THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

DBE (26)M1

DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION

Minutes of a meeting of the Diocesan Board of Education held on Wednesday 11 February 2026 at 1.30pm in the Boardroom and via Zoom

Prayers: Revd Laura Mumford led the opening prayer.

Present:

Mrs Jane Addis
Mrs Maggie Elder
Mr Tim Fairbairn (via Zoom)
The Ven Rich Henderson (Chair)
The Revd Laura Mumford
Mr Hugo Parker
Mrs Debs Shipp
The Revd Canon Susan Taylor

Apologies:

Mrs Liz Campbell
Mrs Julia Grainger
The Revd Jo Gunn
The Revd Rachel Revely
The Revd Toby Tate
Mrs Sue Todd

In Attendance:

Mrs Victoria Bush	Diocesan Schools' Adviser
Miss Rachel Cutts	Diocesan Schools' Adviser
Mr Daniel Jones	Diocesan Buildings Officer
Mrs Jane Sheat	Diocesan Director of Education (DDE)
Miss Jacqui Studd	Administrator (Education)

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and asked members to keep the DDDE in their prayers as she is unwell.

26.01 DBE MEMBERSHIP

The Chair noted that this would be Revd Laura Mumford's last meeting as she was moving to York for a new ministerial role and thanked Laura for her contribution to the DBE. The Chair also noted that Paul Ryle had recently resigned after nine years as a member and the Chair had written a letter of thanks to Paul for his service.

26.02 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2025 were approved and signed.

26.03 MATTERS ARISING

25.52 DIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION'S REPORT

The DDE advised that she had liaised with the Local Authority about historic forecasts on numbers on roll. The forecasts do look at 'trend' information to take into account popularity of schools and parental movement. Some degree of local knowledge does need to be applied and the Local Authority actively encourages schools to feedback so that this can be captured.

26.04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Revd Canon Susan Taylor declared an interest as the ex officio foundation governor at Sir Robert Hitcham CEVAP School, Debenham, as another foundation governor at the school was on the list of governors to be ratified at Paper E.

26.05 DIOCESAN DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION'S REPORT

The DDE referred to Paper A, which provided an update to DBE members on issues arising since the last meeting. The DDE noted that:

- she would be retiring with effect the end of July 2026 and that her position had recently been advertised with interviews due to take place on Monday 2 March. The Chair will be leading the interview process and the DDE will keep DBE members updated on the interview arrangements once shortlisting has taken place so that they could hear presentations
- the SEO role will be advertised once the new DDE has been appointed, also to start in September but in the meantime, Rachel Cutts is now responsible for SIAMS support, Heather Hann, Head of Professional Development in the Diocesan MAT is providing support on a part-time basis for approximately one day a week for the spring and summer terms and Tor Bush is working an additional half day a week for the rest of the academic year
- Thedwastre Education Trust is still pursuing a MAT merger and Tilian is currently reviewing due diligence. The DfE now require online submissions for academy mergers.

Debs Shipp asked about the split of the four schools currently within the Trust and the DDE advised that this was regarded by all as the best option for all schools. The DDE invited discussion amongst members on how best to consider consent to this proposed MAT merger. The DBE agreed to authorise the Chair to approve the merger on behalf of the DBE.

The DDE further noted:

- two church schools in the diocese have been inspected under the renewed Ofsted framework and we await publication of the reports
- the Bible course being led by the DDE and Revd Laura Mumford is going well with 11 Headteachers and governors attending for personal and professional development.

The Chair thanked the DDE and Revd Laura for leading the Bible course and committed to maintaining a focus on this course for schools. Maggie Elder asked if DBE members could be involved in leading future courses and the DDE advised that this would certainly be open for discussion.

The DDE noted the recent development of a number of partnerships with other organisations, including those which help schools support parents. The DDE invited discussion amongst members on how the DBE can best support schools in dealing positively with parents. Maggie Elder asked about the relationship with the Mothers' Union and the DDE advised that she works closely with the President of the Mothers' Union in Suffolk. The Schools' Adviser asked whether schools were still able to afford family support practitioners and the DDE advised that family support is embedded in schools. Tim Fairbairn advised that budget pressures are forcing schools to prioritise attendance, often by reallocating staff to manage pupil absence.

The DDE further noted:

- the Big Sing on 23 March at 10.30am at the Cathedral in partnership with Christian Aid

- the church schools service on 15 June at 1.30pm at the Cathedral which will be led by iSingPOP again
- the updated strategy action plan (Appendix 1)
- information about trends in pupil numbers at our schools using October census information from 2018-2025 (Appendix 2).

The DDE invited discussion amongst members on the data in Appendix 2. Debs Shipp highlighted the number of schools which have 58% fewer children since 2021. Hugo Parker asked if there was any data to explain these trends. The DDE identified that factors impacting the data include the school's location (specifically being remote, rural or expensive) and recent Ofsted inspection results. However, only one school with fewer than 50 pupils and one school with fewer than 100 pupils are not in a MAT or federation. Hugo asked about the support available for schools and the DDE advised that support for small schools is diverse and often tailored to specific local needs. Schools are beginning to treat marketing as a necessity with some developing good practice to secure pupil enrolment.

The DDE further noted that the White Paper on SEND and school reform is still awaited. Debs Shipp highlighted the recent Diocesan Headteachers' Forum where Daniel Woodrow, Headteacher at St Gregory CEVCP School, Sudbury had spoken positively about the benefits and challenges of having a special needs unit in school.

The Chair thanked the DDE for her report.

26.06 DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' ADVISER REPORT – Rachel Cutts

The Schools' Adviser referred to Paper B and noted:

- the National Society for Education (NSE) had released the new Statement of Entitlement for RE in church schools following the recommendations from the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR) released in November 2025
- the new Statement of Entitlement for RE will be implemented from September 2026 and she has sent a video to schools outlining the main changes
- section 6.6 of the Statement details the expectations for DBEs.

The Schools' Adviser invited discussion on the new Statement of Entitlement. Revd Laura Mumford referred to the expectations for DBEs and noted that most of these were included in the DBE Strategy Action Plan.

The Schools' Adviser highlighted the NSE's confidential paper on RE, the national curriculum and the dual system.

The Schools' Adviser further noted that:

- there had been two SIAMS inspections since the last meeting
- all church schools inspected under the current SIAMS framework have received a J1 judgement
- of the 18 schools expecting a SIAMS inspection this academic year, seven have been inspected so far
- she is trialling the NSE's new Introduction to Racial Justice training programme with a small group of church schools

In answer to a question from Debs Shipp, the Schools' Adviser noted that RE is compulsory for pupils from reception to 18 although parents have a legal right to withdraw their children from all or part of these lessons. Further guidance on withdrawal from RE is expected.

Action: The Schools' Adviser to forward the video sent to schools on the Statement of Entitlement.

The Chair thanked the Schools' Adviser for her report.

26.07 DIOCESAN SCHOOLS' ADVISER REPORT – Victoria Bush

The Schools' Adviser referred to Paper C and noted:

- recent work in schools has focused on supporting spiritual development, nurturing a distinct Christian ethos and helping with biblical literacy
- the KSI Emmanuel Project units are being refreshed and rewritten in March with the help of 12 teachers from church schools and also feedback from schools on the current KS1 units
- the new KS1 units will be available on the website before September 2026.

26.08 LOCAL AUTHORITY UPDATE

The DBE received Paper D, the Local Authority report and the Chair asked for any queries to be sent to the Chair or DDE.

26.09 CONFIRMATION OF FOUNDATION GOVERNORS

The DBE ratified the appointment of Foundation Governors listed in Paper E including a recent addition, Lyn Tomlinson at Tattingstone CEVCP School.

The Chair thanked the Administrator for her report.

26.10 FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Chaplaincy

Sue Bridges and Learning Hub at Gusford Primary School, Ipswich

DfE Estates Strategy

The Chair advised members to email either the DDE or Administrator if they have suggestions for items to include for discussion at future meetings.

26.11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

26.12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Board noted that the next meeting would be Wednesday 6 May 2026 at 4.00pm in the Boardroom.

The Chair thanked members for their contribution to the meeting. The meeting closed at 2.15pm.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

[Chair]