

St Helens College

GOVERNING BOARD

Minutes from the extraordinary meeting held via Microsoft Teams

Friday 16 January 2026 at 11.00am

Present:	Phil Han	External Governor
	Alison Cannon	External Governor
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Natalie Ibbs	External Governor
	Liz Duncan	External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)
	Ann Marr	External Governor
	Alistair Greer	External Governor
	Doug Laver	External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)
	Wayne Longshaw	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	Jen McGill	Staff Governor
In attendance:	Stephanie Donaldson	Deputy Chief Executive
	Mohammed Ramzan	Deputy Principal – Curriculum and Quality
	Carys Bibby	Governance Director (minutes)

2526/30 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received for Thomas Carey, Zulakha Desai, Tracey Turner and Emilia Lulek.

2526/31 Declarations of interest

No declarations to note.

2526/31 Ofsted outcomes

Governors received interim feedback on the Ofsted inspection, which took place between 9 and 12 December 2025, ahead of the report's publication expected in February 2026. The inspection took place under the new further education inspection framework and the presentation included the provisional grades for each of the 16 judgement areas. The College had reached the expected standard in nine areas, a strong standard in one area and attention was needed in six areas. For the College to reach the expected standard, every indicator of that standard must be met and in some areas which were judged to need attention, this was due to only one indicator in the expected standard not being achieved. Governors noted the Ofsted inspection process,

which was conducted solely by His Majesty's Inspectors, and the areas observed as part of this. It was noted that the College was one of only three further education colleges nationwide inspected under the new arrangements prior to Christmas 2025 and as such it would not be possible to widely compare these grades with other colleges.

The inspection highlighted a number of key strengths for the College including inclusion, high needs provision and apprenticeships. Areas for improvement included English and maths; teaching, achievement and progress. During the inspection, this had been identified through some student feedback on the quality of teaching and through lesson observations. Due to the proportionally higher number of students on these qualifications, this had impacted inspection grades across young people and adult programmes. Governors discussed that the College's teaching and learning strategy was having the desired impact but that more focus was needed on English and maths. Governors queried what feedback had been provided by students. Students had indicated that supply teachers impacted the quality of their experience and that they did not enjoy the subjects.

For young people's vocational programmes, more consistent retention and achievement across different curriculum areas and year-on-year was required to meet the expected standard. Inspectors had used the as yet unvalidated outcomes from 2024/25 to inform the inspection but only 2023/24 achievement data can be published in the final report.

Governors queried to what extent context had informed the judgement on attendance. The College continues to work with schools to obtain specific attendance information for each student, but until this is received it is difficult to prove if a student has better attendance at the College than at school. Governors noted that attendance at the College was similar to many other general further education colleges and discussed how this might impact the sector, if all colleges with similar attendance were to subject to ongoing Ofsted monitoring visits.

For adults, attendance was also an area for improvement alongside personal development for students on substantive programmes and increasing engagement with the college offer. This is well developed for ESOL students and best practice will be shared across the College. Governors noted constraints around adult funding and that in some instances adults are already engaging with a personal development offer but may need reminding what they have accessed.

Governors considered actions being planned to ensure that these areas have improved by the monitoring visit. New staff have been recruited in English and maths, with a new leadership structure in this area to be embedded and more focused training planned. Root cause analysis was a focus for inspectors and managers and teachers will receive further support and tools to identify issues in-year. More resource may be required to ensure early follow-up on attendance in all areas and to develop personal development opportunities for more adults. These actions will be reflected in the Quality Improvement Plan and brought to governors via the next Curriculum and Quality Committee meeting.

The College expects a monitoring visit within 13 months of the final Ofsted report being published. In the interim period, an Ofsted inspector will be appointed to support the College with improvement actions. There may also be support offered via the Further Education Commissioner's 'regional improvement team'.

The inspection found that governors had an accurate understanding of the quality of curriculum, teaching and training and the areas that leaders need to improve. The board considered potential changes to governance reporting and structures to monitor progress against areas needing attention. Governors discussed more detailed reporting at Curriculum and Quality Committee through the development of a more granular KPI dashboard. Focus groups on attendance and English and maths were suggested to allow for proper scrutiny that may not be possible in committee meetings. On attendance the board requested more detail around how disadvantage impacts college students and whether this is the main cause for poor attendance. The board also discussed that a focus group might consider those students with known poor school attendance and the impact that attendance strategies have on this cohort. On English and maths, governors queried whether poor achievement reflected the quality of teaching and requested that the group receive further information on progress measures compared to other colleges with similar levels of disadvantage. The board requested that actions are given deadlines that align with Governing Board meetings, with a section of the 'performance report' setting out how the College is performing against the actions due to be completed.

The board heard that staff and managers had been positive about the outcome of the inspection. The actions identified were not unexpected but indicated that the areas the College has been focusing on; staff training, improving teaching and learning, high standards and expectations, are changing the College culture. In some instances, the work that has been undertaken is starting to have the desired impact and continuing with actions already in place will secure consistently higher outcomes.

Governors queried if the Ofsted outcome would be a risk to student recruitment. The impact of the Ofsted report is uncertain, as with the move away from a single word judgement and a lack of other schools and colleges with a similar report, students and parents may not rely on this information to make their choice. There may be some restrictions around projects the College can bid for however; this has not yet been confirmed.

Governors thanked staff and managers for the huge effort they had put into the inspection.

RESOLVED: The board noted the Ofsted preliminary inspection outcomes.
The board approved the creation of English and maths and attendance working groups.

Natalie Ibbs left the meeting.

2526/32 Strategy 2026-2029

The report presented the draft College Strategy 2026-29 for approval. The Strategy Working Group had met on four occasions to develop this plan, informed by stakeholder input. The Strategy Working Group had supported a smaller number of objectives, supported by themes, and fewer values. The objectives and themes will be monitored through key performance indicators, to be agreed by the Governing Board at the Strategy Day on 5 February 2026.

The board commended a concise document, which clearly explained the College's vision and purpose, and welcomed the values being at the front of the document, indicating that the strategy is values drive. The board requested that the introduction be shortened as some sections were repetitive. Governors also requested that the strategy be more explicit about improving achievement and attendance, moving this forward in the relevant section.

The board requested that more themes are added under goal three; to expand flexible and inclusive learning opportunities for adults. This might link to Ofsted's feedback around personal development programmes for adults and the board supported more activity to build adult confidence, such as coaching and mentoring support.

Governors suggested that the improved delivery of Higher Education should be articulated as an ambition for the College, rather than Higher Education as a destination for students. The College has a Higher Education Strategy, which could be referred to here.

The board strategy day will consider the ongoing monitoring of the strategy, through key performance indicators, to ensure board activity is targeted to deliver the strategy.

RESOLVED: The board approved the College Strategy 2026-29, subject to the changes requested and any non-material changes.

Jen McGill left the meeting.

2526/33 AoB

Industrial action

The UCU strike had taken place 14-16 January. This had not impacted public examinations, with student exam attendance at 100% in most subjects. [REDACTED]

EWG membership

Following Jim Pinsent's retirement, the Governing Board was asked to appoint another member to the Estates Working Group.

RESOLVED: The board approved the appointment of Alistair Greer to the Estates Working Group.

Date of the next meeting

Strategy Day - 5 February 2026