

MINUTES FROM THE SECAT CEO Q&A SESSION

Held on 17th June 2026 at 12:00pm via Microsoft Teams

Chair: Ben Stickley, CEO, SECAT

Introduction

The SECAT CEO Q&A Session was held as part of the Trust's commitment to strengthening engagement with parents and carers across all SECAT schools. Questions were submitted in advance and through the live chat. The purpose of the session was to provide an opportunity for parents and carers to ask questions directly of the CEO.

1. Welcome and Purpose of the Session

- 1.1 Ben Stickley welcomed attendees and thanked them for attending.
- 1.2 It was confirmed that the session formed part of a programme of regular parental engagement opportunities and that future sessions would take place at least termly.
- 1.3 The next session was provisionally scheduled for 30th September 2026 at 12pm.
- 1.4 Attendees were advised that the meeting was being recorded and transcribed and that minutes would be published on the Trust governance website.
- 1.5 Katy Love, Governance Manager, monitored the chat facility and read questions submitted by attendees.

2. Educational Outcomes and School Improvement

- 2.1 Questions were raised regarding attainment across SECAT schools, particularly the difference in outcomes between Bournes Green, Hinguar, Richmond Avenue and Thorpedene.
- 2.2 The CEO clarified that Richmond Avenue was broadly in line with national averages, whilst Thorpedene remained below national averages and continued to be a significant focus for school improvement activity.
- 2.3 The Trust's school improvement structure was explained, including termly school improvement meetings involving school leaders, governors and Trust representatives.
- 2.4 Academy Committees, the Curriculum and Pupil Matters Committee and the Trust Board all receive information relating to educational performance and challenge leaders regarding progress.
- 2.5 The CEO explained that pupil mobility represented a significant factor affecting outcomes at Thorpedene, with a high number of pupils joining and leaving during their primary education.
- 2.6 It was noted that a significant number of pupils join the school late in their primary journey, reducing the time available for the school to influence outcomes.
- 2.7 Additional contextual factors included deprivation, free school meal eligibility and SEND need.
- 2.8 Parents questioned whether enough ownership and accountability was being taken for outcomes and highlighted the importance of improvement plans and measurable actions.
- 2.9 The CEO confirmed that improvement plans were in place and that governors and trustees regularly scrutinised progress.
- 2.10 It was further confirmed that support was being accessed through external partners including English and Maths Hubs.

3. Comparisons with Similar Schools

3.1 Parents asked how Thorpedene compared with Porters Grange and other schools serving the local community.

3.2 The CEO advised that he was unable to provide a detailed comparison during the meeting but agreed to review the information and provide further commentary after the session.

3.3 Parents emphasised that comparison with successful schools serving similar cohorts could provide useful learning.

3.4 Discussion took place regarding benchmarking against schools both within and beyond the Trust.

ACTION: CEO to review comparative performance information for Thorpedene against Porters Grange and provide further commentary after the session.

4. Disadvantage, SEND and Inclusion

4.1 Questions were raised regarding support for disadvantaged pupils and how the Trust was ensuring they achieved as well as their peers.

4.2 The CEO outlined support available through Trust inclusion arrangements, specialist services and local authority partnerships.

4.3 The role of the specialist teaching team and mental health support services was discussed.

4.4 A comment was received regarding awareness of local authority support services amongst staff.

4.5 The CEO welcomed the feedback and agreed that staff awareness and induction arrangements should continue to be strengthened.

4.6 Parents stressed the importance of viewing barriers faced by children as opportunities to improve long-term outcomes.

4.7 Questions were raised regarding SENCO staffing arrangements at Bournes Green Schools and whether part-time provision was sufficient.

4.8 The CEO explained that staffing structures were determined by individual schools according to budget and need and noted that part-time SENCO arrangements were common across the sector.

5. Secondary Transition and Quality of Education

5.1 Parents questioned how weaker outcomes in some primary schools impacted pupils entering Shoeburyness High School.

5.2 The CEO outlined curriculum alignment work and transition arrangements across the Trust.

5.3 Trust-wide projects and collaboration between schools were highlighted.

5.4 Questions were raised regarding oversight of quality of education at secondary level and support for diverse pupil needs.

5.5 The CEO referenced positive inspection outcomes and continuing work to improve opportunities for disadvantaged pupils.

5.6 It was confirmed that accountability for educational outcomes rests with school leaders, the CEO and ultimately the Trust Board.

6. Ofsted and Inspection Readiness

6.1 Questions were raised regarding preparations for the revised Ofsted framework.

6.2 Particular reference was made to the increased emphasis on inclusion and disadvantage.

6.3 The CEO advised that schools were not run solely to satisfy inspection criteria but confirmed that the Trust had reviewed the revised framework.

6.4 It was noted that inclusion remained central to the Trust's strategy.

6.5 Examples included the alternative resource base (ARB) provisions, specialist partnerships and Trust-wide inclusion leadership.

7. Swimming Provision

7.1 A significant proportion of the discussion focused on swimming provision.

7.2 Parents questioned the closure of pools at Bournes Green and Hinguar and the impact on swimming opportunities.

7.3 The CEO confirmed that swimming lessons continued through Shoeburyness Leisure Centre and the dual use agreement that Shoeburyness High School has to use this.

7.4 It was explained that all schools could access the facility and that National Curriculum requirements continued to be met.

7.5 Parents expressed concern that a limited number of sessions may not be sufficient for all pupils to become confident swimmers.

7.6 The CEO acknowledged the importance of swimming within a coastal community and agreed that additional opportunities would be beneficial where feasible, this is however down to individual schools to book.

7.7 Questions were raised regarding the future use of the former Bournes Green pool site.

7.8 The CEO confirmed that the pool was being filled in and that alternative sports and recreational provision was under consideration.

7.9 Parents requested consultation regarding future use of the site and the CEO welcomed suggestions.

8. Pool Safety and Maintenance

8.1 A concern was raised regarding damaged pool steps at Shoeburyness Leisure Centre.

8.2 It was reported that some less confident swimmers had experienced difficulties when leaving the pool.

8.3 The CEO agreed to ensure that the matter was reported to the local authority leisure provider for investigation.

ACTION: CEO to report concerns regarding damaged pool steps at Shoeburyness Leisure Centre to the local authority leisure provider for investigation.

9. Pool Expenditure and Financial Transparency

9.1 Multiple questions were raised regarding expenditure on temporary swimming pools and associated structures previously installed at Hinguar and Bournes Green.

9.2 The CEO explained the rationale behind the original decision, including significant maintenance and operational costs associated with existing pools.

9.3 It was explained that purchasing temporary pools had been assessed as more economical than hiring equivalent facilities.

9.4 The CEO advised that schools had subsequently decided not to continue funding the ongoing running costs of the pools.

9.5 It was confirmed that the temporary pools had been sold.

9.6 Several parents requested detailed information regarding expenditure, disposal costs and overall value for money.

9.7 Parents expressed concern regarding transparency and the use of public funds.

9.8 The CEO advised that expenditure was subject to oversight through audited accounts, Academy Committees, trustees and external regulatory processes.

9.9 It was noted that a number of parents continued to hold a strong interest in this matter.

10. School Funding and Resources

10.1 Questions were raised regarding whether schools received equal funding.

10.2 The CEO explained the operation of the National Funding Formula and the role of deprivation related funding.

10.3 It was confirmed that schools receive funding based largely on pupil numbers and levels of need.

10.4 Questions were raised regarding whether some schools benefited disproportionately from capital investment.

10.5 The CEO explained that investment decisions were informed by condition surveys, priorities and need.

11. Estates and Capital Projects

11.1 Questions were raised regarding delays to refurbishment works at Bournes Green, including Year 6 classrooms.

11.2 The CEO advised that delays had arisen due to staffing capacity issues within the estates team and competing priorities across the Trust estate.

11.3 It was confirmed that refurbishment remained part of the longer term estates strategy.

11.4 Concerns were also raised regarding facilities at Richmond Avenue Primary School.

11.5 The CEO outlined previous investment in playground improvements and explained that remedial works had been completed following contractor issues.

11.6 It was confirmed that the situation would continue to be monitored.

12. ParentKind and Parent Engagement

12.1 Questions were raised regarding the ParentKind engagement.

12.2 The CEO clarified that the initiative had not been shelved and remained part of the Trust's wider parental engagement strategy.

12.3 It was acknowledged that there had been challenges during the early stages of implementation but that support arrangements had subsequently improved.

12.4 Parents welcomed the opportunity to engage directly with Trust leaders.

12.5 Feedback was provided regarding meeting timings, notice periods and communication methods.

12.6 Several attendees suggested that future sessions should be held at varying times of day.

12.7 Suggestions included running multiple sessions and exploring additional engagement opportunities.

12.8 The CEO confirmed that feedback would be considered when planning future events.

12.9 It was reiterated that questions could be submitted in advance and that minutes would be made available.

13. Governance and Accountability

13.1 Discussion took place regarding the role of Academy Committees and trustees in representing parents.

13.2 The CEO explained that Academy Committee governors act as representatives of their school communities and provide a mechanism through which concerns can be raised.

13.3 The governance structure was described as providing extensive scrutiny of educational and financial matters.

13.4 The CEO reiterated that governors and trustees routinely challenge leaders regarding outcomes, spending and strategic priorities.

14. Closing Remarks

14.1 Attendees thanked the Trust for holding the session.

14.2 Several comments were received recognising the event as a positive step towards greater engagement and transparency.

14.3 The CEO thanked everyone for their participation and feedback.

14.4 The meeting closed at 12:57pm.