

Great Oak Multi Academy Trust
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Minutes of the video conference meeting held on 8 December 2022

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		

The EHT opened the meeting with a prayer

63/22 Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed Lilly Barker to her first Board meeting following her appointment as a director.

Apologies were received and accepted from Gary Brown and Alison Meadows.

64/22 Notification of AoB

- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

65/22 Notification of business interests/ Self Declaration

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.

66/22 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 12 September 2022 were approved as an accurate and true record of the meeting.

67/22 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

68/22 Governance

a) Membership

The Chair reported that the Trust’s members had appointed Lilly Barker to the Board on 17 November 2022 for a four-year term.

The Board required at least two more directors to help it fulfil its role and responsibilities and provide the capacity to develop and grow the Trust.

It was **agreed** that all the Directors should continue to identify any potential persons that may be interested in becoming a director.

Action

**Chair/
Clerk**

All

b) **DPA LGB**

The meeting noted and approved the Chair's action in appointing Lt Col Marcus Hayakawa as a Parent Governor on the DPA LGB.

c) **GCPA LGB**

The meeting considered and **agreed** to appoint Jayne Greenwood as the Chair of the GCPA LGB for the remainder of the 2022-23 academic year.

Jayne had been a governor for two years, was the Chair of the Academy's Teaching and Learning committee and was the governor responsible for SEND.

69/22 Corporate/ Strategy

a) **See confidential minutes.**

b) **MAT Growth**

The meeting noted the government had scrapped its Education White Paper 2022 that included plans for a fully trust-led system for all schools to be academies and part of a Multi Academy Trust [MAT]. The White Paper had also included a proposal for the many small MATs who had only two to three academies to join other MATS.

The meeting noted the updated map and list of suitable schools to approach to discuss the benefits of becoming an academy and joining the Trust.

Several schools listed had already joined other schools as federations with shared headteachers.

The EHT felt that many MATs were unable to take on and support funding for small schools who were already experiencing financial difficulties and that the government would need to find ways to provide funding to these schools.

Feedback from the Diocese was that some schools had started to express interest in converting to an academy and joining a MAT.

Paul Gray highlighted there were five Church of England Primary schools that were geographically close to GCPA that offered the potential for new schools to join the Trust.

It was **agreed** to follow this up as an urgent priority.

c) **2022-23 School Development Plans for each Academy**

The meeting received and noted the individual 2022-23 School Development Plans for each Academy that had been updated and highlighted [in blue] the actions taken and outcomes during the Autumn term and the progress being made in achieving their key priorities.

The EHT explained the process in drawing up, implementing, and monitoring the progress on the School Development Plans. Each plan addressed areas identified for improvement by Ofsted and all key priorities are cross-referenced to the Ofsted framework.

DPA was due for Ofsted Inspection and had been preparing by evidencing the improvements in the areas identified for improvement at the previous Ofsted inspection including ensuring the standard of teaching in all subjects was consistently good across the school.

DPA had made progress and was on track on to meet all of its five key priorities.

DPA was due a Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) inspection that would likely be carried out in the next academic year. A new inspection framework would be used for the visit once it has been published and the EHT would be attending training in February. Schools would no longer be assessed using grades but on whether they met the standard or not.

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Chair/
EHT

d) Risk Register

The meeting received and noted the updated Risk Register and the progress being made to mitigate the likelihood and impact of the key risks identified.

The EHT highlighted the key risks facing the Trust and individual academies.

The cost-of-living increases and rising energy bills were putting a lot of pressure on the funding gap.

The high number of children with high special education and behavioural needs was also putting a strain on teaching and financial resources. Particularly with the on-going recruitment challenges - this was also affecting staff morale.

The recruitment of a new MAT Business Manager was proving difficult and created a new risk on the timeliness and accuracy of providing financial information to manage the Trust's finances that needed to be addressed.

The risk of industrial action and the plans to mitigate the impact had been included on each Academy's risk register as a new risk.

The Chair asked whether there were any other risks or any further mitigations that should be considered.

The EHT reported the LGBs of each Academy reviewed and monitored their risk registers closely at each termly meeting.

Paul Gray felt that it was difficult to know what mitigations that could be put in place with some of the new emerging risks like the risk of industrial action.

The Chair reported the Trust and Academies had a more robust leadership team to help identify, monitor and manage risks.

70/22 EHT Report

The EHT introduced her report and highlighted the following areas.

Admissions and roll

The number of pupils at DPA was on an upward trajectory after years when it fell. The growth of pupil numbers had resulted in the school being able to fund and increase the number of classes currently by one with plans to provide a further class in the future.

Attendance

Attendance at both academies was increasing after COVID and was now above 95%. Attendance targets for the Trust remained at 97% with the aim to return to pre-pandemic levels. As with previous years, attendance levels during the Autumn term had been affected by seasonal colds and coughs.

Identified Groups

The number of children qualifying for Free School Meals [FSM] at each Academy reflected the level of deprivation locally that was lower for GCPA and DPA when compared to other schools, particularly those in large urban areas but numbers were increasing, particularly at GCPA.

Lilly Barker asked why GCPA recorded and reported on the number of children from split families while DPA did not.

The EHT reported it was down to the leadership teams at each school to identify the groups of pupils that they felt the school should support. For example over half the pupils at DPA were children of service families that had different challenges to other children.

Leadership and management

No children had been excluded on either a fixed or permanent basis at either Academy.

Performance management reviews for all the headteachers had been carried out and the targets set for the 2021-22 academic year had been met. The Trust's external education advisor is a member of the performance management appraisal panel.

No further questions were raised.

The Chair thanked the EHT for her comprehensive report.

71/22 Policies

The Trust used Key, a trusted resource for leadership teams of academies and trusts when drafting, reviewing, and updating policies in addition to the Department for Education [DFE] and Essex CC statutory and other guidance.

It was **agreed** to approve the following policies without further amendment:

- Trust Pay Policy.
- Recruitment and Selection Policy.

The EHT reported that the Attendance Policy had been updated and now included a new provision on penalty notices [Page 7].

The meeting discussed whether it was right to include the new penalty provision taking into consideration disadvantaged families and the current cost of living challenges. It was questioned whether a financial penalty would improve attendance of all groups.

The Chair felt that it was important for the leadership team to have a policy which gave the ability to issue a penalty if this was deemed to be the appropriate action.

It was **agreed** to approve the updated Attendance Policy without further amendment.

The EHT reported the Finance Regulations had been updated to reflect the restructuring of the MAT Business Manager's position (MAT Finance Manager and MAT Premises & Finance assistant) and responsibilities as well as tightening up the Trust's procedures on purchase orders raised by the auditors and shared at the last Audit and Risk Committee.

It was **agreed** to approve the updated Finance Regulations subject to amending the references to the Audit Committee to include its new name, the Audit and Risk Committee [Paragraph 2].

72/22 Finance

a) Management Accounts for the year ended 31 August 2022

The meeting received and noted the management accounts for the year ended 31 August 2022 for the MAT, GCPA and DPA.

Paul Gray reported the results for the financial year were significantly better than budgeted and forecast and reflected the leadership teams and staff considerable effort in controlling costs.

b) Audit Findings Report to the Trustees following the audit to 31 August 2022

Paul Gray reported the Audit and Risk Committee had reviewed the Auditors' findings following the audit for the financial year ended to 31 August 2022 at its last meeting.

The report highlighted that the auditors had achieved a satisfactory outcome on the Trust's results for the year and financial position and that they would be issuing an unmodified and unqualified audit report for the year.

The report also stated the auditors would also be issuing an unmodified regularity assurance report for the year as no significant regularity and accounting issues had been identified during their audit, reflecting the accuracy, the recording and reporting of the Trust's financial transactions and balances.

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The main focus of the discussions with the auditors was on section 2, the significant findings they had identified during the audit. The report included their proposed recommendations together with the management responses and actions either already taken or planned to address those findings and recommendations.

They had raised concerns on the Trust's governance arrangements, the number of the Trust's members, the potential for conflicts of interests with some members also being directors and some directors being governors. The committee was able to demonstrate to the auditors' satisfaction that these issues arose primarily due to the restrictive nature of the Trust's governing document, the Memorandum and Articles of Association and that changing them could be very expensive.

The committee agreed it would be appropriate to have an externally led review to fully understand the complexity and cost of amending the Trust's governance structure at members' level.

Some of the auditors' findings and recommendations overlapped with the findings and recommendations following the visit and review by the ESFA's School Resource Management Advisor [SRMA] earlier in the year that had already been addressed.

Section 3 set of the report set out a number of minor to medium weaknesses/ recommendations in the accounting and internal control systems. These had already been addressed and resolved by strengthening the relevant accounting and control systems.

All the management issues and matters raised last year by the previous auditors had been addressed satisfactorily.

The committee had felt there had been a benefit with appointment of the new auditors and having a fresh review of the Trust's governance and management arrangements and its financial and internal control procedures.

It was **agreed** to:

- Approve the draft audited Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31 August 2022.
- Approve the Value for Money Statement included in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

c) Internal Scrutiny Arrangements and Future Plans

The meeting received and noted the Internal Scrutiny Arrangements and Future Plans.

The EHT reported a new Reporting Officer had been appointed who had reviewed the current financial scrutiny arrangements and felt that they could assist the Audit and Risk Committee with a more strategic and robust reporting system when reviewing and reporting on the internal financial and other controls and procedures.

The Internal Scrutiny Arrangements and Future Plans document had been drawn up to by the committee in reviewing and reporting on the financial controls and systems.

It was **agreed** to approve the report and its 'good' findings for the financial controls and systems.

d) Requests for expenditure above EHT approval limit

None.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

73/22 Chairman's action

Already covered on the agenda.

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74/22 Correspondence

No correspondence had been received for the attention of the Directors.

75/22 Committee Reports

a) LGBs

The meeting received and noted the minutes of the GCPA LGB meetings held on 27 September 2022 and DPA LGB minutes meeting held on 22 September 2022.

No questions were raised.

b) Audit and Risk Committee

A verbal report of the last meeting of the Audit Committee had already been provided by Paul Gray during various discussion of the relevant items of the meeting.

76/22 Any other business

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Policies

The Trust used the Essex CC Information Governance Support [IGS] for Data Protection Officer [DPO] services. As part of this they provided the statutory policies for GDPR. The EHT reported the leadership team had reviewed the suggested policies and had personalised them where required for the Trust and were recommending that they should be adopted by the Trust.

If the board wished to adapt the policies, they would need to report back to IGS their reasons for doing so.

It was **agreed** to approve the updated suite of GDPR policies without further change.

77/22 Date/time of future meetings

- Thursday 27/04/2023
- Thursday 13/07/2023

All meeting to commence at 19:45 hrs

EHT

Approved by the Board on 2 May 2023