Omnia LEARNING TRUST

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Omnia Learning Trust – Operations Committee Meeting Minutes

Held remotely via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday 21 April 2026| 10:00–11:30am

Invitees and Attendance

Name	Position	Attendance
Tyler Jeffs	Board Director / Operations Committee Chair	Present
Jodie Croft	Board Director & CEO	Present
Carina Cuddington	CFO (Edufin)	Present *(Joined at Agenda item 10)*
Sam Reilly	Accountant (Edufin)	Present
Sarah Bellingham	Head of Operations (HOO)	Present
Alison Hill	Board Director	Present
Nicola Poole	Board Director	Present *(left 11:00am)*
Hana Hamilton	Governance & Communications Officer (Clerk & GCO)	Present

Disclaimer – Microsoft Teams Meeting Transcript

The meeting was held via Microsoft Teams. The automatic transcription function was enabled solely to support accurate minute-taking. The transcript is not the formal record of proceedings. Approved minutes, once confirmed by the Board, constitute the only official record. Transcripts are stored securely and deleted following formal approval. By attending, participants acknowledged and consented to the use of transcription for governance purposes.

1. Approval of Teams Transcript, Welcome and Apologies for Absence

The Chair opened the meeting and confirmed it was quorate.

The Committee acknowledged use of Teams transcription for governance accuracy.

Apologies received from NP.

✅ **APPROVED:** Use of Teams transcription for minute accuracy.

2. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

The Chair invited declarations of pecuniary, business or hospitality interests.

No new declarations were made. The Register of Interests (March 2026) remains accurate.

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✅ **APPROVED:** Register of Interests reviewed and confirmed as accurate.
☐ **ACTION:** None required.

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3. Identify AOB and/or Confidential AOB

The chair asked the committee if there were any AOB's to identify and discuss at the end of the meeting.

No AOB declared.

☐ **ACTION:** None required.

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4. Approval of Minutes of February 2026 Operations Meeting & Matters Arising

Report introduced by: Chair

The Committee reviewed the previous Operations Committee minutes.

The Chair asked whether there were any issues arising from the previous minutes.

The CEO confirmed that all matters arising were covered within the current agenda.

The Committee confirmed the minutes as an accurate record.

✅ **APPROVED:** Minutes of **10 February 2026** received and approved.
☐ **ACTION:** Upload the approved minutes to OLT website and Governor Hub.

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5. Receive DfE Trust Reserves Letter

Report introduced by: CEO

The CEO explained that the Trust had received a Department for Education reserves letter because forecast reserves exceeded the 20% threshold.

The Committee heard that actual achieved reserves at year-end were approximately 21.25%, placing the Trust only marginally above the threshold.

The CEO explained that the Trust needed to remain comfortable that reserves were not being retained unnecessarily or withheld from schools without continuing investment into ICT, repairs, maintenance, staffing sustainability and wider operational priorities.

The Committee heard that reserves continued to support:

- ICT investment;
- Estates maintenance and compliance;
- SEND support;
- Staffing sustainability;
- Medium-term financial viability.

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The CEO confirmed that the Trust continued to monitor three- to five-year financial forecasts carefully due to:

- Rising staffing costs;
- Falling pupil numbers;
- SEND pressures;
- Estates liabilities;
- Long-term sustainability concerns.

The Committee discussed the importance of ensuring reserves were not unnecessarily accumulated without purpose.

The CEO further confirmed that where Heads identified significant need, funding and expenditure approvals were supported appropriately by the Trust.

The Committee discussed examples of reserves being actively utilised to support schools.

The CEO explained that Didcot Primary Academy was currently supporting staffing costs at Sires Hill through reserve allocation arrangements in order to support sustainability.

Director Question / Challenge:
Directors questioned whether schools fully understood that reserves could be utilised proactively and whether school leaders felt sufficiently empowered to request support.

Response / Assurance Provided:
The CEO confirmed that leaders were actively encouraged to use reserves where necessary to support pupils, staffing and operational sustainability, and that Trust leaders regularly supported Heads to make confident spending decisions.

The Committee discussed the financial impact of falling birth rates and reductions in PAN numbers, particularly at Twickenham Primary Academy.

The Committee also discussed future estates liabilities including the Twickenham roof CIF bid and possible contribution requirements if the condition improvement funding application was successful.

The Chair stated that the reserves position did not concern him given the wider national funding landscape and future financial pressures facing schools.

The Committee agreed that the reserves position represented prudent financial management rather than excessive retention of funds.

✅ **APPROVED:** DfE reserves letter received with assurance.
☐ **ACTION:** Continue monitoring reserve levels against medium-term budget forecasts and future staffing pressures.

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6. Receive Estates Conditions Data, Asset Registers and Review Strategic Priorities

Report introduced by: CEO

The CEO explained that the DfE had recently updated expectations regarding how trusts manage estates strategy and asset management.

The Committee heard that the Trust had reviewed and updated its Estates Policy in line with new DfE guidance and that strategic estates planning was now structured around four key DfE themes:

- Safe;
- Suitable;
- Sustainable;
- Sufficiently sized.

The Committee discussed each category in detail.

The CEO confirmed the Trust remained in a very strong position regarding estates safety and compliance, supported by:

- Extensive external audits;
- Robust maintenance systems;
- Strong compliance oversight;
- Significant investment into upkeep and maintenance.

The Committee discussed the increasing need to adapt school buildings to meet SEND and inclusion requirements.

Discussion included:

- Breakout spaces;
- SEND intervention rooms;
- Alternative provision spaces;
- Behaviour support areas;
- Flexible learning environments.

The Committee heard that current school buildings had not been designed for the current inclusion landscape or expectations now being placed on mainstream schools.

The Committee discussed Wantage Primary Academy specifically, including concerns regarding limited breakout space capacity for SEND pupils despite increasing pupil numbers.

The Committee discussed the future challenge of providing appropriate spaces for:

- Internally suspended pupils;
- SEND pupils;
- Pupils requiring alternative provision;

- Pupils requiring one-to-one support.

The Committee discussed the practical and financial implications of adapting school estates to meet increasingly complex SEND needs.

The CEO explained that the Trust had no option other than to continue improving inclusive provision and developing alternative curriculum approaches within its schools in order to meet the increasingly complex needs of pupils.

The Committee discussed the implications of forthcoming SEND reform proposals and the increasing expectation that mainstream schools retain and support children with increasingly complex needs.

The Committee also discussed climate and sustainability responsibilities, including:

- Renewable energy;
- Solar panels;
- Climate action planning;
- DfE sustainability expectations.

The Committee heard that solar panels had previously been explored for Twickenham Primary Academy but were not currently financially viable.

The Committee discussed new school design issues for Valley Park Academy, including concerns about open balcony designs and safeguarding implications.

The Committee also discussed the challenge of balancing design aspirations against operational safeguarding realities.

Director Question / Challenge:
Directors challenged whether the Trust's estates and building designs remained genuinely fit for modern SEND and inclusion expectations.

Response / Assurance Provided:
The CEO and DCEO confirmed that SEND adaptation and inclusive design now formed a major strategic priority and that future planning would increasingly focus on alternative provision spaces, breakout areas and SEND infrastructure.

The Committee heard that the summer term would focus heavily on:

- Mapping SEND need;
- Mapping staffing expertise;
- Reviewing support staff deployment;
- Planning future infrastructure and space requirements.

The Committee discussed the increasing difficulty of proving inability to meet need within mainstream settings due to the current legal and parental choice framework.

✅ **APPROVED:** Estates conditions data, asset management update and strategic priorities received with assurance.

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☐ **ACTION:** Continue strategic estates planning focused on SEND adaptation, future inclusion requirements and infrastructure planning.

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7. Key Financial Priorities in Each School Budget

Report introduced by: DCEO

The Committee received a detailed discussion regarding SEND expenditure pressures and the growing financial sustainability challenges facing mainstream schools nationally.

The DCEO explained that notional SEND funding allocations no longer reflected the actual cost of supporting pupils with increasingly complex needs.

The Committee heard that although the funding framework notionally assumed approximately £6,000 support per SEND pupil, actual funding received per pupil was often substantially lower once funding formulas and school-level allocations were applied.

The DCEO explained that schools were increasingly required to utilise mainstream core funding to subsidise SEND provision and support pupils whose needs significantly exceeded available funding allocations.

The Committee discussed examples where:

- EHCP funding levels remained substantially below actual staffing costs;
- pupils requiring high levels of support could cost schools over £30,000 annually;
- funding contributions often remained closer to £9,000;
- schools absorbed the remaining costs directly from core budgets.

The DCEO explained that mainstream school funding was increasingly being utilised to subsidise SEND provision and support pupils whose needs exceeded the available dedicated funding allocations.

The Committee discussed the increasing strain this placed on staffing budgets, curriculum delivery and long-term sustainability.

The CEO explained that schools were increasingly balancing:

- inclusion expectations;
- financial viability;
- staffing sustainability;
- operational capacity.

The Committee heard that the current position was becoming increasingly difficult for mainstream schools nationally.

Discussion took place regarding the wider national context, including:

- SEND tribunal growth;
- increasing parental legal challenge;

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- local authority funding limitations;
- rising complexity of pupil need;
- lack of specialist placements;
- mainstream inclusion pressures.

The Committee discussed Oxfordshire specifically and heard that the local funding model remained particularly challenging compared with other authorities.

The DCEO explained that support services such as:

- speech and language therapy;
- occupational therapy;
- SEND specialist provision

remained inconsistent and difficult to secure.

The Committee heard that Trust leaders had spent considerable time challenging funding decisions and advocating for additional support for pupils.

The CEO explained that despite occasional successful funding challenges, the wider system remained unsustainable without significant reform.

The Chair expressed concern that some mainstream schools nationally may become financially unviable if SEND pressures continued increasing at the current rate.

The Committee discussed whether future school closures nationally could become increasingly likely due to combined pressures relating to:

- falling rolls;
- staffing costs;
- SEND expenditure;
- declining birth rates.

Discussion then moved to individual school budgets.

Twickenham Primary Academy (TPA)

The Committee discussed the continued impact of falling pupil numbers and reduced birth rates within the local area.

The CEO confirmed that Twickenham Primary Academy had already proactively reduced PAN to one-form entry in order to maintain long-term viability and staffing sustainability.

The Committee heard that staffing restructures and fixed-term staffing reviews had already taken place in response to declining pupil numbers.

The Committee also discussed EHCP income negotiations and the challenge of securing funding sufficient to meet actual pupil need.

The CEO explained that although approximately £16,000 had originally been pursued through EHCP discussions, approximately £6,000 had ultimately been secured.

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Discussion also reflected positively on improvements in school culture, behaviour and operational stability.

The CEO explained that significant progress had been made in strengthening leadership, operational consistency and educational culture at the school despite ongoing financial pressures.

Didcot Primary Academy (DPA)

The Committee heard that Didcot Primary Academy remained in a comparatively stable reserves position overall, although staffing allocation changes and contract inaccuracies had created additional pressure during the spring term.

The CEO explained that approximately £40,000 pressure had emerged following identification of staffing contract discrepancies, although the school's reserves remained sufficiently strong to absorb the impact.

The Committee discussed the importance of maintaining careful oversight of staffing structures and payroll accuracy moving into the next financial year.

The Committee also heard that Didcot continued to support wider Trust sustainability arrangements through leadership deployment flexibility across schools.

Wantage Primary Academy (WPA)

The Committee heard that Wantage Primary Academy continued to experience increasing SEND pressures alongside growing demand for intervention and breakout spaces.

The DCEO explained that existing infrastructure was becoming increasingly stretched and that the school required significantly more flexible SEND provision space than was currently available.

The Committee discussed the practical challenge of accommodating pupils requiring one-to-one support, regulation spaces and internal alternative provision within buildings not originally designed for such levels of need.

The Committee also heard that staffing movements and additional EHCP income had improved the in-year financial position slightly compared with earlier forecasts.

Sires Hill Primary Academy (SHPA)

The Committee discussed Sires Hill Primary Academy in considerable detail due to ongoing sustainability concerns.

The CEO confirmed that leadership restructuring and staffing changes had already been implemented proactively in response to forecasts which previously suggested reserves could have been fully depleted during the following financial cycle.

The Committee heard that:

- staffing restructuring had significantly reduced future financial risk;

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- SEND pressures remained particularly high;
- nursery projections remained challenging;
- agency staffing costs had increased.

The Committee acknowledged that while the financial position remained manageable, Sires Hill would continue to require close monitoring moving forward.

The CEO explained that proactive intervention had already prevented a substantially more serious financial position from developing and that future sustainability planning remained a priority for the school.

The Committee discussed the wider impact of declining birth rates nationally and locally and the resulting effect on pupil numbers, staffing affordability and school sustainability.

The Committee heard that Trust leaders continued to review:

- staffing structures;
- PAN arrangements;
- curriculum models;
- inclusion provision;
- long-term financial forecasts.

The CEO confirmed that despite increasing external pressures, school leaders had worked effectively to stabilise staffing structures and maintain provision quality across the Trust.

The Committee acknowledged that the current financial climate remained exceptionally challenging for schools nationally.

Director Question / Challenge:
Directors questioned whether the current national SEND funding model was realistically sustainable for mainstream schools over the medium to long term and whether schools could continue absorbing increasing levels of need from core budgets.

Response / Assurance Provided:
The CEO and DCEO confirmed that the current system placed significant strain on mainstream schools nationally and that schools were increasingly subsidising SEND provision from core budgets. The Trust would therefore continue monitoring staffing structures, inclusion models and financial sustainability carefully while advocating for improved funding arrangements.

✅ **APPROVED:** School budget priorities and SEND financial pressures received with assurance.
☐ **ACTION:** Continue monitoring SEND expenditure pressures, staffing sustainability and long-term school viability risks across all schools.

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8. Review of ESFA/LA Funding and Procurement

Report introduced by: CEO

The Committee received an update regarding procurement activity for Valley Park Academy.

The CEO confirmed that a large-scale ICT procurement process valued at over £280,000 was now underway.

The Committee heard that the procurement process covered:

- Infrastructure;
- Hardware;
- Software;
- ICT systems for the new school.

The CEO confirmed procurement support had been secured externally to ensure compliance with procurement law.

The Committee heard that three bidders would be invited to tender and that evaluations would take place during the summer.

✅ **APPROVED:** Procurement update received.
☐ **ACTION:** Provide further procurement progress update at next Operations Committee meeting.

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9. Receive First Internal Audit Report (Spring Term)

Report introduced by: HOO

The Committee reviewed the Spring Term Internal Audit Report completed by UHY.

The Committee noted that the audit outcome provided “Substantial Assurance.”

The HOO explained that the audit reviewed:

- Procurement;
- Value for money processes.

The Committee heard that three issues had been identified:

- One medium issue;
- One low issue;
- One advisory point.

Discussion included:

- Credit card workflow processes;
- Invoice approval systems;
- Contract management records.

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The Committee heard that actions were already underway to strengthen systems further.

The Committee also heard that the next internal audit cycle covering estates management and health and safety was already underway.

Director Question / Challenge:
Directors queried whether the audit process had proved useful operationally despite the low number of findings.

Response / Assurance Provided:
The HOO confirmed that the audit process remained valuable in identifying operational improvements and strengthening controls further.

✅ **APPROVED:** Internal Audit Report received with assurance.
☐ **ACTION:** Continue implementation and monitoring of audit recommendations.

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10. Receive Management Accounts

Report introduced by: CFO

The Committee received the January and February 2026 Management Accounts for all schools and the central Trust, including detailed review of reserves, cashflow, staffing ratios, balance sheet positions and projected carry forward balances.

The CFO shared the February Management Accounts and confirmed that the overall Trust reserves position remained healthy and stable despite increasing operational pressures across the sector.

The CFO explained that the KPI position remained positive overall and that the Trust continued to maintain a comparatively stable financial position relative to the wider sector.

Central Trust Position

The Committee heard that the central Trust budget remained in surplus.

The Committee agreed this remained a healthy and sustainable position at Trust level.

Twickenham Primary Academy (TPA)

The Committee reviewed the Twickenham Primary Academy position in detail.

Didcot Primary Academy (DPA)

The Committee reviewed Didcot Primary Academy's financial position.

Wantage Primary Academy (WPA)

The Committee reviewed the Wantage Primary Academy budget position.

Sires Hill Primary Academy (SHPA)

The Committee discussed the Sires Hill position in significant detail.

The CFO confirmed that:

- National funding settlements had ultimately been more favourable than originally anticipated;
- This improvement was largely due to minimum funding guarantees and pupil-attainment related adjustments rather than genuine increases in core per-pupil funding;
- Budget assumptions for 2026–2027 were now being developed ahead of the June Operations Committee meeting.

Director Question / Challenge:
Directors questioned whether the Trust's financial position remained comparatively stable relative to wider sector pressures and whether current reserves levels remained sufficient to absorb future SEND and staffing volatility.

Response / Assurance Provided:
The CFO and CEO confirmed that while pressures continued to intensify nationally, the Trust remained in a comparatively stable position due to proactive financial planning, strong reserves management, restructuring decisions and careful monitoring of staffing expenditure.

✅ **APPROVED:** January and February 2026 Management Accounts received with assurance.
☐ **ACTION:** Continue development of 2026–2027 budget assumptions and present revised budget forecasts to the June 2026 Operations Committee meeting.

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11. Receive OLT Compliance Report

Report introduced by: HOO

The Committee reviewed the OLT Compliance Report.

The Committee heard updates regarding:

- IT and GDPR compliance;
- Internal audits;
- Estates compliance;
- Staffing absence monitoring;
- Health and safety;
- Safeguarding;
- Valley Park Academy project management.

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The CEO confirmed that significant progress had been made toward the DfE 2030 digital standards and that schools remained well advanced against expectations.

The Committee discussed:

- Infrastructure planning;
- ICT future-proofing;
- Broadband provision;
- Digital strategy progress.

The Committee reviewed staffing absence data and associated costs.

The Committee heard that:

- 792 sickness absence days in the previous year had cost approximately £160,000;
- Non-sickness absence had cost approximately £32,000.

The CEO confirmed that management of compassionate leave and attendance continued to be strengthened.

The Committee also reviewed recommendations arising from the most recent annual external fire safety audit at Sires Hill and heard that remedial works remained in progress.

The Committee received a detailed Valley Park Academy project update covering:

- Construction progress;
- ICT planning;
- Stakeholder engagement;
- Nursery interest;
- Reception applications;
- Statutory consultation processes.

The Committee heard that handover remained forecast for March 2027.

✅ **APPROVED:** Compliance report received with assurance.
☐ **ACTION:** Continue compliance monitoring and Valley Park project oversight.

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12. Policies Requiring Committee Approval

Report introduced by: CEO

The Committee reviewed:

- OLT Estates and Asset Management Plan;
- Charging and Remissions Policies;
- OLT Sickness Absence Management Policy.

The CEO explained that the revised **Sickness Absence Policy** included:

- Simplified formal processes;
- Clearer appeal arrangements;
- Updated trigger monitoring periods;
- Integrated disability and reasonable adjustments provisions.

The Committee discussed the rationale for moving from six-month to twelve-month monitoring periods for absence triggers.

The Committee also discussed proportionality and pattern monitoring.

The Committee noted that **Charging and Remissions Policies** had been reviewed and updated for factual accuracy.

Director Question / Challenge:
Directors queried the rationale for revised absence trigger review periods.

Response / Assurance Provided:
It was confirmed that revised monitoring arrangements would provide clearer and more proportionate oversight of absence patterns over time.

✅ **APPROVED:** All listed policies approved.
☐ **ACTION:** Publish approved policies and update policy tracker.

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13. Review of Trust Risk Register

Report introduced by: CEO

The Committee received a detailed update.

✅ **APPROVED:** Trust Risk Register noted

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14. Any Other Business (AOB)

The Chair raised possible alternative instant-access banking arrangements offering potential improved interest rates.

The Committee discussed maintaining liquidity while improving returns on reserves.

✅ **APPROVED:** N/A
☐ **ACTION**: CEO to explore alternative instant-access and notice account options.

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15. Agreement of Confidential Status of Meeting Documents

Directors agreed that all papers — excluding the agenda and approved policies — should remain confidential in accordance with **ATH 2025 (paras 1.50–1.51)**.

✅ **APPROVED:** Confidential status of meeting documents confirmed.
☐ **ACTION:** None required.

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Meeting Closed 11:26am

Appendix A – Summary of Operations Committee Action Points

Action Point Number	Owner	Minute Item	Action	Deadline
1	Clerk	Item 4	Upload the approved minutes to OLT website and GovernorHub, with request sent to Chair to sign electronically	Summer Term 2026
2	CEO	Item 6	Continue strategic estates planning focused on SEND adaptation, inclusion infrastructure and future alternative provision requirements	Ongoing
3	CEO / DCEO	Item 7	Continue monitoring SEND expenditure pressures, staffing sustainability and long-term school viability risks across all schools	Ongoing
4	CEO	Item 8	Provide updated ICT procurement and Valley Park Academy procurement progress update	June 2026 Operations Committee
5	HOO	Item 9	Continue implementation and monitoring of internal scrutiny recommendations relating to procurement, value for money and estates compliance	Ongoing
6	CFO / CEO	Item 10	Continue development of 2026–2027 budget assumptions and present revised budget forecasts to the June Operations Committee meeting	June 2026
7	CEO/HOO	Item 11	Continue compliance monitoring, Valley Park project oversight and digital infrastructure planning	Ongoing
8	Clerk	Item 12	Publish approved policies and update Trust policy tracker	Summer Term 2026
9	CEO	Item 13		
10	CEO	Item 13		

Document Reference Disclaimer

All documents and reports referred to within these minutes were circulated to members via GovernorHub in line with the corresponding agenda and published in advance of the meeting. Each minute item recorded herein directly corresponds to the relevant numbered agenda item for that meeting. Supporting papers are retained on GovernorHub as part of the official governance record in accordance with Omnia Learning Trust protocols.