

Great Oak Multi Academy Trust
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Minutes of the meeting held on 2 May 2023

Directors	Office	Term
* Gary Benn		31/08/2025
Lilly Barker		16/11/2026
Paul Gray		10/02/2026
Alison Meadows		11/05/2025
Sarah Mitchell	Executive Headteacher [EHT]	Ex-Officio
Andrew Taylor	Chair	31/08/2025
<i>In attendance:</i>		
Tom Bennett	Clerk	
* indicates absence		

Sarah Mitchell opened the meeting with a prayer

1/23 Apologies for absence

No apologies for absence had been received.

2/23 Notification of AoB

None.

3/23 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 any gifts or hospitality that could be perceived to compromise their impartiality when dealing with matters for the MAT.

4/23 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

5/23 Matters Arising

Minute 49/22 – Vice Chair

It was **agreed** to defer the election of a Vice-Chair to the next meeting.

All other matters arising in the minutes had either been completed or were included on the agenda.

MAIN BUSINESS

6/23 Governance

a) New Director

The Chair reported the Trust’s members had agreed at their last meeting to appoint an additional director to fill a number of vacancies on the Board.

The Rev Alex Jeewan had approached the Rev. John Saxon, a governor at DPA, to ask if he would be interested in becoming a director. He expressed an interest in becoming a director and had recently provided a CV that that was currently being considered by the members prior to making an appointment.

The Chair felt it was important to find a governor on the GCPA LGB who would be interested in becoming a director to represent the interests of the school and advise the LGB on the board’s discussions and decisions.

Action

**Chair/
Clerk**

It was **agreed** to approach the GCPA governors and other interested parties who would like to become a director on the board.

EHT

b) Guidance on the role of Trust Members issued by NGA in February 2023

The meeting noted the Guidance on the role of Trust Members issued by the NGA in February 2023. The guidance from the NGA and ESFA was that Trust's should have at least five members.

The EHT reported she had spoken to the Director of Education at the Chelmsford Diocese Board of Education, Carrie Prior on increasing the current number of the Trust's members from three. She supported increasing the number of members provided the majority of members were Diocese appointed members.

The ESFA and auditors had raised a number of issues on Trust's governance arrangements and potential conflicts of interest and had recommended an external review.

It was noted the provisions within the Trust's Articles of Association on the appointment of and who could be members were very prescriptive and may need amending to allow the Trust to increase the number of members.

The Articles of Association had been drawn up the Diocese's legal advisors and any changes would require approval by the Diocese.

It was **agreed** to undertake an internal review the Trust's Articles of Association and its governance arrangements to consider and make any recommendations on the need for an external governance review and whether to refer any governance issues to the Diocese to consider.

EHT/ AM/
LB

c) The School Resource Management (SRM) Self-Assessment Checklist 23-24 prepared and submitted to the ESFA

The meeting noted the SRM Self-Assessment Checklist 23-24 prepared and submitted to the ESFA.

The Self-Assessment Checklist set out the Trust's approach and actions taken to ensure good governance and management of the Trust's activities.

It was **agreed** to include future Self Assessments on the Trust's approach and actions of the Trust's activities on the Board's Programme of Business and to include an additional meeting, as necessary, to consider and confirm that the Trust's governance and management arrangements were being appropriately operated.

EHT/ Clerk

d) Vacancies on the Audit and Risk Committee

The meeting noted there were currently two independent members on the Audit and Risk Committee and two out of three internal members.

It was **agreed** to ask John Saxon whether he would like to a member of the committee, subject to his appointment as a director.

Chair

e) The School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) 6-month review

The EHT reported the Trust had received a visit from the ESFA's SRMA in November 2021 to initially review the finances at DPA who had extended her review to cover the Trust's governance and management arrangement and the implementation of the statutory guidance and requirements set out in the Academies Trust Handbook [ATH].

The SRMA had made a number of recommendations on the economies, efficiencies, and finance at DPA and non- financial recommendations on the Trust's governance and management arrangements and compliance with statutory guidance and requirements.

In response to the SRMA's report, a non-financial action plan was drawn up detailing the steps that would be taken to further improve and strengthen the Trust's governance and management arrangements, its financial controls, and other areas to meet

guidance and requirements set out in the Academies Trust Handbook [ATH] and other good practice.

The SRMA had conducted a follow up review and was impressed with the actions taken and progress made in improving and strengthening the Trust's governance, management arrangements and its financial controls and advised that she would not be recommending an external governance review as the issues raised had been successfully addressed internally.

7/23 Strategy/ Future Plans

a) Update on the development of the MAT

The priority for developing and expanding the MAT would now be on finding and attracting other schools to join the Trust.

It was noted although the recommendation from the ESFA for MATs to have at least 5 to 6 schools for a MAT to be financially sustainable, the Trust was currently in a financially sustainable position with only two schools.

The EHT reported that the following the withdrawal of the Education White Paper 2022, and the proposals for all schools to be academies and part of a Multi Academy Trusts [MAT] and for smaller MATs who had only two to three academies to join other MAT had been relaxed.

The EHT reported that she had also spoken to the Director of Education at the Chelmsford Diocese Board of Education, Carrie Prior on expanding the Trust and finding new schools that would be a good fit with the schools within local area.

b) Academy Development Plans 2022–2023

The meeting received and noted the highlighted activities carried out in the Spring Term and progress made by the Academies in achieving their key development priorities for 2022–2023.

No questions were raised on the plans.

c) Risk Management

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

The EHT reported the Strategic Risk – Admission needed close monitoring as pupil numbers at DPA were increasing with mid-year admissions and the level of pupils applying to join in September. Although this was positive sustained growth, the Trust needed to ensure the current class structure would accommodate the higher number of pupil numbers.

The number of pupils applying to join Reception at GCPA had initially been low but had since increased and the number of in-year admissions was increasing due to new building developments at Great Chesterfield.

Another strategic risk facing the Trust that needed close monitoring was the financial gap between government funding and unfunded higher costs from cost-of-living increases and higher than budgeted staff pay awards that could impact on the Trust's effectiveness in meeting its objectives.

It was **agreed** to update the strategic risk facing the Trust on its stability and development to include the governance issues raised by the Auditors and ESFA and the need to ensure that the Trust was following statutory guidance and best practice.

EHT

8/23 Executive Head Teacher's [EHT's] Report

The EHT presented her Spring term on the operation and performance of the MAT and highlighted the following points:

Admissions

The number of pupils who had applied to join GCPA was initially lower than previous years but was now closer to the Published Admissions Number [PAN] of thirty. With seven the Academy's total capacity was 210 pupils.

Seven pupils had joined since the start of the Academy year and three had left. Pupil numbers were very stable and were being monitored closely.

The number of pupils who had applied to join DPA in September was 24 compared to a PAN of 23. With eight pupils joining mid-year and three leaving the total pupils on roll was 131 pupils. This would increase with further interest for mid-year admissions from service families moving from Wethersfield to the area as well as a number of more local families choosing to change schools.

Taking account of all the increases together the now expected total number of pupils at September could result in there being in the region of 150 pupils that would be difficult to teach with the current class structure.

The Academy's Senior Leadership Team [SLT] had started investigating increasing the number of classes from five to six including Reception.

The Chair asked how the Trust could increase the DPA's PAN from 23 to 30 a year.

The EHT reported that discussions had already taken place with regards to increasing the PAN with Essex CC. The Academy needed to review the size and condition of the space available to teach six classes of 30 pupils. The space included two demountable classes of which only one was currently being used.

The Academy would also need to fund an additional teacher and teacher support assistant that would not be immediately funded by the increase on the number of pupils due to one-year lag in ESFA funding.

The Chair felt the rising number of pupils at the school was positive and moving towards the Trust's long-term aim of a single form entry class structure for each year.

Alison Meadows asked whether increasing the number of classes could be sustained for the long-term as the school was in a small village.

The EHT reported DPA had become a school of choice for families in the wider community, beyond Debden. The school had also achieved higher pupil numbers in the past that had fallen prior to joining the Academy due to the school's leadership capacity.

Lilly Baker reported there were also a number of new housing development in the village that could lead to more families needing school places.

The meeting welcomed and supported the increase in pupil numbers, and it was **agreed:**

- To continue to investigate whether an increase to the PAN to 30 was viable based on the building and facilities constraints and agreement with the LA.
- To draw up a business plan for the additional class to include the additional costs of teaching and any capital building costs together with the future additional ESFA grant and any other capital grant funding available.
- To draw up a recruitment pack to advertise for a new teacher for the start of the new academic year in September, subject to approval of the business plan.

Staffing

The EHT reported she had met DPA Headteacher, Matt Hawley, to discuss the current staff structure at the school and the need to change it to increase the leadership, teaching, and support capacity and to provide improved career progression for the leadership team to help retain key staff.

The Trust had supported the school financially over the past two year in setting up the

EHT

current leadership team to support the HT who now felt the school needed a Deputy Headteacher to increase the leadership capacity with the increasing number of pupils. It would also allow Mr Hawley to continue teaching classes part time, provide career opportunities across the trust and provide additional resources to further develop the MAT.

The meeting discussed whether to defer the appointment of a new deputy headteacher and to temporary fund an enhanced Teaching and Learning Responsibility [TLR] post while the additional class was being set-up and to ensure that the increased pupil numbers at the school were maintained. The board concluded that it would not be financially prudent to increase the number of classes at the same time as appointing a deputy head at the school.

The EHT reported the Academy had secured a substantial grant from the Ministry of Defence to help service family children at the school and further financial support could be available with the proposed movement of other service families.

The Chair supported the appointment of an enhanced senior teacher who could support the establishment of the new class, strengthen the school's capacity to meet the increase in the number of pupils and allow the current Headteacher to expand his role within the Trust.

The EHT reported DPA was due a visit and assessment by Ofsted but was well prepared and in a very good position.

It was **agreed** to approve the appointment of an enhanced TLR subject to a review of the business case set out in the draft budget for 2023-24 and projections for the following two years.

EHT

It was **agreed** to review the appointment of a deputy in the future once the board was confident that school numbers and growth were sustained over a period of time.

EHT

The EHT reported that some parents and staff were being affected by the higher cost of living levels.

Both schools had received increased correspondence from parents that had taken up leadership time implementing new measures to resolve concerns and provide support. Complaints at both schools had followed the required policies and procedures by all leaders involved.

There were three children at GCPA with extremely high special educational and behavioural needs that required a significant number of staff and leadership time on monitoring, and supporting the children and working with external agencies who also supported the children. She felt this was having an adverse effect on the physical and emotional wellbeing of those staff supporting the children. The leadership team had implemented a lot of measures to minimise the disruption to the teaching and learning of the other children. The governors were also informed about these challenges and supporting the school.

Paul Gray asked whether the industrial action taken by a few teachers had impacted on other members of staff.

The EHT reported the leadership teams had taken a neutral, non-judgmental approach to those taking industrial action across the Trust. GCPA had had to close two classes due to teachers taking industrial action.

The meeting **agreed** the proposed KS1 and KS2 targets for pupil achievement for 2023-24 against the comparative targets for 2023 and 2022 on pages 7-8 of the report.

EHT

9/23 Policies

Financial Regulations

The EHT reported that due to the difficulty in obtaining three written quotations for orders with a value between £5,000 and £50,000 from companies due to their current high workloads, regulation 7.1 of the Financial Regulations had been amended to read “wherever possible, three written quotations should be obtained” and where it was not possible two quotes would be sufficient.

It was **agreed** to approve the amended Financial Regulations.

EHT

Recruitment and Selection Policy

The EHT reported the specific roles and responsibilities had been updated to reflect the changes to the leadership staff and governor responsibilities and that professional social media sites would also be used when advertising vacant posts, in addition to other methods.

It was **agreed** to approve the amended Recruitment and Selection Policy.

EHT

10/23 Finance

a) Managements accounts for each Academy for the 7 months to 31 March 2023

The meeting received the Managements accounts for each Academy for the 7 months to 31 March 2023, noted and approved the variances between the forecasts and budgets for the year-end.

b) Requests for revenue or capital expenditure that exceeds the EHT’s approval limit

None.

c) Requests for future revenue or capital expenditure from the LGBs not included in their approved budgets

GCPA Hall Floor

The EHT reported GCPA had obtained quotes to repair, sand and varnish the hall floor and the best value quote received was £3,4320 +VAT.

It was **agreed** to approve the planned work at the quoted price to be completed during the summer holiday.

EHT

GCPA Roof and Window Works

The EHT reported the school had received a professional fee proposal and scope of services from Eddisons to project manage the renewal of the slate coverings on the two pitched roofs and the replacement of the windows, doors, and cladding on the listed school building.

It was noted the Trust had used Eddisons in the past to project manage other building projects and to submit funding bids to the ESFA Capital Improvement Fund.

Eddisons had assessed the cost of the proposed works at £90,000 and had quoted a fee for their services at 10% of the final contract sum. Half would be payable at the tender stage and balance during contract stage split into equal monthly sums.

It was **agreed** to obtain two further quotes for the tendering exercise.

EHT/Chair

d) The recruitment and staffing structure of Trust’s financial staff

The meeting noted that following an interview during the Easter break, a Finance Manager had been appointed. The successful applicant was Helen Edwards, a qualified management accountant with experience of large and small companies including several years as a Finance Director.

The interview panel felt Helen would be a great asset to the Trust and both academies

in this central services role.

11/23 Personnel

- a) **To note the appointment of staff to confirm the operation of the recruitment, performance, and dismissal policies**

[included in the EHT's Report]

- b) **External advice on personnel and human resource issues.**

The EHT reported the Trust used Juniper Education for advice on personnel and human resource issues. Over 12,000 schools subscribed to Juniper Education for their consultancy advice services.

- c) **Staff performance management reviews**

The EHT reported that all teaching staff performance management reviews had been completed including the interim headteacher reviews.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

12/23 Safeguarding

[Included in the EHT's report].

13/23 Health and Safety

The EHT reported that Sonia Sault, the Trust's external appointed H&S advisor had undertaken H&S checks at both schools and had drawn up a number of recommendations that were being implemented.

14/23 Correspondence

No correspondence relating to the Board of Directors was reported.

15/23 Minutes/reports of committees

- (a) The meeting noted the confirmed minutes of the meeting of the GCPA LGB held on 21 March 2023. No questions were raised.
- (b) The meeting noted the confirmed minutes of the meeting of the DPA LGB held on 30 March 2022. No questions were raised.
- (c) The meeting noted the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 26 January 2023. No questions were raised.

16/23 Any other business

None

17/23 Date/time of future meetings

Thursday 13/07/2023 at 19:45 hrs

Approved by the Board on 13 July 2023