



## Ruskin Community High School

### Teaching, Learning & Assessment Committee 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2026 at 4:15pm Venue - School

#### MINUTES – PART ONE

<b>Present:</b>	Dean Postlethwaite (HT) Chris Griffin Don Higgs (Chair) Denise McCumskey (DK) William Ollier (WO) Margo Veitch (MV) Peter Storey (PS) Emma Szymura (ES) Milena Kwaczynska (MK)	<b>Headteacher</b> <b>Co-opted - Chair of Committee</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Parent Governor</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	Debbie Jones (DJ) Peter Thorpe (PT) Duncan Burrows (DB) Marion McKenzie (MM)	<b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Co-opted Governor</b> <b>Staff Governor</b>
<b>Maths Presentation:</b>	Sophie Barrett (BAS) Chloe Grinnell (GRC)	<b>Curriculum leader – Mathematics until 16.53</b> <b>Assistant Curriculum leader until 16.53</b>
<b>In attendance:</b>	Sarah Robson (SR) Natalie Burke (NB) Natalie Cross (NC) Claire Harrison (CH) Joanne Lea (JL) Su Garbutt (Clerk)	<b>Assistant Head</b> <b>Assistant Head</b> <b>Assistant Head and SENDCO</b> <b>Deputy Head</b> <b>Associate Assistant Headteacher</b> <b>Senior Governance Officer</b>

**Due to the previous meeting over-running, the Committee started at 16.30**

	Agenda Item	Actions
<b>1.</b>	<p><b>Maths Presentation</b>  <b>(As requested at FGB)</b></p> <p>The Committee received a presentation from Sophie Barrett and Chloe, Grinnell who have jointly led the transformation of the Maths Department over the past 18 months. They explained that, upon joining the school, one of their first decisions was to redesign the scheme of work to ensure pupils developed greater depth of understanding rather than simply breadth of curriculum coverage. This has underpinned the department’s approach to curriculum sequencing, assessment and teaching practice.</p> <p>A major development this year has been the decision to switch the GCSE Maths exam board from AQA to Edexcel. The team explained that AQA had historically been a strong choice, particularly for pupils with literacy</p>	



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challenges and EAL backgrounds, due to clearer phrasing and question structures. However, changes to AQA's approach in recent years had resulted in decreased pupil confidence and earlier disengagement.

Edexcel's papers, by contrast, offer:

- Lower grade boundaries
- A progressive question structure, where difficulty increases gradually across the paper
- A strong suite of support materials for teachers
- Clear tier-placement guidance, supporting effective decisions on whether students should sit Foundation or Higher papers

Year 10 are currently following the Edexcel specification, with positive feedback from staff and students. The existence of "crossover material"—questions appearing on both Foundation and Higher tiers around Grades 4 and 5—also supports accurate assessment of pupil readiness and provides continuity in teaching.

A demonstration was given of the updated scheme of work, and the structure of the seven sets was outlined:

- Set 1: 30 pupils
- Set 2: 22 pupils
- Set 3: 15 pupils
- Remaining pupils distributed across sets 4–7

The department is also delivering the Extended Mathematics Certificate, targeted at students aiming for Grade 7 and above. This is an additional qualification that strengthens applications for A-Level Maths. Students attend a further three hours per week after school to complete the programme.

### **Homework and Assessment Developments**

Significant changes have been introduced to homework expectations:

- Previously: 20 questions per week
- Now: Year 11 complete half a past paper weekly
- Use of Hannah Kettle's YouTube channel, where scanning a QR code provides video walkthroughs and exam advice
- Staff are able to identify precisely where students become stuck

The department has produced homework booklets and embedded Sparx Maths, which Chloe explained is now compulsory. Teachers set bespoke tasks, with students able to access maths support from the department three times a week. Over 60,000 questions have been attempted so far this year. Sparx is fully integrated into assessments, with pupils given topic lists linked to Sparx codes.



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Following assessments, students receive traffic-light analysis (green, amber, red), which supports parental understanding and student ownership.

Weekly departmental time is used to strengthen retrieval practice, particularly for Key Stage 3 (Years 7, 8 and 9), after research highlighted that pupils often forget previously taught material. Pupils now complete a low-stakes quiz, followed by a similar homework task. Homework return rates have improved significantly. Staff ensure retrieval content matches prior teaching sequences.

Classroom oracy has also improved, with teachers prompting students who feel unsure by using structured questioning:  
“What can you see?” → “What do you know?” → “What can you do?”

Students are also being supported to use the new examination calculators effectively.

**Enrichment and External Collaboration**  
The school participates in the Cheshire and Wirral Maths Hub and in a Higher-Level Maths Achievement Group, working with 15 disadvantaged students who attend sessions at Chester University to strengthen their attainment.

A well-received Maths Residential took place earlier in the year, involving 35 Year 11 students completing seven hours of revision over a weekend. Students returned highly motivated, and the residential has had a positive impact on confidence and exam readiness.

The department also runs:

- Sparx Parties
- Mathematical Easter egg hunts
- Other initiatives to promote enjoyment and positive attitudes towards mathematics

**Impact on Outcomes**  
Predicted outcomes have improved significantly, with projected whole-cohort results of:

- 67% achieving Grade 4+
- 45% achieving Grade 5+
- 14% achieving Grade 7+

These predictions include built-in “wobble room” for grade boundary shifts. Staff noted that changing exam boards has contributed positively to these projections.



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**Q: Was the residential funded?**

Parents funded places, although PGL provided some financial support for certain students.

**Q: How should parents support students with high levels of intervention?**

Parents are encouraged to sit with their children during homework. Staff noted that some students excel independently, while others are using AI to complete work—patterns that are detectable through timing data.

A follow-up system is now in place, with five targeted questions issued on Mondays based on identified misconceptions.

**Q: Does homework completion differ for PPG students?**

The department has not formally stratified return rates by PPG status but has identified challenges among some SEND students. Case-by-case follow-up is taking place. Sparx sessions run three times a week, and SEND students often need regulation time before starting; written homework is also used.

DP thanked Sophie and Chloe, describing the presentation as an exceptional example of a department reflecting deeply, changing practice courageously and showing the results of significant work.

**Q: What inspired such a radical transformation?**

The response was due to a strong interest in educational research. The work was influenced by research from Ormskirk Academy Trust, which has developed nationally funded mathematics resources.

**Q: Has the change required a shift in classroom teaching?**

Yes. Some staff were initially unsure, but departmental meetings supported consistency, and all staff are now fully aligned.

**Q: Has this been shared with other departments?**

Yes. Curriculum Leaders meet weekly, and this approach has been cited as an example of strong practice to be shared across the school.

ES noted the amount of work undertaken following last year’s disappointing outcomes and praised the vision and leadership shown in reshaping the department.

Governors expressed appreciation, describing the department’s journey as exciting and full of promise for improved pupil achievement.

Sophie and Chloe left the meeting at 16:53.



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<p><b>2.</b></p>	<p><b>SPARX Presentation – Reading (Joanne Lea)</b> <i>(As requested at FGB)</i></p> <p>The Committee received a presentation from Joanne Lea on the use of SPARX Reader to support reading development across the school. JL demonstrated what the platform looks like when pupils log in and outlined how the system can be customised to individual reading needs. The software automatically adjusts text difficulty using an algorithm that sets personalised reading levels based on each pupil’s ability.</p> <p>Once a pupil finishes reading a section of text, SPARX Reader generates comprehension questions. Importantly, only the minutes spent answering these questions are counted, ensuring that engagement reflects active reading rather than passive scrolling. Adjustments have been made for certain SEND pupils, providing tailored accessibility options where appropriate.</p> <p>Teachers are able to assign specific texts to a whole class, including original and simplified (“easy read”) versions. Pupils can also be asked to re-read sections where further practice is needed.</p> <p>Joanne shared current engagement data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5,209 “careful reading” minutes logged</li><li>• 3,909 books read as of 9 March</li><li>• A leaderboard is in use to encourage participation</li><li>• The top 10 readers across year groups include three PPG pupils and four EAL pupils, demonstrating strong engagement across diverse cohorts</li><li>• Certificates are issued to promote motivation and celebrate progress</li></ul> <p>A SPARX Reader Club runs every Wednesday, and the school library has full access to SPARX. Library lessons also incorporate 30 minutes of SPARX reading, embedding the tool into wider literacy practice.</p> <p>JL reported that reading data shows encouraging progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Between end of September ‘25 and January ‘26, the cohort has achieved an average increase of eight months in reading age</li><li>• 52 pupils are now reading at or above their chronological reading age</li><li>• The proportion of pupils significantly below expected reading age has reduced to around 20%</li></ul> <p>Year 7 continue to arrive with reading levels significantly below age-related expectations, a pattern consistent with national trends.</p> <p>Governors questioned whether pupils within the “20% below” group were predominantly EAL. JL confirmed that approximately half of these pupils are EAL. All EAL assessments have now been completed, and pupils are receiving differentiated levels of intervention. While manpower limits the</p>	
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	<p>scale of one-to-one reading intervention, updates to reading age data will be provided in the coming months.</p> <p>JL noted an emerging pattern in SPARX data showing that non-PPG pupils are reading more consistently than PPG pupils, and the department is mindful of avoiding a widening attainment gap in English. Strategies are being developed to ensure reading support remains equitable.</p> <p>JL ended by highlighting the importance of ensuring consistency in the teaching of reading across the department, acknowledging the range of excellent practice already in place and the ongoing efforts to streamline approaches.</p> <p>The Committee thanked Joanne for her presentation and acknowledged the strong early impact of SPARX Reader on reading progress.</p>	
<b>3.</b>	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b> Governors accepted the apologies received from Peter Thorpe, Duncan Burrows and Debbie Jones.</p>	
<b>4.</b>	<p><b>Conflicts of Interest, (pecuniary or otherwise)</b> There were no conflicts of interest with the business to be discussed at the meeting to be reported.</p>	
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>AOB</b> There were no items of any other business for discussion.</p>	
<b>6.</b>	<p><b>Approval of the minutes from the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2025.</b> Governors approved the minutes from the previous meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2025 as a true and correct record.</p> <p>The Chair of the committee would approve the minutes electronically on Governor Hub.</p>	CG
<b>7.</b>	<p><b>Matters arising from the above minutes / outstanding actions update</b> <b>SIP Report</b> The School Improvement Partner (SIP) report is due by the end of the week. It will be included within the Headteacher’s Report and uploaded to Governor Hub.</p>	
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>Teaching &amp; Learning – Sarah Robson</b> <b>To receive an update on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence against the new framework</li> <li>• SDP highlights around teaching and learning</li> <li>• SEND updates</li> </ul>	



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An overview was provided on progress within Teaching and Learning. A more detailed session will take place at a later meeting to review the full Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) document line by line. Initial highlights and ongoing work were shared with the Committee.

The Committee was reminded that, as a school, inclusion has long been central to Teaching & Learning practice, not simply as a response to the new Ofsted framework. All areas of work—governor visits, CPD, curriculum development and lesson design—continue to be approached through the lens of inclusion. Leaders expressed confidence that this has been embedded in school practice for a considerable time.

A clear Teaching & Learning framework is in place, previously highlighted to governors. This includes structured expectations for lesson delivery, priorities for pedagogical practice and a consistent approach across subjects.

### **Areas for Development**

The SEF has been RAG-rated and remains a working document.

Development areas are being addressed gradually, and updated staff voice is being collected through ongoing CPD sessions.

The Committee was informed that the next meeting will include an update on EAL intervention, particularly how it aligns with reading intervention strategies such as SPARX Reader.

SDP Teaching & Learning priorities remain closely aligned to the key themes identified during the previous Ofsted inspection, particularly the focus on the 'Four M's'.

A key area for improvement concerns consistency. While Maths lessons provide a strong example of consistent routines and structures, there is variation across other subjects. Developing consistency across departments is important to ensure pupils understand expectations and feel secure in classroom routines.

### **Q: Does every teacher understand the expectations for consistency?**

Leaders confirmed that a clear list of expectations exists and can be uploaded to Governor Hub. Staff know the expectations, although they are not always applied consistently. As part of the inclusion vision, consistency is essential.



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Governors discussed the balance between consistency and autonomy. Leaders confirmed that the aim is not to standardise teaching styles but to ensure a consistent framework, including:

- Retrieval practice at the start of every lesson
- Regular use of mini whiteboards
- Early-lesson routines such as equipment checks
- Predictable structures that promote pupil safety and readiness

This does not restrict pedagogy but supports strong routines and reduces cognitive load for pupils.

New staff—whether early career or highly experienced—receive full induction training, including presentations and a staff handbook outlining expected routines. Expectations are typical for secondary settings (e.g. silent entry) and are designed to empower teachers and support pupils.

### **SEND Update – Natalie Baker**

NB provided an update on SEND.

The school currently has:

- 90 SEND K pupils
- 25 pupils with EHCPs

This remains slightly below national averages.

In Year 11, there are two pupils with EHCPs. One had originally been allocated a special school place before joining Year 7 but has remained successfully in mainstream education.

A Year 11 revision carousel is running, providing targeted Maths and English support for six SEND pupils once a week. Support is focused on revision planning and encouraging attendance at lesson 6 sessions.

For September, the school has responded to a significantly increased number of consultations. Currently:

- Six new EHCP pupils are expected
- Two placement moves are in progress (one to a local secondary school, one to a special school)
- Two pupils are awaiting needs assessments

NB reported on the school's work to strengthen inclusion:

- An Inclusion Framework review will be undertaken by NB and Dean on 16 and 23 April.
- The SEND team recently hosted a Coffee Morning, attended by DH, to increase parental engagement.
- An additional evening event is planned to reach parents who cannot attend during the school day.
- The Forest Provision is now operational, led by Kim Beddington.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After Easter, a group of vulnerable SEND and Pupil Premium pupils will visit the Safety Centre in Warrington, run by Cheshire Fire Service, to experience realistic safety scenarios (e.g. road safety, fire safety) in a controlled environment. This visit targets Year 9 pupils.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>9.</b></p>	<p><b>School Improvement Partner (SIP)</b></p> <p>The Committee received an update on the most recent School Improvement Partner (SIP) activity. The latest report on Governor Hub is from November, during which the SIP carried out reviews in English, Maths and Science, and held discussions with Curriculum Leaders.</p> <p>Following the analysis of outcomes in Science, the SIP recommended targeted support for the department. As a result, Mark Bayley has been working closely with the Head of Science and the Second in Department. His work has focused on leadership development, teaching approaches and curriculum delivery.</p> <p>Mark has produced a Rapid Response Plan, which is available on Governor Hub. The plan focuses primarily on current Year 11 pupils and outlines actions to improve outcomes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening retrieval practice</li> <li>• Increasing targeted interventions</li> <li>• Enhancing attendance at lesson 6 sessions</li> <li>• Encouraging motivated students to participate in additional support</li> </ul> <p>Mark has worked with the Science team to review this plan and required each teacher to reflect on what they will personally implement to support improvement. These reflections have also been uploaded to Governor Hub.</p> <p>SR reported a noticeable shift in attitude and approach within the Science department over the past three weeks since Mark’s involvement. Staff have recognised the need to adapt their practice and have responded positively.</p> <p>A number of science-related events are also planned, which will help to raise the profile of the department and further drive engagement.</p> <p>The SIP will return over the Easter period to review updated predictions and analyse results class-by-class. Teachers now have clarity regarding what needs to be done and how best to approach rapid improvement.</p> <p>Looking ahead, the school intends to use Mark’s expertise with other departments, although the immediate focus remains on Year 11 Science outcomes.</p> <p><b>Q: Were the SIP’s findings already anticipated by the school?</b></p> <p>Yes. Leaders confirmed that several of the issues identified were already</p>	



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	<p>known and had been highlighted through the IDSR (Inspection Data Summary Report), which indicated emerging trends requiring attention.</p>	
<p><b>10.</b></p>	<p><b>Pupil Premium</b></p> <p>The Committee received an update on the Pupil Premium (PP) Strategy, which had been uploaded to Governor Hub prior to the meeting. Governors were informed that the strategic priorities remain consistent, focusing on the key areas identified through data analysis and national research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Reading gaps</li> <li>• Behaviour and engagement</li> </ul> <p>The strategy document sets out the evidence base, planned actions and success measures for each priority. Governors confirmed they had reviewed the documentation and noted that the priorities align well with both the School Improvement Plan and current student needs.</p> <p>The school continues to work closely with RADY (Raising the Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters). The school has now moved into Cohort 2, having previously been in a cohort that offered limited support due to being the only secondary. Cohort 2 consists solely of secondary schools, allowing the school to benefit from a much stronger level of collaboration, guidance and shared practice. This is expected to support sharper implementation of strategies for disadvantaged pupils.</p> <p>Attendance remains the biggest area of focus for Pupil Premium students at present. The gap between PP and non-PP pupils continues to require sustained intervention, with PP boys identified as the group with the greatest challenge moving forward. Leaders confirmed that targeted attendance actions are in place and progress is being closely monitored.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the strategy is clearly structured, evidence-informed and aligned with school improvement priorities.</p>	
<p><b>11.</b></p>	<p><b>CPD Update</b></p> <p>An update was provided on the school’s Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Strategic Plan, with a focus on its alignment to Teaching and Learning priorities.</p> <p>The school continues to structure CPD around the Four M’s, with twilight sessions following lesson observations to reinforce core pedagogical principles and support ongoing staff development. These sessions ensure that staff receive timely, relevant and reflective feedback based on current classroom practice.</p>	



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	<p>Looking ahead to next year, the CPD programme will include a stronger focus on modelling and consistency. The school plans to introduce lesson filming, enabling staff to capture short, targeted snapshots of teaching practice. These recordings can then be shared during CPD sessions to demonstrate effective strategies, support professional dialogue and promote a shared understanding of high-quality classroom practice.</p> <p>Leaders explained that this approach will help drive consistency across departments while still respecting teacher autonomy.</p> <p>Additionally, the school will introduce use of the Carousel Learning platform, which contains a range of pre-populated instructional videos and exemplars. Departments will continue to deliver their own subject-specific CPD alongside whole-school training, enabling staff to access development that is both generic and curriculum-focused. Many local schools are already using this blended approach, and it is expected to have increasing impact over time.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the CPD programme remains purposeful, evidence-informed and well-aligned to teaching and learning priorities.</p>	
<p><b>12.</b></p>	<p><b>Link Governor Reports (Teaching, Learning and Assessment)</b></p> <p>Governors were thanked for their continued commitment in coming into school and engaging with subject areas. It was noted that written reports from the visits will be presented at the next meeting.</p> <p>Leaders highlighted the value of Link Governors speaking directly with pupils during visits, as this provides meaningful insight into students’ perceptions of their subjects and their learning experiences. Governors agreed that student voice remains a powerful way of understanding the impact of curriculum delivery.</p> <p>CG reported on his visit earlier in the day, during which he met with a number of pupils. He noted that every pupil he spoke to appeared on the vulnerable pupils list, which enabled a broader understanding of the contextual challenges faced by some learners. He undertook three separate visits across different subject areas and found the range of perspectives to be highly informative. CG commented that the visits had helped to signpost clear ways forward and would support governors in continuing to challenge and champion curriculum development.</p>	
<p><b>13.</b></p>	<p><b>Directors Report</b></p> <p>The Clerk informed the Committee that an update on the Director’s Report had been uploaded to Governor Hub prior to the meeting. Due to time constraints arising from the extended discussions earlier in the agenda, the</p>	



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	<p>Clerk advised that any questions regarding the Director’s Report or the Clerk’s Update should be submitted directly through Governor Hub.</p> <p>This approach will ensure that responses can be viewed by all board members and will support transparency and consistency in the governance record.</p>	
<b>14.</b>	<p><b>Meetings</b> Governors confirmed the date and time of the next meeting as 17.06.26 at 4.15 pm.</p>	
<b>15.</b>	<p><b>AOB</b> There were no items of AOB for discussion.</p>	
<b>16.</b>	<p><b>Impact Statement</b> The Committee reflected on the impact of the meeting in relation to the core strategic functions defined by the Department for Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction</li> <li>• Hold the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school</li> <li>• Oversee the financial performance of the school, ensuring value for money</li> <li>• Promote the highest possible standards for safeguarding</li> </ul> <p>Governors agreed that the presentation from the Maths team was highly impressive, offering clear evidence of strong curriculum leadership, innovative practice and a strategic approach to raising attainment. The committee noted the ambition and clarity shown in re-designing curriculum structures, embedding retrieval practice and aligning the department’s approach with research-informed pedagogy. This reinforced confidence in the school’s strategic direction for core subjects.</p> <p>The update on SPARX Reader further demonstrated strong progress in literacy intervention and a clear focus on addressing reading gaps, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Governors acknowledged the importance of ensuring that the use of SPARX does not widen the gap between Pupil Premium and non-PP pupils, and welcomed the school’s targeted strategies to mitigate this risk.</p> <p>Governors commended the continued work in Inclusion, recognising the positive impact of personalised support and the alignment of SEND and reading interventions. The school’s proactive engagement with external guidance, new frameworks and parent involvement evidences a strong safeguarding ethos and a commitment to meeting the needs of all learners.</p>	



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	<p>Consistency across teaching and learning was highlighted as a key theme. Governors noted the honest analysis of teaching standards presented by leaders and the clear steps being taken to address variability across departments. This reflects strong self-evaluation processes and a culture of improvement aligned with the IDSR findings.</p> <p>Finally, governors acknowledged the thorough identification of school development needs and the openness with which leaders evaluate strengths and weaknesses. The Committee was assured that leaders have a clear and strategic approach to securing ongoing improvements, in line with national expectations and the school's own priorities.</p>	
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**There were no part 2 items for discussion.**

**The meeting closed at 17.30**