



Great Oak Multi Academy Trust

Board of Directors

Meeting Date: 24 April 2025

Time: 19.45

Director	Office	Term	Present
Gary Benn		31/08/25	Yes
Lilly Barker	Chair (CH)	16/11/26	Yes
Paul Gray		10/02/26	No
Kate Porch		19/09/27	Yes
Wazz Mughal	Vice Chair (VCH)	03/09/27	Yes
Sarah Mitchell	Executive Headteacher (EHT)	Ex-Officio	Yes

In attendance: Alice Balchin, Clerk

- | | | |
|-------------|---|---------------|
| 1/25 | Apologies for absence | Action |
| | Apologies were received from Paul Gray. | |
| 2/25 | Notification of AoB | |
| | None. | |
| 3/25 | Notification of business interests | |
| | No director declared a potential conflict of interest on any matters to be discussed at the meeting or that they had received or given hospitality or a gift that could be perceived to compromise their impartiality when dealing with matters for the Trust. Wazz Mughal had been excluded from a previous action conducted outside the meeting- reported 10d/25. | |
| 4/25 | Minutes | |
| | <p>a) The minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p> <p>b) The confidential minutes of the meeting of the 31 March 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p> | |

5/25 Matters Arising

No matters arising from the last meeting, not otherwise covered on the agenda, were reported.

MAIN BUSINESS

6/25 Governance

a) Membership of the Board

It was noted that Paul Gray had confirmed he intended to resign at the end of the academic year. The replacement would need to have financial and audit expertise to balance the skills of the Board.

Following discussions with EHT, John Burwood, a Governor at GCPA, had expressed an interest. He had the relevant financial and audit experience. It is hoped that he will be able to join the Board in September. This will need to be approved by the Trust Members, including CDET.

It was **agreed** to action his nomination to the Members for A September 2025 start.

EHT/CH

The possible candidate the Chair had been in discussions with from Debden's local community was no longer interested.

It was **agreed** that advertising would take place during the Summer Term to recruit further directors. There is a new incumbent at Debden, Reverend Lynda Sebbage, it was suggested she could be approached or the existing Governors at DPA to see if there was any interest. This would fill the vacancy following Reverend John Saxon (DPA governor) stepping down following his relocation.

It was **agreed** that EHT would discuss this with Rev'd Lynda Sebbage before the next meeting.

EHT

The Trust would benefit from additional directors with knowledge and skills in the following areas: finance, HR and education.

Gary Benn is unclear about his intentions in August when his tenure finishes. He is considering extending this on a periodical basis.

Gary Beenn agreed to update the board with his decision.

GB

b) School Resource Management (SRM) Self-Assessment Checklist

The meeting noted a draft 2025-26 School Resource Management (SRM) Self-Assessment Checklist had been prepared and circulated to all Directors to review and raise any comments. No comments had been raised and the SRM Self-Assessment completion had been **approved**.

The Checklist had been submitted to the ESFA by the due date.

c) Audit Committee

There are currently no vacancies on this committee. It is hoped that the forthcoming vacancy position will be filled by John Burwood and that he will also consider the position of Chair on Paul Gray's departure.

It was **agreed** that ideally a replacement for Wazz Mughal should be found as he also holds the position of Chair of GCPA LGB and Vice Chair of Directors as well as being on the Audit Committee.

7/25 Strategy/ Future Plans

a) The development of the MAT

• DPA Headteacher

The Debden Headteacher is leaving at the Academic Year. Recognition of his achievements at the school was acknowledged. The existing Deputy Head, Sarah Bailey, has been appointed. The stakeholders have confidence in her ability to lead the school and EHT will provide specific support through her first year.

• SENCO

The EHT reported that both schools will need a new SENCO from September 2025. Sarah Bailey is the current SENCO at Debden and the SENCO at GCPA has resigned from the role on return from Maternity Leave. Amy Sargeant is covering the role at GCPA short term until the end of the academic year. The intention is to appoint a SENCO working across both schools. This role could potentially be a joint role with the Deputy position at DPA. If a joint role was adopted, this would then require recruitment of an additional part time teacher at Debden.

EHT was meeting with Matt Hawley, Sarah Bailey and Amy Sargeant in the week beginning the 28/4 to discuss these options further. The roles were going to be advertised separately with interviews to be conducted before the half term break.

It was generally agreed that a SENCO working across the Trust was a good idea and would be an attractive opportunity for an individual looking for career development.

• Academisation

The details of future expansion, following a change in government, has not yet been determined. If the process is reinvigorated, the Trust is in a strong position as a Church Majority MAT. The aim remains to grow and additionally explore the possibility of outsourcing services to provide a revenue stream.

b) School Development Plans

The meeting received and noted the progress being made by the Academies in achieving their key development priorities for 2024 – 2025.

c) The Risk Register

The meeting received and noted the changes to the MAT's and the individual Academy's Risk Registers.

• DPA

Strategic Risk - Admissions

EHT

Discussion took place to check if the ratings and mitigations were sufficient.

There are now two classes full at DPA With a PAN of 23 and the roll stands at 141. The maximum is 161. Local schools need to be full before funding becomes available for expansion. With spaces still available it was **agreed** that no changes were needed at this point.

Operational Risk – Educational balance - it was noted that Rachel Stoddart needs removing from this risk.

EHT

Operational Risk – SEND - Recruitment of Trust SENCO **to be added** to mitigating actions.

- **GCPA**

Strategic Risk - Admissions

Low numbers for Reception 2025 pose a significant risk because of its impact on the GAG. However, numbers are expected to grow with the building being undertaken in the village. With the increased risk, mitigating actions need to be completed by the LGB.

EHT

EHT

Operational Risk – SEND – Mitigating actions need further information to include recruitment of Trust SENCO and budgeting early.

Given their current low risk grading, mitigating actions are not required for the following items and it was **agreed** that they could be removed:

Operational Risk – Governor/ Director Effectiveness

Operational Risk – IT Support and System

Operational Risk – Inappropriate Internet Content

- **GOMAT**

Strategic Risk - MAT Stability and Development – The mitigating action had been updated to include Headteacher recruitment at DPA; it was **agreed** that SENCO recruitment would be added.

EHT

Strategic Risk - Absence of Key Persons – It was **agreed** that the mitigating actions would include Headteacher recruitment; Deputy Head recruitment; support from EHT and summer term HT handover.

Operational Risk – Governor/ Director Effectiveness – The difficulty had been expanded to include recruiting Directors. It was **agreed** that the likelihood and impact should both be increased to 3. Mitigating actions to be out in place to include more advertising.

Operational Risk – SEND - Recruitment of Trust SENCO added to mitigating actions.

8/25 Executive Head Teacher's [EHT's] Report

The EHT provided an overview of her termly report on the operation and performance of the MAT and highlighted the following:

- **Admissions**

GCPA: Lower pupil numbers are being closely monitored. Low birth rate for incoming Reception 2025 as well as pupils moving to other settings due to relocating; Independent Schools and specialist provision were highlighted.

DPA: Reception class 2025 is expected to be full at DPA against National Trend and there is a waiting list in place. When any year groups are full, future applicants are signposted to the other school if there are spaces.

Greater mobility within the forces had resulted in slightly lower numbers this term but the ability to run 6 classes has not been compromised.

The level of high need SEN had increased during the year. This has been due to new pupils joining at both the start of the year and through mid-year admissions.

- **Secondary school allocations**

Secondary school allocations for Year 6 pupils leaving each Academy were released on 1 March 2025 everyone had received their first choice.

- **Attendance**

Both schools now compare well against the National Average. GCPA had been congratulated by ECC for its high levels of attendance compared to both Essex and National figures.

- **Safeguarding**

GCPA: Safeguarding incident

Security of the school site has been re-examined following a child leaving the school site of their own accord. Staff followed the child, and the child returned to school with the HT. The police and parent were routinely called; both parents attended the incident and met with the child and HT in school. The governors were satisfied all procedures had been followed. The LGB has **agreed** that all external doors need upgrading to the Paxton door system as soon as possible. Three more doors are being placed on the Paxton System to release on the Fire Alarm. The child has an individual Risk Assessment in place and procedures have been changed to prevent a further incident.

Fencing of the premises at the front boundary is being investigated by a Governor. Location of school in conservation area will make planning permission more difficult.

DPA: Have just moved across to an online system for monitoring and raising of safeguarding concerns (CPOMS). It is easier to transfer information to other organisations and educational settings. It should also allow more efficient linking of behaviour, attendance and health needs. If this system proves beneficial, then it will roll out in both schools.

- **Staffing**

Teachers have to offer notice by the end of May so there may be additional recruitment later this term. Support Staff must give 4 weeks notice but recruitment of Support Staff has been easier this year with multiple applications.

Both schools have needed long term supply teaching support for and extended sickness absences and maternity cover (DPA).

- **Church Schools**

The Board was most pleased to note that both Schools now have incumbents following the appointments of Reverend Lynda Sebbage at DPA and Reverend Ella Harris at GCPA.

DPA has been notified that its SIAMS inspection is expected to take place next academic year.

- **Finance**

DPA GAG: increased for 2025-2026 because of an increase in the roll at October 2024 census.

GCPA GAG: decreased because of a decrease in the roll at October 2024 census.

- **Buildings and Premises**

GCPA: The fitting of sound proofing has been delayed because of the prioritisation to the door access control. Some children have been finding the noise difficult and the staff have been issued with ear defenders.

It was suggested that the lunchtime arrangements could be staggered/ changed to mitigate the noise.

9/25 Policies

The meeting received and reviewed the following:

- Reserves Policy – this reflects a change in the agreed figure of reserves held £303,0000. Whilst meeting the aims of the policy and ensuring it refers to free reserves; it also reflects the decrease in GCPA's reserves following the KS1 playground works.

It was **agreed** to approve the updated Reserves Policy, April 2025.

- Recruitment and Selection Policy – this has been updated to reflect Essex HR's suggested changes. Key changes were referencing the Probationary Procedures; the requirement to keep interview notes and a change to volunteer provision.

It was **agreed** to approve the updated Recruitment and Selection Policy, April 2025.

10/25 Finance

a) Management Accounts

The meeting received and noted the managements accounts for each Academy for the 7 months to 31 March 2025.

All

Budgets were already being prepared for the following year. Helen Edwards (CFO) had prepared and circulated consolidated headline accounts and had invited the Board's feedback on these. It was **agreed** that any feedback / suggested changes should be sent directly to the CFO prior to the next meeting.

The Board **agreed** to proceed with the Key Performance Indicators that the CFO had suggested:

GAG per pupil

Cost per pupil

Staff as a percentage of income

CFO

Staff absence days against cost of cover

The Chair had requested that SEN be added, and this was generally **agreed**.

The Board would like Premises costs as a percentage of income added as an additional KPI.

b) Capital Expenditure exceeding EHT Limit

No requests

c) Future Capital Expenditure

No requests

d) Restricted Donation

It had been **approved** by email on 24.3.25 to accept donation of £5,000 by a local company to GCPA to support STEM within the school. Wazz Mughal had been excluded from this decision due to a conflict of interest.

11/25 Personnel

a) Appointment of new Headteacher at Debden

Noted. This had been verified at the board meeting on 31 March 2025.

b) Appointment of staff to confirm the operation of the recruitment, performance and dismissal policies

EHT reported that all appropriate policies had been followed for performance management and the recruitment of new staff. This included the involvement of the Diocese and Local Authority for the Headteacher recruitment at DPA.

c) The arrangements for the provision of external advice on personnel and human resource issues

It was **agreed** to continue with Essex Legal and H/R.

d) Update on the staff performance management reviews

Interim PMRs in progress. Dates to be arranged for Amy Sargeant, Matt Hawley and Sarah Mitchell.

EHT

ROUTINE BUSINESS

12/25 Chairs Action

The Chair reported she had approved the following actions on behalf of the directors since the last meeting:

- Agreed to leasing of laptops by GCPA. Trust approval was needed for Wazz Mughal signed the lease. Contract is with GCPA.
- Ratified the appointment of Natalie Starbuck as Staff Governor at GCPA

- Agreed extension of Griffin Chapman contract to 2 years to maximise savings and value for money. The members had approved the continued use of Griffin Chapman at their meeting (13.2.2025).
- Approved the use of a card machine at GCPA.

13/25 Safeguarding

WM reported that there were no further safeguarding items to report. Safeguarding governors had been carrying out their planned monitoring visits. Andrew Pickering (GCPA) had also completed further NGA training. Further meetings will take place before the annual safeguarding reports are drawn up and these will be shared at the next meeting.

14/25 Health and Safety

Gary Benn reported that there is a new Health and Safety External Monitor – Peter Mclean who is the Premises Manager for Saffron Trust. He had visited both Schools. The reports were yet to be received but no serious concerns had been expressed at the visits.

15/25 Correspondence

No

16/25 Minutes/reports of committees

- The meeting received and noted the confirmed minutes of the meeting of the GCPA LGB held on 18 March 2025.
- The meeting received and noted the un-confirmed minutes of the meeting of the DPA LGB held on 3 April 2025.
- The meeting received and noted the draft minutes of the meeting of The Audit and Risk Committee on the 6 March 2025.

17/25 Any other business

Gary Benn had become a STEM Ambassador. He is advising schools on Climate Change Action Plans which all schools need to have in place by the end of 2025.

18/25 Date/time of future meetings

Thursday 17/07/2025 at 19:45 hrs

Approved by the Board of Directors on 17.7.2025