

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Minutes of the video conference meeting held at 14:00 hrs on 11 March 2022

Directors	Office	Term
* Andrew Armour		31/08/2025
* Gary Benn		31/08/2025
Melissa Challinor	Vice Chair	31/08/2025
* Paul Gray		10/02/2026
Alison Meadows		11/05/2025
Sarah Mitchell	Executive Headteacher [EHT]	Ex-Officio
Andrew Taylor	Chair	31/08/2025
Liam Tobin		22/07/2023
<i>In attendance:</i>		
Tom Bennett	Clerk	
* indicates absence		

The Executive Headteacher opened the meeting with a prayer

1/22 Apologies for absence

Action

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Paul Gray and Gary Benn.

2/22 Notification of AoB

- Executive Headteacher
- Email

3/22 Notification of business interests/ Self Declaration

No director present declared any potential conflicts 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.

4/22 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 30 November 2021 were approved as an accurate and true record of the meeting.

5/22 Matters Arising

All the actions arising at the last meeting had been completed or were covered on the agenda.

MAIN BUSINESS

6/22 Governance

a) Membership

Th Chair reported that Paul Gray had been appointed as a director by the Trust's Members at the AGM held on 11 February 2022.

Paul had previously been the Chair of Governors at Joyce Frankland Academy and was a Church Warden at Littlebury Parish church.

He had been an independent member on the Trust's Audit Committee but could no longer be an independent member following his appointment as a director.

The Chair reported that Melissa Challinor would also be standing down at the end of the academic year following her appointment as the Uttlesford Consortium Manager and as the Responsible Officer for GCPA with effect from 1st September 2022.

The Chair felt it was important to recruit a new director linked to DPA to maintain the balance of directors representing each academy on the Board.

There were now two vacancies on the Audit Committee following Paul's appointment as a director and Andrew Armour's decision to step down at the end of the current academic year. It was noted Paul Gray could remain on the Audit Committee as a general member.

The Chair had approached a person with a financial background that may be interested in joining the Audit Committee as an independent member to provide an external challenge to the directors and executive.

It was **agreed**:

- To carry out a review of the Board's roles and responsibilities and how they could be best delivered by the remaining and newly appointed directors;
- To notify the Chair of any areas and roles that directors would be interested in taking up.

Chair
All

b) DPA LGB

It was **agreed** to ratify the Chair's action taken on 2 February 2022 to appoint Tom Caster as a Foundation Governor on the DPA LGB

EHT

It was **agreed** to re-appoint Sarah Belchambers as a governor for a further four-year term from 28 March 2022.

EHT

The meeting received and considered a request to increase the number of governors on the DPA LGB.

The Chair reported that when the DPA joined the MAT, the Directors had agreed that DPA should have ten governors compared to twelve on the GCPA LGB, reflecting the size of each Academy.

DPA had been successful in growing the number of pupils at the school and there had been an increased interest among parents and the community in wanting to join the governing body.

It was expected new governors should be appointed on how best their skills met the needs of the governing body and school, such as creating a strong the link to service families at Carver Barracks and in providing oversight over the academy's finances, premises, and education provision.

The meeting noted the Board of Directors considered and approved all appointments to the governing bodies of each the Academy.

It was **agreed**:

EHT

- To increase the number of governors who can sit on the DPA LGB to twelve;
- To ask each Academy, when nominating a governor for appointment, to demonstrate how the nominee would either contribute to delivering the Academy's improvement plans or was part of the succession plan.

7/22 Corporate/ Strategy

a) School Resource Management Self-Assessment

The meeting received and noted the draft MAT's School Resource Management Self-Assessment checklist due to be submitted to the ESFA by the 15 March 2022.

The EHT reported she and the Business Manager had reviewed and completed each question on the draft checklist that had resulted in one self-generated action, being the requirement to evidence that its three-year financial forecast has been reviewed by the Directors before approval.

The EHT reported that this would be incorporated and completed within the timetable for the preparation and agreement of the 2022-23 budget to be submitted to the ESFA by 26/07/2022 and all following year budgets.

It was **agreed** to approve the draft MAT's School Resource Management Self-Assessment checklist and to implement the action to evidence that MAT's three-year financial forecast has been reviewed by the Directors before approval.

EHT

b) **Benchmarking**

The meeting considered several reports benchmarking the Trust and each Academy against benchmark data of similar trusts and academies in terms of contextual factors including size, pupil numbers, urban/rural location, pupils qualifying for free school meals and the number of SEND pupils.

The benchmarked data available was historic having been published in 2019-20.

Benchmarking the financial data had identified several areas for the senior leadership team to review. These included reviewing premises costs and in particular energy costs at DPA.

The main part of the Academies' funding was expended on staffing, and it was important to ensure that this area was closely monitored and benchmarked with staffing costs at similar schools.

The meeting noted that the total amount spent on staffing by DPA was similar to like sized schools, despite having a higher number of children with high need Education and Health Care Plans [EHCPs].

The Chair asked why both GCPA and DPA spent significantly less on educational resources when compared to similar schools and whether this would impact on each school's capacity to improve.

The EHT reported each Academy did spend less on external curriculum resources because they developed, wrote, and used their own resources that better met the education needs of the children at each academy. This raised the question as to why staff costs could be slightly higher than the mean of the staffing costs for the benchmarked schools. It was noted staff were not paid additional hours for such curriculum development.

There appeared to be an inconsistency between GCPA's reported spending on "Occupancy" that was the highest when compared to similar schools and on "Premises" that was the lowest. This was likely to be due to how the individual fields within occupancy and premises had been allocated within the budget.

It was **agreed** to carry out a more detailed review and provide a report on the comparative costs for teaching costs, costs of teaching resources and premises' costs.

EHT

c) **DPA Academy Structure**

The meeting considered a proposal prepared by the Head of School at DPA to amend the school's class structure from four classes to five classes in September 2022.

The Board of Directors had previously agreed to set up an additional class to accommodate the forecast increase in pupil numbers and to review the situation after a year to confirm the increase and that there was a financial case to make the change permanent.

The number of children on roll at Debden Primary Academy was going through a period of swift and sustained growth. The number of pupils on roll at the school had grown over the past two years since February 2020 from 85 to 129 as at February 2022.

The Academy had a Published Admissions Number [PAN] of 23, the total number of pupils that school could admit into each relevant age group. With 129 pupils and further growth expected and a PAN of 23, the school needed more than four classes.

The number of children at the school had fallen following an adverse Ofsted Inspection in 2015 and changes in leadership. Improvements were seen at the Ofsted Inspection in 2019 but had been still graded as Requiring Improvement [RI]. The new Head of School, Matt Hawley, had only been in post for 4 weeks at the time of the inspection and since then significant improvements with teaching and learning improvements have been demonstrated during both internal monitoring and through external monitoring (Education Advisor and Saffron Academy Trust). This had resulted in the school increasing in popularity again with families in both the village and surrounding areas.

The number of first choice applications for the Reception Class intake in September 2022 stood at 19 when compared to the PAN of 23.

Should the growth in pupil numbers continue the school would ultimately need to move from mixed year classes to single year forms.

The EHT reported the increase in children was from families both within and outside the catchment area and DPA becoming a “school of choice”. There was limited residential development in the village and the increase was due more to “word of mouth”.

Increasing the PAN from 23 to 30 would reduce the teaching costs per pupil and make the academy stronger financially. The EHT would look at the potential for increasing the PAN at DPA if numbers continued to grow.

Growing the school by adding an additional class also reduced the high fixed costs of the leadership team suffered by all small schools due to their size.

The current number of children at the school warranted the additional class.

The meeting noted all Academies were funded through the annual allocation of a General annual grant (GAG) that was set on the number of pupils at each academy at the previous year’s school census. This created a time lag in funding for growing or declining schools.

The proposal included detailed forecast amounts for DPA’s GAG funding and Staff Costs for both the current year and 2022-23.

The forecast GAG for DPA for 2022-23 confirmed that, despite the lag in funding for the increase in pupil numbers in 2021-22, DPA could fund the additional teaching costs of the additional class with the re-deployment of Learning Support Assistants [LSAs] from SEND children leaving the school to the new class.

It was also noted DPA’s GAG funding for 2023-24 would be set on the number of pupils in September 2022 that would exceed the current number of 129 due to more joining the school at Reception when compared to those leaving the school to go to secondary schools at the end of the current academic year.

The Chair summarised by saying the forecast numbers of children on the roll and the financial estimates justified the proposal to permanently increase the number of classes at the school.

It was **agreed** to approve the request to permanently create an additional class;

The Chair asked the EHT to forward the Board’s appreciation of the Head of Schools and leadership teams’ work to improve the school and make it popular again for local families.

EHT

8/22 Policies

Trust's pay policy

The EHT reported that Juniper, the Essex CC HR agency, had advised academy governing bodies and Multi Academy Trusts of the effect on pensions for a few teachers who were due to retire within the next ten years. Juniper had suggested academies and trusts should consider awarding these teachers a £12 pay increase to prevent any adverse effect on their pensions.

It was noted the £12 pay increase could have unintentional consequences on individual teachers' pension brackets and/ or child benefit entitlement. The suggested pay increase for those teachers affected was to increase their pay by £1 per month. Teachers will be given the choice as to whether accept this increase following HR guidance.

The proposal was in line with the advice given by teaching trade unions and the national government.

It was noted the national government had imposed a national pay freeze for all qualified teachers in September 2021. The MAT had awarded teaching pay increases in line with the National pay awards in the past but was able to award its own pay increases if it so wanted.

- a) It was **agreed** to offer those teachers whose pensions were affected a recruitment and retention payment of £1 per month / annual pay rise of £12 for leadership positions. *[Note, the EHT abstained from the vote]*
- b) It was **agreed** to award teachers' pay increases in line with the national pay award.
- c) It was **agreed** to award support staff a pay increase of 1.75% in line with the local government pay award for support staff in local government maintained schools.

EHT

EHT

EHT

9/22 Finance

a) Management Accounts

The meeting considered the Management Accounts for the 5 months ended 31 January 2022 for the MAT, GCPA and DPA and noted the amended year end forecasts and explanations provided for variances between the amended forecasts and agreed budget totals.

Alison Meadows asked why GCPA's support staff costs were currently below budget for the five months.

The EHT reported there were several support staff vacancies that were proving difficult to fill due the lack of any candidates – a national theme across the education sector. A few staff had also reduced their hours.

The Chair advised this was currently having an adverse effect on staff having to work more hours to cover and staff morale and motivation.

b) DPA's Spending Priorities for the School Premises

The meeting considered a paper from the DPA Governors setting out the Academy's spending priorities for the school premises and a request to use the Academy's reserves to part fund the expenditure, where necessary.

The EHT reported the Academy wanted to make further improvements to the facilities, fabric, and decorations at the school to make it more attractive to potential families. No cost estimates had been obtained or provided yet, but the governors were looking for

the Board to agree to the Academy spending up to £20k of its reserves on improvements.

The focus of the proposed funding would be on providing a covered outside space for pupils in Early Years. This would involve providing a suitable surface and all weather covering for the space directly outside the Early Years' classroom. All schools were required to make outdoor provision to children in Early Years.

Alison Meadows felt the Academy should provide fully costed plans when making the request.

The EHT advised the governors were aware the Academy would be required to follow the Trust's financial procedures when seeking approval for capital projects that would include obtaining three quotes. The DPA governors would like to know whether the Board would approve the use of the Academy's reserves in principle prior to seeking quotes and submitting formal requests for approval.

It was **agreed**:

- a) To approve the request to spend reserves up to £20k, in principle and subject to receiving and approval of fully costed plans that also met any planning regulations.
- b) To approve the application to spend up to £650 on providing a suitable store for the school's bins.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

10/22 Chairman's action

No other urgent action had been taken by the Chair or (Vice) Chair since the last meeting.

11/22 Correspondence

The EHT reported the MAT had received a visit from the ESFA's School Resource Management Advisor [SRMA] following GCPA's application to the Education and School's Funding Agency's [ESFA] Condition Improvement Fund. The SRMA had made several recommendations on the Trust's governance, financial procedures, and finances that the EHT and leadership team were currently reviewing to present to the Board with a number of proposed actions.

12/22 Any other business

- **Executive Headteacher** [*Refer to confidential minutes*].
- **Email**

The EHT reported directors would be provided with new GOMAT email accounts shortly after the meeting.

13/22 Date/time of future meetings

- Tuesday 03/05/2022
- Thursday 14/07/2022

All meeting to commence at 19:45 hrs

Approved by the Board on 3 May 2022