

**Minutes of the Diverse Academies Trust Board Meeting
Wednesday 14 May 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	
Mr I Storey	IS	
Mr R Vizma	RV	

Quorum required: 3
Trustees Present: 9

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	Item	Action
1. DAT/121/2425	Apologies for absence There were no apologies for absence, all trustees were present.	
2. DAT/122/2425	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. Mr Quigley informed the Board that from 6 May 2025 his role as Councillor had ceased. Mr Robertson informed the Board that he had taken up a new role of Magistrate for Nottinghamshire Panel on 31 April 2025.	
3. DAT/123/2425	Minutes of the meeting dated Wednesday 19 March 2025 Public & Confidential	

	The public and confidential minutes of the meeting held 19 March 2025 were agreed and approved by the Chair.	
4. DAT/124/2524	Matters Arising: DAT/99/2425 (DAT/81/2425) <i>Cyber Security update training</i> <i>Action: Trustees to complete Cyber Security Training and Inform Mrs J Harrison Hill when completed.</i> All trustees had now completed the Cyber Security Training; this item is now complete. DAT/99/2425 (DAT/82/2425) <i>GDPR Training link</i> <i>Action: Trustees to complete GDPR Training and Inform Mrs J Harrison Hill when completed.</i> The final Trustee is currently in the process of completing this training. DAT/100/2425 EDI <i>Action: J Harrison Hill to liaise with Mrs Saxelby for future dates and share with Board.</i> The Board were informed that EDI Training is taking place during the November INSET days (26 & 27 November 2025). Once more details are known this will be shared with Trustees. DAT/101/2425 Review LAC Attendance <i>Action: Chair of Board to communicate a mid-term update to Chair of Governors following Trustees attendance at LAC meetings.</i> Mr Schwarz had communicated a mid-year update to Chairs of LAC's. This item is now complete. DAT/102/2425 CEO Report <i>Action: Mr Cotton to develop time plan for strategic objective five-year plan development to bring to board</i> Mr Cotton has shared a document to show the time plan for developing the Strategic objectives and is discussed in agenda item 5. This item is now complete. DAT/11/2425 Executive Items Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.	
5. DAT/125/2425	Chief Executive Officers Report Documents: CEO Board Report May 2025, Appendix 1: Safeguarding and attendance report, Appendix 2: Confidential: document noted in the confidential minutes, Appendix 3: Strategic Objectives term 2 evaluations and Appendix 4: Draft strategic plan timeline 2026-2031 were previously received by the Board.	
DAT/126/2425	Mr Cotton referred to the CEO Board report which detailed: 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/127/2425	The work underway to support students currently sitting exams was discussed. Yeoman Park Academy has moved into the new building following the Easter handover, children are now on site. The positive experience and culture in the building was noted and considered outstanding. Trustees recognised this as a notable success, given the challenges the children face making the adjustments partway through the year. Action: Board to formally express gratitude to all staff involved in the smooth transition of opening Yeoman Park Academy.	Chair/JHH

DAT/128/2425 DAT/129/2425 DAT/130/2425 DAT/131/2425 DAT/132/2425	Trustees commented that having recently attended the Local Academy Committee meeting for Yeoman Park Academy they were impressed that the committee had been able to recruit new governors, and the meeting was well attended. The official opening ceremony for Yeoman Park Academy will be held during the second half of summer term. Trustees discussed the five-year time frame from initial announcement of funding for the new school building programme to the opening of Yeoman Park Academy, which was the first of the programme to be opened. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes Thoresby Vale Academy and Horizons Academy were then discussed, noting the Ofsted pre inspection visit taking place based on the independent schools framework. The recruitment campaign for Horizons Academy is progressing well. Meet and greet sessions are being held at Head Office prior to interviews. Trustees referred to section 4.3 of the CEO report, querying the capability of those undertaking the absence management. Mr Cotton explained that short term absence is spiking, with mental health being one of the top reasons given. Anna Freud training has been provided to all leaders, to support dealing with mental health challenges and moving away from procedural approach, to encourage informal conversations to prevent escalation to formal process. Trustees referred to the safeguarding report noting that page 3 child on child sex abuse is written in an ambiguous way and needs clarification to ensure greater clarity to avoid potential misinterpretation. Action: Mr Cotton to follow up on wording to clarify reporting. Strategic Objectives term 2 evaluations were discussed by trustees, querying how the measure of consistency will be undertaken to measure improvement, with improvement actions being bespoke to academies but overall measure remaining consistent. Mr Cotton will feedback to Board once more is known for future staff surveys and approach. The current provider is being considered as part of the work being undertaken to review all value for money on contracts and impact. The strategic objective planning timeline was considered, with trustees noting the approach and away day for planning.	DC
6. DAT/133/2425	Committee Meeting Update from Chairs – Finance and Resources Committee update Documents: Finance and Resources Committee Minutes , Financial Performance, Confidential Budget and Benchmarking Report and Kreston Report were previously received by the Board. Mr Rolph, Chair of Finance and Resources Committee updated the Board on the committee meeting held 28/04/2025. The majority of meeting had focused on the current finance position. The March financial accounts had been circulated today via email to Trustees. Mr Rolph discussed the financial outlook for the year, which has the potential to range from a £700k deficit to a	

DAT/134/2425	small surplus, depending on how the threats and opportunities materialise. Significant cost-cutting measures are underway with the aim of achieving a breakeven position by year-end. Many of the identified opportunities are expected to be realised, though financial conditions will remain challenging. Improved pupil number data is enabling better long-term budget planning. Primary pupil numbers are declining, and the General Annual Grant (GAG) funding is also decreasing. There is currently no indication of a real increase in GAG from the government. The proposed teacher pay increase from the DfE is 2.8%, while the recommendation is 4% from the STRB. The government has not confirmed if this will be implemented but have stated that no funding support will be available. The increase would need to be found through academy efficiencies. Forecasts show that without increased funding, the Trust could face huge deficits in the coming years. In response, a comprehensive review is underway, covering leadership structures, teaching costs, and all contractual commitments, to identify changes needed for financial sustainability. Mr Rolph referred to the Kreston benchmarking report, noting the need to move the percentage staffing costs to a more sustainable figure. The Committee had discussed the approach to this with a review for contact time for teachers which is currently very generous. Leadership costs are high and are an area being addressed. Non pay areas are also being reviewed with all contracts considered for value for money and impact. Work is underway to produce a budget to present at the next Finance and Resources Committee. Trustees queried if more could be done to reduce energy costs, suggesting utilising young people to encourage savings in energy usage. Mr Cotton noted the suggestion. Some improvements had been made to improve energy usage within academies, PFI academies energy costs are out of the Trusts control. Mr Rolph noted that the benchmarking shows that although we have improved our return on investment there is still more to do when compared against other trusts. Following trustees querying it was explained that areas being prioritised are teaching, deployment and class sizes, group sizes, non-contact time, leadership costs, and contract reviews. Trustees commented on the importance of communication to ensure staff feel supported and engaged throughout and reduce the increase this may have on absence. Mr Cotton informed the Board that a plan is being developed and will be brought back to the Board. Agency costs were discussed noting the need for creative solutions through staff capacity and teacher deployment. Absence rates had been a discussion in the meeting. Trustees raised the Kreston report age profile of governors noting the need to increase a younger profile and discussing how to encourage civic responsibility within the demographic. – <u>Standards and Outcomes update (30/04/2025)</u> Document: Standards and Outcomes Committee Minutes were previously received by the Committee.	
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DAT/135/2425 DAT/136/2425 DAT/137/2425 DAT/138/2425	Mr D Schwarz, Chair of Standards and Outcomes Committee, updated the Board on the meeting held 30/04/2025. P Simpson, having volunteered, had been appointed as Safeguarding Link Trustee. Discussion on concerns raised about suicidal ideation among students, with a need for more support resources identified. Attendance is below the national average but improving at a faster rate. Suspensions remain high but are slightly reducing. The discussion on strategic objectives raised the need for a focus on measurable SEND objectives. BSquared tool is being used to develop this. Trustees considered if the new free school would assist with being able to measure this with implementation and trial from day one. Action: Mr Cotton to feedback to Executive Principal and Chief Education Officer on suggestion of trial of BSquared to monitor measurement from day one. The committee had reviewed the AIR reports, and following a discussion on middle leadership more feedback will be presented at the next committee meeting. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes. The Committee discussed the risk appetite statements and agreed amendments to reflect discussion, these will then be submitted to Audit and Risk for the process of approval and inclusion to the risk register. - <u>Governance and Partnership Feedback meeting 23/04/2025</u> Document: Governance and Partnership feedback Committee meeting Minutes were previously received by the Board. Mr Quigley, Chair of Governance and Partnership Committee, updated the Board on the committee feedback meeting held 23/04/2025. Risk appetite statements were discussed and agreed for submission to audit and risk committee for the process of approval and inclusion to the risk register. The Head of Governance discussed the governance plan which had been submitted to the DfE, for Thoresby Vale and Horizons Academy, ahead of the Pre-opening Ofsted Inspection. Feedback forms from Local Academy Committees were reviewed, discussion was held regarding inclusion of a stakeholder engagement section. This will be reviewed as part of the annual review of the form. The Committee commented that if the external governance review flags up any risks to governance this would need to be considered for incorporation to the risk register. <u>Audit and Risk update</u> from Mr I Storey, Chair of Audit and Risk Committee. Whilst there had not been an Audit and Risk committee since the last Board meeting Mr Storey updated the Trustees that, following the work being carried out by committees to review risks and draft risk appetite statements, the Audit and Risk committee will bring this information together at the meeting in June and produce a revised version of the risk register to bring to Board on 9 July 2025. A document outlining the planned internal audits for the 2025/26 Trustees were invited to consider whether any additional areas	DC
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DAT/139/2425	from their respective committees should be included in the plan, and to inform the Audit and Risk Committee of any suggestions before the plan is finalised in June 2025. Trustees discussed the contract term for WBG auditors and the tender process which will commence in 2026. Policies approved at Committees Finance and Resources Committee • Capability Policy • Disciplinary Policy • Grievance Policy Standards and Outcomes Committee • Special educational needs and disability policy • Suspensions and exclusions policy Policies for approval at Board: Trustees noted policies which had been approved.	
7. DAT/140/2425	Statutory Updates, Changes to legal documents and Companies House filing • Identity verification – Companies House Trustees were informed of the voluntary ID verification process which is now available ahead of the mandatory process which will be required in Autumn 2025. Guidelines for completing the id process are provided in the link, once complete trustees are asked to record the ID number assigned to them and inform the governance professional. • Thoresby Vale Funding Agreement • Thoresby Vale Capital Grant agreement • Horizons Funding Agreement The above funding agreements have been signed and agreed as delegated by the Board and shared with trustees for information.	
8. DAT/141/2425	Annual Requirements There were no annual requirements to record.	
9. DAT/142/2425	Trustee items: • Chairs Correspondence: ◦ Thoresby Vale Ofsted Inspection Trustees had been advised of the Ofsted pre inspection meeting taking place for Thoresby Vale Academy.	
DAT/143/2425	• Accounting Officer Letter 19 March 2025 The Accounting Officer Letter had been shared with Trustees for information.	
DAT/144/2425	• Governor Conference expectations Mr Schwarz informed the Board that a meeting had been held between himself, Mr Cotton, Mrs Elway and Mrs Harrison Hill to review the Governance Conference numbers and topics for keynote speaker. Part of the conference will be to discuss objectives and highlights from the external review of governance. Approximately 28 attendees have confirmed their participation, representing one third of the total number of governors. Governance professionals are actively encouraging further engagement through local academy meetings.	
10. DAT/145/2425	Executive items: • Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes. This item was discussed under agenda item 4.	
DAT/146/2425	• Free School bid proposal update	

	Mr Cotton informed the board that no further information had been received since the submission of the SEMH free school bid in Lincolnshire. Mr Cotton informed Trustees that RISE advisors at The Holgate Academy and Hillocks Academy had now been assigned. Following Trustees querying what they would be focusing on, it was explained that they would support four areas: attainment for English and Maths, attendance, early years and inclusion.	
11. DAT/147/2425	Determination of Confidentiality Trustees considered whether anything discussed during the meeting should be deemed as confidential. It was resolved: - An item discussed in agenda item 4 DAT/124/2425 (DAT/11/2425) would remain confidential until complete. - An item discussed and associated document in agenda item 5 DAT/128/2425 would remain confidential until in public domain. - An item discussed in agenda item 4 DAT/129/2425 would remain confidential until complete. - A document in agenda item 6 DAT/133/2425 would remain confidential until complete. - An item discussed in agenda item 6 DAT/133/2425 would remain confidential until complete. - An item referred to in agenda item 10 DAT/145/2425 would remain confidential until complete. Equalities Act consideration The Board were assured that no discussions were impacted by the equalities act. Have decisions been made according to the 7 Nolan Principles The Board considered that all discussions had followed the Nolan Principles. Consider any item to be referred to Charities Commission There were no items to refer to the charities commission.	
12. DAT/148/2425	Date and time of next meeting: 09 July 2025, 5.00pm at Retford Education Centre, Retford.	

The meeting closed at: 19:00

Minutes agreed by Chair: