Minutes of the Diverse Academies Trust Board Meeting
Wednesday 13 May 2026 at 5pm, at Diverse Education Centre, Retford

Quorum Required:3
Trustees Present:

Trustee name	Initials	A = absence
M Blore	MB	
A Hardie	AH	
I Hylan	IH	
J Robertson	JMR	
J Rolph	JR	
D Schwarz (Chair)	DS	
I Storey	IS	
R Vizma	RV	

Quorum required: 3
Trustees Present: 8

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/116/2526	**Apologies for absence** There were no apologies for absence.	
2. DAT/117/2526	**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/118/2526	**Minutes of the meeting dated Wednesday 18 March 2026 Public and confidential** The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed. It was noted that the recorded location of the meeting was incorrect. The location should read Horizons Academy. Subject to this amendment, the minutes were approved as an accurate record.	
4. DAT/119/2526	**Matters Arising:** ***DAT/92/2526 (DAT/68/2526 Executive Pay)*** *Revised documentation will be brought to the next Board meeting for formal approval.*	

	J Rolph advised the Board that work had been undertaken to separate mainstream pay from executive pay. The next step is to set up the committee to oversee executive pay. The **Board approved** the procedures and agreed for J Rolph and D Schwarz to set up the panel and agree its constitution. This item is now complete. ***DAT/53/2526 Follow up Chairs and Vice Chairs of Governors conference*** ***Action:*** *J Harrison Hill will circulate the schedule of LAC meetings so trustees can identify when they are available to attend.* The schedule of Trustee attendance at LAC committees is now agreed and in progress. Trustees discussed what questions had been asked of those who had attended the meetings so far. With LAC's asking where their own schools were discussed by the Board, there had also been questions regarding the Post 16 provision which had generally been responded to by the Executive Principals. This item is now complete. ***Action:*** *D Schwarz will prepare a final summary outlining the visit framework and proposed approach to feedback* The framework had been distributed to trustees and Chairs of Governors. This item is now complete. ***Action:*** *N Benson to inform Chairs of Governors that this schedule will restart in the summer term.* Chairs of Governors had been informed of the schedule of attendance by Trustees. This item is now complete. ***DAT/76/2526 Strategic Plan*** ***Action:*** *J Harrison Hill to liaise with D Cotton on date for Trustee meeting to discuss strategic plan.* The Board strategic planning meeting is scheduled for Thursday 4 June 4pm till 6pm at Retford Education Centre. This item is now complete. ***DAT/100/2526 Operational Excellence*** ***Action:*** *D Cotton confirmed he would check and clarify the seven points within the report.* D Cotton clarified the details queried in the report. This item is now complete. ***DAT/103/2526 Audit Tender*** ***Action:*** *A Teams meeting will be set up for Wednesday, 23 March for Trustees who are able to attend to receive the recommendation, if the panel have chosen to remain with Smith Cooper this meeting will be cancelled.* J Rolph updated the Board that the meeting had taken place, discussion was held around the presentations received, independence, and advantages and disadvantages of each tender. The trustees attending the meeting took the decision to retain Smith Cooper. **Trustees queried** the term of the reappointment. It was confirmed that the reappointment was for three years but would be considered for renewal annually. It was conveyed to the auditors that the Board are expecting to move to another auditor at the end of the three-year period to ensure independence This item is now complete.	
5. DAT/120/2526	**Trustee questions/discussion on pre-reading pack**	

	Document: CEO Board Report May 2026 and Appendices : Appendix 1: Safeguarding, attendance, exclusion report April 2026 Appendix 2: Strategic Objectives Term 2 evaluations Appendix 3: Decarbonisation of the estate March 2026 Appendix 4: Trust strategy filming CET interviews Appendix 5: Strategic alignment 2026 to 2031 Appendix 6: Strategic plan 2026 to 2031 outline Appendix 7: TA business case timings of school day consultations Confidential Document: Recorded in confidential minutes The Chief Executive Board report detailed the following areas: 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/121/2526	CEO Report questions/discussion D Cotton highlighted that the Trust is currently in the middle of the examination season, including SATs, GCSEs and A Levels. Staff have prepared students well for these examinations. There were a number of appendices as part of the pre-reading pack, some of which will be revisited at the Board strategic planning meeting on Thursday 4 June 2026. Regarding Term 2 evaluations, D Cotton referenced questions raised in previous meetings relating to LED lighting. G Corban has since pulled together a broader decarbonisation timeline for the Trust. D Cotton informed Trustees that filming for the new Strategic Plan will take place next week. This will include capturing generic footage across Trust settings for use on the Trust website. A professional company will undertake the filming, involving staff, children and the Chair of Board. Ongoing work to ensure the strategic alignment and connectivity between balanced scorecards and the risk register continues. This will be discussed in more detail at the meeting on 4 June. Summary responses to questionnaires will also be shared at that session. **Trustees queried** if the survey and pre-reading pack will be circulated prior to the meeting? **Action:** Pre-reading pack to be circulated prior to meeting on 4 June. **Trustees referred** to the strategic planning documents considering two of the key priorities of SEND and inclusion, and adaptive teaching, noting the need to be clearly defined and demarcated to ensure clarity on how they are being measured. D Cotton confirmed that further clarification around this would be discussed during the strategic planning meeting in June.	DC
DAT/122/2526	Safeguarding, attendance, exclusion report April 2026 **Trustees referred** to the safeguarding report, querying the significant increase in neglect in primary settings, **asking** if this is linked to the cost of living. It was explained that this was due to work to re-categorise coding to support with referrals to social care rather than an increase in cases. **Trustees queried** if the suspension numbers can be meaningfully compared across academies, given differences in policies, number of days and reasons for suspensions?	

	D Cotton advised that it is difficult to compare due to differences in cohorts and thresholds. A spike may occur where there is a particular focus, but the context must be understood and trends reviewed over time. The figures are primarily used to trigger conversations. Following a **Trustees query** D Cotton explained that the longer suspensions for older students may reflect the nature of the incidents or the limited impact of shorter suspensions as pupils progress through the school, the rate of sanctions typically increases. **Trustees referred** to Retford Oaks Academy utilising spaces within Retford Education Centre to reduce suspension levels, querying if there are opportunities for similar internal solutions across the Trust. D Cotton confirmed this is being reviewed by the Lead Safeguarding Officer P Knight and Chief Education Officer, N Holmes including efforts to secure funding for alternative approaches.	
DAT/123/2526	Ofsted Updates D Cotton updated Trustees on the two recent inspections under the new Ofsted framework. Discussions were held on the differences in expectations and criteria. There has been publicity around achievement judgements, particularly in disadvantaged communities due to reliance on national average attainment. A table in the report CEO report indicates the Trust's view of where schools currently are. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes. It was noted that Bracken Lane Primary Academy, Redgate Primary Academy, Retford Oaks Academy, Hillocks Primary Academy and The Holgate Academy fall within the forthcoming Ofsted inspection window. D Cotton explained following a **Trustees enquiry** that the successes are shared across the Trust through leadership teams, with debriefs involving senior leaders to share lessons learned and highlight positive practice. **Trustees discussed** the different inspector's approach despite the framework intended to improve consistency, having moved from a "best fit" model to a "secure fit" approach to attempt to reduce subjectivity. The importance of principals being open in the initial inspection conversations about the reality of their schools, ensuring that Trustees and Governors are fully aware of key issues and challenges, was discussed.	
DAT/124/2526	Confidential item: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.	
DAT/125/2526	External engagement A number of opportunities demonstrating positive external recognition of the Trust's work were highlighted by D Cotton. The DfE, Head of Policy, had contacted the Trust requesting a meeting to discuss national attendance datasets in primary schools. The Trust is currently the only one where all primary schools have improved attendance this year and met improvement targets, at a time when there is an approximate 80% failure rate nationally. The DfE have contacted to understand how this has been achieved.	

	Following this D Cotton has been invited to present at a national primary conference to share its approach to attendance. An invitation had also been received from the Swedish Embassy to attend a session focused on AI and mathematics in education. The Trust is currently piloting a programme developed in Sweden, which is used by 97% of Swedish schools, and early indications show a positive impact within the academies. Another stakeholder engagement opportunity includes an invitation from the Editor of Times Educational Supplement to attend a reception at Westminster with the Secretary of State for Education to discuss education policy. D Cotton also informed the Board that Diana Osagie had invited the trust to take part in a pilot relating to “Juggernaut thinking”. Finally for this area of updates D cotton advised that Nottinghamshire County Council is funding a two-year secondment for a senior leader to undertake a virtual school’s role. An appointment has been made from East Leake Academy to work with the Trust to lead this work. Confidential item: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.	
DAT/126/2526	<u>Committee updates</u> Finance and Resources Committee meeting minutes 27 April 2026 and Financial Report were previously received as part of the pre-reading pack. J Rolph updated the committee on the Finance and Resources Committee discussion, reporting that the Trust is currently on track against the budget. While the forecast remains slightly negative, a number of positive adjustments are anticipated. The year-end outturn is expected to be satisfactory. Discussion at the committee focused on the budget for the next year, particularly in relation to staffing costs, noting that three-year budgets must be submitted in August, and there is a need to reduce these costs. Significant discussion also took place regarding Post-16 provision. The committee considered staff absence management in detail, including trends and movements in absence levels. There were concerns raised regarding agency costs, and clarification was provided as to why these had not been specifically budgeted. Variations in staff absence levels between academies were noted. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes. It was confirmed that the risk review for finance related risks had been reviewed. Standards and Outcomes Committee meeting minutes 06 May 2026 were previously received as part of the pre-reading pack. R Vizma updated the Board that the committee had discussed pupil attendance, and Ofsted. A Presentation had been received from the Principals of Horizons Academy and Thoresby Vale Primary Academy. Thoresby Vale Primary Academy was reported as already oversubscribed and has combined some classes, with pupils drawn from 16 different counties. It was noted that 34% of pupils have diagnosed needs, compared to a national figure of 18%, and the school’s approach to managing this was discussed. Horizons Academy was reported to demonstrate stability, increasing engagement and growth, with a strong emphasis on developing positive relationships.	

	Positive pupil attendance trends were noted, particularly within Primary schools and at East Leake Academy at secondary level. The committee had recognised the support and hard work from the Acting Head of Bracken Lane Primary Academy and Executive Principal for their management of the Ofsted process in the absence of the substantive Head. A standards and outcomes committee visit is scheduled for next week to the academy, and all are welcome to attend. The committee had considered the related corporate risks though not in as much depth as planned. Additional time has been allocated at the next committee meeting to review mitigations in greater detail. **Trustees commented** that the presentations from staff were noted as demonstrating the factors involved in establishing new institutions and clearly articulating how they were developed. This provided a strong overview of skills. **Trustees noted** the level of work undertaken in the start-up phase of the Horizons Academy and Thoresby Vale primary Academy, particularly in building relationships to support pupils. **Trustees queried** what the position regarding pupil numbers at Thoresby Vale Primary Academy and Horizons Academy was going forward. It was noted that the local authority funds initial pupil numbers for the first three years. If additional pupils are admitted beyond this, the academy bears the cost. After three years, funding reverts to standard lagged funding, meaning schools must reach appropriate pupil numbers by Year 3. Careful consideration is therefore required regarding pupil admissions, although additional pupils may be accommodated within existing classes where no additional teacher is required. D Cotton confirmed that this is being closely reviewed, with Prime Budget Holders leading on this work, noting the need to balance these considerations carefully. Governance and Partnership LAC feedback committee minutes 20 April 2026 were previously received as part of the pre-reading pack. The committee had reviewed the Local Academy Committee feedback forms. Minutes had been circulated, and there were no matters requiring escalation to the Board. It was noted that reports from academies continue to improve and are now presented in a way that better supports discussion.	
6. DAT/127/2526	**Trustee recruitment update** D Schwarz updated the Board on Inspiring Leaders who had been previously engaged to support trustee recruitment. The process had not been successful. The person who managed this service has now left the organisation and Inspiring Leaders have communicated that this is not an area which they intend to continue to explore. An advert placed with Reach volunteering had brought a potential applicant. Following a preliminary informal chat to discuss the role and time implications, they had progressed to a formal interview. D Schwarz and J Rolph recommended the candidate for appointment to the Board. Discussion took place regarding the diversity of the Board's composition, including the challenges associated with appointing	

	more diverse Trustees and the need to strengthen this in future appointments. **Trustees approved** the appointment of A Ball as a co-opted Trustee under Article 58 with effect from 1 June 2026. D Schwarz confirmed that following this appointment, he would be finalising after consultation with respective Chairs of Committees and individual trustees, the allocation to committee membership for new trustees. **Action:** Following trustee raising West Burton Energy project keen to be involved with schools, D Cotton would inform the Business Partnerships and Income generation Lead.	 DC
7. DAT/128/2526	**Risk Register Update** It was agreed that this item was not required at this point due to ongoing committee work.	
8. DAT/129/2526	**Approvals required by Board:** <u>Admissions Policy</u> Document: Changes to admission policy was previously received as part of the pre-reading pack. The changes were **noted and accepted** by the Board. <u>Tuxford Academy change of school day consultation proposal</u> Document: Timings of School Day Consultation Tuxford Academy was previously received as part of the pre-reading pack. D Cotton discussed the proposal from Tuxford Academy to proceed with a consultation on changing the structure of the school day. The proposal seeks to move from a split lunch model back to a single lunch arrangement, following a pilot which did not deliver the intended outcomes. The approach has been supported by the Chief Executive Team and now requires Trustee approval to consult. **Trustees queried** if there are staffing implications and costs related to the proposal. D Cotton confirmed this is not applicable, as the school operates under a PFI arrangement with a fixed fee for delivery of the catering contract. There are therefore no cost implications for the school. **Trustees referred** to the five-minute lesson changeover period **asking** if there was a risk of encouraging pupil drift between lessons. It was explained that this reflects the nature of the site and its one-way system. Pupils are expected to be in the classroom and ready to learn within five minutes, otherwise they are recorded as late. This model provides clear expectations and works well. **Trustees queried** if there are any implications for PE, particularly regarding teams and evening fixtures with a later finish to the school day. D Cotton confirmed that no issues have been raised. Previous concerns had related to shorter lunch periods. **Trustees approved** the proposal to proceed to consultation at Tuxford Academy for change to timings of the school day.	
9. DAT/130/2526	**Statutory Updates, Changes to legal documents and Companies House filing** The board were informed that Members had appointed an additional member M Quigley.	
10. DAT/131/2526	**Annual Requirements** There were no annual requirements to report.	

11. DAT/132/2526	**Chairs Correspondence** Document: Samuel Barlow Significant change letter was previously received as part of the pre-reading pack. The board were updated that work is now progressing on the SEND hub.	
12. DAT/133/2526	**Determination of Confidentiality** Trustees considered whether anything discussed during the meeting should be deemed as confidential. It was resolved: – A discussion in agenda item 5, DAT/123/2526 will remain confidential until publicly released. – A discussion in agenda item 5, DAT/124/2526 will remain confidential until released publicly. – A discussion in agenda item 5, DAT/125/2526 will remain confidential. – A discussion in agenda item 5, DAT/126/2526 will remain confidential. **Equalities Act consideration** The Board considered equality and diversity implications as part of its discussions, with specific consideration recorded under agenda item 5 (DAT/124/2526) and agenda item 6 (DAT/127/2526). **Have decisions been made according to the 7 Nolan Principles** The board were content that all decisions had been made in accordance with the 7 Nolan principles. **Consider any item to be referred to Charities Commission** There were no items requiring referral to the Charities commission.	
13. DAT/134/2526	Date and time of next meeting: **Wednesday 15 July 2026, 5.00pm** at Retford Education Centre, Retford.	

The meeting closed at: 19:05

Minutes agreed by Chair: