

Minutes of the Diverse Academies Trust Board Meeting Wednesday 19 March 2025 at 5pm, at Diverse Education Centre, Retford

Quorum Required:3

Trustees Present:

Trustee name	Initials	A = absence
Mrs M Blore	MB	
Mrs J Mordue	JM	
Mr M Quigley MBE (Chair)	MQ	
Mr J Robertson	JMR	
Mr J Rolph	JR	
Mr D Schwarz	DS	
Mr P Simpson	PS	virtual
Mr I Storey	IS	
Mr R Vizma	RV	

Quorum required: 3

Trustees Present: 9 (of which 1 virtually)

In attendance (staff or other invited persons):

Staff name	Initials	Role	A = Absence
Mr D Cotton	DC	Chief Executive Officer and Accounting Officer	
Mrs C Saxelby	CS	Executive Principal	
Mrs J Harrison Hill	JHH	Company Secretary and Governance Professional	
L Dolben		Observer for External review of Governance	

Agenda item number	Item	Action by who/when
1. DAT/96/2425	Apologies for absence Due to personal reasons, Mr P Simpson participated in the meeting remotely. L Dolben was welcomed to the meeting, attending as an observer for the external review of governance commissioned by the Board.	
2. DAT/97/2425	Declaration of interest and notification of any changes to declaration made 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/98/2425	Minutes of the meeting dated Wednesday 29 January 2025 public and confidential.	

	The public and confidential minutes of the meeting 29 January 2025 were agreed and approved by the Chair.	
4. DAT/99/2425	<p>Matters Arising: DAT/69/2425 Primary opening hours consultation Action: Mr Cotton agreed to review the times and respond if they are not correct to meet statutory requirements Mr Cotton confirmed that the times and proposals were correct within the consultation and met regulations required. This item is now complete.</p> <p>DAT/79/2425 Modern Slavery Statement Action: Mr Cotton to follow up on existing suppliers in relation to adherence to the Modern Slavery Act. Mr Cotton confirmed that the follow up to existing suppliers had been undertaken. This item is now complete.</p> <p>DAT/81/2425 Cyber Security update training Action: Trustees to complete Cyber Security Training and Inform Mrs J Harrison Hill when completed.</p> <p>DAT/82/2425 GDPR Training link Action: Trustees to complete GDPR Training and Inform Mrs J Harrison Hill when completed. Mrs Harrison Hill informed the Board that completion of GDPR and Cyber security was complete with the exception of Mrs Mordue, who had just returned from sabbatical, in the process of completing.</p> <p>DAT/83/2425 External Review of Governance Action: Mrs J Harrison Hill and Mrs A Elway to present recommendation to Governance and Partnership Committee for appointment of external governance reviewers. The Governance and Partnership Committee has approved the commission of CST for the external governance review which is currently underway.</p> <p>DAT/93/2425 Yeoman Park Academy Ofsted Inspection Action: Trust Board to send a letter of congratulations to Yeoman Park Academy. It was confirmed a letter of congratulations had been sent. This item is now complete.</p>	
5. DAT/100/2425	<p>Presentation of EDI progress within Trust Document: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion was previously received by the Board. Mrs C Saxelby, Executive Principal, presented to the Board on work and progress to develop equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the trust. Mrs Saxelby informed the Board of the approach to assessing EDI, then discussed strengths, areas for development and progress towards these areas from the report which reported on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas of Strength • Areas for development • Progress so far • Examples of individual academy priorities • How are we going to sustain <p>Trustees queried if the report was based on data or perception, it was clarified that it was based on perception from staff. Areas of development were discussed for both staff and students, noting steps taken to prevent tokenism.</p>	

	<p>Every Academy has an EDI champion: the principal in primary schools and a senior leader in secondary schools. Training with the EDI external consultant has been undertaken.</p> <p>Trustees referred to the report querying what type of discrimination is being seen that requires communication development.</p> <p>Mrs Saxelby gave an example of supporting neurodivergent adults in the workplace, and communicating how the trust supports those colleagues in different ways to accommodate different perspectives.</p> <p>A trust policy for EDI is in place, with some wording revised to avoid negative connotations.</p> <p>Trustees raised that language used in all policies needs to be considered.</p> <p>Trustees discussed training encouraging questions to gain understanding of different perspectives.</p> <p>Mrs Saxelby discussed the INSET training which had taken place for EDI covering subjects such as supporting neurodivergent adults, inclusive spaces and recognising micro aggressions.</p> <p>Each academy has an action plan in place specific to the context, relating to training and support for staff and students.</p> <p>Trustees expressed concerns about the organisations used for training staff and students on equality, particularly regarding the transgender community, ensuring their information on single-sex spaces aligns with the Equality Act.</p> <p>Following trustees querying how EDI would be codified across all academies, to ensure the non-negotiables are enacted in the same way and do not fall by the wayside, Mrs Saxelby explained that this would be through regular updates, sharing good practice, staff training, academy improvement plans and embedding throughout the Trust.</p> <p>Discussion was held on non-negotiables and the culture of belonging linking into these.</p> <p>Trustees queried if there is a culture of peer-to-peer challenges to banter and micro aggression comments amongst staff.</p> <p>It was discussed that changes to the culture are being embedded with some areas more embedded than others.</p> <p>It was clarified that there is no case for considering that someone is being oversensitive, as it is a perspective and awareness to the position of the person feeling those emotions. Trustees sought clarification on "collective belonging" and were informed that it means feeling a sense of belonging despite differences and being able to thrive and feel valued.</p> <p>Mr Cotton clarified that following the key workstream on EDI the strategic objective of EDI has now been moved into day-to-day operation to progress work further.</p> <p>Trustees asked if future sessions of EDI training could be shared with Trustees for potential attendance.</p> <p>Action: J Harrison Hill to liaise with Mrs Saxelby for future dates and share with Board.</p> <p>Mrs Saxelby left the meeting at 17:38</p>	JHH
6.	Review LAC Attendance feedback	

<p>DAT/101/2425</p>	<p>Document: Trustee Attendance at LAC Committees was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>A discussion was held regarding the approach to reviewing the reports and the purpose of attendance, with the aim of fostering better relationships and communication. Trustees were asked to consider whether a review of the feedback would be more beneficial after all committees had been attended. This review could then be integrated into the work being undertaken by the Head of Governance to assess how all the meetings align to look at next steps and bring to the next Board meeting.</p> <p>Trustees discussed feedback from Local Academy Committees on attendance of Trustees and this was considered as a potential discussion at the Governor conference. Following discussion on how to follow up on the momentum of building relationships it was agreed that Mr Schwarz would write to Chair of Governors with a mid-term update on the process.</p> <p>Individualised responses to questions raised to Trustees by LAC's are being addressed through Executive Principals or Head of Governance.</p> <p>Action: Chair of Board to communicate a mid-term update to Chair of Governors following Trustees attendance at LAC meetings.</p> <p>Mr Schwarz raised that following agreement at Board to remove the 360-degree process with Chairs of Governors, he was offering them a one to one if they felt it would be beneficial.</p>	<p>DS</p>
<p>7. DAT/102/2425</p>	<p>Chief Executive Officers Report</p> <p>Documents: CEO Board Report March 2025, was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Mr Cotton discussed the CEO Board report which covered the following areas updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction Vision, ethos, and strategic direction of the organisation Educational performance of the organisation and its pupils Financial and business performance of the organisation <p>Mr Cotton informed Trustees that a copy of the annual report had been distributed to various stakeholders and external stakeholders to celebrate collaboration and successes.</p> <p>Strategic Objective term 2 evaluations will be provided at the next Board meeting. Over the next 18 months planning for the following five-year strategic objective plan will be developed, working with the Board and its committees on priorities.</p> <p>Trustees requested that a time plan be developed for the strategic objective planning priorities, including who is involved, to inform how shaped over the period and to enable Trustees to have the opportunity to provide feedback.</p> <p>Action: Mr Cotton to develop time plan for strategic objective five-year plan development to bring to board.</p> <p>Trustees then discussed government priorities and the reviews currently taking place with some indications being outlined in the interim report which could be built into the plan</p>	<p>DC</p>

<p>DAT/103/2425</p>	<p>as early indications. Mr Cotton confirmed that these are being monitored and will be built into the Strategic Objective Plan.</p> <p>Trustees referred to the annual report and suggested that incorporating more quotes from students, staff and governors. The report was also discussed highlighting that the expansion of the four-step school improvement model had been refined, following research, to include the behaviours of engage, unite and reflect to drive effective implementation.</p> <p>Following Trustees asking if there was an over reliance on staff surveys Mr Cotton clarified that this is a workstream on strategic objective 3, to develop pulse surveys, focus groups and communication with staff.</p> <p>The Board were updated that Yeoman Park Academy move into the new premises after the easter break.</p> <p>A visit from Cllr Ben Bradley and Cllr Sam Smith is taking place on 21 March 2025, during which a cheque is being presented for £240k, from Nottinghamshire County Council, to support funding of furniture and ICT infrastructure for Thoresby Vale Primary Academy.</p> <p>Trustees refereed to the Mock examination results in the report, querying if these are aligned with what would normally be expected at this point. Mr Cotton clarified that a deliberate decision was made not to use predicted grades; the results are based on actuals for December 2024 mocks. Another round of mock examinations have just been completed, and the results are showing a significant shift which are aligned with expectations for this point in the academic year. Primaries are currently undertaking a similar process. The Board were informed that this is a positive picture in terms of improvements.</p> <p>Trustees queried if improvements had been seen in English and Maths following previous concerns.</p> <p>Mr Cotton clarified that improvements are being seen regarding Maths in Queen Elizabeths Academy.</p> <p>A discussion was held on the in-depth scrutinising of the results by Queen Elizabeth Academy LAC.</p> <p>Document: Appendix 1:Safeguarding; Culture and Compliance report was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>The Safeguarding culture and compliance document had been reviewed by the Standards and Outcomes Committee and shared with the Board. Trustees had no further questions on the report.</p> <p>Confidential Document: This document and its discussion was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.</p> <p>Trustees raised the people value proposition, querying the current stage of progress to the approaching key recruitment time for academies.</p> <p>Mr Cotton explained that this had been discussed during the Finance and Resources Committee and Mrs Green could provide more in-depth details should the minutes not provide the information sought.</p>	
<p>8. DAT/104/2425</p>	<p>Committee Meeting Update from Chairs</p> <p>Draft minutes from the committees were previously received by the Board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <u>Finance and Resources Committee update (10/03/2025)</u> 	

<p>DAT/105/2425</p>	<p>Documents: Financial performance Report and SRMSAT were previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Mr Rolph, Chair of Finance and Resources Committee updated the Board on the Committee meeting:</p> <p>Risks and opportunities were discussed noting the main threat was the government funding of National Insurance increases.</p> <p>Forecast 2 is being prepared based on actuals to January 2025 to provide a further update to outturn for the year. It is expected that there will be a breakeven outturn.</p> <p>HR and people planning, recruitment and salaries were discussed at the committee meeting, Mr Rolph provided the board with a detailed update on the discussion held.</p> <p>The Board were informed that eligibility for Teacher's pension was approved for senior levels of teaching staff as detailed in the minutes of the committee.</p> <p>Budget plans for Thoresby Vale Academy and Horizon Academy were reviewed with a summary of discussion held provided to the Board.</p> <p>The Gender Pay Gap report was reviewed by the committee, noting the discussion held regarding comparison without the additional inhouse catering and cleaning roles.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the usefulness of the report and need to ensure equal pay without discrepancies between male and female roles.</p> <p>Trustees approved the Gender Pay Gap report.</p> <p>The committee had reviewed the School Resource Self-assessment (SRMSAT), Mr Rolph explained the purpose of the document and compliance aligned to the Academy Trust Handbook. The report is signed off by the Accounting Officer.</p> <p>The financial performance report was reviewed by the Committee and discussion was held on agility to respond to changing circumstances.</p> <p>– Standards and Outcomes update (05/03/2025)</p> <p>Mr Schwarz, Chair of Standards and Outcomes Committee updated the Board on the Committee meeting:</p> <p>A presentation and discussion was held on alternative pathways and mental health.</p> <p>Acknowledging the efforts made to ensure unregistered alternative provisions meet required standards, and the work by staff to place students in the most suitable provisions.</p> <p>Trustees queried if there is a policy for unregistered provision and were assured that the alternative provision policy includes utilisation of unregistered provision and due diligence requirements.</p> <p>Mocks exams were reviewed and progress discussed.</p> <p>Discussion on risk appetite was deferred to the next committee meeting.</p> <p>Discussion was held regarding The Holgate Academy, Hillocks Primary Academy and Samuel Barlow Primary Academy regarding challenge of students.</p> <p>The safeguarding reports was discussed by the committee and a strength was noted in the increase in reporting culture.</p> <p>Progress in Maths is showing improvement in Queen Elizabeth Academy.</p> <p>DfE RISE teams were discussed at the committee.</p>	
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<p>DAT/106/2425</p>	<p>Work is in progress to ensure time for discussion is more effective during meetings when reports are received in advance.</p> <p>– <u>Audit and Risk Committee update (26/02/2025)</u></p> <p>Documents: Internal Audit reports were previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Mr Storey, Chair of Audit and Risk Committee updated the Board on the Committee meeting:</p> <p>The committee reviewed the internal audits undertaken by WBG, these audits had been previously shared with trustees and generated questions for the committee to raise.</p> <p>The internal audits had substantial assurance with recommendations which will be monitored on the actions tracker for progress.</p> <p>Changes to the risk register following Finance and Resources committee review were approved by the committee. Risk appetites for Audit and Risk 'owned' risks were agreed.</p> <p>The next step is for those changes to be updated in the Risk Register. The remaining committees are in the process of reviewing risk appetites.</p> <p>The Board meeting in July will review the risk appetite statements as a whole.</p> <p>Cyber security accreditation certificate has been completed.</p> <p>The committee reviewed the risk management policy, but approval was not given due amendments required to the wording to ensure board committees take ownership of risks within their remit. This will be brought back to the next committee meeting.</p>	
<p>DAT/107/2425</p>	<p>– <u>Governance and Partnership (12/02/2025)</u></p> <p>Mr Quigley, Chair of Governance and Partnership Committee updated the Board on the Committee meeting:</p> <p>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was a discussion by the committee with a recommendation for a presentation to Board on EDI progress.</p> <p>The committee reviewed the tenders and commissioned the external governance review (as delegated by the Board).</p> <p>The committee agreed for a separate meeting to be arranged for trustees to receive feedback from the review on 20 May 2025, 4.00pm at Retford Education Centre.</p> <p>Policies approved at Committees</p> <p>Standards & Outcomes Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supporting students with medical conditions ○ Behaviour Policy <p>Finance and Resources Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expenses and benefits policy ○ Charging and Remissions Policy ○ Levels of Authority (recommended for approval) <p>Audit and Risk Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Risk Management Policy deferred by committee to 4 June 2025 	
<p>DAT/108/2425</p>	<p>Policies for approval at Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of Authority <p>The Board were informed that the levels of authority have been reviewed at Finance and Resources Committee, with</p>	

	<p>monetary amounts predetermined by DfE and Academy Trust Handbook. The Board approved the levels of Authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender pay gap report <p>The Board were informed that the Gender Pay Gap report have been reviewed at Finance and Resources Committee. The Board approved the report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governor Allowances & Summary <p>The Board approved the Governor allowances policy.</p>	
<p>9. DAT/109/2425</p>	<p>Statutory Updates, Changes to legal documents and Companies House filing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr L Donald removed from Companies house as Trustee/Director with effect from 6 February following resignation. Mrs E Rew no longer a Member of the Trust now a Governor at Tuxford Primary Academy. Thoresby Vale Academy supplementary funding agreement <p>The funding agreement for Thoresby Vale Academy has been signed following approval by the Board for either Mr D Schwarz or Mr J Rolph to sign legal documents on the Boards behalf for the opening of Thoresby Vale Academy and Horizons Academy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yeoman Park Academy deed of Variation 110 to 138 pupils <p>The deed of variation was a legal formality in line with DfE requirements to capture the change from 110 students to 138. This document has now been approved and signed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bracken Lane Primary Academy Grant Agreement <p>The document for Section 106 funding was approved and signed.</p>	
<p>10. DAT/110/2425</p>	<p>Annual Requirements</p> <p>School Resource Self-assessment tool submission SRMSAT (March 2025)</p> <p>As discussed under agenda item 8 DAT/104/2425 the SRMSAT is due for submission and has been reviewed by the Finance and Resources Committee.</p>	
<p>11. DAT/111/2425</p>	<p>Trustee items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chairs Correspondence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resignation letter Mr L Donald (shared via email) <p>The resignation letter had previously been circulated to all Trustees.</p>	
<p>DAT/112/2425</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External Review of Governance <p>The External Review of Governance is underway and feedback meeting date proposed is 20 May 2025 at 4.00om at Retford Education Centre.</p>	
<p>DAT/113/2425</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delegated authority for sign of legal documents Thoresby vale and Horizons Academy <p>Email approval had been given by Trustees consenting to Mr D Schwarz and/or Mr J Rolph to sign legal documents relating to the new academies Thoresby Vale and Horizon Academy. Documents are first reviewed by our retained solicitors.</p>	
<p>DAT/114/2425</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguarding link Trustee vacancy <p>Following the resignation of the safeguarding link trustee, an email had been sent to all trustees inviting expressions of</p>	

	interest in taking up the role. Trustees are encouraged to consider this opportunity.	
12. DAT/115/2425 DAT/116/2425 DAT/117/2425 DAT/118/2425	<p>Executive items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes. • Annual Report <p>This item was discussed under agenda item 7.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horizon Section 10 Consultation Report <p>Document: Horizon Section 10 Consultation report was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>The consultation process was detailed in the report noting the positive responses.</p> <p>Trustees noted the report and consultation process which had taken place approving that the process had been completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RISE Team update <p>Mr Cotton informed Trustees that The Holgate Academy and Hillocks Primary Academy had both qualified for support from the DfE RISE team. Trustees were updated on the meeting between Mr Cotton and the Regional Director to discuss the resources and support from the RISE Team.</p> <p>Currently timelines and resources are not yet clearly defined.</p>	
13. DAT/119/2425	<p>Determination of Confidentiality</p> <p>Trustees considered whether anything discussed during the meeting should be deemed as confidential. It was resolved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An item discussed under agenda item 12 DAT/115/2425 would remain confidential to the Board until completion. • An item discussed under agenda item 7 DAT/103/2425 would remain confidential to the Board due to individual roles being identifiable. <p>Equalities Act consideration</p> <p>The Trustees had received a presentation on EDI and discussed the progress of EDI within the Trust and its embedding through the culture of Diverse Academies.</p> <p>Have decisions been made according to the 7 Nolan Principles</p> <p>Trustees were content that all decisions made adhere to the seven Nolan principle</p> <p>Consider any item to be referred to Charities Commission</p> <p>Trustees resolved that there were no items which needed to be referred to the Charities Commission.</p>	
14. DAT/120/2425	Date and time of next meeting: Wednesday 14 May 2025, 5.00pm at Diverse Education Centre, Retford.	

The meeting closed at:

Minutes agreed by Chair: