

**Minutes of the Diverse Academies Trust Board Meeting  
Wednesday 6 December 2023 at 5pm, at Diverse Education Centre, Retford**

Quorum Required:3

Trustees Present: 6

Trustee name	Initials	A = absence
Mrs M Blore	MB	
Mr L Donald	LD	A
Mrs J Mordue	JM	
Mr M Quigley MBE (Chair)	MQ	
Mr J Rolph	JR	
Mr D Schwarz	DS	
Mr I Storey	IS	

**In attendance (staff or other invited persons):**

Staff name	Initials	Role	A = Absence
Mr D Cotton	DC	Chief Executive Officer and Accounting Officer	
Mrs J Harrison Hill	JHH	Company Secretary and Governance Professional	

Agenda item number	Item	Action by who /when
1. DAT/35/2324	<b>Apologies for absence</b> Apologies for absence were received from Mr L Donald.	
2. DAT/36/2324	<b>Declaration of interest and notification of any changes to declaration made</b> There were no declarations of interest, either direct or indirect, for any items of business on the agenda. The Chair asked if anyone had any declarations to update. No new declarations of interests were made.	
3. DAT/37/2324	<b>Minutes of the meeting dated Wednesday 11 October 2023 <u>Public</u> and <u>Confidential</u></b> The Minutes of Wednesday 11 October were approved by the Board.	
4. DAT/38/2324	<b>Matters Arising:</b> <b>DAT/154/2223 <u>KCSIE update 2023</u> Trustees to complete by September.</b> <b>DAT/157/2223 <u>Declaration of Interest</u> To be completed by Trustees by September.</b> <b>DAT/158/2223 <u>Code of Conduct</u> To be completed by Trustees by September.</b> These items are now complete. <b>DAT/161/2223 <u>Exit Questionnaire</u></b> <b>Action: Mr Cotton to liaise with EDI consultant to discuss support to develop EDI objectives for Governance.</b> The Board were informed that a meeting had been arranged between Mr Corban COO, Mr Cotton CEO, Mr Spencer Head of People Attraction, Mrs Elway Head of Governance, and Mrs Harrison Hill Governance Professional to the Board, to look at Trustee recruitment including EDI.	



	<p>It was agreed that Mrs Mordue, Mr Schwarz, and Mrs Blore would also attend the meeting.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Mr Cotton to share best practice templates from Wylie Bisset with Audit and Risk Committee as they are received to allow co-invention to bring about a suitable resolution. The templates had now been shared with the Audit and Risk Committee. This item is now complete.</p> <p><b>DAT/10/2324 Key Stage 4</b> <b>Action:</b> Share think tank <a href="#">report</a> from schools on parental attitudes to attendance. The report was previously shared via email, this item is now complete.</p> <p><b>DAT/11/2324 Proposed action plan for Board and LAC relationship Development</b> <b>Action:</b> Trustees to feedback at Board meeting on 6 December 2023 availability to accommodate the above two proposals. Trustees were asked to inform Mrs Harrison Hill if they are available for Local Academy Committee meetings and visits. <b>Action:</b> Trustees to email JHH with availability for LAC meetings and visits.</p> <p><b>DAT/26/2324 Replacement Board Chair Recruitment Process</b> <b>Action:</b> Questions for candidate to be shared with all Trustees and Teams Meeting to be set up for 8 November 2023 at 6.00pm. The meeting was held on 8 November. This item is now complete. Mr Schwarz will begin to undertake the process for succession of Chair of Board, holding one to one discussion with Trustees and reviewing current commitments and handover. <b>Action:</b> Mrs Harrison Hill to set up one to one discussions.</p>	<p>JHH</p> <p>JHH</p>
<p>5. <b>DAT/39/2324</b></p> <p><b>DAT/40/2324</b></p> <p><b>DAT/41/2324</b></p> <p><b>DAT/42/2324</b></p> <p><b>DAT/43/2324</b></p>	<p><b>Chief Executive Officers Report</b></p> <p>Confidential Document: CEO Board <a href="#">report Dec 2023</a> was previously received by the Board. The CEO Board contained:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Vision, ethos and strategic direction of the organisation</li> <li>• Educational performance of the organisation and its pupils</li> <li>• Financial and business performance of the organisation</li> </ul> <p>Mr Cotton highlighted from the report that Ofsted inspections are expected for Tuxford Primary, Yeoman Park Academy and The Holgate Academy. An update was provided for the progress at Thrumpton Primary Academy following the flood. Trustees had received a tour of the temporary accommodation prior to the meeting. Feedback from Parents had been positive.</p> <p><b>DAT/40/2324</b> CONFIDENTIAL: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.</p> <p><b>DAT/41/2324</b> CONFIDENTIAL: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.</p> <p><b>DAT/42/2324</b> <u>Yeoman Park Academy building project</u> update was provided for Trustees informing them that the groundbreaking ceremony had been undertaken.</p> <p><b>DAT/43/2324</b> Trustees were informed of the meeting held at The Holgate Academy with the Regional Schools Director (RSD). The RSD was assured by the progress made.</p>	



<p><b>DAT/44/2324</b></p>	<p><u>Growth Strategy and Growth Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document: Appendix 2: <a href="#">Growth strategy</a> and Appendix 3: Confidential Document: <a href="#">Growth plan</a> was previously received by the Board.</li> </ul> <p>Discussion was held regarding the Growth Strategy and Plan with the outcomes of phase one informing future phases.</p> <p><b>Trustees approved</b> the Growth Strategy and Plan.</p>	
<p><b>DAT/45/2324</b></p>	<p><u>School improvement framework</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document: Appendix 1: <a href="#">School improvement framework</a> was previously received by the Board.</li> </ul> <p>Mr Cotton brought Trustees attention to the document noting that it was useful for external parties to capture how the Trust is improving schools or intervening when declining or has a low Ofsted rating.</p> <p>Trustees <b>noted</b> the report and agreed it resonated with language used widely within the Trust.</p>	
<p><b>DAT/46/2324</b></p>	<p><u>Vision and Values Installations</u></p> <p>Document: Appendix 4: <a href="#">Vision and values academy installations</a> was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>The document shows how the vision and values have been applied in context to each individual academy but with the theme of Diverse Academies Trust running through it.</p> <p>Trustees <b>commented</b> that during the visit to East Leake Academy staff had brought the vision and values to life in their discussions. When talking to students during the visit, they had communicated that stigma around students receiving extra support was not an issue and were positive about the benefits.</p>	
<p><b>DAT/47/2324</b></p>	<p><u>Educational performance of the organisation and its pupils</u></p> <p><b>Trustees queried</b> the attendance reports received and how they can determine persistent absence related to exclusion and how that brings the percentage down. And following this, if persistent absence and exclusions are removed from the information, is the general trend on absence improving.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Mrs Mordue to feedback to CEo's to look at how information on general absence trends can be reported to the Standards and Outcomes Committee.</p>	<p>JM</p>
<p><b>DAT/48/2324</b></p>	<p>CONFIDENTIAL: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.</p>	
<p><b>DAT/49/2324</b></p>	<p><u>Finance</u></p> <p><b>Trustees referred</b> to the CEO board report section 4.4 rationalisation of suppliers and <b>queried</b> if there was a Procurement Manager who monitors high percentage of spend on typical goods across the academies and supports to reduce that. Mr Cotton confirmed that there was a Procurement Manager who oversaw this.</p> <p>Referencing 4.5 of the report, <b>Trustees queried</b> if research was being undertaken to assess where areas of good practice was taking place in Post 16 Institutions. Mr Cotton confirmed that this is being investigated and a project is underway to maximise the offer and delivery of hybrid learning,</p> <p><b>Trustees raised</b> that a recent article in 'Governors Matters' refers to in school catering and assurances. As the Trust has moved to predominately inhouse catering how are assurances received regarding food safety standard?</p> <p>Mr Cotton explained that a Catering Manager had been recruited to ensure expertise and all appropriate certificates are in place.</p> <p>Discussion was held regarding current catering contracts, profits and how used to support free school meals, and potential audits for Internal auditors.</p>	

<p>DAT/50/2324</p>	<p>Document: Appendix 5: <a href="#">S&amp;O safeguarding report</a> was previously received by the Board. Trustees noted the report. The Standard and Outcomes Committee had received and reviewed the report at the committee meeting.</p>	
<p>6. DAT/51/2324</p>	<p><b>Committee Meeting Update from Chairs</b>  - <a href="#">Finance and Resources Committee update (20/11/2023)</a>  Mr J Rolph, Chair of Finance and Resources Committee provided the Board with an update from the Committee meeting:  Document link: <a href="#">Academy trust reserves - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</a> was previously received by the Board.  Mr Rolph discussed the EFSA reserves guidance and informed the Board this had been discussed at the Finance and Resources Committee meeting and views sought from external auditors. Further research is being undertaken on the guidance considering assets such as staff and buildings to develop the reserves policy.  Reserves are within the current policy (2.5% -5%).  Documents: Financial Performance <a href="#">Secondary</a> , Financial Performance <a href="#">Sept 23</a> and Financial Performance <a href="#">October 23</a> were previously received by the Board.  Mr Rolph reported that financial reports show figures are in line with budget for the year. Re-forecasting will take place at the end of December. It is expected that the Trust will breakeven at year end. A deeper analysis within groups of schools e.g. Secondary, Primary and Post 16 is being undertaken with the first report on Secondaries presented to the committee.  Post 16 is showing a loss across the majority of academies; however, parents select schools on the basis of Post 16 provision.  Mr Cotton informed trustees that a workstream is being undertaken regarding Post 16 provision and hybrid offers to provide a broader offer and be more cost effective.  Mrs Mordue, Link Careers Trustee, added that East Leake Academy had asked students to complete a form asking which subjects would like to study that are not currently offered, suggesting that all academies undertook this as part of careers building to build a picture of what all schools collectively want on the curriculum.  <b>Trustees queried</b> if external collaboration with academies outside the Trust was being considered to share resources.  Mr Cotton explained that this was not currently being discussed due to the priority is to develop collaboration inside the Trust. Currently Sixth Forms are working in isolation. External collaboration is an area which can be explored when further ahead in the development.  Discussion was held on the current barriers to hybrid learning across the Sixth Forms within the Trust regarding resources, independent learning, technical equipment, curriculum design, course programmes and the balance between face-to-face learning and online.  Document: Benchmarking <a href="#">report 2023</a> was previously received by the Board.  Mr Rolph informed the Board that the Finance and Resources Committee had looked at the report in depth.  The Board noted the benchmarking report and breakdown of information into categories for academies not just within the Trust.  The report shows the Trust is not strong at raising income from other areas and this is an area which the Chief Operating Officer is exploring.  Mr Rolph informed that Board that the Finance and Resources Committee meeting were presented with the audit findings report which had a clean audit result.</p>	



<p><b>DAT/52/2324</b></p>	<p>Discussion was held regarding pension surpluses and how to treat within the accounts.  Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.  The financial statements were not ready to be presented at the Finance and Resources Committee, a draft has now been provided, the figures are correct but not at the point where accounts can be approved.  <b>Trustees agreed</b> for the final Trustee report and financial statements to be circulated to the Board once finalised for approval by the Chair.  Mr Rolph confirmed that at the last Board meeting the pay increases for teachers, support staff, senior executives and governance professional were agreed.  The Chief Executive Officer Performance and Review Panel met to discuss the pay and has agreed the CEO salary.</p> <p>– <u>Standards and Outcomes update (15/11/2023)</u></p> <p>Mr D Schwarz, Chair of Standards and Outcomes Committee, provided the Board with an update from the Committee meeting:  The Committee held a safeguarding discussion with particular attention paid to monitoring and filtering. Attendance was also a focus of discussion.  Following Trustees querying how Progress 8 scores will be reported to the Committee, it has been agreed that Mr Donald would meet with the Chief Education Officers to discuss a programme of reporting and review of performance measures to the Committee.  The Committee raised concern regarding the number of polices requiring approval and referred to the Board the suggestion that they be spread across the year.  <b>Action:</b> Mr Cotton to review the timing of polices to Committees to even across the year.  Mr Schwarz informed the Board that the Committee had reviewed The Holgate Academy improvement plan, confirming that the plan aligns to the progress referred to in the Regional Directors visit.  The Committee discussed the issue of SEND link governors not attending update sessions.</p>	
<p><b>DAT/53/2324</b></p>	<p>– <u>Audit and Risk Committee update (29/11/2023)</u></p> <p>Mr I Storey, Chair of Audit and Risk Committee, provided the Board with an update from the Committee meeting:  Wylie Bissett the new internal auditors attended the meeting, bringing experience and input.  The Committee discussed the risk process, improvements to the process have been made and a new format based on wider identification of risks is being developed with the final version to be reviewed by the Committee in February 2024 and then by the Board.  The Committee reviewed the external risks identified by Browne Jacobson.  A deep dive presentation was received on Data Protection, IT security and privacy. The Committee are assured by the mitigations in place.  The Committee discussed and agreed the internal audit programme as referred to in the Chief Executives Report.  The Internal Scrutiny report was reviewed.  The external audit findings report was reviewed and reported it was a clean audit report.  Mr Storey informed the Board that Wylie Bissett had a view that the Audit findings report should be reported to Audit and Risk and not Finance and Resources, raising that they considered a conflict arises in the crossover of membership between the committees with one member being on both committees.</p>	

<p><b>DAT/54/2324</b></p>	<p>Guidance had been sought from the NGA goldline regarding the crossover of membership between committees, and advice received was that the committee membership is not contravening the Academy Trust Handbook requirements.</p> <p>Discussion was held regarding the membership of the two committees, and it was felt to be a strength to have crossover as many Trusts have combined Audit and Risk and Finance Committees.</p> <p>The Committee <b>recommended</b> to the Trust Board the extension of external auditors' contract for a further year.</p> <p>The register of business interest was reviewed for Trustees, Governors, Members and Executive Team.</p> <p>Business Continuity Audits actions from the previous year were reviewed.</p> <p>– <u>Governance and Partnership update (08/11/2023)</u></p> <p>Mr M Quigley, Chair of Governance and Partnership Committee, provided the Board with an update from the Committee meeting:</p> <p>Following the resignation of Miss N Marriott on the 8 November, the Board discussed the Audit and Risk Committee had only two members. Mrs Blore agreed to become a member of the Audit and Risk Committee.</p> <p>The Committee recommended to the Board the Diversity report for approval and publishing on the Trust website.</p> <p>The Committee agreed the changes made to the draft Governance Strategy document for recommendation to Board for approval.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to recommend to the Board that further work is to be carried out for recruiting volunteers.</p> <p>The Committee reviewed the Local Academy Feedback forms, Action Plans and Self evaluations of Academy Committees.</p> <p>Training and engagement was discussed with further exploration on how to improve engagement.</p> <p>The Committee approved the 23-24 Training plan.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the Chairs Governors conference and questions raised from Chairs of LACs regarding finance.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Mr Cotton to enquire if consistent response is being provided by Finance Manager to LAC's.</p>	<p>DC</p>
<p><b>DAT/55/2324</b></p>	<p><b>Policies approved at Committees</b></p> <p><b>Audit &amp; Risk Committee:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whistleblowing Policy</li> </ul> <p><b>Standards &amp; Outcomes Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-bullying Policy</li> <li>• Attendance Policy &amp; appendix</li> <li>• Behaviour Policy</li> <li>• Early Years Foundation Stage Policy &amp; Appendix</li> <li>• Online Safety Policy</li> <li>• Safeguarding and Low Level Concerns Policy recommended to Board for approval</li> <li>• Suspensions and Exclusions of Pupils Policy</li> </ul> <p><b>Finance and Resources Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whistleblowing Policy (recommended future approval at A&amp;R)</li> <li>• Staff Code of Conduct Policy</li> <li>• Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy &amp; Appendices</li> <li>• Reserve and Investment Policy</li> <li>• Health and Safety policy recommended for Board approval</li> </ul> <p><b>Governance and Partnership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scheme of Delegation reviewed for Board approval (agenda item 8)</li> </ul>	
<p><b>DAT/56/2324</b></p>	<p>Policies for approval at Board:</p>	



	<p>– Safeguarding and Low Level Concerns <a href="#">Policy &amp; summary of changes</a></p> <p>Health and Safety <a href="#">Policy &amp; summary of changes</a></p> <p>The Board <b>approved</b> the Safeguarding and low-level concerns policy and Health and Safety Policy.</p>	
7. DAT/57/2324	<p><b>Statutory Updates, Changes to legal documents and Companies House filing</b></p> <p>The Board were informed that Companies House and GIAS had been updated to reflect the resignation of Miss N Marriott.</p>	
8. DAT/58/2324 DAT/59/2324 DAT/60/2324 DAT/61/2324	<p><b>Annual Requirements</b></p> <p>Document: <a href="#">Scheme of Delegation</a> was previously received by the Board. The Board agreed and approved the Scheme of Delegation.</p> <p>Document: <a href="#">Draft Trustee Year-end &amp; financial statements report</a> was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Having discussed under agenda item 6 Trustees agreed for the Final Trustee report and financial statements to be circulated to the Board once finalised for approval by the Chair</p> <p>Document: <a href="#">Internal Scrutiny report</a> was previously received by the Board. Mr Storey informed the Board that the format was the same as the previous year with a summary of the key financial controls audit by ICCA and Business Continuity Audits by Karen Bonser Consultancy included in the report.</p> <p><b>Trustees agreed</b> the Internal Scrutiny report.</p> <p>Document: <a href="#">Audit findings report</a> was previously received by the Board. <b>Trustees approved</b> the audit findings report with management responses.</p>	
9. DAT/62/2324 DAT/63/2324 DAT/64/2324 DAT/65/2324 DAT/66/2324 DAT/67/2324 DAT/68/2324 DAT/69/2324	<p><b>Trustee items:</b></p> <p>Document: Self-Evaluation <a href="#">Action plan update</a> was previously received by the Board</p> <p>The Board Self-evaluation plan had been updated with progress following the communication review.</p> <p>Trustees were encouraged to <a href="#">register with CST</a>. As well as receiving the briefing, they will gain access to wider CST benefits including their <a href="#">Trustee and Governance Leaders Professional Community</a> and a range of tools, guidance, and policy papers on their website.</p> <p>Document: <a href="#">Final Diversity Indicators September 2023</a> was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Trustees noted the report and approved for publication on the trust website.</p> <p>Chair succession planning this item was discussed under agenda item 4, DAT/26/2324.</p> <p>The Board <b>approved</b> the continuation of Browne Jacobson for legal support and advice for the Trust. Approved.</p> <p><a href="#">External Auditors contract</a> extension was approved see agenda item 6.</p> <p>Document: <a href="#">Trustee Application Form</a> was previously received by the Board. Trustees agreed to offer the opportunity for an informal chat via Microsoft Teams.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> JHH to contact to set up informal chat on Teams between applicant and M Blore and J Mordue.</p> <p><b>Chairs Correspondence</b></p> <p><b>Confidential Document:</b> <a href="#">Hillocks Primary Academy 01122023</a> was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Mr Quigley informed the Board that the letter recognised that the Academy is moving in the right direction. The Academy joined the Trust with an Ofsted rating of Special Measures, it has now been in the Trust just under three years. The recent Ofsted report refers to significant improvements achieved in recent years.</p>	JHH

<p>10. DAT/70/2324</p> <p>DAT/71/2324</p>	<p><b>Executive items:</b>  <u>Thrumpton Primary Academy Update</u>  Document: Academy serious incident <a href="#">report</a> was previously received by the Board.  The Trustees discussed the report, having previously received a tour of the temporary accommodation. Mr Cotton informed the Board that a copy of the report has been shared with DfE, Ofsted, Local Authority and Insurance.  Mr Corban and Mrs Harvey are undertaking a review of the incident to assess areas of good practice and areas for learning.</p> <p><u>Hillocks Ofsted Report</u>  Document: Hillocks Ofsted <a href="#">report</a> was previously received by the Board. The Board having previously discussed the verbal feedback noted the report.</p>	
<p>11. DAT/72/2324</p>	<p><b>Determination of Confidentiality</b>  Trustees considered whether anything discussed during the meeting should be deemed as confidential. It was resolved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a document under agenda item 5 DAT/39/2324 would be confidential until consultation is complete.</li> <li>- an item under agenda item 5 DAT/40/2324 would remain confidential until a consultation is complete.</li> <li>- An item discussed under agenda item 5 DAT/41/2324 would remain confidential until a decision was made public.</li> <li>- A document under agenda item 5 DAT/44/2324 would remain confidential.</li> <li>- An item discussed under agenda item 5 DAT/48/2324 would remain confidential.</li> <li>- An item discussed under agenda item 6 DAT/51/2324 would remain confidential until published.</li> <li>- A document under agenda item 9 DAT/69/2324 would remain confidential.</li> </ul> <p><b>Equalities Act consideration</b>  Trustees discussed trustee recruitment and inclusivity of the process, and resolved meet to discuss process on 11 December 2023.</p> <p><b>Have decisions been made according to the 7 Nolan Principles</b>  Trustees were content that all decisions made adhere to the seven Nolan principles.</p> <p><b>Consider any item to be referred to Charities Commission</b>  Trustees resolved that no items required reporting to the Charities Commission.</p>	
<p>12. DAT/73/2324</p>	<p>Date and time of next meeting: <b>Wednesday 31 January 2024</b> at Diverse Education Centre, Retford.</p>	

The meeting closed at: 19:36

Minutes agreed by Chair:

