

Minutes of the Diverse Academies Trust Board Meeting 29 January 2025 at 5pm, at Diverse Education Centre, Retford

Quorum Required:3

Trustees Present: 8

Trustee name	Initials	A = absence
Mrs M Blore	MB	
Mr L Donald	LD	A
Mrs J Mordue	JM	A
Mr M Quigley MBE (Chair)	MQ	From 17:07
Mr J Roberston	JMR	
Mr J Rolph	JR	
Mr D Schwarz	DS	
Mr P Simpson	PS	
Mr I Storey	IS	
Mr R Vizma	RV	

In attendance (staff or other invited persons):

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

Agenda item number	Item	Action by who/when
1. DAT/60/2425	Apologies for absence. Mr Schwarz welcomed Mr J Robertson to his first Board meeting and asked trustees who had not already met him to introduce themselves. The Board were informed that Mrs Elway was attending to observe the meeting and report on how meetings fit together. Apologies were received and accepted from Mrs J Mordue. Mr Schwarz informed the Board that he has communicated with Mrs Mordue and discussed her resuming her duties as Trustee from after February half term. Mr L Donald was absent from the meeting, no apologies had been received.	
DAT/61/2425	Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes. <i>Post meeting note: Mr Donald submitted his resignation as Trustee on 6 February with immediate effect.</i>	
2. DAT/62/2425	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/63/2425	Minutes of the meeting dated Wednesday 4 December 2024 public and confidential. The minutes of the meeting held Wednesday 4 December were agreed and approved.	
4. DAT/64/2425	Matters Arising: DAT/42/2425 Annual Report <i>Discussion on additional statement from the new Chair for the current year.</i> Action: Mr Cotton to take back to see how this might work within the report. The Board were informed that a statement from the new Chair of Trustees has been included. This item is now complete.	
5. DAT/65/2425	Chief Executive Officers Report Document: Chief Executive Officers Report was Previously Received by the Board. Mr Cotton discussed the Chief Executive Officers report which detailed: <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 	
DAT/66/2425	The Board were referred to the report detailing the delay to the moving date for Yeoman Park Academy, this is to allow checks to be undertaken. Mr Cotton requested approval to move the closure dates from the previously agreed dates to the following: closure on 3rd and 4th April 2025, prior to the Easter break, and 22nd to 25th April 2025, following the Easter break.	
DAT/67/2425	Trustees agreed the revised closure dates. Mr Cotton informed the Trustees of the appointment of a new Principal, Mr L Beesley to Horizons Academy. Appointment will be from 1 April 2025 to ensure a strong handover and preparation work for opening. Trustees were given a summary of experience the appointee brings to the role.	
DAT/68/2425	Trustees approved the appointment Mr Beesley as Principal for Horizons Academy. The Local Authority are providing additional upfront funding, following a request submitted by the Trust, for work related to Horizons Academy to undertake outreach work, to cover expenses related to teaching time, leadership experience being utilised in the planning process, meetings with parents and associated costs.	
DAT/69/2425	Trustees queried if funding had been agreed for all costs requested. Mr Cotton confirmed that the full request had been funded. The Board were informed of public relation events taking place regarding Thoresby Vale Forest School and Yeoman Park Academy. Primary opening hours consultation Mr Cotton referred to Appendix 3: Change in primary school day Dec 2024 consultation document. Discussion was held by Trustees regarding the new timings proposed and how this added up to the required 32.5 hours across the week.	

<p>DAT/70/2425</p>	<p>Action: Mr Cotton agreed to review the times and respond if they are not correct to meet statutory requirements.</p> <p>Trustees having, reviewed the consultation responses, agreed increasing the opening hours in Samuel Barlow Primary Academy, Thrumpton Primary Academy, Tuxford Primary Academy and Wainwright Primary Academy to meet the DfE directive of a minimum core hours of 32.5.</p> <p><u>Growth strategy and plan</u></p> <p>Document: Appendix 4: Draft growth strategy and plan 2025 was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Trustees referred to the document, querying if the new government strategy had been considered against the impacts on the growth plan.</p> <p>Mr Cotton responded that due to the changes in government strategy, the plan details the new approach to growth. Growth will no longer take the same form as previously, the report details the knowns impacts, such as funding, the introduction of Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) teams, and current sector position.</p> <p>Trustees queried the reasoning behind growth for Diverse Academies Trust and benefits this brings.</p> <p>Mr Cotton responded that the Trust is of a reasonable size and operates efficiently. However, there is potential for further efficiency and collaboration within the system. The Trust also plays a crucial role in supporting sector-wide improvements and broader school improvement agendas. Growth will be more focused towards partnerships and partner schools. Formal agreements could be developed, giving examples such as providing brought in services to gain efficiencies for smaller schools or trusts, or providing expertise in terms of school leaders. The summary document provided gives an overview of proposed approach.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the benefits of partnerships, smaller trusts/schools within the locality of the Trust with Mr Cotton confirming that knowledge on the geographical picture of schools and Trusts was known and detailed the informal work currently happening. Trustees discussed business models being developed for providing services and advice as this area grows.</p> <p>Trustees queried if there are areas where the Trust would benefit from advice from Partnerships. Mr Cotton detailed areas where this is already happening, with an example of curriculum modelling with schools of a similar profile making more progress being contacted currently as part of work being undertaken.</p> <p>Trustees discussed Local Authority resources to open new Free Schools, Mr Cotton elaborated the Trust has established a positive and collaborative relationship with the Local Authority. They have expressed their satisfaction and support for our initiative to take on the new Horizon school, recognizing our capability and commitment to providing quality education.</p> <p>Mr Cotton asked whether the Trustees believe that the repositioning of the growth plan aligns with their perspective on the current educational climate. He noted that, given the ongoing changes to the Children and Wellbeing Bill, this is an early draft to assess where to focus energy and resources. The growth strategy and plan are part of strategic objective one.</p> <p>Trustees were confident that the revised approach aligned to where focus needs to be and agreed the plan.</p>	<p>DC</p>
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<p>DAT/71/2425</p>	<p>Document: Appendix 2: Safeguarding report January 2025 was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Trustees referred to the safeguarding report and the impact on staff mental health, querying if suitable supervision was in place to provide the opportunity to for staff to debrief.</p> <p>Mr Cotton informed the Board of the processes and support in place, also referring to a commission, taken up with Anna Freud company, to deliver a programme to leadership on mental wellbeing for self and others.</p> <p>Trustees deliberated on the issue of young people's disengagement from society and considered whether the curriculum review would effectively address this concern.</p> <p>Mr Cotton informed the Board on how Executive Leaders and Principals are developing more creative approaches to the curriculum following the absence of progress 8 data but cautioning that restraints remain regarding accountability measures.</p> <p>Trustees discussed possibility of interlinking the Endurio survey with mental health, workload and line manager relationships. Mr Cotton explained that due to the confidentiality of the surveys this is not possible, but pulse surveys and personalisation of line management will help understand staff mental health in more depth within the organisation.</p>	
<p>6. DAT/72/2425</p>	<p>Strategic Objectives</p> <p>Strategic Objective- Term one evaluations.</p> <p>Document: Appendix 1: Strategic Objectives Term 1 evaluations was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Mr Cotton queried if trustees had any further questions from the report.</p> <p>Trustees having discussed some of the items under agenda item 5 (i.e. growth) had not further questions.</p>	
<p>7. DAT/73/2425</p>	<p>Committee Meeting Update from Chairs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finance and Resources Committee update (20/01/2025) <p>Documents: Financial performance October 2024, November 2024.</p> <p>People survey & survey results, metrics report 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>Discussion had been held regarding the risk register and changes required. The next step is drafting the risk appetite statements.</p> <p>Mr Rolph had met with Mr Corban, and other staff involved to discuss refining the year end process, proposing to plan the Committee and Board meeting in December with an extra week between meetings.</p> <p>Mr Rolph briefed the Board on the Committee meeting providing a summary of the financial position, capital spend update, proposed budget planning process, and staff survey undertaken.</p> <p>Trustees held an in-depth discussion on the staff survey reports discussing completion rates and more focused surveys with a speedier response. Debating informal discussions and mechanisms for capturing these.</p>	

	<p>Trustees noted that it would be interesting to determine what percentage of staff for schools with negative feedback have completed the survey.</p> <p>Trustees raised responses for Tuxford Primary Academy and a more focused response required.</p> <p>Trustees commented that the survey is an aggregate of both teaching and support staff and queried if future focus will be to distinguish the differing issues between the two groups. Mr Cotton confirmed that this is being reviewed.</p> <p>Mrs Green, Head of HR, is working with leaders on detailed plans and pulse surveys to address responses.</p> <p>Trustees queried how widely the report findings had been shared. It was confirmed that the report had been distributed to leaders of individual academies, with Executive Principals and Principals managing how the messages are conveyed in the most appropriate way for the setting.</p> <p>Trustees suggested that they would raise the survey findings with the Principal during the Standards and Outcomes visits.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the Trust perception results from the survey, noting a dichotomy of responses in this area and ways to approach this, comparison to national picture, and how to increase responses to the survey.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards and Outcomes update (15/01/2025) <p>Mr Schwarz, Chair of Standards and Outcomes Committee, updated the Board on the Committee meeting providing a summary of the safeguarding and SEND presentations. Briefing on discussions regarding safeguarding workload, lack of external support, improvements in attendance, and issues of mental health for young children.</p>	
DAT/74/2425		
DAT/75/2425	<p>Policies approved at Committees</p> <p>Finance and Resources Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disciplinary policy Staff grievance policy Capability policy 	
DAT/76/2425	<p>Policies for approval at Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions Policy <p>Document: Admission Policy was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>This item was discussed and approved under agenda item9.</p>	
8. DAT/77/2425	<p>Statutory Updates, Changes to legal documents and Companies House filing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Board were informed that Mr J Robertson had been appointed as a Trustee by Members on 9 December 2024 under Article 50 Document: Annual report and financial statement filing was previously received by the Board. <p>The Board were informed that the final report had been signed and submitted to the DfE.</p>	
9. DAT/78/2425	<p>Annual Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine Admission arrangements <p>Document: Admissions Policy and appendix Consultation summary for 2026/27 was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>Trustees reviewed the admission consultation paper.</p>	

<p>DAT/79/2425</p>	<p>They noted the external schools and MAT consultations, and the proposal for Dukeries and Sutton Community Academy to close their Post 16 provision.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the consultation responses and debated the change to staff priority in oversubscription list for the two academies, considering the rural location and need to attract staff.</p> <p>Trustees noted the responses to the consultation that had taken place between 11 November 2024 and 23 December 2024.</p> <p>Trustees agreed to proceed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With the addition of catchment areas for Retford Oaks Academy and The Holgate Academy and the small change to Tuxford Academy's catchment. - To have the same oversubscription criteria for each of our primary academies (Bracken Lane Primary Academy, Thrumpton Primary Academy, Tuxford Primary Academy, Samuel Barlow Primary Academy, Wainwright Primary Academy and Hillocks Primary Academy) - To have the same oversubscription for Year 12 in all settings - To allow East Leake Academy and Tuxford Academy to change the criterion priority of staff to number four in the oversubscription list due to the responses received to the consultation - To have the same oversubscription criteria for Retford Oaks Academy and The Holgate Academy and for Queen Elizabeth Academy (with the addition of a faith criteria) - And confirmed there were no changes to the oversubscription criteria for Walton Academy <p>Following the above discussion, Trustees determined the admissions for 2026/27 and agreed the admission policy for 2026/27 and each academies appendix.</p> <p>Modern Slavery Statement Document: Modern Slavery Statement</p> <p>Trustees discussed areas covered by the statement, referring to the statement in section 3 '<i>While most direct suppliers are UK-based, their supply chains often extend internationally. We are committed to upholding the highest ethical standards and encourage suppliers to adhere to the Modern Slavery Act</i>' querying if this goes far enough.</p> <p>Mr Cotton advised that all new tenders require suppliers to provide Modern Slavery Statements and would enquire and feedback regarding existing suppliers.</p> <p>Trustees agreed the statement.</p> <p>Action: Mr Cotton to follow up on existing suppliers in relation to adherence to the Modern Slavery Act.</p>	
<p>10. DAT/80/2425</p>	<p>Trustee items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs Correspondence: - Document: email from CEO to Chair of Board 'School Closures' was previously received by the Board. <p>The email had been shared for information updating on closures which took place during a period of bad weather. Mr Cotton and Mr Schwarz had discussed directly at the time of closure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Document: Email from Nottinghamshire County Council was previously received by the Board. 	

DAT/81/2425	<p>The letter had been shared for information regarding a qualifying complaint for Samuel Barlow Primary Academy, a response has been provided to the Local Authority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyber Security update training link was previously received by the Board. <p>Trustees were asked if they had not already completed this training to complete and inform the governance professional of the date of completion to update the training records.</p>	
DAT/82/2425	<p>Action: Trustees to complete Cyber Security Training and Inform Mrs J Harrison Hill when completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> GDPR Training link was previously received by the Board. <p>Trustees were asked if they had not already completed this training to complete and inform the governance professional of date of completion to update the training records</p>	Trustees
DAT/83/2425	<p>Action: Trustees to complete GDPR Training and Inform Mrs J Harrison Hill when completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> External Review of Governance <p>Document: External Review of Governance Scope was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>The Board were updated that the Academy Trust Handbook recommends that an external review of governance be conducted every three to five years. The previous external review was carried out in December 2022. Five companies have been asked to quote, selected due to experience in the sector and one from outside of education sector for a comparison.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the draft scope, suggesting that Members be included in the review.</p> <p>Trustees approved Mrs J Harrison Hill and Mrs A Elway collating the quotes and taking a recommendation for appointment to the Governance and Partnership Committee on 12 February.</p> <p>Trustees approved the Governance and Partnership Committee appointing the external review.</p> <p>Action: Mrs J Harrison Hill and Mrs A Elway to present recommendation to Governance and Partnership Committee for appointment of external governance reviewers.</p> <p>Following the committee's approval to appoint, the review will be undertaken in the spring term, with the hope that feedback and any recommendations can be discussed at the Governor's conference in June for an action plan to agree for September 2025.</p>	Trustees
DAT/84/2425	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance conference <p>Document: Governance Conference was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>The Board reviewed the proposed agenda, proposed keynote speaker and theme, reviewing how the agenda items impact directly on academy governance.</p> <p>Mrs Elway explained that the Trusts Scheme of Delegation will be shared with the keynote speaker to ensure knowledge of audience and layers of governance.</p> <p>Trustees agreed the agenda for the Governance conference.</p>	JHH/AE/G&P Committee
DAT/85/2425	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board skills audit update <p>Mr Schwarz discussed with the Board the proposal to delay the skills audit until after the external review. This approach aims to provide a clearer context for targeted training and development, based on the recommendations and direction from the review.</p>	

DAT/86/2425	<p>Trustees agreed to undertake the skills audit in the Autumn term.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and Wellbeing Bill <p>Document: Children and Wellbeing Bill- briefing was previously received by the Board.</p> <p>This document had been shared for information. Trustees discussed the Education Secretary's speech regarding academy freedoms and changing landscape.</p>	
<p>11.</p> <p>DAT/87/2425</p> <p>DAT/88/2425</p> <p>DAT/89/2425</p> <p>DAT/90/2425</p> <p>DAT/91/2425</p> <p>DAT/92/2425</p> <p>DAT/93/2425</p>	<p>Executive items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was reported in the confidential minutes. Free School bid proposal update <p>Mr Cotton updated the Board that no further communication had been received related to the bids submitted for new Free Schools. Announcements are expected from the DfE in April regarding Free School bids and Capital Projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary opening hours consultation <p>This item was discussed in agenda item 5 DAT/69/2425</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Appointments <p>This item was discussed in agenda item 5 DAT/67/2425</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yeoman Park Academy revised opening plans <p>This item was discussed under agenda item 5 DAT/66/2425</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidential update: Business areas staffing. <p>This item was taken at the beginning of the meeting with Mrs Elway leaving the room for the discussion. Mr Quigley arrived at 17:06 after the discussion had finished.</p> <p>This discussion was deemed confidential and was reported in the confidential minutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yeoman Park Academy Ofsted Inspection 14 &15 January 25-update <p>The Board were informed of the recent Ofsted visit to Yeoman Park Academy Ofsted report (<i>report shared with Board via email 29 January 2025</i>). The report was very strong with outstanding in all areas.</p> <p>Mr Cotton commented that the report had no areas for improvement. A letter had been received from the Director for Education at Nottinghamshire County Council congratulating the Trust for the outstanding outcome and service provided for children, community and families.</p> <p>The Ofsted report highlights the school's 'exceptional provision.' This outcome underscores the Trust's commitment and capability in opening another special school, Horizons Academy.</p> <p>Action: Trust Board to send a letter of congratulations to the Yeoman Park Academy.</p>	JHH/DS
<p>12.</p> <p>DAT/94/2425</p>	<p>Determination of Confidentiality</p> <p>The Board resolved that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An item discussed under agenda item 1 DAT/61/2425 would remain confidential due to related to an individual. An item discussed in agenda item 12 DAT/87/2425 would remain confidential until in the public domain. An item discussed in agenda item 12 DAT/92/2425 would remain confidential due to related to individuals. <p>Equalities Act consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trustees considered the equalities act and its implications in all discussions. 	

	<p>Have decisions been made according to the 7 Nolan Principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trustees were content that all decisions made adhere to the seven Nolan principles <p>Consider any item to be referred to Charities Commission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trustees resolved that there were no items which needed to be referred to the Charities Commission. 	
13. DAT/95/2425	Date and time of next meeting: Wednesday 19 March 2025, 5.00pm at Diverse Education Centre, Retford.	

The meeting closed at:18.52

Minutes agreed by Chair: