

East Sussex College Group

Annual Board Review Summary 2024-25

LEWES
NEWHAVEN
EASTBOURNE
HASTINGS

Scope & Approach

The 2024-25 Board Review process included the following activities:

- **Board & Committee Effectiveness Surveys** – Governors fed back on a range of areas including strategy, compliance, oversight, people and structures.
- **Skills Audit** – an assessment of Independent Governor skills, expertise and experience. Board Diversity data was also gathered.
- **Chair 360° Annual Review** – Governor survey led review of the Chair.
- **Annual Chair & Governor 1:1 Conversations**
- **Summary Desktop Review of Effectiveness** – assessment of membership, attendance, live meeting assessments, coverage of the annual cycle of business.
- **Governor Training** – assessment of overall participation and engagement; new governor induction survey.

Board Survey Results



Area	Movement
Strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board effectively shapes and influences College strategy The Board makes evidence based and timely decisions The student voice and their experience is central to Board decision making 	↑ ↓ ↑
Compliance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governors understand and satisfy the Board's legal, regulatory and financial requirements There are sufficient compliance checks and Board reporting on statutory and contractual requirements including Safeguarding, PREVENT, SEND and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion The Board has sufficient assurance about performance and delivery of its objectives 	↑ ↑ ↑
Oversight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board has access to relevant, accurate and triangulated data and uses this to inform decision making The Board drives financial efficiency The Board implements best practice self-evaluation to drive improvement Risk management and internal control systems are robust Governance (Chair and the Board) and Leadership (CEO & Principal and the Executive Team) work well together 	↑ ↑ ↑ ↑ ↔

Key:

75-100% - Green, 51-75% - Amber, 0-50% - Red

Survey response rate – 89% (16 of 18)

Board Survey Results

Area	Movement
People: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governors understand their roles & responsibilities and exemplify College culture, values and ethos Governors add value, individually & collectively Governors provide supportive challenge and hold the Executive Team to account The Board has an appropriate range of expertise, skills and experience & succession plans are in place 	<p>↑</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↑</p>
Structures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agendas and supporting documents are clear, focused and prioritised according to the importance of the issue There is clear linkage in agendas between Board priorities and College goals The Board devotes sufficient time and thought to long-term strategic issues and their achievement Board induction is effective and Governors benefit from Board and personal development Information within the Board portal sufficiently supports Governors to effectively carry out their roles The Chair of the Board provides effective leadership The Director of Governance provides effective governance advice and clerking services The Governance Improvement Plan has been effective in driving improvements to Governance arrangements 	<p>↓</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↑</p> <p>↔</p> <p>↔</p> <p>↑</p>

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Board Survey Results – Insights



- **Response rate of 78%***, which represents a 22% drop from the prior year. However, there was still balanced representation from Independent, Staff and Student Governors.
- **22 of 23 questions rated 75%+.**
- **18 questions have seen improved results** (some areas markedly so), including access to high quality data, driving financial efficiency, risk management controls, levels of support and challenge, balance of Governor skills and expertise, focus on strategic priorities, and the effectiveness of Governor induction processes.
- **Just 2 questions have seen a drop** since the previous survey, related to the Board making evidence based and timely decisions, and agendas/supporting papers being sufficiently clear. However, both questions scored above 80%.
- Whilst this remains priority focus area, **student voice being central to decision making has seen a marked increase to 86%.**

**14 of 18 Governors, with 1 newly appointed Governor out of scope, as they were too new to role.*

Skills Audit Results Summary



Strengths	Development Opportunities
Chairing a Board/Committee (4.6)	Legal Expertise (3.0)
Organisational Restructuring (4.6)	Accountancy and financial matters in a business/educational environment (3.1)
Appointment/Appraisal of Senior Staff (4.5)	Digital intelligence/expertise and cyber security (3.2)
A governance role in an organization (4.5)	Economic Planning (3.3)
Target Setting/Performance Monitoring (4.5)	Corporate Social Responsibility (3.4)
Working with a Board or equivalent as a director/senior manager (4.5)	Small & Medium Sized Enterprise (3.4)
Change Management (4.4)	Knowledge & Understanding of Apprenticeships (3.5)
Strategic planning at Board Level (4.4)	Targeting improvements in educational standards across a community (3.5)
Commentary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has been a general uplift in skills audit scores across the board. Excluding training needs, no skill received an average score below 3.0. There has been a significant increase in areas of strength, with only the highest scoring areas reported above. 	

Desktop Review



- **Membership:**

- All Board and Committees adequately resourced – able to meet quorum requirements and business need.
- GP&R Committee resourcing gap addressed with additional Independent Governor allocation.
- CDB membership enhanced to include Student Governor.
- 3 Student Governors successfully recruited in 2024-25.
- 4 Governor resignations in 2024-25 – 1 staff, 1 student, 2 independent.
- 4 Independent Governor vacancies currently on the Board.

- **Attendance:**

- Board attendance up 8% YOY to 84%.
- Overall attendance up to 83%, equating to 8% increase YOY.
- 5 Governors below 75% threshold for overall attendance.
- 20% drop in CS&Q attendance in 2024-25 (down to 61%), due to late rescheduling of Spring meeting for Ofsted inspection.

- **Cycle of Business:**

- Overall coverage YTD is 96%.

Desktop Review

- **Live Meeting Assessment:**
 - Increased Governor participation levels overall, due to availability of both paper and online options for in meeting survey submissions.
 - Most areas continued to score highly. Limited instances where average scores fell below 80% for the following areas:
 - Succinct meeting papers – CS&Q
 - Student experience at the heart of decision making – CDB
 - Input from Staff/Student Governors – CDB
 - **Key feedback themes:**
 - Need to further simplify meeting papers.
 - Requests for executive summaries for ease of review.
 - Alternatives to Hastings for Board meeting locations.
 - New PPT format for CS&Q Report is very popular.
- **Meeting Papers & Minutes:**
 - 41% reduction in total volume of meeting minutes YTD.
 - 11% reduction in total volume of meeting papers YTD.

Governor Training



- **Mandatory Training:**
 - Programme now delivered as an in-person, pre-Board session.
 - Mop-ups handled via self led review of training resources.
 - ETF online training modules discontinued following Governor feedback.
- **Comprehensive Governor Induction Programme:**
 - Induction session with the Director of Governance.
 - Buddy mentoring support.
 - Committee Chair overviews.
 - Meetings with the Executive Team.
- Student Governors have struggled to access timely external induction training – feedback has been shared.
- Regular communications re Governor training opportunities.
- Bespoke Governor support/challenge training to be planned.
- **Overall, Governor engagement with external training and networking remains inconsistent.**

Progress YTD



- Following an extensive programme of Governor recruitment over the last 18 months, **robust induction processes** have helped ensure Board cohesiveness during this period.
- **Reduced volume of meetings in 2024-25** has been highly successful, without impact to cycle of business coverage.
- **Strategic planning days** held in April and October 2024, which focused on the development (and subsequent launch) of the ESCG Strategic Plan.
- Board meeting agendas have been restructured to enable further focus on key strategic priorities. An extension of **committee level delegations** and **extended policy review cycles** will also free up Board capacity moving forward.
- Staff and Student Governor Reports were redesigned to adopt a **'think piece' format**, directly linked to the College's PROUD values.
- A **review of the Governance Improvement Plan** was undertaken – no significant changes and confirmed fit for purpose.

Key Insights

- **Strategic Focus** – the Board has made significant strides in aligning its strategic focus with College goals, particularly in areas of financial efficiency and risk management.
- **Student Voice** – increased emphasis on integrating student perspectives into decision-making processes, though this remains a priority focus area.
- **People & Structures** – robust levels of collaboration and leadership is evident, though there is room for further improvement in reducing the volume of meeting papers to ensure clarity of information.
- **Training & Development** – whilst induction programs are effective, there is a need for more consistent governor engagement with a broader range of training opportunities.

Key Recommendations

Staff & Student Governor Engagement

- Monitor the impact of existing mechanisms for gathering and integrating Staff and Student Governor feedback into Board and Committee discussions.
- Extend support and training for Student Governors.

Meeting Efficiency

- Leveraging AI technology, further simplify meeting papers and explore alternative formats for sharing reports to improve clarity and focus.
- Adjust meeting schedules and locations to better accommodate Governor availability and travel needs.

Financial Oversight

- Increase access to targeted training for Governors to enhance understanding of College finances.
- Continue to regularly monitor and report on the College's cashflow position to the Board.

Recruitment, Succession Planning & Governor Training

- Prioritise diversity of thought in Board recruitment and ensure a balanced representation of skills and backgrounds.
- Ensure robust succession planning for the Chair.
- Establish a Networking & Development programme which meets priority Governor skills needs/drives engagement.