilst the scrutiny of this now sat with the Finance & Resource Committee, JS flagged that efforts undertaken to reduce the number of late POs were having little impact, particularly at BMA.
7.9	This prompted discussion in relation to a potential cultural issue of non-compliance across a number of processes at BMA. The Committee expressed concern in relation to BMA's non-compliance with Trust

Item No	Agenda Item
	processes. As part of the discussion, SR assured the Committee that he was cognisant of the compliance issues at BMA, and that in the absence of a substantive Executive Director of Secondary Education, SR was taking direct action as CEO to address these issues. SR anticipated that further improvements would follow once the substantive Executive Director of Secondary Education was in post and Steve West (SW) returned to his Executive Principal role.
7.10	To further allay the Committee's concerns, SR offered to write to the leaders of BMA to make them aware of the concerns discussed and remind them of their compliance obligations.
7.11	**ACTION: Simon Rose to write to leaders of Bobby Moore Academy to make them aware of the Committee's concerns and remind them of their compliance obligations (Simon Rose).**
8.	**Risk Management Report**
8.1	***Risk Management Policy:*** Following an overview from JS of the main changes to the policy, the Committee approved the Risk Management policy.
8.2	***Key Risk Register:*** As this demonstrated regular review, the Committee were pleased to note that risk scores had moved as appropriate.
8.3	Discussion centred around the two risks that had increased, Wellbeing (STR0009) and Recruitment and Retention (STR0010).
8.4	In answer to a question, JS explained that rather than being linked to factors such as restructures, the initial assessment of the Wellbeing score had probably not been appropriate. Following a review of HR data at an Executive Team meeting, it was acknowledged that staff absence, particularly absence related to mental health, was relatively high, and the risk score was amended to reflect this.
8.5	Building upon this, the Committee asked whether the available data identified the cause of wellbeing challenges, and the extent to which they were attributable to Trust related factors, such as workload, or to external personal circumstances. Unfortunately, data was not collected in this level of detail, but JS and SR outlined some of the actions being taken as part of the strategic approach to address wellbeing holistically, such as development of line managers, the provision of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), Health Hero.
8.6	Whilst data was not collected formally in relation to the reason for mental health challenges, it was recognised that line managers could better understand the reasons for staff absence by building trusting relationships with their teams. Jon French (JF) shared that at present formal return to work meetings were not consistently carried out, and HR were working to ensure these took place so line managers could forge these relationships.
8.7	Following a question JS clarified that the Trust did not receive information on which specific employees used the EAP. However, information on uptake levels was available and showed that usage within the Trust remained low.
8.8	As the Finance & Resource Committee had responsibility for detailed scrutiny of Wellbeing, it was agreed that Rachel Ridgill (RR) would present the Health Hero uptake data to that Committee for further consideration alongside other wellbeing interventions.
8.9	**ACTION: Health Hero uptake data to be presented to the Finance & Resource Committee (Rachel Ridgill).**
8.10	Regarding Recruitment and Retention, JS outlined that the rating change was driven by a review of vacancies. This had identified that some roles were repeatedly going out to advert as the calibre of

Item No	Agenda Item
	applicants was not strong enough to appoint. SR clarified that these recruitment challenges were limited to specific roles, and that for leadership roles such as the Executive Director of Secondary Education and for the four new Principals in Primary there was a good field of strong applicants.
8.11	Noting the recruitment challenges, the Committee felt it positive that standards were being maintained by the conscious decision not to appoint from a weak field.
8.12	Based upon results in Secondary, the Committee challenged whether the score assigned to the Secondary Performance risk (STR0004) should be higher. SR agreed to review this rating and acknowledged that in Secondary a great deal of progress needed to be made in changing both culture and outcomes. At present, SR's focus was improving the regional connectiveness of Secondary by setting up formal networks. To ensure that messaging was not diluted, SR was also working directly with Heads of Maths and English faculties in schools.
8.13	Whilst thanking SR for his efforts addressing the challenges in Secondary personally, the Committee had concerns that direct intervention by the CEO had been necessary. Referencing discussion earlier in the meeting, SR discussed the current challenges with Secondary leadership and reassured them that his intervention was temporary but necessary to drive change until the new Executive Director of Secondary Education took up post in June 2026.
8.14	The Committee was assured that SR was cognisant of the challenges in Secondary and had a clear plan to address these issues.
8.15	In reply to a question, SR shared that if the Trust was to be inspected as part of a MAT inspection, he would be confident in the Trust's systems and processes. Once again, SR recognised that in order to bring it to the strong level of Primary, improvements were required in Secondary. SR also stressed that MAT inspections were not due imminently, and that by 2027/28 he anticipated that improvements would be underway.
8.16	*Rob Barnett left the meeting at 12:12.*
8.17	Recognising that this was mainly an Education Committee issue, brief discussion took place regarding the culture of leadership in Secondary. It was recognised that the strong culture of leadership SR was looking to establish would need further embedding. To provide assurance, SR shared that Secondary leaders were supportive of the changes he was making, and that to help set the culture from the top he was attending all Secondary Principals meetings.
8.18	**ACTION: Education Committee to consider whether the Secondary Performance (STR0004) risk rating should be increased (Maria Maltby).**
8.19	***Bishop Fleming Benchmarking Report:*** Noting a key risk within the benchmarking report was SEND provision, the Committee queried whether the Trust should review this as a distinct risk. SR agreed to reflect on this outside of the Committee meeting.
8.20	**ACTION: Consideration to take place as to whether to consider SEND as a standalone risk on the Trust key risk register (Simon Rose).**
9.	**Any Other Business**
9.1	No additional business was raised.
10.	**Date and Time of Next Meeting:** 11 June 2026, 1pm

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 12.16, and those that attended the meeting in person visited the Forest School at Nevill Holt Farm.