

MINUTES
GREAT HEIGHTS ACADEMY TRUST
MAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Monday 19th July 2021 (7.00 p.m) by Zoom

Present: C Midgley (Chair) A Bennett OBE (CEO)
A Birt (from Item 4) K Inwood
I Jaffar J Nellis
J Midgley J Power
E Brooke J Fryer

In attendance: N Oliver (Governance professional), J Firth (COO), A Rawson (CFO)

1. Apologies – None
2. Declaration of Interests – Trustees noted the update email from Illy Jaffar (2nd July). C Midgley (Chair of Trustees), J Midgley (F&P Chair) and A Midgley (Director of Leadership and Governance) are related.
3. Opening remarks and governance update
The Chair (C Midgley) summarised the outcomes from the Trustee skills audit, plus the first part of a self-review and thanked all the Trustees for their input. It was explained that - in view of the extensive framework - the self-review (part two) will be completed next year together with a review of the Chair, followed by an external review in 2022-2023. In summary, the Trust has a strong Board which has been substantially improved through recent recruitment but, as a result, is lacking (‘desirable’) in opportunity of experience:
 - I am/have been chair of a board or committee
 - I have experience of preparing for and responding to inspection and oversight
 - I have experience of marketing, media and PR

All trustees were clear about the contributions they have made to the Trust Board over the past year and the Chair was happy to endorse their statements, as every Trustee has made significant impact during a challenging and unprecedented academic year. There was only one suggestion for improvement as follows: *“I think the board would benefit from getting together with each other and the SMT outside of the formal meeting schedule in order to get to know one another and the roles/expectations a little better.”*

Trustees debated the following key areas and how they might impact on future CEO / CFO / COO reporting and pre-meeting briefings:

- Thinks strategically
- Manages change
- Sets clear expectations for executive leaders
- Is honest, reflective and self-critical
- Uses feedback from external scrutiny (school improvement, audit and organisational effectiveness) to inform decisions

In concluding the discussion, the Chair added that he would be mindful of the additional areas of responsibility that Trustees would like to contribute to in future. In the short-term, Item 8 is a succession management opportunity (re. self-nomination as Chair &/or

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Vice Chair, 2021-22). Trustees were also invited to request any re-allocation of responsibilities prior to Autumn Term meetings, but K Inwood (Chair of Standards) & J Midgley (Chair of Finance & Premises) were both of the opinion that the two existing committees – last reviewed July 2020, are strong with a good balance of expertise and contributions, with no reasons to change.

Trustees noted the following Terms of Office: C Midgley and A Birt to January 2022, which would be re-visited in Autumn Term. For succession management purposes, an email had also been received from G Newton (Member/LGB Chair) withdrawing from all areas of school and trust governance in July 2022.

A Birt joined the meeting at this point

4. Minutes of 24th May 2021

5. Matters Arising

The draft minutes were agreed, with the Chair to email approval in lieu of a wet signature. **Prior to publishing the minutes on the Trust website, Trustees agreed that the confidential discussion on reserves should be replaced by the simplified statement “The Trust agreed that reserves be centralised”.** There were no matters arising, not already on the agenda.

6. Correspondence, including ESFA

Letters from DfE (Baroness Berridge, 10th June) and ESFA (to Accounting Officer/Chair, 14th July) had been received, with particular reference to the Academies Financial Handbook - expanded and renamed to Academy Trust Handbook (w.e.f. 1st September). Changes to the 2021 Handbook were discussed at Finance & Premises Committee and are summarised in ‘TheSchoolBus’ & NGA briefings and on pages 9-10 of the Handbook. **Paragraph 2.51 re. availability of agendas, papers and minutes** (“*The trust must make available for public inspection: the agenda for every meeting of the trustees, local governing bodies and committees; the approved minutes of each meeting; any report, document or other paper considered*”) **to be re-visited in Autumn Term.** The CEO (A Bennett) added that this was a further opportunity to re-visit the reporting proformas.

Trustees were thanked for promptly approving emails from the COO (J Firth) as follows:

Raynville - Reroofing, Fire Alarm and Emergency Lighting Works. Approval of Tender Adjudication (21st June). Trust Board approval for the tender to be issued to Carnam Construction at a total outturn cost of £563,627.73 (CIF Funding £590,300) and F&P Committee approval for Building Consultancy costs £26,640 + £10,800.

Noted that questions from E Brooke had been answered.

Greetland - Heating Replacement Tender Adjudication (5th July). Trust Board approval for the tender to be issued to Clifford Cooper, total £198,381.55 (original cost £195,155).

7.1 MAT reporting – CEO (A Bennett)

The CEO Report provided an honest reflection of attendance, absentees and bubble closures - which have been operating effectively and efficiently – and headlines within the two key areas of School Improvement and School Organisational effectiveness. School Improvement Partner visits have taken place with an external partner (SIP) and School Organisational Effectiveness meetings (SOE) led by the COO/J Firth and CFO/A Rawson.

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School Improvement: The Chair of Standards (K Inwood) shared his dual reflections on the Bowling Green SIP visit, as Chair of their LGB. He was thoroughly complimentary of all involved and pleased with good progress made. The School Improvement Team Report to the Trust Board (7.1.1) was welcomed. Overall, GHAT's curriculum (in all schools), collaborative working, subject leads and networks are a feature of the Trust, with the core offer strategy now visibly stronger.

SEND: At the invitation of the CEO, J Nellis endorsed the outcomes of the SEND review (in each school) and recommendations for moving forward, which include new systems and connections to local specialist provision (Highbury, Ravenshall, Fairfield etc). SEND now has a sharpened focus and is embedded in Headteacher Reports, School Improvement Plans and Performance Management.

School Organisational Effectiveness: Developments to date have added a sharpening of focus on the COO and CFO areas of Headteacher responsibility. Effective 'local' management of premises and finance flows into School Improvement Plans, connecting wider school decision-making with educational standards. Each school has had an initial SOE meeting and a follow-up to target development areas (sample pre-meeting briefing provided for Trustees); Chair of Trustees has attended. The CEO noted that SOE has moved forward strategically, with F&P and Standards committees to provide a QC role.

Ofsted: The CEO Report concluded with an honest reflection of current Ofsted positioning, if visited. In response to J Power (part of West Vale's LGB), the CEO provided further insight on the relative positioning of Bowling Green (has had more immediate benefit from SOE developments) and West Vale. A Birt added that she will be visiting West Vale imminently, as a follow-up from Standards Committee (24th May).

Data summary report: Trustees discussed at length an overview of the MAT's Y6 "In house (non-validated data)", July 2021. The data summary report had been circulated by the CEO earlier in the day from in-school teacher assessments and was an indicator of positioning at the end of KS2, backed up by SIP visits with an external advisor.

All the MAT's schools had shown a 15-20% improvement since pupils returned. The CEO emphasised that the way forward now is to prioritise a benchmarking exercise from September 2021 for every year group in each school, to inform trends, barriers and catch-up plans pre-May (NB re. comparisons, need to report numbers achieving rather than percentages - due to variations in pupil numbers). J Nellis confirmed that the Ofsted 'lens' is on catch-up and K Inwood suggested an extra Standards meeting late in Autumn Term (with benchmarking and the rate of catch-up as the sole agenda item, as in 2020). The CEO added that Spring Term would bring predicted data and pathways for each child.

In response to the Chair of Trustees, it was noted that Writing was significantly weaker compared to National (2019), due to lockdown/remote learning. K Inwood confirmed that this was not unexpected as parents generally have insufficient experience of the level of writing and grammar expected at Y6. K Inwood challenged that not a single child at Bowling Green was 'working at greater depth' (GDS). The CEO explained that teacher confidence re. 'exceeding' at BG was building over time.

K Inwood concluded that the Trust's positioning was very good in light of the past two years. The CEO will work with the Chair of Trustees and Chair of Standards to shape Autumn Term reporting.

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7.2 MAT reporting – CFO & COO

Financial reporting

The CFO Report and consolidated Management Accounts had been scrutinised by Finance & Premises Committee, with prior discussion at a pre-meeting between the CFO, Chair of Finance and Chair of Trustees.

The CFO (A Rawson) highlighted that the CFO Report details the Trust finance strategies over time and key assumptions.

Trustees received the annotated Trust Management Accounts (7.2a) and three year forecasts as at 28.6.2021, with a current forecast of £1,898,084 carried forward at the end of 2020-21 and a forecast at 31.8.2023 of £2,109,609. The Trust Board confirmed that they were confident of the Trust position given the notes and assumptions provided.

Financial approvals required at Trust Board (£35,001 and above) were detailed in Agenda item 7.2b (two Trusts: no cost impacts on MAT budget; Huddersfield University: SCITT; Accounting software: seven licences across the Trust). **All four approvals were formally agreed by Trustees.**

Chair of Standards report

Nothing further to add – see K Inwood comments embedded above.

COO report

MAT Board had received a safeguarding audit summary with full copies to the Named Trustee (A Birt), who had recommended a central register to monitor refresher training at all sites. The COO will re-visit one site to check that recommendations made are in place.

7.3 MAT reporting – Trust policies

Reserves and Investment Policy: Finance & Premises Committee had discussed and recommended a revised policy to the Trust Board. A stepped approach had been proposed, to separate historic balances (in September 2021) from the implementation of the new policy (in September 2022). Each entity should aim to hold one month's expenditure, as a buffer in case of emergency. If exceeded - in a year's time - any excess will be held by the Trust.

Questions from A Birt and K Inwood were answered by the CFO. Implementing the new policy in September 2022 gives Trust schools a full year to reflect on spending priorities; existing controls (Financial Scheme of Delegation) plus School Organisational Effectiveness developments should avoid any "rush to spend". K Inwood confirmed that he was happy with these combined checks and balances. Following a comprehensive response from across the Trust, the CEO recommended the policy for Trustee approval which was agreed unanimously.

Shared Use Agreement (Pre-School): Agreed in principle, subject to any final modifications to be discussed outside the meeting (J Firth / E Brooke).

Risk Registers (all entities including GHAT) and risk policy update: All agreed.

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- 8 Arrangements for the appointment of Chair and Vice Chair, 2021-2022
The MAT Board were reminded that “*Trustees shall each school year elect a chair and vice-chair from among their number. A Trustee who is employed by the Academy Trust shall not be eligible*” (Mem & Arts). Trustees agreed to follow a process of self-nomination to the Clerk/Governance professional (N Oliver) by end of day, 9th September.
- 9 Standing Item - specific MAT Board decisions
Minutes of previous meeting 24.5.21 - **approved**
To receive the Trust Management Accounts and 3 year budget - **approved**
Financial approvals required (x4) - **agreed**
Shared use agreement, reserves and risks policies, and risk registers - **all approved**
Chair/Vice Chair 2021-22: self-nominations to the Clerk by Thursday 9th September
- 10 AOB
- Non-teaching pay scales: the views of Trustees were heard on aligning non-teaching pay scales within their authority base, to ensure recruitment and retention of good staff; an issue raised by LGBs at Raynville and Carlinghow. The Board were in favour of the COO revising the Pay Policy, with HR advice, to align schools with their LA.
 - Premises for the core team: the joint EOI with Stainland Parish Council was rejected. Other options continue to be explored.
 - Local Plan: options for primary provision in Greetland and Elland were discussed at a Stage 3 Hearing 16.6.2021. The COO reported that there had been no support for the Trust’s case (release of suitable land) and the Inspector’s final ruling is awaited,
- 11 Future Meetings
Detailed arrangements tbc:
4th October 2021 (Standards 6pm / MAT Board 7pm)
13th December 2021 (Members AGM 5pm / F&P 5.30pm / MAT Board 7pm)
- if possible to be in-person meetings, tbc
1st November 2021 **MAT training day** (November/CH) – all welcome

In closing the meeting, the Chair of Trustees expressed his personal thanks on behalf of the Board to everyone in the Trust for outstanding work in a very unsettling year. Trustees had also provided tremendous support and contributions.

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