

Minutes – Digitech Studio School Academy Council

Meeting Date: Tuesday 11 November 2025
Location: DSSB
Time: 6.00pm

AC Members		Attended	Apologies
Rob Gillman (RG)	Sponsor 1 (Chair)	✓	
Stephanie Martin (SM)	Sponsor 2	✓	
Vacancy	Sponsor 3		
Vacancy	Sponsor 4		
Lewis Wild (LW)	Sponsor 5	✓	
V Balasco (VB)	Support Staff Councillor		✓
Ashley Williams (AW)	Teacher Councillor	✓	
Matt Pincott (MP)	Parent Councillor	✓	
Vacancy	Parent Councillor		
Invited attendees			
Simon Jones (SJ)	Head of School	✓	
Katherine Ogden (KO)		✓	
Gareth Williams (GW)	Senior Leader, Outcomes		
Wendy Hellin (WH)	Clerk	✓	

Matters Arising:

Date/No	Action	Owner
16.07.24 002	MP to link with PS to discuss resources that might be open to the academy around mental health. Update: WH will make this offer of support to PS and provide MP's contact details should he wish to get in touch. Closed	MP
10.02.25 002	An AC meeting will be planned to take place at the Bottle Yard. Update: CB confirmed this can happen but requires some planning due to access requirements at the Bottle Yard. It will be proposed next time Boomsatsuma are invited to attend an AC meeting. Update: SJ and RG can consider this as part of agenda planning. Action closed.	SJ
29.04.25 001	A comparative picture of contextual attendance data from other studio schools will be shared in the term 1 meeting of the next academic year. Update 11.11.25 SJ advised that work on this is underway within the Principal's forum and data will be included in the next AC report. Ongoing	SJ
03.07.25 001	CB will provide information on the Edurio staff survey results at the next meeting. Update 1 Oct 25: The survey results were positive overall, with some issues raised around staff workload. Action closed.	SJ

Minutes

Item	Description (Questions from Academy Councillors unless otherwise stated)	Action
1	Introductions, Administration, Apologies	
1.1	RG welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies are recorded above.	
2	Declaration of Interest	
2.1	No verbal declarations were made for the agenda items for this meeting. ACTION: SJ and VB were reminded to complete their annual written declarations on Governor Hub.	SJ VB
3	Academy Council Membership	
3.1	There are 3 vacancies: 2 sponsor Councillors and 1 parent Councillor. The parent Councillor nomination process closed today and there have not been any nominations.	
4	Minutes of Previous Meeting	
4.1	The minutes of the meeting of 1 October 2025 were confirmed as a true record.	

5	Matters Arising	
5.1	The action table above has been updated.	
6	Pupil Premium	
6.1	CL shared a presentation on Pupil Premium and invited questions from Academy Councillors. The slides are available on Governor Hub and linked here: https://app.governorhub.com/document/690e4a786b6461d8864f728a/view	
6.2	Q: You have mentioned that attendance for PP students is around 10% lower than for non-PP students. What is the focus of the work to close that gap? The attendance and pastoral teams work incredibly hard to get the students through the door each morning and give them a warm welcome and a sense of belonging. There is a real focus on continuing to build relationships with families and to deeply understand the context and barriers for each child. I am putting together a student profile for every PP student that details what they like, how they like to learn, their aspirations and some details around what their barriers are. Sharing that information with staff will make a huge difference. It is also beneficial to collect parent voice and further staff voice. It is key that staff know the students really well. There are some PP students that have incredible reading ages (some are 17 years +) and we need to ensure the teaching is stretching those children and think about how we support them in class to achieve their very best.	
6.3	Q: The updated Pupil Premium plan has been shared. The new plan was written around a year ago by Jost Sterling and differs from the old version which was more of a list of how the PP funding was spent. The money allocated this year is approximately £54k. Can you describe the overall strategy in place? How have you invested the money? We closely follow the trust vision for disadvantaged students, with a focus on ensuring they feel that they belong, and we recognise that there are many students with SEND in this category. We need to ensure all teachers know who the children are, what their barriers are and develop strategies to help them progress. The behaviour system needs to be clear, but relatively gentle and supportive, with a lot of pastoral input to correct challenging behaviour. Although suspensions and discipline points can look high, they rarely follow through to the point of an exclusion, which indicates the strategy is working. We want students to feel they belong, to experience success and to see the value that education has. This feeds into the destinations work within careers. In terms of the funding, the bulk of the money is invested in teaching and pastoral support. Last year an Assistant SENCO was appointed, and that comes with a cost. There is also an investment in training and development and a huge focus on literacy and the promotion of reading. A recent student survey reflected that when a disadvantaged student does better, they then attend more, and their sense of belonging grows.	
6.4	Q: How has the plan been tweaked for this year? What was working well last year, and what has been changed? We have done a lot of work in the past with Voice 21. While we are no longer buying the service, that work continues. The training we have had is very much embedded and that work is running alongside all we do. We no longer have an Education Welfare Officer as we now have the skills in the staff body to do that here ourselves. We are looking closely at the links with home; school and home partnerships are key. We have 80% uptake on the My Child At School (MCAS) app, which is good, but we want to increase that to 100%. We are reviewing the interventions being used. Last year there was expenditure on the deployment of TAs, and we need to be clear about how they are used to support with interventions, and of the starting points and exit points for each student so we can track and measure progress. We also have various enrichment activities in place, and we prioritise these for disadvantaged students; there is no additional cost for this, but it is about being able to track who is attending and the impact it has. The majority of last year's strategies are still in place but need further time to embed.	
6.5	Q: The data shows some relative improvements to attainment and attendance for non-disadvantaged students, but not yet for disadvantaged students. What do you conclude from that about the strategy in place?	

	The data for disadvantaged students is lagging compared to non-disadvantaged. However, when you look at attendance for specific individual children compared to this time last year, there is an upward trajectory. The progress for some is huge – some have attendance increases of around 60%. Overall, the average is around 80%, but it does fluctuate day to day. The cohort is small, and each child contributes a high number in terms of the percentage. For us, the key is to focus on working with individuals and families to understand the barriers and put solutions in place. It is a multi-faceted approach and is a challenge considering the low starting points for many of the children.	
6.6	Q: How would you characterise the outcomes from last summer? Basics (9-4) were in line, or slightly better, than the national average. The non-PP data was lower than expected. The challenge is that we only have around 18 months with which to work with the children. They often arrive with a fragmented education from KS3, low previous attendance and low reading ages. We have strategies in place to support with reading and use NGRT testing to monitor and track progress. There are 4 students who have been receiving the intervention who have significantly improved their reading scores.	
6.7	Q: It was interested to hear about the focus on parental engagement. What are the plans in place for that work and what has worked well so far? We have had Jane Morgan leading a Year 13 evening where parents and students can learn about pathways and with UCAS applications. It was very well attended by families, and the feedback was very positive. It is essential that we make the most effective use of communications to keep families up to date with things coming up. We are holding drop-in sessions, revision information sessions and coffee mornings so that parents can open up and communicate to us in an informal way. We open the parents evening booking system to parents and carers of PP students first, so they are able to get the time slot that suits them and we follow up by telephone with anyone that cannot attend.	
6.8	Q: Are you able to detail how the £54k has been spent, if asked? Yes. The biggest expenditure is staffing. We can also detail the interventions we have put in place and need to ensure there is rigorous tracking of those interventions so that we can demonstrate their value in terms of progress made vs cost.	
6.9	AW advised that he has noticed that many students, when using a school laptop, do not have the necessary skills and confidence to operate them. Basic functions such as saving a file can be a challenge. Some students have access to phones and internet at home, but not necessarily laptops. He noted that it may be helpful to offer some basic skills as part of a lunchtime club or enrichment opportunity. LW confirmed that this is a picture that is seen trust wide.	
6.10	RG thanked CL and she left the meeting.	
7	AC report	
7.1	Partnership working update	
7.1.1	SJ reported that quarterly contract meetings are taking place, involving KON and colleagues from the central team. The focus is on ensuring the relationships and quality assurance processes are strong.	
7.1.2	KON advised that there is now more clarity around those contractual agreements and around how both parties are serving each other to the best effect, to ensure outstanding educational outcomes for students and ensuring the wider provision is secure. It is key that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) is well understood, and this is opening up some conversations around capacity within DSSB and how to ensure the right support for all partnerships particularly during the period of growth.	
7.1.3	RG confirmed that each of the partnerships will be invited to come to an Academy Council at least once per year.	
7.2	Progress Data – Year 11 and Year 10 assessments updates (end of term 1)	
7.2.1	RG invited SJ to share how the mocks have gone and when the data might be expected.	
7.2.2	SJ advised that the Year 11 mocks were underway, with three more exams to take place. Teachers are busy marking the papers. Anecdotally, the mocks have gone well and have been positive. There has been reasonable attendance, although there was some illness this week. Year 10 have very recently been arranged into sets and the lessons that have taken place so far are going well. The only available data so far is the reading age data, and this demonstrates very low reading ages across the cohort.	

	Last week saw the school very busy with resits; there were 60 students taking exams on one day and this meant lots of extra students on site. Overall, the resits went well, with students well engaged and respectful on site.	
7.3	Attendance	
7.3.1	Q: What are the most effective 5 things you have done over the last 2/3 years to improve attendance? We know the attendance figures are not strong enough and it remains a key focus for us. We have considered the staffing model and now have a Designated Attendance Lead in place. Due to the size and context of the school, this cannot be a standalone role and ME is the lead for Behaviour and Attendance. In addition, SC moves from an administration and reception role to an attendance role, and this has had a positive impact on morning routines in terms of attendance. Having the dedicated attendance team in place has positively impacted on the relationships being built with families and individuals. Strategically, the team are working with colleagues in the central team around attendance processes and with systems for tracking students and monitoring on an individual level.	
7.3.2	Q: Has there been any progress in ensuring previous provisions provide that attendance data for students as they join Digitech, so that you can fully understand the student's previous attendance? Some are now providing that; we have some data. We can give some narrative around some strong success stories, as well as some detail around improved admission processes.	
7.3.3	KON reflected that there are some lessons that can be learned about transition from the Year 6 to Year 7 transition that can be used to support transitions from Year 9 into Year 10 at Digitech.	
7.3.4	AW advised that internal truancy, where students are in school but not in lessons, is an increasing challenge that needs a focus and noted that it was good to see this is recognised and being addressed.	
7.3.5	Q: How do measure success of our attendance strategies given Digitech's unique position/timing of intake? We have some case studies prepared that demonstrate great progress in attendance for some key students. There is one student in Year 10 that had very low attendance on joining (around 10%) who is now on 69% attendance, for example.	
7.3.6	Q: It is helpful to have some case studies prepared, but it will also be helpful to be able to talk to the wider picture of attendance. Is that something you are able to do? We have some work going on in the background around aggregated attendance data. It can be difficult to measure, but we are looking at specific cohorts and groups in a similar way, such as the previous Elective Home Education (EHE) cohort. It is important to keep in mind that although we are a studio school, we are measured against other mainstream schools. The new Ofsted framework will be slightly favourable in how it considers the importance of strong destinations. There are still too many students not getting the grades they could, and attendance is definitely a factor in that.	
7.3.7	AW explained the process he follows when a student is absent, to help them catch up with lost learning. AW suggested it might be useful to look at what the wider teaching body and tutors do when a student is absent, and if there was something consistent that could be put in place to support the catch up of learning.	
7.4	Behaviour and Exclusions	
7.4.1	SJ advised that the suspension figures look proportionately in line with those at this time last year. There are a very small number of students that contribute to that data and this links to the individual needs of those students. There is also some data relating to internal truancy and again this relates to a very small group of students. Staff are working closely with those students.	
7.4.2	Behaviour Policy	
7.4.3	The revised Behaviour Policy has been included for approval by the Academy Council.	
7.4.4	Q: Is this policy specific to Digitech or is it based on a trust template, meaning it will look similar to that of another CLF academy?	

	There is a CLF policy template for behaviour that sets out core principles such as upholding academy core values, being ready to learn, being kind etc. Within that, each academy operates its own specific system for how to manage and reward behaviour, and the policy will be adapted to reflect those local procedures and the specific school context. This policy has been updated to reflect some changes in terminology around managed moves and offsite direction.	
7.4.5	<p>Q: Matt, as a parent Councillor, can you give some feedback on what behaviour looks like from a parent's perspective?</p> <p>My oldest child had a good experience at Digitech. With my youngest, the numbers attending Digitech had increased, and I think the data reflects that there were more behaviour challenges in and around school and this could be seen and felt more in classrooms. Overall, their experience was also positive.</p>	
7.4.6	<u>Decision: The Academy Council approved the Behaviour Policy</u>	
7.4.7	SJ reported that the parent survey is now live and that 39 responses have been received so far. Of these only 2 raised concerns around behaviour, with everyone else agreeing or strongly agreeing that behaviour is good.	
8	Safeguarding	
8.1	RG noted that, following RK's resignation, there was a vacancy on the Academy Council for a Safeguarding Link Councillor. This role will be considered at the next meeting. In the interim period, RG will cover safeguarding.	
8.2	<p>Q: The most prominent item in the recent Safeguarding report, is the mention of substance misuse; can you provide further information on that?</p> <p>Several years ago, there was a challenge in the school around the use of illegal substances. This is no longer the case, but there have been some isolated incidents recently and these are taken extremely seriously by the school. There are a number of suspensions recorded and these largely come from where students have been vaping, smoking or have had drugs paraphernalia in their possession on the school site. There is a known issue in the local community around vaping and cannabis use. Where staff have any concerns about a student, a referral is made to the Young Person's drug and alcohol service. In relation to the data in the report, there are 3 or 4 students of concern that account for the 11 incidents noted and staff are working closely to support those students.</p>	
8.3	<p>Q: There was also a reference in the report around the responsibilities that you have, as a school, for students that attend alternative provision. Are the right systems in place to quality assure that provision?</p> <p>Yes, we remain responsible for the safeguarding, wellbeing and the education of all students whether they are in alternative provision or with one of our partnerships. It is crucial that we track and monitor students when attending alternative provision and our processes and systems around that have improved dramatically over time.</p>	
9	Ofsted Readiness	
9.1	<p>Q: What is the likely timeline for Ofsted, what are the key actions happening in school and what can the Academy Council do to support you to be ready?</p> <p>Digitech is almost in the Ofsted window. There is a new Ofsted framework to work to and myself and the senior team are receiving support from colleagues in the Executive Team and across the trust to understand that new framework and the toolkit. Ofsted is an agenda item for the one-to-one meetings I have with KON, and the wider staff team are ensuring policies and procedures are in place, that systems are working well and that the partnerships are working as they should and are well supported.</p>	
9.2	KON advised that it would be helpful for the school if Academy Councillors increased the level of challenge they bring to the leadership team during the Academy Council meetings and when visiting in school, stressing that asking difficult questions is important and that they will be warmly received. The focus of the questions should be on 'show me' rather than 'tell me', so that the academy can demonstrate evidence of improvements.	
10	Academy Improvement Plan (AIP)	

10.1	The Academy Improvement Plan was reviewed in detail at the last meeting. SJ advised that it remains unchanged. Work is taking place with middle leaders to ensure they are clear on the areas for improvement; these are attendance, raising outcomes, behaviour and culture.	
11	Staffing and wellbeing to include staff voice	
11.1	SJ advised that further mental health first aiders have been trained, and this has allowed more drop-ins to take place. Generally, feedback indicates that staff are feeling positive. The survey will be reviewed once complete next week.	
12	Destinations	
12.1	SJ advised that the school is still working to establish guarantees for destinations. ACTION: Destinations will be reviewed at the next AC meeting.	RG SJ
13	Policies	
13.1	The Academy Council approved the Behaviour Policy as per item 7.4.2 above.	
14	Matters for the Board or COAC	
14.1	No matters for the board were raised.	
15	AOB	
15.1	No further business was reported. The meeting closed at 8.02pm.	
15.2	Dates of future meetings: Meeting 3 – 13 January 2026 – 5pm in school Meeting 4 – 24 March 2026 – 6pm teams Meeting 5 – 9 June 2026 – 5pm in school	

Matter's Arising

Date/No	Action	Owner
29.04.25 001	A comparative picture of contextual attendance data from other studio schools will be shared in the term 1 meeting of the next academic year. Update 11.11.25 SJ advised that work on this is underway within the Principal's forum and data will be included in the next AC report. Ongoing	SJ
11.11.25 001	SJ and VB were reminded to complete their annual written declarations on Governor Hub.	SJ VB
11.11.25 002	Destinations will be reviewed at the next AC meeting.	RG SJ