Moorland Federation

The Moorland Federation Full Governing Board
Minutes of the meeting held at 7pm on Tuesday 7 July 2026
on Teams

Governors Present	Category	Also Present	Role
Frances Nicholson (Chair)	Foundation	Mark Lees	RISE advisor (observing)
Rev Ann Gibbs (from 6.2)	Foundation	Lizi Pravato	Chief Operations Officer
Paul James	Staff	Kathryn Lanning	Clerk
Helen Jenkinson (member of staff)	Co-opted		
Daniel Moncrieff	Co-opted		
Hazel Mutter	Parent		
Naomi Philp	EHT, Ex-Officio		
Steven Pugsley	Foundation		
Rev Helene Stainer	Foundation		
Patrick Watts-Mabbott	Foundation		

Item 1 – Quorum

1.1 The clerk confirmed the meeting was quorate (it remained so throughout).

Item 2 – Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

2.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were accepted from Kim Garner, Julia Kingsford and Ruth Smith. Apologies for lateness were accepted from Rev Ann Gibbs.

2.2 There were no new declarations of interest.

Item 3 – Minutes of previous meetings (papers)

3.1 The Board approved minutes of the following meetings:

a) FGB – 28 April 2026
b) EGM – 18 May 2026

Item 4 – Matters Arising / Action Tracker (paper)

4.1 EGM Minutes 18 May 2026 – the Chair reported that, following further discussions with the LA, the member of staff discussed at the EGM had been given compulsory redundancy rather than voluntary.

4.2 Action Tracker – governors noted the following updates on actions not covered elsewhere on the agenda:

Mobile phone use in schools (3 Feb FGB, Para 7.6)

4.3 HJ reported that, building on the government's no mobile phones in school policy, she would draft something for the September newsletter promoting the https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/ movement which aims to delay children having access to smartphones until they are at least 14.

Year 5/6 provision (28 April FGB, Para 16.3)

4.4 The Board noted that the LA currently had no plans for year 5/6 provision in First Schools but agreed that this was an on-going strategic issue for the area.

Item 5 – Chair's Report

5.1 The Chair commented on a number of extra-curricular successes highlighted in the papers, and congratulated staff for having their energy, passion and commitment. These included an Eco Plastic Free Schools Award for Exford; an Eco RSPB Award for Langford Budville; and a planned Big Cycle charity fundraising event to be undertaken by three Heads of School.

5.2 Governors reflected on the impending anniversary of the tragic coach crash on Cutcombe Hill in July last year where a number of former Moorland Federation children were injured and one child killed. A tree had been planted and a memorial bench installed locally for the child who lost his life.

5.3 The Chair reported that the Diocese had now formally appointed Ruth Smith to the Board as a Foundation governor. Ruth has a background in school education and finance, is a member of the Diocesan Board of Education and a member of the Quantock Education Trust. The Chair also reported that Clive Franklin had stood down as a governor and expressed her thanks to him on behalf of the Board. This had created a further Foundation governor vacancy and possible replacements were being explored. His departure had also created a vacancy for a H&S link governor and this would be addressed at the next meeting. In the meantime, the Board would continue to rely on the excellent work of the Federation's compliance lead, Sarah Masters noting that the LA had recently sought her advice on H&S processes/templates etc in order to support another Federation.

ACTION: Board to appoint a H&S link governor

5.4 The Chair reported that Paul James had decided to stand down as staff governor. An election to find his replacement would be held at the start of next term. The Chair thanked Paul for his willingness, helpfulness and commitment to the role.

ACTION: Clerk to organise staff governor election in September

5.5 The Chair thanked those governors who had completed a 360º Chair review and she would reflect on the very helpful feedback.

5.6 The Chair advised that she was content with the rationale for closing Federation schools during the recent heatwave but there would be an opportunity to review extreme weather procedures at a future meeting.

ACTION: EHT

Item 6 – EHT Report (papers)

Overview

6.1 The EHT introduced her overview report which included an early overview from Heads of School on assessment data. She commented that the Federation's greatest challenges related to impact and attendance. A consistent theme is the need to sustain improvement in challenging financial circumstances and with a pared back leadership structure.

Question: notwithstanding the financial constraints and reduction in staff, what are the greatest opportunities presented by the new staffing model?

Response (EHT): we now view ourselves as one school with a single leadership team whilst still retaining contact with each local school community. This means we can work smarter and reduce replication of work. For example, the training programme will be taken back in-house, enabling us to make it more streamlined, consistent and effective. Analysis of directed time will be carried out centrally rather than by individual Heads which will allow us to identify more easily any inconsistencies. We have also carried out a full analysis of how LSAs are deployed, in particular to support the SEND Action Plan. The three remaining Heads will also have oversight of Federation-wide leadership topics such as teaching and learning, quality of education, wellbeing, attendance, behaviour and outcomes/data which will promote fresh Federation-wide oversight.

Question: what do you see as the biggest risks/challenges to the reduction in staff?

Response (EHT): we will still have to go through 8 Ofsted Inspections. There will be leadership to manage the 310 pupils spread across 8 schools. My being based at Langford Budville covering the Head of School role reduces capacity. Heads monitoring Federation-wide topics and needing to visit other schools will also need careful management to ensure their school is covered when they are off site, but these new monitoring roles will be introduced gradually over the course of next year.

Question: Heads typically have to cover operational jobs when the need arises, such as caretaking. Will the remaining Heads have the capacity for this now when they are spread more thinly?

Response (EHT): to a degree we will have to see how things go during the first year and undoubtedly issues will occur that we have not anticipated in our contingency planning.

Question: falling rolls continue to be a challenge across the Federation and the current class structure addresses this for the time being. However, should the Board be thinking more radically beyond the next two years in order to influence strategic direction rather than continue to make small cuts and wait for findings of the LA small rural schools review?

Response (EHT): this is very much on our radar. Financial forecasting beyond three years is difficult but we cannot afford to ignore falling rolls and whilst the leadership team shares the Board's vision of keeping small rural schools open we have to have some in-depth strategic discussions about the future. Some of this will be impacted by local area reorganisation and regional-wide educational provision plans but we do need to keep this under review, making decisions that are best for our children.

Question: is there a piece of work for us to look at 2028/29 and beyond in the autumn term particularly in relation to the small rural schools review and response to the LA submission to the DfE regarding SEND reforms.

Response (Chair): we will add this to the agenda plan for the autumn term.

ACTION: Clerk to add to agenda plan

Attendance

Question: is there any reason why Moorland Federation boys outnumber girls 2:1? (A more even split might improve our attendance data since girls tend to be better school attenders than boys.) Is there anything we could do – perhaps around the curriculum – to improve attendance for boys in particular?

Response (EHT): I don't know why there is such an imbalance but we are seeing more boys with SEMH and there is a correlation between that and SEND, Additional Provision, Transitional Timetables etc. It would definitely be worth reviewing the curriculum to see if there are any reasons why it might appeal more to girls than boys and if this could be adjusted.

6.2 Governors noted that the national average for SEND is 2:1 boys to girls, but at Dulverton it is 4:1 boys to girls and that the SEND teacher at Dulverton is carrying out a review of what needs to be done to improve boys' engagement with the curriculum. The EHT commented that this also links to the work the SENCo has been doing on the SEND universal offer, looking at the learning environment as well as provision, and developing staff training to roll out in September. She would ensure that a review of boys' engagement with the curriculum and the school environment feeds into the Attendance Plan, the SEND Action Plan and the Curriculum Plan.

ACTION: EHT

6.3 The staff governor commented that, for Heads of School, key to improving attendance is knowing your families and their back stories, offering support not pressure and creating a culture where families know that they are expected to send their children to school. For example, understanding that if they are unsure whether or not their child is genuinely ill, they should still attend and the school will make a decision.

Ann Gibbs joined the meeting at this point

SEND

6.4 One governor suggested there were focus areas in the SEND Action Plan that needed to be bedded in and therefore it would be useful for the Board to have an update on this and the impact of the Plan in the Spring term next year.

ACTION: EHT/SENDCo

6.5 Governors noted that suspension numbers for the year were low and welcomed the efforts of staff to keep children in full time education. They were particularly appreciative that staff had managed to avoid a permanent exclusion for one child.

Question: how many children stay on part-time timetables longer than 4-6 weeks?

Response (EHT): this is already reflected in the SEND Action Plan and we now use the term 'transitional timetables' which more accurately communicates that the

arrangement is temporary and a stepping-stone to moving a child back into full-time education as soon as possible. The leadership team has already reviewed the process that each Head follows for transitional timetables to establish best practice and improve understanding and oversight. We expect to be able to give you some positive data by the end of the autumn term in the next SEND report.

ACTION: EHT/SENDCo

Curriculum: Maths

Question: the report by the Federation maths lead identifies some inconsistency in the way in which maths mastery is taught across the Federation. How confident are you that this can be resolved?

Response (EHT): the Federation's maths lead feels that the Mastery in Number element of the maths curriculum is where the most impact can be made so it is essential that there is a strong commitment to delivery and this will be closely monitored going forwards. We have also tried to refocus the deployment of LSAs to support class teachers in delivering the maths curriculum, especially in mixed age classes where this can be particularly difficult.

Staff Wellbeing

Question: since our staff work in quite stressful circumstances dealing with frequent change – can you assure us that they receive adequate support to ensure their wellbeing? Was there any particular reason for the high levels of staff sickness in October last year?

Response (EHT): we have been unable to find any reason for the October sickness levels but it is worth noting that other schools in the area have a slightly longer October half term which might help promote resilience levels around that time of year. We have put two INSET days immediately before the next October half-term break and will be interested to see if this has any impact. Staff have access to PAM Wellness which they can access confidentially but we do get some feedback from staff with mixed reviews on how helpful they found the service. We also use the Bradford Scale to monitor staff absences. We have carried out some work on the style of communication with staff (for example looking at how to identify priorities) and have tested a new format for collating staff voice through anonymous surveys. This has produced some very clear and actionable feedback.

6.6 The Chair commented that, while it would not be appropriate for governors to see the detail of staff survey responses, it would be helpful if they could hear about any particular themes or trends.

6.7 Governors noted the EHT overview report, including the data on pupil performance.

Item 7 – Federation Development Plan 2025-28 (Paper)

7,1 The Board considered the 2025-28 Federation Development Plan (FDP) which had been updated in June.

Question: is the FDP based on the new Ofsted framework and how will the current plan inform next year's iteration?

Response (EHT): the FDP is based on the new Ofsted framework but we have learnt a lot about that new framework over the course of this year and have been able to strip out non-essential activity to give a clear focus on core priorities. Going

forward the FDP will be informed by a range of action plans including for SEND, Maths, Attendance, Writing, EYS, Leadership and Communication. Additional elements will be metacognition, behaviours for learning and pupil voice but the key strands I would like governors to monitor are SEND, attendance, maths and writing.

7.2 Governors agreed that it would be very useful to have a presentation from the action plan leads at FGB meetings next year, and suggested one per meeting.

ACTION: Clerk to add to meeting planner

Item 8 – Finance

8a – Finance Update

8.1 LP reported that closing balances for all 3 budgets showed improvements against the 2025/26 budget plan as follows:

- Langford Budville – the estimated budget plan deficit had reduced by £14,220
- Dulverton Schools – the estimated budget plan deficit had reduced by £34,549
- Moorland First Schools – the estimated budget plan surplus had increased by £140,419

8.2 Each budget has a three-year recovery plan and these were submitted to Schools Funding at the end of June:

- Langford Budville has an estimated in-year surplus for 2027/28 of £38.5k, however in 2028/29 the in-year budget is only expected to break even due to a drop in numbers on roll. This means it will be difficult to make any inroads into the deficit. The recovery plan includes savings made by replacing the cleaning contract with a contracted caretaker/cleaner and a Gateway reduction of 0.2FTE UPS3 teacher. It also includes an increase in LSA hours from September 2026 by 12.5 hours pw to add capacity.

- Dulverton has an estimated in-year surplus of £91k for 2027/28 and £105k for 2028/29 due largely to the work carried out to ensure proper SEND funding through costed plans. The deficit position has improved due to the receipt of 2 years backdated Higher Needs Funding. It was anticipated that the deficit would be cleared in four years.

- Moorland First Schools had been showing an in-year deficit year on year, reducing the surplus carry-forward. The estimated in-year deficit is £67k for 2027/28 and £87k for 2028/29. The gateway process had been avoided due mainly to the Heads of School restructuring and to the redeployment of a member of the Shared Services team to cover a retirement post.

8.3 Government plans to remove the PE and Sport Premium grant will have a detrimental impact for the Federation as this equates to £90k funding across the eight schools. Governors also noted that the Federation is expected to receive approximately £35k from the Mainstream Inclusion Fund.

Langford Budville Unofficial Funds Account

8.4 The Board noted that the current authorised signatories for Langford Budville's unofficial funds account are no longer employed by the Federation. In order for the account to be closed and the funds (approximately £2k) transferred to and ring-fenced in the main budget the signatories needed to be changed to existing staff members.

8.5 The Board authorised:

a) the removal of Kim Blackmore, Carys Barnett and Gabriella Chidgey (and any other former employees currently recorded as authorised persons) as authorised signatories for Santander Account No. 57570705

b) the appointment of Helen Hickman and Lizi Pravato as authorised signatories and account operators for the above account, with authority to act in accordance with the bank mandate applicable to the account

c) Santander Bank plc to amend its records accordingly and to rely upon this resolution as the authority of the Governing Board to update the account mandate

d) the Chair of Governors and Clerk to the Governing Board to sign any documentation and provide certified copies of these minutes or any further evidence of this resolution reasonably required by Santander Bank plc.

8b – SRMA Review of Budgets

8.6 The Board noted that a School Resource Management Adviser was, at the EHT's request, carrying out a review of the Federation's three budgets in order to provide assurance that they are being managed as effectively as possible. Shared services staff would be meeting with the adviser on 9 July.

8c/d – Finance and Pay Committee 2026/2

8.7 The Board:

a) approved the Finance and Pay Committee Terms of Reference for 2026/27;

b) agreed that membership of the Committee should comprise: Kim Garner (Chair), Frances Nicholson, Daniel Moncrieff, Ruth Smith and Naomi Philp.

Item 9 – Dulverton Junior School RISE Programme (oral)

9.1 A link to the RISE Action Plan for Dulverton Junior School and notes of meetings had been included with the agenda. The Chair invited the RISE Adviser, Mark Lees, to comment on how the programme was progressing. Coming from a large organisation of 48 schools, ML said that it had been necessary to adjust his expectations of how quickly things could happen in a Federation of small rural schools. He imagined that staff might feel under scrutiny but stressed that his role was a supporting one with two main aims:

- to consider how classroom quality could be improved (which links back to earlier discussions in the meeting about attendance and SEND)
- to maximise funding to benefit the Junior School, and – by association since they share a site – the Infant School. ML added that, where possible he had

drawn on the experience of Federation practitioners, such as the SENCo, to keep costs down.

9.2 ML commented that he felt everything on the RISE Plan was achievable over the two-year plan period and he anticipated some positive feedback on progress from the DfE representative at their meeting the following week.

Question: how will governors know that the work you have been undertaking through the RISE programme has impacted on classroom practice?

Response (ML): you could maybe come and join one of my visits. I will also try and attend the governor monitoring visit taking place on 14 July. The DfE will produce a summary report and update on the identified plan and monetary spend which can be made available to governors.

9.3 The Chair stressed the importance of ensuring that learning from the RISE programme is shared across the Federation and, together with the EHT, thanked ML for the work he is carrying out.

Item 10 – Langford Budville (paper)

10.1 The EHT introduced a SWOT report on Langford Budville, praising the strong foundation laid by Jon Moise-Souch (Head of School) and Heather Davidson (Senior Teacher) and the positive impact they and the rest of the staff have had on the school and its children. Sadly, they would be leaving the school at the end of this term but measures to maintain continuity and stability included Angela Hall, currently the school's SENCo, taking on the senior teacher role, Sophia Prevett increasing her teaching load and the retention of support staff . Furthermore, the EHT would be based at Langford Budville as acting Head of School. She would be having a follow-up meeting to discuss the school with the SC Deputy Director of Education the following week and sensed a more positive view of the Federation's plans for the school, aided by the support of the DBE.

Question: how will we know in say two terms that the Langford Budville model is working?

Response (EHT): there will be no more talk of closure, we will see continued progress in children's books and the school will be a shining example of inclusive practice.

10.2 One governor commented that we will also know that we have succeeded if the school attracts more children and we can resource additional staffing to release the EHT. At the moment it feels like we are putting our best resources into one school which can only be sustainable for a temporary period.

10.3 It was also suggested that there should be stronger links with the government's Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy to help children become 'school-ready'.

Item 11 – Working Groups (paper)

11.1 The Board:

a) noted feedback from the Communication and PR Working Group; and

b) agreed to postpone the creation of a working group on pre-school provision in rural areas pending publication of the rural small schools review by the LA.

Item 12 – Governor Monitoring (papers)

12.1 The Board considered the summary report of spring term governor monitoring visits and noted that most summer term monitoring visits had yet to take place. The EHT suggested that it would be useful if, in future, summer term monitoring visits could take place before half term. She had also drafted a proposed template to improve reporting consistency.

Question: how do we know that our understanding of what we see on our monitoring visits is accurate and our visits are useful?

Response (PW-M): I find monitoring visits a very useful way of getting to know our schools.

Response (EHT): staff really value governors going into their schools but we will consider how to make the strategic focus of your visits clearer and ensure visit reports are collected and reported back to the Board in a more timely manner.

12.2 The Board:

a) noted the spring term monitoring summary; and

b) approved the governor monitoring report template.

Item 13 – Board Effectiveness Review (paper)

13.1 The Board noted the results of the Board Effectiveness Review. The Clerk encouraged those governors who had expressed an interest in further training to make use of the training and extensive guidance available on GovernorHub Knowledge.

Item 14 – 2026/27 Meeting Dates (paper)

14.1 The Board agreed FGB meeting dates for the next academic year as follows (7pm start):

- Tuesday 29 September 2026
- Tuesday 1 December 2026
- Tuesday 2 February 2027
- Tuesday 23 March 2027
- Tuesday 18 May 2027
- Tuesday 6 July 2027

14.2 Finance and Pay Committee meeting dates would be reviewed to maximise members' availability.

Item 15 – Any other business

15.1 The Chair reminded governors that Cutcombe School would be celebrating its 150th anniversary on 14 July and encouraged them to attend the afternoon celebrations.

Date of next meeting

The next FGB meeting would be held on Tuesday 29 September 2026 at 7pm,

Kathryn Lanning
Moorland Federation, Clerk to Governors