

Quality and Standards Committee
Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 25 November 2025 at 4:30 PM
Location: CRMZ, Kingsway, Widnes, Cheshire

Present:	Katie Anderson	External Governor
	Michele Bacon	External Governor
	Oscar Lam	Student Governor
	Rachael Owen	External Governor
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Steph Power	Staff Governor
	Carrolly Torres	Student Governor
In Attendance:	Ben Barton	Vice Principal (Head of Riverside)
	Alan Brown	Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality)
	Donna Elston	Head of Student Services
	Ged Hanley	Assistant Principal (Systems Development & Funding)
	Andy James	Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Riverside)
	Joanne Martin	Head of Foundation Studies
	Catherine Shaw	Head of Governance

The Head of Governance welcomed all attendees to the meeting and introductions were made.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None. All committee members were present and the meeting was quorate.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Rachael Owen declared an interest agenda item 5 given her relationship to the Head of Foundation Studies. The Head of Governance confirmed that this was recorded in the register of interests that was open to public inspection.

Resolved: The Committee noted the declaration of interest.

3. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR 2025/2026

Resolved: Rachael Owen was appointed as Committee Chair for 2025/2026, in accordance with the procedure approved in the Board’s Standing Orders.

Rachael Owen took the Chair

4. MINUTES

4.1 To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2025 (previously circulated)

Resolved: The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true and accurate record.

4.2 To receive a progress report on any matters arising from the previous meeting.

Resolved: The Committee noted the action log and agreed that the theme of the curriculum presentation to be delivered at its next meeting was ‘Great Teaching’

5. TERMLY CURRICULUM PRESENTATION

The Head of Foundation Studies (FS) delivered a presentation and highlighted the following:

- Activity that had taken place since her appointment to the role in May 2025 and the laser focus on improving quality and standards
- Significant challenges that had been overcome, resulting in greater staff engagement, an enhanced learning environment (subject to listed building restrictions) and an improved curriculum structure
- Introduction of the “A Group” for learners with anxiety and the bespoke support offered for learners with complex needs
- Overview of safeguarding practices
- Emphasis on building a sense of belonging and integration with the main Riverside College campus; to align with the outstanding education being delivered there
- Anonymised case studies evidencing the pleasing progress for students in terms of developing independence, improving confidence levels and training for the bronze Duke of Edinburgh award
- Future plans – these included further support for staff development and suggested projects for student engagement

A discussion took place with several questions being raised and responded to. The Committee acknowledged the significant challenges encountered in recent years that had hindered timely progress being made in raising standards. In recent months, improvements had been evidenced and this provided assurance to the Committee that the FS curriculum area was on an upward trajectory from ‘good to outstanding’ provision. The Head of FS and staff members working within the department were commended on the progress being made.

Resolved: The Committee noted the content of the presentation.

The Head of Foundation Studies was thanked for her informative presentation, and she left the meeting.

6. STUDENT SUPPORT

6.1 Safeguarding *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Student Services presented this report and highlighted the following:

- Safeguarding cases were increasing in complexity and severity, with more serious cases and a broader gender distribution than in previous years
- The College team had expanded, improving capacity to manage cases and provide focused interventions. This included work with the police on issues, such as substance misuse
- Communication with students and parents had improved through newsletters and student spotlights, encouraging disclosures and engagement
- The safeguarding team supported its own well-being through offloading sessions and carefully managed internal support to avoid replacing external counselling services

A question was raised about how the college tracked and managed waiting times for student counselling referrals. It was explained that safeguarding cases were prioritised, initial contact was made promptly, and support was tailored to student preferences. The college managed high demand by triaging cases and offered limited internal counselling for the most urgent needs.

A governor asked whether it was feasible for counselling students to offer a drop-in facility to assist students and to reduce waiting times in accessing support. The Committee was advised that a service of this nature had previously been considered, though presented concerns regarding the management of disclosures and associated safeguarding responsibilities.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

6.2 Wellbeing and Enrichment Activities *(previously circulated)*

A strong emphasis on pastoral support and well-being was reported to overcome barriers to learning. A new partnership with MerseyCare Talking Therapies provided a referral route for students needing support between college and specialist services, easing the workload on internal teams.

The Committee was advised that student-driven enrichment activities had expanded, including music, meditation, and conversation clubs, with positive feedback and increased participation.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

6.3 Learner Voice *(previously circulated)*

The Committee was advised that the learner voice was actively used to shape enrichment and well-being activities, with tangible examples of student-led initiatives recorded and valued. This was pleasing to the Committee and it was agreed that further information was to be presented within this standing agenda item at the next committee meeting.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

The Head of Student Services/Designated Safeguarding Lead was thanked for her reports, and she left the meeting.

7. COLLEGE SELF-ASSESSMENT REVIEW (SAR) (previously circulated)

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) highlighted the following elements from the report:

- Strong Student Outcomes - these included achievement rates, improved attendance and satisfaction
- Foundation Studies - remained under the college's "special measures" category for close monitoring purposes, though was showing clear signs of improvement
- Achievement Gaps - gaps in achievement by gender, ethnicity, and learning difficulty/disability were narrowing, with most groups performing at or above college averages
- Attendance – This had improved by approximately 2% and was being maintained through high expectations, effective reward systems and early intervention.
- Employer Feedback: The importance of collecting and acting on employer reviews for apprenticeships was discussed, with a need to ensure prompt and regular feedback.

During a discussion, it was clarified that small student numbers in a minority of curriculum areas could cause large percentage swings in achievement rates which may not reflect overall quality. Further information was requested concerning a drop in achievement rates for Postgraduate Teacher Education. Governors were assured that there were no quality concerns in this area and the data was attributed to (i) small numbers, and (ii) an identified need for tighter suitability checks upon enrolment.

Resolved: The Committee recommended approval of the College SAR to the Board, subject to the inclusion of additional information relating to the significantly improved levels of attendance.

8. QUALITY ASSURANCE

8.1 To receive a report on areas subject to the College's special measures and close monitoring processes (previously circulated)

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) explained the College's approach and rationale when categorising the minority of lower performing curriculum areas into either (i) closer monitoring, or (ii) special measures.

In summary:

- One curriculum area remained in special measures
- Two areas had moved into closer monitoring in 2025/2026
- Three areas had been removed from closer monitoring following satisfactory improvements having been evidenced

The Committee was assured that subjects in close monitoring were to receive termly quality reviews and targeted walkthroughs. The area in Special Measures continued to be closely tracked by senior leadership, quality improvement action plans were kept under review, the area was prioritised for

resources and progress reports were to be presented to this committee at each meeting to enable senior leadership to be held accountable.

Resolved: The Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

8.2 Walkthrough/Classroom Observations *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal reported that observations and walkthroughs were part of ongoing efforts to embed consistently high standards and to support professional development. If identified, bespoke training may be offered and observation cycles were used to support staff in improving practice.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

8.3 Complaints and Compliments *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal presented this report which confirmed there were fewer complaints in 2024/2025 compared to previous years. Whilst it was pleasing that numbers remained low, Governors acknowledged that significant time and resources were needed to thoroughly investigate complaints or concerns raised.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

9. MONITORING OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

9.1 Annual Report Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 2024/2025 - Students *(previously circulated)*

The Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Riverside) highlighted the following aspects from his report:

- Achievement gaps by gender, ethnicity, and learning difficulty/disability had narrowed, with most groups performing at or above college averages
- BME students outperformed the college average, and learners with disabilities were close to parity with others
- The main area of concern was children looked after (CLA), whose achievement rates were lower due to complex external factors, especially for those turning 18 years of age and faced changes in care arrangements
- There was a college focus on supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable learners, with early identification and targeted support being of critical importance

During the discussion, it was noted that the new Ofsted inspection framework placed greater emphasis on inclusion, ensuring no learner was left behind.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

9.2 Annual Report Student Suspensions 2024/2025*(previously circulated)*

A governor commented on the usefulness of this report for oversight purposes. In response to a question raised, the Deputy Principal confirmed that unacceptable attendance levels could potentially trigger a suspension.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

10. EXTERNAL PRIORITIES

The Deputy Principal delivered a presentation encompassing (i) the curriculum assessment review (CAR) (ii) the Post 16 White Paper and (iii) the revised Ofsted Inspection Framework. Highlighted areas included:

- Ofsted – the new grading system, shift from ‘leadership and management’ to ‘leadership and governance,’ stronger focus on inclusion and supporting all learners
- White Paper and CAR – drivers for change to include the introduction of new qualifications, English and maths stepping stones to be introduced, changes to the apprenticeship levy, increased investment in teacher development, importance of enrichment and supporting students at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Several questions were raised and responded to during the subsequent discussion.

Resolved: The Committee noted the contents of the presentation.

11. LINK GOVERNOR REPORTS

11.1 Safeguarding

In his capacity as Safeguarding Link Governor, Tom McInerney presented a very favourable verbal report on his findings. He referred to the extent of escalating safeguarding concerns across the borough as a whole and commended the College on its support for students and engagement with partner agencies in complex cases. Staff wellbeing was also discussed and assurance was given that support was in place for staff dealing with distressing matters.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

11.2 Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) *(previously circulated)*

In her capacity as recently appointed SEND Link Governor, Katie Anderson referred to her written report summarising her visit to the Foundation Studies Department. She reported this to be a very positive experience and triangulated elements of the presentation delivered at agenda item 5. Stakeholder engagement with staff was noted to be particularly strong during the visit.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

12. POLICIES

12.1 Safeguarding and Child Protection *(previously circulated)*

12.2 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults *(previously circulated)*

12.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment *(previously circulated)*

12.4 Higher Education (HE) Freedom of Speech *(previously circulated)*

Resolved: The Committee

- recommended all policies for approval by the Board.
- identified a training need in respect of implications relating to the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. It was agreed that the Head of HE was to be invited to the next committee meeting to provide further information.

13. COMMITTEE SELF-EVALUATION 2024/2025 *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Governance presented the draft self-evaluation for consideration, highlighting the impact in 2024/2025 and areas for development in 2025/2026.

Resolved: The Committee approved the Committee Self-Evaluation 2024/2025, as presented.

14. FE SECTOR UPDATES *(previously circulated)*

In conjunction with agenda item 10, the Head of Governance provided an overview of any implications for governance relating to (i) the Curriculum Assessment Review, (ii) the White Paper and (iii) the Ofsted Inspection Framework.

Resolved: The Committee noted the contents of the report and that relevant resources continued to be uploaded to GovernorHub.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

16. ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD

Resolved: The Committee approved that the following items be reported to the next Board meeting:

- College Self-Assessment Report 2024/2025
- Safeguarding Update
- Foundation Studies Curriculum Presentation
- All policies being recommended for approval by the Committee

17. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates were noted:

- **Board:** 15 December 2025
- **Quality & Standards Committee:** 10 March 2026

The Chair thanked attendees for their participation and the meeting was closed.

Signed.....Office copy signed by Rachael Owen

Committee Chair

Date.....10th March 2026.....