External Board Review

Capel Manor College

Reviewer: ***Paul Wakeling***

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Executive Summary

This review concludes that Capel Manor College's Governing Body is effective. It has a good composition, effective structures and a mature pattern of interaction. The Board's collective expertise is broad and relevant to the College's work; its committee framework enables detailed scrutiny; and its culture supports constructive challenge while maintaining trust and respect between governors and the senior team.

The survey evidence strongly corroborates this judgment. Fourteen Board members completed the survey. Every respondent agreed or strongly agreed that the Board upholds the Nolan Principles and the College's values, complies with its adopted Code of Governance, understands economic and skills needs, balances financial management with quality and value for money, understands its safeguarding and Prevent responsibilities, and works effectively with the Principal & CEO and senior team. Thirteen of the 14 respondents were positive about the Board's collective skillset and the effectiveness of committee reporting. Qualitative responses repeatedly praised the Board's professionalism, breadth of expertise, transparency, open discussion and culture of critical friendship.

The Governing Body has developed significantly since the 2023 external review. It has helped to oversee a period of substantial organisational improvement in which quality, financial resilience, leadership capacity and management information have strengthened. The latest Ofsted inspection provides important external validation: inspectors found that governors provide valuable support and rigorous challenge, have extensive industry knowledge and receive comprehensive, data-rich reports that enable them to hold leaders to account, set priorities and ensure resources are used effectively.

The Board is now moving into a different phase. During the preceding three to four years, the Principal & CEO, Deputy Principal & COO and the Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality have necessarily concentrated on internal recovery, quality improvement, financial control and organisational stability. That work has produced significant gains as evidenced in the Good financial health and the January 2026 OfSTED report. The next phase requires the College to become more outward-looking: strengthening its national role in green and blue skills, increasing employer and civic engagement, making clear strategic choices about curriculum, commercial activity and estates, and establishing the measures by which success to 2030 will be judged. The survey reinforces this transition. While all respondents were positive about the Board's understanding of skills needs, confidence in direct stakeholder collaboration was less uniform: 10 of 14 were positive, while four were neutral, disagreed or were unsure. Several comments, reinforced in 1 to 1s, called for stronger direct links with industry, greater commercial awareness and more space for horizon scanning. The Board has the skills and relationships to lead this phase, but its strategic role should now be made more explicit and visible.

Two priority areas for development emerge from the review.

First, student governor participation needs to become reliable and sustained. The constitution provides for up to three student governors and the two prospective student governors present at the observed Board meeting made useful contributions, including questions about the student passport

scheme and the way student voice is heard. The survey shows that the Board is student-focused in intent: 13 of 14 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that student interests are central to decision-making. However, eight of the nine narrative responses to that question identified a need for stronger, more consistent or more representative student participation. Student voice was also the most frequently suggested single change to improve effectiveness. The College and Board had already recognised this and, at the July 2026 Board meeting, the Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality reported plans to introduce the Capel Graduate scheme in the new academic year. This provides a positive foundation for addressing the issue.

Second, the Board should strengthen its ownership of the new strategy. The March 2026 strategy event was valuable, well attended and inclusive. Governors felt heard, met students and staff, and contributed to the emerging direction. Twelve of 14 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Board maintains an appropriate strategic focus. However, several comments also recognised that the successful inspection and recovery phase had required detailed assurance and that the Board should now shift more decisively towards strategy, external engagement, prioritisation and horizon scanning. At the observed July 2026 Board meeting, the objectives were presented within the Principal's update rather than as a distinct strategic item with sufficient time for a full Board discussion. The paper remained a set of aims and potential deliverables; phasing, priorities, resources, risks, business-plan alignment and targets/KPIs were still to be developed. For a Board whose primary functions include defining the College's educational character, mission and long-term strategy, the final plan should be the subject of a clearly designed Board process and a formal, standalone approval decision. The College has already established a timetable for completing this work and securing agreement of the full strategy by December 2026. The review endorses that direction and recommends that the planned process culminates in a clearly identified, standalone full-Board discussion and formal approval decision by that date.

The following table summarises the headline strengths and areas for development:

DIMENSION	STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
BOARD COMPOSITION	The Board has a broad and relevant mix of professional experience, including finance, law, estates and property, education and quality, audit and risk, marketing and recruitment, community engagement, corporate leadership and land-based sector knowledge. Thirteen of 14 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Board collectively has the skills and knowledge required to govern the College. Governors are diligent, mission-focused and prepared to challenge.	Make student governor participation consistent and sustained, linked to the Capel Graduate programme. Continue targeted succession and recruitment activity where gaps or succession risks have been identified, including HR, apprenticeships, property and demographic representation. Use induction, appraisal and committee or link-role allocation to make more deliberate use of every governor's expertise.

BOARD STRUCTURE	The committee model is clear and effective. The annual cycle, Board portal, front sheets, action tracking, committee scrutiny and reporting to the full Board provide a sound framework for assurance and decision-making. Thirteen of 14 survey respondents were positive about committee reporting and 12 of 14 about the opportunity and time available for scrutiny.	Establish a dedicated full-Board process to complete, approve and monitor the 2025–30 strategy, including clear choices, phasing, resources, risks, direct external evidence, named ownership and a concise set of outcome and leading indicators. Continue to reduce paper volume and use sharper, question-led front sheets so that governors have more space for strategic discussion and horizon
BOARD INTERACTION	The Board has an inclusive and constructive culture. The Chair is approachable, well prepared and facilitative; challenge is purposeful; and there is clear evidence that Board scrutiny has sharpened executive thinking and changed decisions. All 14 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Board's relationship with the Principal & CEO and senior team is based on trust, honesty and transparency.	Provide student governors with more systematic preparation, mentoring and opportunities for informal integration so that participation is confident and consistent. Continue to draw out quieter voices and make explicit use of the different professional and lived experiences represented on the Board.

Fig 1

Examples of effective practice that others might learn from.

The combination of inclusive chairing and disciplined challenge is a notable strength. The Chair and committee chairs use good wait time, frame questions strategically and encourage "so what?" discussion about impact rather than accepting activity reports at face value. Committee chairs increasingly report the key assurance, decisions and matters requiring Board attention rather than simply reciting minutes. The use of strategic briefings and a face-to-face strategy event that brought governors into direct contact with students and staff also provides a strong foundation for future strategic work. The survey's unanimous positive findings on integrity, Code compliance and the

relationship with senior leaders confirm that these behaviours are embedded rather than dependent on a single observed meeting.

Thanks and appreciation are recorded to all those who engaged openly and constructively in the review. Particular thanks are due to Jenny Swift (Director of Governance), who coordinated the process efficiently and ensured that meetings and documentation were made available.

Our Approach

This External Board Review was undertaken by Paul Wakeling over the period 7 May 2026 to September 2026. It followed the Association of Colleges framework and considered Board Composition, Board Structures and Board Interaction, together with the nine Board outcomes of integrity, student experience, quality, reflectiveness, strategic leadership, financial soundness, responsiveness, inclusivity & diversity, and collective accountability.

The review process was as follows:

An initial planning and scoping meeting was held online on 7 May 2026 with Joanne Roxburgh, Corporation Chair; Darell DeSouza, Corporation Vice Chair; Peter Brammall, Principal & Chief Executive; Jennifer Swift, Director of Governance; Paul Wakeling, Reviewer; and Briony Denvir of the Association of Colleges. The meeting agreed the approach and timetable for the review. The review applied the standard AoC framework and included consideration of progress since the College's 2023 external board review.

An online survey was completed by 14 Board members, with responses submitted between 11 and 28 May 2026. Respondents included the Principal & CEO, Corporation Vice Chair, staff governor, committee chairs and governors serving across the core committees. The survey was used both as a quantitative source of evidence and to identify lines of enquiry for interviews. Its strongest areas were integrity, Code compliance, skills impact, financial management, safeguarding and the relationship with senior leaders. Its qualitative comments highlighted student voice, external and employer engagement, Board diversity, induction and mentoring, the volume of papers, use of governors' skills and the need for more strategic horizon scanning.

A desktop review was undertaken of selected governance and College documentation. This included the 2023 External Board Review, the latest Ofsted inspection report, the governance meeting timetable, the proposed 2025–30 strategic objectives, the Principal's report, selected Board and committee papers and the external Board review survey.

Individual interviews were held with Joanne Roxburgh, Corporation Chair; Darrell Desouza OBE, Corporation Vice Chair; Peter Brammall, Principal & Chief Executive; Paul Smith, Deputy Principal & Chief Operating Officer; Heather Marks, Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality; Fusun Can, staff governor; Dennis Hone, governor; Sabri Ozaydin, governor; Alex Kent-Jones, governor; and Jennifer Swift, Director of Governance.

The Reviewer observed the Audit Committee on 9 June 2026 the Academic Committee on 15 June 2026, and the full Governing Body on 15 July 2026. The full Board meeting was held in person at Regent's Park with one prospective student governor joining via Teams (and another in-person)

Following completion of the evidence-gathering phase, this draft report was prepared. It will be shared at an initial finding meeting to check factual accuracy, submitted for AoC moderation, amended as appropriate, and presented to the Governing Body on 23/09/2026

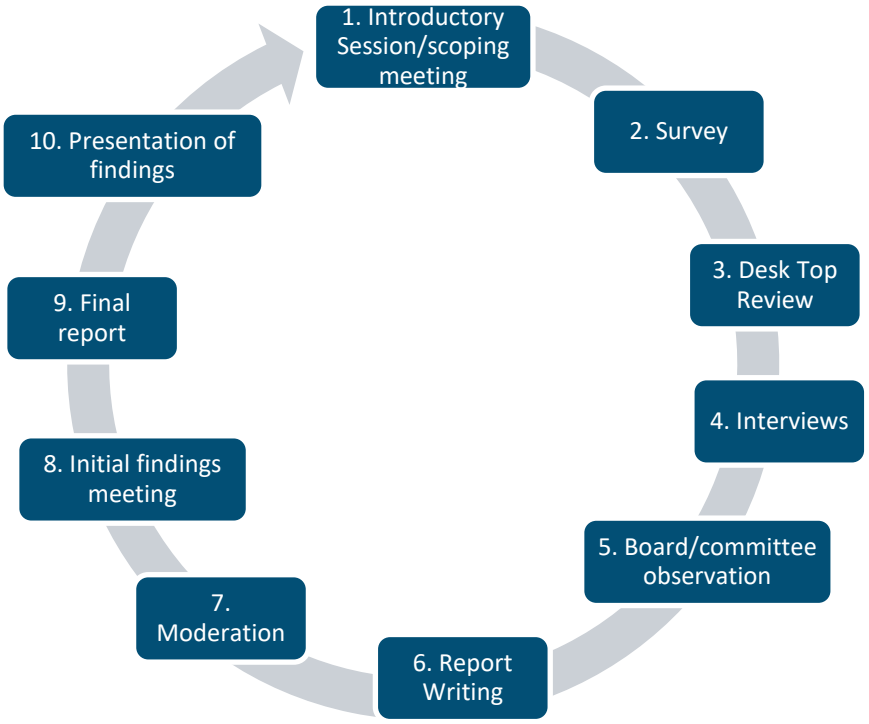

Fig. 2

The remainder of this report is structured to set out key messages across the following Review Dimensions and Board Outcomes:

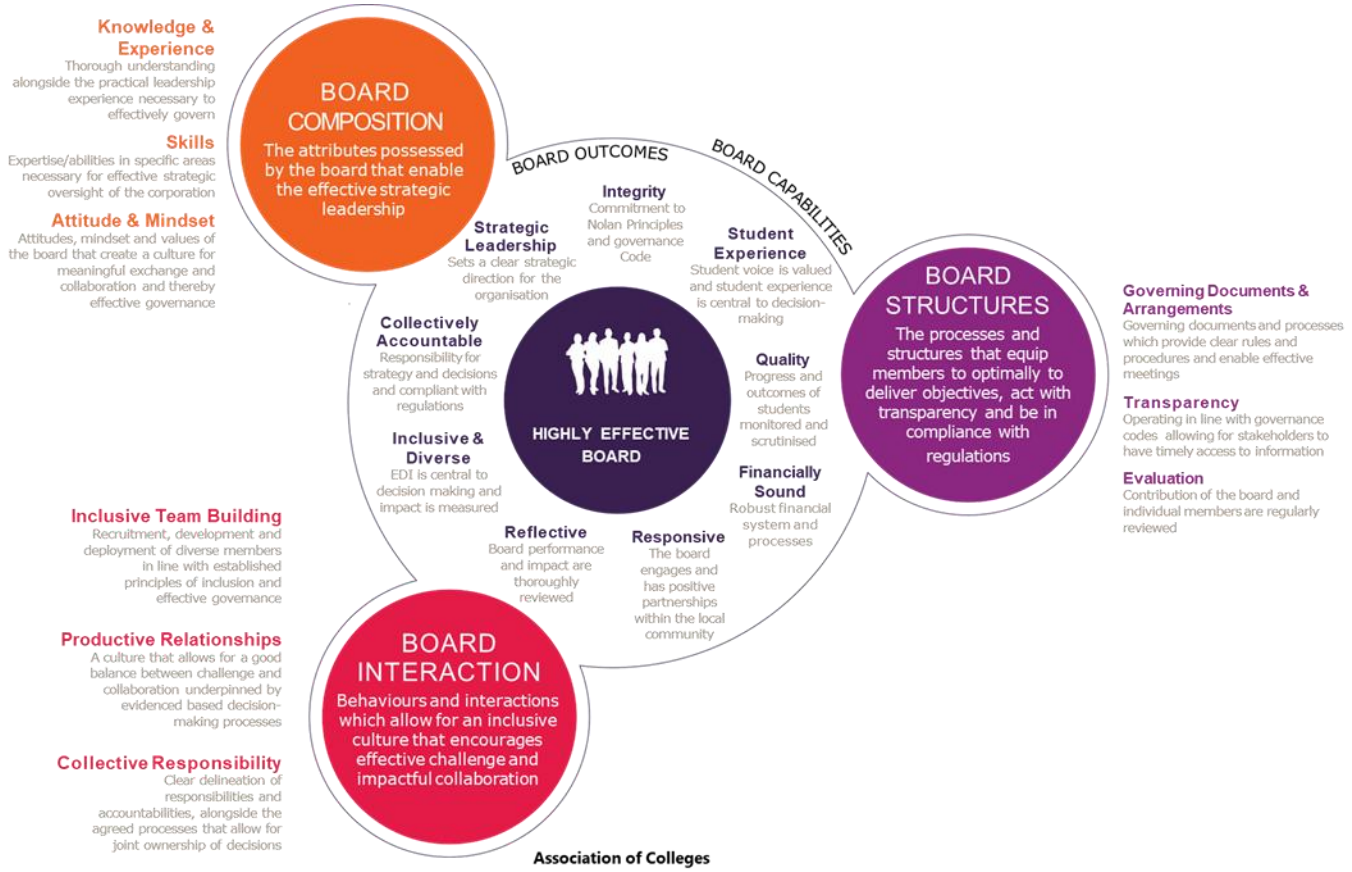
Knowledge & Experience
Thorough understanding alongside the practical leadership experience necessary to effectively govern
Skills
Expertise/abilities in specific areas necessary for effective strategic oversight of the corporation
Attitude & Mindset
Attitudes, mindset and values of the board that create a culture for meaningful exchange and collaboration and thereby effective governance
BOARD COMPOSITION
The attributes possessed by the board that enable the effective strategic leadership
BOARD OUTCOMES
BOARD CAPABILITIES
Integrity
Commitment to Nolan Principles and governance Code
Strategic Leadership
Sets a clear strategic direction for the organisation
Student Experience
Student voice is valued and student experience is central to decision-making
Collectively Accountable
Responsibility for strategy and decisions and compliant with regulations
Quality
Progress and outcomes of students monitored and scrutinised
HIGHLY EFFECTIVE BOARD
Inclusive & Diverse
EDI is central to decision making and impact is measured
Financially Sound
Robust financial system and processes
Reflective
Board performance and impact are thoroughly reviewed
Responsive
The board engages and has positive partnerships within the local community
BOARD STRUCTURES
The processes and structures that equip members to optimally to deliver objectives, act with transparency and be in compliance with regulations
Governing Documents & Arrangements
Governing documents and processes which provide clear rules and procedures and enable effective meetings
Transparency
Operating in line with governance codes allowing for stakeholders to have timely access to information
Evaluation
Contribution of the board and individual members are regularly reviewed
Inclusive Team Building
Recruitment, development and deployment of diverse members in line with established principles of inclusion and effective governance
Productive Relationships
A culture that allows for a good balance between challenge and collaboration underpinned by evidenced based decision-making processes
Collective Responsibility
Clear delineation of responsibilities and accountabilities, alongside the agreed processes that allow for joint ownership of decisions
BOARD INTERACTION
Behaviours and interactions which allow for an inclusive culture that encourages effective challenge and impactful collaboration
Association of Colleges

Fig. 3

Background to the Organisation

Capel Manor College is a specialist land-based college operating across five sites in London: Enfield, Regent's Park, Crystal Palace, Mottingham and Gunnersbury Park. It offers programmes from entry level to level 6 in subjects including animal management, horticulture, floristry, garden design, environmental conservation and countryside management, together with apprenticeships, adult learning and provision for learners with high needs.

At the time of the January 2026 Ofsted inspection, the College had 2,717 learners: 957 learners aged 16 to 18, 1,380 adult learners, 156 apprentices and 224 learners in receipt of high-needs funding. The College serves learners from 32 local authorities. More than half of learners and apprentices have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Two thirds of learners aged 16 to 18 and just over half of adult learners come from the most deprived areas of the country. This context makes inclusion, access, learner support and progression central to the College's mission and to the Board's oversight.

The Ofsted inspection of 27 January 2026 found that safeguarding standards were met. Contribution to meeting skills needs was judged to be at a strong standard. Adult learning achievement, curriculum and teaching, and participation and development were also judged to be at a strong standard. Leadership and governance, education programmes for young people, apprenticeships and provision for learners with high needs were judged to meet the expected standard. Inspectors highlighted extensive employer and civic engagement, strong responsiveness to green skills priorities, sustained improvement secured by leaders, and valuable support and rigorous challenge from governors. Areas for further improvement included greater consistency in teaching and support, attendance and progress in GCSE English and mathematics, and support for apprentices whose learning had been disrupted.

The College's financial health was reported to the Audit Committee as good. The evidence reviewed also shows improved management accounts, a developing balanced scorecard and greater financial resilience, although the Board continues to face important choices about curriculum viability, commercial growth, campus costs and estate investment.

The senior leadership team is led by Peter Brammall, Principal & Chief Executive, and includes Paul Smith, Deputy Principal & Chief Operating Officer, and Heather Marks, Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality. The College's designated senior post holders are Peter Brammall, Principal & Chief Executive and Jennifer Swift, Director of Governance. This is being broadened in 2026-2027 to include two additional Senior Post Holders. The leadership structure has become more stable and more distributed following a period of significant change. This stability, combined with improved quality and financial control, gives the College an opportunity to move from an internally focused recovery phase to a more outward-looking period of strategic development.

The emerging strategic direction is described as "Future Ready – Empowering the Green and Blue Skills Generation for a Sustainable Future". It contains three proposed aims: establishing Capel Manor as a national centre of excellence for land, nature and water-based skills; widening access and pathways to green and blue skills; and using employer insight to co-create future skills solutions.

Proposed enablers include investment in people, operational excellence and a student-centred approach. The ambitions are relevant and distinctive, but the document remains a set of strategic objectives and potential deliverables rather than a complete, phased and resourced strategic plan.

The 2023 External Board Review concluded that the Board was proficient and had some impact on College strategy, effectiveness and outcomes. It identified strengths in the Board's skills mix, committee structure and supportive culture. Its recommendations included fuller Board engagement in strategic planning; development of a dashboard with agreed KPIs; more focused work planning, agendas and papers; annual Chair and governor appraisal; and stronger leadership succession and contingency planning.

There has been clear progress. The Board now holds a well-attended strategy event; management information and the balanced scorecard have improved; action tracking is thorough and consistent; committee reporting to the full Board is more focused; governor induction and appraisal are more developed; and the senior leadership team is more stable. The two principal matters that remain are the need to complete the transition from consultation on strategy to visible full-Board ownership of a final plan, and the need to secure sustained student governor participation.

Board Composition

The attributes possessed by the Board that enable the effective strategic leadership

Background

The Governing Body operates a committee model and has a stated membership of up to 23, including the Principal & Chief Executive, a staff governor and up to three student governors, with the remaining 18 places held by independent governors. There are currently 3 independent vacancies & 3 student vacancies (whilst the new 'Capel Graduate' scheme is rolled out in the new academic year). The Search, Governance & Remuneration Committee will be discussing whether they want to revert back to the original board size of 22 at their October 2026 meeting.

The Board have adopted the AoC Code of Good Governance.

Findings

The Board has a strong and varied skills base. Observation and interviews demonstrated expertise in finance, legal and contractual matters, property and estates, education and quality, audit and risk, marketing and recruitment, corporate leadership, safeguarding, community engagement and the land-based sector. At the observed Board meeting, governors drew on relevant legal and property knowledge in scrutinising deeds and lease arrangements; questioned the costs and impact of proposed developments; and tested assumptions about recruitment, retention and the 42-day funding date. This is not a passive Board: members read the papers, understand the College's context and ask questions that are relevant to strategic oversight.

The survey supports this finding. Thirteen of 14 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Board collectively has the necessary skills and knowledge to govern the College. Ten of 14 were positive that those skills are used effectively in decision-making, while two were neutral and two were unsure. This difference is important: the skills are present, but there is scope to make their deployment more deliberate through appraisal, committee allocation, link roles, strategic task groups and direct invitations to contribute on matters where individual expertise is especially relevant.

Governors display the attitudes needed for effective governance. Interviewees consistently described the Board as diligent, professional, passionate about the College and focused on the interests of students. Every survey respondent agreed or strongly agreed that the Board demonstrates commitment to the Nolan Principles and the College's values and complies with its adopted Code of Governance. Narrative responses referred to accountability, evidence-based scrutiny, ethical conduct, openness, transparent leadership and constructive

challenge. Survey and interview evidence also indicates that governors seek to balance financial sustainability and value for money with the quality of provision and its impact on learners.

The range of professional backgrounds provides genuine diversity of thought. Governors bring different styles, experiences and perspectives, and the Chair of Corporation is skilled at using this range. The Board observation showed knowledge being deployed appropriately: marketing expertise was used in the opening strategic briefing, finance and curriculum knowledge informed questions about student recruitment and retention, and legal expertise strengthened scrutiny of estate matters. Interview evidence also suggests that skills are generally well matched to committees.

Recruitment and succession planning are active rather than reactive. The Board is currently seeking additional HR expertise, which is a sensible response to an identified gap. Interview evidence also identified a potential benefit from stronger current expertise in apprenticeships, given the importance of apprenticeship growth and the findings of internal audit. Survey comments additionally identified the need to maintain succession depth in property development, finance and legal expertise. These should be treated as targeted enhancements and succession considerations for an already strong Board rather than evidence of a weak composition.

Diversity data was shared from October 2025; it will be recollected in October 2026. The Board was 38% female, the largest age group was 65-74 with (31%), 2 governors declared a disability and the Board was 81% white and 94% declared heterosexual. Most governors serve two terms and at the time of the survey 31% were in their second term with no governors in a third term. These figures reinforce the importance of continuing to consider gender, ethnicity, disability, age, professional background and lived experience in succession planning. Particularly in regard to reflecting and serving the local communities of London and of each campus.

Survey confidence in equality, diversity and inclusion was positive but lower than in most other governance areas: 11 of 14 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that EDI is central to Board decision-making, while three were neutral. Qualitative responses recognised progress but called for greater demographic diversity and sharper understanding of the experiences and outcomes of different groups of students and staff. This supports continued analysis of disaggregated data and deliberate recruitment of under-represented perspectives, while retaining the specialist expertise required by the College.

Induction and development have improved, but the survey shows that experience has not been completely consistent. Ten of 14 respondents were positive about induction, two were

neutral and two disagreed that it had been effective. Campus visits, meetings with the Principal & CEO and senior staff, the induction guide and access to documentation were valued. Less positive comments referred to needing more help to understand the further education environment, a more effective mentoring process, greater encouragement to ask questions and more informal time with other Board members. Some respondents explicitly noted that induction has improved since they joined. The Director of Governance had already begun a wider journey to strengthen induction, appraisal and continuing development, and the review's findings should be understood as supporting and helping to shape that work rather than proposing that it begins afresh. As that work develops, the formalization of light-touch buddying, a clear first-year development plan and facilitated introductions for link roles would help every new governor contribute confidently at an earlier stage.

Ongoing training is available and no respondent disagreed that opportunities are provided, but the result was more measured than in other areas: 10 of 14 were positive and four neutral. Online modules were regarded as convenient and valuable, but sometimes inflexible, time-consuming or excessive. Governors would benefit from a more structured blend of mandatory modules, sector context, strategic briefings, learning walks and peer exchange. Appraisal should be used to tailor development and to identify where governors want to contribute more.

The Chair of Corporation is appraised by the Vice Chair of Corporation, informed by a survey of all governors, and all Governors have a one to one review with the Chair. This appraisal process is being formalised in 2026/27.

The main composition issue is the student governor role. The constitution provides for up to three student governors and the observed Board included two prospective governors, one online and one in the room. They asked useful questions and demonstrated the value of direct student participation. The survey found that 13 of 14 respondents believed student interests are actively considered, which is consistent with observation and interview evidence. However, eight of the nine respondents who added comments to that question identified limited involvement, lack of continuity, under-representation or the need for a stronger route from student voice to Board. The Principal & CEO, Vice Chair of Corporation, staff governor and other governors also described student governor attendance and continuity as inconsistent during the previous year. This reflected weaknesses in the College's arrangements for recruiting, preparing and supporting student governors, rather than any assumed lack of interest or motivation on the part of individual students. Other mechanisms—surveys, learning walks, campus visits and the Student Council or student Board—provide useful student voice, but they are not a complete substitute for sustained student membership of the Governing Body.

The College had already recognised this issue and, at the July 2026 Board meeting, Heather Marks, Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality reported the planned introduction of the Capel Graduate scheme in the new academic year. This provides an appropriate vehicle through which to strengthen student governance. The student governor role should be embedded within the scheme as a supported leadership pathway, with structured preparation, mentoring, reflection and recognition. Recruitment should draw on the Student Council and campus voice mechanisms; role expectations should be clear; papers and briefings should be accessible; and each student governor should have a named mentor and regular contact with the Director of Governance and relevant student-services staff.

CONCLUSIONS

Board Composition is an area of strength. The Board has a broad, relevant and well-deployed skills base, together with the professional mindset required for independent and mission-focused governance. The survey strongly confirms the Board's skills, integrity and commitment. Recruitment, induction and development have improved and the Board is alert to identified gaps. Its main development priority is to ensure that student membership is reliable, prepared and sustained throughout the year. Continued attention should also be given to demographic representation, succession depth in specialist areas, more consistent induction and the active deployment of governors' skills.

The following table summarises headlines:

BOARD COMPOSITION	
STRENGTH	**AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT**
1. Broad and relevant professional skills, including finance, law, estates, education, quality, risk, marketing and community engagement.	1. Establish a reliable student governor pathway linked to the Capel Graduate programme.
2. Diligent, independent and student-focused mindset, with unanimous survey confidence in the Board's commitment to the Nolan Principles and its Code.	2. Continue targeted recruitment and succession planning for HR, apprenticeships, property and under-represented demographic perspectives.
3. Skills are generally deployed effectively across the committee structure, with strong external validation from observation and Ofsted.	3. Use buddying, facilitated link-role introductions and a tailored first-year development plan so that every new governor becomes integrated and confident quickly.
4. Recruitment, induction and appraisal have developed positively since the previous review.	

Fig. 4

Board Structures

The processes and structures that equip members to optimally delivery objectives, act with transparency and be in compliance with regulations

Background

Capel Manor College operates a committee-based governance structure. The annual cycle includes the full Governing Body, Audit Committee, Academic Committee, Finance and Resources Committee, Estates Committee, Search, Governance and Remuneration Committee, and Senior Post Holder Appraisal Committee. The full Board meets four times a year, supported by governor briefings, learning walks or campus tours, and a dedicated strategy event. Committees and the Board use an electronic portal and a mix of online and in-person meetings.

Findings

The Triumvirate (Chair, CEO and Director of Governance) works well together and meets monthly and the Chair of Corporation meets weekly with the CEO. The committee structure is comprehensive and well understood. It gives appropriate space for detailed scrutiny of quality, finance, risk, estates, governance and senior post-holder matters. The 2025–26 timetable is clear and provides an orderly cycle of meetings. Thirteen of 14 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Board receives regular, detailed committee updates, and narrative comments valued access to committee papers and the willingness of committee chairs to answer questions. Committee reporting has moved from reciting minutes to identifying matters for approval or attention is a positive development and helps the Board avoid unnecessary duplication.

The meetings observed provided strong evidence that committees add value. The Academic Committee was well chaired and included knowledgeable questioning about English and mathematics, application patterns, implications for staffing, retention, apprenticeships, work readiness, V-level reform, safeguarding and student disciplinary trends. Governors did not confine themselves to noting reports; they asked what the information meant for learners and what further action or evidence was required. The committee Chair challenged the ambition of the committee's terms of reference and handled a proposed amendment constructively.

The Audit Committee also provided effective assurance. It spent appropriate time on the highest-rated risks, challenged the meaning and movement of RAG ratings, questioned whether changes related to the risk itself or only the narrative, and tested the impact of mitigating action. Governors asked pertinent questions about apprenticeship clawback, cyber security, data-protection reporting and the concentration of partially completed audit actions around the year end. The Chair was disciplined in ensuring that items presented "to agree" resulted in a clear decision.

Governance administration is a strength. Matters arising are taken seriously and action schedules provide a clear audit trail. Papers are issued in a timely way, and the portal is valued by governors. The observed Board meeting began promptly, attendance was reported as improved and high, and a strategic briefing from the Director of Marketing provided governors with useful operational context before the formal business.

The survey provides a balanced picture of scrutiny. Twelve of 14 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that governors have sufficient opportunity and time to scrutinise proposals, while two were neutral. The narrative comments were more revealing: several governors said that papers arrive in time but that the volume and length of packs can make full digestion difficult. One respondent suggested that the front page of each report should identify the principal messages and the questions on which the Board's view is required; another called for reduced administrative burden to create space for horizon scanning. These comments match the observation evidence.

There remains scope to improve the economy and clarity of some papers. The Academic Committee observation identified places where narrative statements and percentages were not accompanied by raw numbers, baselines, trends or visual presentation, making impact harder to judge. Some papers labelled for decision read primarily as updates, and not every recommendation was framed with complete clarity. These are process enhancements rather than structural weaknesses. A concise cover sheet could consistently identify the decision or assurance required, the strategic priority and risk, key evidence, learner impact, EDI implications where relevant, financial implications, and the action requested of governors. Dashboards should show trends, baselines and exceptions.

Risk governance has improved. Interview evidence described the risk register as more joined-up, and Audit Committee members recognised that the current version was better than the previous iteration. The next stage is to make risk appetite and tolerance more explicit and to clarify whether the risk register, Board Assurance Framework and strategic dashboard together provide a complete line of sight from strategic objective to assurance. This could be addressed within the strategy work.

The Board's March 2026 strategy event was valuable. Governors have reported that they were highly engaged, worked in groups, met students and staff, and felt their contributions were heard. Interviewees described the process as more genuinely co-created than the previous internally developed turnaround strategy. The emerging strategic objectives are distinctive and ambitious, with a stronger focus on national leadership in green skills, employer co-creation, civic and community engagement, technology, commercial activity and inclusion.

The survey confirms that the Board generally maintains a strategic rather than operational focus: 12 of 14 respondents were positive and two neutral. However, the comments add important context. Governors recognised that the successful inspection and recovery work had sometimes required detailed operational assurance, but several felt that the Board could now shift its balance towards strategic matters, commercial thinking, risk analysis, prioritisation and horizon scanning. This is a developmental transition rather than evidence of a current failure to govern strategically.

External engagement is particularly relevant to that transition. All 14 respondents were positive that the Board understands local, regional and national skills needs. Confidence in stakeholder collaboration was less uniform: 10 were positive, two neutral, one disagreed and one was unsure. Comments ranged from praise for local-authority engagement and external speakers to concern that direct Board exposure to employers was limited or that curriculum consultation with industry needed to be stronger. Ofsted's finding that leaders engage extensively and purposefully with employers and civic partners is strong evidence that the College itself has developed this work. The governance implication is that the Board should have a clearer and more direct line of sight to the evidence, impact and future priorities of that engagement.

However, the governance process had not yet reached the point at which the full Board could be said to have set and approved a complete strategic plan. At the observed July meeting, the strategic objectives were included within the Principal's report rather than presented as a separate agenda item with dedicated time. The paper was framed as a set of "potential deliverables" and explicitly stated that subsequent work would address phasing, the distinction between external and internal content, alignment with the People Strategy, Skills and Apprenticeships Growth Plan and Financial Strategy, associated targets and KPIs, and the refresh of mission, vision and values. The recommended decision was to note the update and endorse the direction of travel, rather than to approve a finished strategy.

The Board's central role is to define the College's educational character, mission, long-term direction and appetite for risk. The final strategy should demonstrate visible Board ownership. It should set out the choices made, what will not be pursued, the evidence from employers, students, communities, labour-market intelligence and policy developments, the financial and estate implications, the sequence of delivery, principal risks and dependencies, named executive and committee ownership, and a small number of meaningful outcome and leading indicators with baselines and targets.

In finalising the strategy, the Board should also assure itself that the College's London-wide ambition is rooted in the distinct demographic, cultural, social and economic contexts of the communities served by each of its five campuses. This means testing whether community needs and voices have informed strategic choices about curriculum, access, partnerships, progression and investment, and whether the Board's composition, engagement arrangements and sources of assurance provide an appropriate range of perspectives from those communities. Governors are not delegates for particular localities, but the Board collectively has a responsibility to ensure that the College's strategic direction is relevant, inclusive and responsive across its different settings. The College's context makes this particularly important.

The previous strategy was appropriately focused on internal recovery, quality and financial control. That phase has delivered significant improvement. The new strategy is more outward looking: defining Capel Manor's national and London-wide role; testing the realistic market share for different forms of provision; strengthening employer and sector partnerships; making decisions about curriculum viability, apprenticeships, higher education and commercial activity; and using the five campuses and specialist assets to create distinctive value.

The 2023 external review recommended a strategic planning timetable, fuller Board participation and a dashboard of agreed KPIs. There has been real progress. The College has already established a timeline intended to secure full agreement of the strategy by December 2026. The final step should therefore be delivered through that existing process, culminating in a standalone full-Board discussion and formal approval by December 2026, followed by a governance reporting programme that keeps strategic progress, risks and outcomes visible throughout the year.

Conclusions

Board Structures are effective. The committee model, meeting cycle, governance support, action tracking and flow of assurance provide a sound basis for oversight and compliance. Survey responses and observation both show that committees provide strong scrutiny and clear added value. Papers and dashboards have improved, although some could be shorter, clearer and more evidence-rich. The principal area for development is to ensure that the new strategy is completed and approved through a dedicated full-Board process, with the Board visibly exercising its primary strategic function.

BOARD STRUCTURES	
STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. Clear and comprehensive committee model, supported by an orderly annual cycle.	1. Complete and formally approve the 2025–30 strategy through a standalone full-Board process with sufficient time for debate and decision.
2. Strong governance administration, effective portal, consistent front sheets and disciplined action tracking.	2. Align the strategy, risks, business plans, committee work plans and a concise set of KPIs and leading indicators
3. Committees provide detailed, intelligent scrutiny and clear assurance to the full Board; 13 of 14 survey respondents were positive about committee reporting.	3. Continue to shorten papers and make the decision, key questions, evidence, trends, learner impact and EDI implications clearer.
4. Management information, risk reporting and the balanced scorecard have improved since the previous review.	4. Develop an explicit statement of risk appetite.

Fig. 5

Board Interaction

Behaviours and interactions which allow for an inclusive culture that encourages effective challenge and impaction collaboration

Background

Board interaction concerns the way governors and senior leaders work together, the extent to which different voices are included, the quality of challenge and collaboration, and the collective ownership of decisions. Evidence was drawn particularly from the Board and committee observations, the survey and interviews with governors and senior leaders.

Findings

Interaction is a clear strength. The Board has a constructive and professional culture in which governors and senior leaders treat one another with respect. Relationships before and during the observed Board meeting were purposeful and welcoming. The Director of Marketing giving the opening briefing was made to feel part of the meeting, governors engaged with one another informally, and the Chair was approachable and inclusive.

The Governance website is clear and shows a commitment to transparency, key personnel and documents are easy to find. Internally the Board is well-served by good use of the *OneAdvanced* Governance platform.

The survey provides strong confirmation. All 14 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Board works effectively with the Principal & CEO and senior team through relationships based on trust, honesty and transparency. Twelve of 14 were positive that diverse opinions and contributions are valued; one disagreed and one was unsure. Narrative descriptions included “open”, “engaging”, “transparent”, “friendly challenge” and “critical friendship”. Several respondents credited the Chair and Director of Governance with setting this culture.

The Chair provides effective leadership. Meetings start promptly, agenda items are framed clearly and governors are given time to think and respond. At the Audit Committee, the committee Chair used wait time well and ensured that decisions were explicit. At the Academic Committee, the committee Chair connected English and mathematics performance to vocational success, drew out the implications of retention as student numbers grew, and encouraged greater ambition. At full Board, theChair of Corporation maintained an inclusive tone while allowing challenge and professional disagreement.

Challenge is purposeful rather than performative. Governors ask for evidence, test impact and revisit matters where assurance is incomplete. In interview, the Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality described the Chair of the Academic Committee as providing rigorous challenge on English and mathematics, regularly pressing for the implications of the data to be made clear. She also reported that governors requested stronger evidence of impact in relation to the College’s contribution-to-skills

work, which she said led to the development of balanced scorecards. The Deputy Principal & Chief Operating Officer described Board influence on the phasing of property developments, the approach to the farm and the balance between EBITDA and student investment. A governor identified an omission in comparative attainment analysis, resulting in the executive recalculating the baseline. These examples demonstrate that challenge changes or sharpens executive work.

The observed committees provided further evidence. Academic governors questioned the relationship between applications and staffing, the risks within apprenticeships, how curriculum prepares learners for employment, and patterns in student discipline and complaints. Audit governors tested risk ratings, cyber security, clawback and whether compliance reporting captured actual reporting behaviour. The full Board scrutinised legal, estate and financial matters and considered learner impact when discussing risk and resources.

There is a strong balance between support and challenge. Senior leaders described the Board as engaged, interested and aware of staff workload, while still prepared to hold the executive to account and not let issues go. Governors described the executive as responsive to challenge. This creates an environment in which difficult matters can be discussed without undermining trust. Healthy professional differences were visible in the legal and estates discussion, but they took place within a shared commitment to the College. The survey's unanimous positive results on the Nolan Principles and the Code reinforce the finding that challenge is grounded in a shared ethical framework.

Collective responsibility is also evident. Matters arising are followed through, committee business is reported to the full Board, and the Board is willing to revisit decisions or assumptions. The meeting of committee chairs with the Principal & CEO helps coordination, while the Director of Governance provides continuity across the structure. The increasing emphasis on reporting key assurance, recommendations and decisions rather than reciting minutes supports collective accountability.

The minority survey responses should nevertheless be used constructively. One respondent questioned whether industry perspectives were sufficiently influential; another suggested that papers can encourage passive rather than active engagement; and several noted that more experienced or specialist governors often contribute most. Specialist expertise can sometimes result in other members deferring too readily, particularly on estates matters. The Chair should continue to draw out alternative perspectives, invite specific contributions and ensure that the presence of an expert raises the quality of collective discussion rather than narrowing it. The Director of Governance should feel empowered to step in if discussion are straying into operations.

The experience of newer governors is not uniformly social or relational. Survey comments requested better mentoring, more informal time with other governors, greater clarity about link-governor expectations and easier introductions to relevant staff. The quantitative result on effective use of skills—10 positive, two neutral and two unsure—also indicates that some contribution may remain untapped. Buddying, periodic informal engagement and appraisal questions about under-used expertise would strengthen an already positive culture.

The most important interaction issue is again the student governor role. The students at the observed Board meeting contributed usefully, showing that the Board is receptive when student governors are present and prepared. The weakness lies in the consistency of the College's arrangements for enabling and sustaining participation, rather than in the Board's willingness to hear student views or any assumed lack of motivation among students. A supported pathway through the Capel Graduate programme, Student Council and campus voice arrangements would give student governors stronger links to the wider student body and help them bring representative rather than purely personal perspectives. It would also make their Board service a meaningful leadership and employability experience. The survey's qualitative comments make clear that governors themselves see this as the most immediate way to make the Board more inclusive and responsive.

Conclusions

Board Interaction is an area of clear strength. The Chair creates an inclusive environment, governors challenge thoughtfully, senior leaders respond constructively, and decisions are collectively owned. Survey evidence shows exceptionally strong confidence in integrity and in the relationship between the Board and senior team. There is credible evidence that Board discussion has influenced executive decisions and improved management information. The principal development is to extend this effective culture consistently to student governors and, where needed, to new or quieter governors through structured preparation, mentoring and deliberate deployment of their expertise.

BOARD INTERACTION	
STRENGTH	AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT
1. Inclusive, approachable and well-disciplined Chair leadership.	1. Embed student governors more fully in the Board's relational and decision-making culture.
2. Productive relationships built on trust, transparency and mutual respect, supported by unanimous survey confidence.	2. Use buddying, clearer link-role arrangements and informal engagement to accelerate the contribution of newer governors.
3. Strong, evidence-based challenge with demonstrable impact on decisions and reporting.	3. Use appraisal and chairing techniques to draw out quieter voices and under-used expertise.
4. Collective responsibility supported by action tracking, focused committee reporting and a shared commitment to the Nolan Principles and Code.	4. Continue to ensure that specialist expertise informs rather than dominates collective discussion.

Fig. 6

Overall Board Effectiveness

In assessing overall Board effectiveness, the review considered the Governing Body's three core functions: setting and communicating the College's educational character, strategy and goals; holding

executive leaders to account for educational performance and quality; and exercising effective control so that funds and assets are protected and legal obligations are met.

We have looked at the way in which you observe the Nolan Principles and your adopted Code of Governance and the extent to which the culture of the Board focusses on outcomes. Key Board outcomes are shown below:



Fig. 7

The survey presents a high-consensus picture of an effective Board. Every respondent was positive about the Nolan Principles, Code compliance, understanding of skills needs, financial management, safeguarding and the relationship with senior leaders. Thirteen of 14 were positive about student-focused decision-making, staff input, the Board's collective skillset and committee reporting. Twelve of 14 were positive about inclusivity of opinion, opportunities for scrutiny and strategic focus. The more mixed areas were stakeholder collaboration, EDI, induction, ongoing development and the effective use of governors' skills. The narrative comments in those areas align closely with the review's two priority recommendations and with a small number of process enhancements.

The Board is effective in holding leaders to account. Academic Committee observation showed detailed and strategic scrutiny of curriculum, English and mathematics, retention, safeguarding, work readiness and learner conduct. Board challenge has led to improved evidence and balanced scorecards. Ofsted independently confirmed that governors provide valuable support and rigorous challenge and use comprehensive information to hold leaders to account. The quality outcomes achieved since 2023, including strong adult provision, improved achievement and a strong

contribution to meeting skills needs, provide evidence of a governance and leadership system that is delivering impact.

The Board is also effective in financial and regulatory oversight. Finance, estates and audit expertise is strong. The Audit Committee scrutinises risk, internal audit, apprenticeships, cyber security and data protection, and no audit recommendations were reported as overdue. Financial health was reported as good. All survey respondents agreed that the Board balances financial management with value for money and quality. Governors are prepared to challenge both over-caution and under-evidenced growth assumptions and routinely consider student impact alongside financial sustainability.

The Board's strategic leadership is developing but is not yet as strong as its assurance and accountability functions. The March 2026 strategy event was a significant improvement and there is genuine evidence of co-creation. The emerging green and blue skills direction is ambitious, relevant and outward-looking. The survey confirms that governors generally believe the Board maintains a strategic focus, but also identifies appetite for more external engagement, commercial thinking, prioritisation and horizon scanning. The remaining task is to convert the objectives into a complete strategy that the full Board formally owns, approves and monitors. This is the most important governance transition for the next phase.

Across the nine Board outcomes, the evidence is positive:

Integrity is a clear strength. All survey respondents were positive about the Nolan Principles and Code compliance, and observation showed professional conduct, clear decision-making, disciplined action tracking and a culture in which challenge is welcomed.

Student experience is central to many Board discussions and investment decisions, and 13 of 14 survey respondents were positive that student interests are actively considered. The College's learner outcomes and inspection findings provide evidence of impact. The weakness is not student focus in principle but the consistency, representativeness and influence of direct student governor participation.

Quality is subject to strong scrutiny and has improved substantially. Governors understand the key issues and challenge both performance data and the impact of improvement activity. Ofsted's findings and the Board's challenge on English and mathematics, retention, apprenticeships and teaching consistency support this judgment.

Reflectiveness is demonstrated by the Board's progress since the 2023 review, its use of appraisal and training, and its willingness to revisit risk, reporting and strategy. Survey comments indicate that induction has improved but should be made consistently strong, and that governor development should be more tailored and less dependent on online modules.

Strategic leadership is increasingly evident through the March event and the Board's engagement with green and blue skills, employer needs and curriculum direction. Twelve of 14 respondents were

positive about strategic focus. The final strategy process now needs to be more clearly Board-led, externally informed and connected to measurable choices and outcomes.

Financial soundness is supported by a good reported financial health grade, strengthened management information and robust committee scrutiny. All survey respondents were positive about the Board's approach. Important choices remain about curriculum viability, commercial growth, estates, campus costs and the balance between resilience and investment.

Responsiveness is shown in the way the Board and executive have addressed quality, apprenticeships, risk and leadership stability, and in the College's response to employer and green-skills needs. The more mixed survey result on stakeholder collaboration suggests that governors' direct visibility of external engagement and its impact should be strengthened.

Inclusivity and diversity are strong in the College's mission and learner support, and the Board contains a useful diversity of professional experience and thought. Eleven of 14 survey respondents were positive about EDI in decision-making and three neutral. Continued demographic diversification, more systematic analysis of different learner and staff experiences, and consistent student representation would strengthen this outcome.

Collective accountability is supported by the committee structure, improved committee reporting, matters-arising processes and the willingness of governors and senior leaders to own difficult decisions together. Thirteen of 14 survey respondents were positive about the flow of committee assurance to the Board.

KEY MEASURES

Latest Ofsted inspection: 27 January 2026. Safeguarding standards met; contribution to meeting skills needs at a strong standard; leadership and governance at the expected standard; adult learning at a strong standard; education programmes for young people, apprenticeships and high-needs provision at the expected standard.

ESFA financial health grade: Good, as reported to the Audit Committee.

External Board Review survey: 14 completed responses, submitted between 11 and 28 May 2026.

Governor attendance: Attendance is high. Overall Committee attendance was very high at 91% for 2025/26 and Board attendance was 80.5%

Governor tenure: Reported tenure (October 2025) ranged from newly appointed to six years, (Up to 1 year 4 1-4 years 7 4-8 years 5 8-12 years 0 12 years+ 0)

Chair tenure: Joanne Roxburgh became Chair of the Corporation in August 2024, succeeding Roger McClure. Joanne had joined the Board as Chair Designate on 17 May 2023, allowing an extended handover before taking office.

Concluding Judgment

Capel Manor College has an effective Governing Body. It is well composed, supported by sound structures and characterised by constructive, respectful and evidence-based interaction. This judgment is strongly corroborated by the survey, observation, interviews and Ofsted. The Board has helped to oversee a significant improvement journey and now has the skills, confidence and relationships to provide stronger outward-facing strategic leadership. To maximise its impact in the next phase, it should ensure that the full Board visibly owns and approves a complete 2025–30 strategy and that student governor participation becomes reliable, representative and integral to the Capel Graduate and wider student voice arrangements.

Recommendations and Action Plan

This review makes two priority recommendations and three supporting recommendations.

Summary of Recommendations

Priority Recommendations

1. Build on the planned Capel Graduate scheme to establish and sustain a reliable student governor pathway, with clear recruitment arrangements, tailored preparation, mentoring, representative links to the wider student body, a feedback loop showing how student input influences decisions, and termly monitoring of participation and contribution.
2. Complete and formally approve the 2025–30 strategy by December 2026, in accordance with the College's existing timetable, through a standalone full-Board process. The completed strategy should set out clear strategic choices, draw on an outward-looking evidence base reflecting the communities served by each campus, and be supported by a governance reporting cycle that keeps progress, outcomes, risks and required corrective action visible throughout the year.

Supporting Recommendations

3. Introduce a standard, concise cover sheet for Board and committee papers that clearly identifies the purpose of the paper; the decision, discussion or assurance required; its relationship to strategic priorities and principal risks; the key evidence and trends; learner impact; relevant equality, diversity and inclusion and financial implications; and the action required of governors.
4. Strengthen the Board's approach to risk by defining and recording its appetite and tolerance for the principal strategic risks and ensuring that the risk register, Board Assurance Framework and strategic dashboard provide a clear line of sight from each strategic objective to the associated risks, controls, sources of assurance and performance indicators.
5. Build on and complete the work already underway to develop a consistent framework for governor induction and continuing development, including a structured first-year development plan, appropriate buddying or mentoring, further education sector context, introductions linked to committee and link-governor responsibilities, and a balanced programme of mandatory training, strategic briefings, campus visits, learning walks and peer exchange. Annual appraisal should be used to tailor development and make fuller use of governors' skills and experience.

Action Plan

Issue	Action	Intended outcome	Named lead	Timescale
1. The College and Board had already identified that student governor participation had not been consistently sustained and have begun to address this through the planned Capel Graduate scheme. The remaining task is to ensure that College arrangements provide a reliable pathway for recruiting, preparing and supporting student governors throughout their term of office.	*Building on the work already underway, agree and implement a student governor framework within the Capel Graduate scheme, including recruitment, induction, mentoring, pre-meeting preparation, links with wider student voice arrangements, succession planning and termly monitoring.*	*The agreed student governor places are filled and sustained throughout the year; attendance meets the Board's agreed target; student governors contribute confidently to Board and committee discussions; and the Board receives a more direct, representative and influential student voice.*	*Chair of Corporation and Director of Governance, working with the Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality the Capel Graduate/student-services lead and student governors.*	*Framework agreed by 30 September 2026;*

2. *The Board has contributed well to consultation on the emerging strategy and the College already has a timetable for completing and agreeing it by December 2026. The objectives now need to be converted into a complete, measurable strategic plan that is formally approved and visibly owned by the full Board.*	*Deliver the College's existing strategy-development timetable, providing dedicated full-Board time to consider the completed strategy and secure formal approval by December 2026. At the point of approval, agree the associated KPIs, principal risks, committee responsibilities and subsequent reporting cycle.*	*Full strategy formally approved by the Governing Body by December 2026. Strategic monitoring and reporting arrangements agreed at the same time and implemented from January 2027.*	*Chair and Principal & CEO, supported by the Director of Governance, Deputy Principal & Chief Operating Officer, Deputy Principal, Curriculum & Quality and committee chairs.*	*Process and dedicated Board time agreed by 30 September 2026*

3. Although papers are issued promptly, their volume, length and inconsistent presentation of purpose, evidence and recommendations can make effective scrutiny more difficult.	Introduce a standard, concise cover sheet for Board and committee papers identifying the purpose of the paper; the decision, discussion or assurance required; links to strategic priorities and principal risks; key evidence, trends and benchmarks; learner impact; relevant EDI and financial implications; and the action required of governors.	Governors can identify quickly what is important, what is being asked of them and how the paper relates to strategy, risk and learner impact. Board and committee time is focused more consistently on assurance, challenge and decision-making.	Director of Governance, supported by the Chair of Corporation, Principal & CEO, committee chairs and executive report authors.	Template agreed by 31 October 2026 and used for all appropriate Board and committee papers from 1 January 2027. Effectiveness reviewed by July 2027.
4. Risk governance has improved, but risk appetite and tolerance are not yet sufficiently explicit and the relationship between the strategic objectives, risk register, Board Assurance Framework and strategic dashboard requires greater clarity.	Define and record the Board's appetite and tolerance for each principal strategic risk. Map the final strategic objectives against the relevant risks, controls, sources of assurance and performance indicators, identifying and addressing any gaps or duplication.	Governors have a clear and shared understanding of the level of risk the College is prepared to accept. The Board can see whether each strategic objective is supported by adequate controls and assurance and can focus its attention on risks outside agreed tolerance.	Chair of the Audit Committee and Deputy Principal & Chief Operating Officer, supported by the Director of Governance and Principal & CEO, with final approval by the Governing Body.	Initial risk appetite and tolerance considered alongside the final strategy by 31 December 2026. Integrated risk and assurance mapping completed by 31 March 2027 and reviewed annually.

5. Governor induction and development have improved, but the experience is not yet consistently strong and development opportunities are not always sufficiently tailored to individual needs, roles and experience.	Continue and formalise the work already begun by the Director of Governance, developing a consistent governor induction and development framework that includes a first-year development plan, buddying or mentoring, appropriate further education sector context, campus and senior-staff introductions, clarity about committee and link-governor roles, and a balanced programme of mandatory training, strategic briefings, learning walks and peer exchange. Use annual appraisal to agree individual development priorities and identify how governors' skills and experience can be used more fully.	New governors are able to contribute confidently at an earlier stage. Development is proportionate, relevant and tailored, and the Board makes more deliberate use of the knowledge, experience and interests of individual governors.	Chair of Corporation and Director of Governance, overseen by the Search, Governance and Remuneration Committee and supported by committee chairs and the Principal & CEO.	Revised framework approved by 31 December 2026 and applied to all new appointments thereafter. Individual development plans arising from appraisal in place by 31 March 2027 and reviewed annually.

Fig. 8