

Great Oak Multi Academy Trust
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023

Directors	Office	Term
* Gary Benn		31/08/2025
Lilly Barker	Chair	16/11/2026
Paul Gray	Vice-Chair	10/02/2026
Alison Meadows		11/05/2025
Wazz Mughal		03/09/2027
Sarah Mitchell	Executive Headteacher [EHT]	Ex-Officio
Kate Porch		19/09/2027
<i>In attendance:</i>		
Tom Bennett	Clerk	
* indicates absence		

72/23 Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed Kate Porch to her first meeting as a director.
 Apologies were received and accepted from Gary Benn.

73/23 Notification of AoB

- Staff Pay Progression
- Recruitment of a Clerk
- Headteachers' Performance Management

74/23 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.

75/23 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 8 August and the 6 September 2023 were approved as an accurate and true record of each meeting.

76/23 Matters Arising

No matters arising on the actions agreed at both meetings and, had not been included on the agenda were reported.

MAIN BUSINESS

77/23 Governance

a) **Membership**

The meeting noted the number of Directors shall be not less than five, but (unless otherwise determined by ordinary resolution) shall not be subject to any maximum.

The number of Directors currently and in the past had been around seven. The Directors had agreed in the past to allow space on the Board to allow new directors to be elected to represent new schools joining the MAT.

There was an immediate need to recruit new directors to replace those whose terms of office had or were due to end and to ensure the Board had the necessary skills and experience to manage the Trust effectively.

Action

The Trust had advertised locally for new directors and had been successful with the two recent appointments. The Board had agreed it would be good to have a representative from the DPA LGB as a Director.

Paul Gray asked whether the other directors felt there were any skills and experience that the Board should target when advertising.

The EHT reported that the Board's finance and education skills and experience could be strengthened and assist with succession planning.

Advertisement would be placed again in the new year.

b) DPA LGB

The meeting noted the Chair's action in appointing Jo Hart as new parent governor on the DPA LGB for a term of office ending on 08/10/2027.

c) GCPA LGB

The meeting noted the Chair's action in appointing Jonathan Macdonald as a new parent governor on the GCPA LGB for a term of office ending on 29/10/2027.

78/23 Corporate/ Strategy

a) Update on the development of the MAT

The EHT reported the MAT primary development priority remained to increase the number of schools within it to benefit from the financial and staff economies of scale and provide improved recruitment and retention through enhanced career opportunities.

She reported there was a lack of momentum from single Local Authority maintained schools to academise and join MATs at this given time. Governors and/or headteachers were still divided on the merits of becoming an academy and joining a MAT and only schools with financial difficulties had expressed interest in academising and joining a MAT. Funding pressures remain the main focus and challenge for school leadership teams at this current time.

The Trust was currently focused on updating and embedding new governance and infrastructure systems including a new finance team that would put it into a good position should schools begin to express an interest in joining the MAT.

The Chair asked whether the work carried out to improve Debden's Ofsted rating would encourage other church schools to join the Trust.

The EHT reported church schools could join the Diocese's MAT, the Vine, or alternatively could consider joining GOMAT, a smaller MAT with two academies that were rated as good.

b) School Development Plans

The meeting received and noted the 2023-24 School Development Plans for each Academy that had been updated to include the actions taken during the Autumn term to progress the achievement of each priority.

No questions were raised.

c) Risk Register

The Board received and noted the updated Risk Registers for the MAT and each Academy and the progress being made to mitigate the likelihood and impact of the key risks.

It was **agreed** to review the risk-owners on each risk registers to ensure they were consistent by name or position held.

Paul Gray, the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, reported the committee had reviewed all the registers at their last meeting and had concluded that they had all been appropriately updated and reflected the risks pertinent to each school.

EHT

Paul Gray had also highlighted a potential funding risk facing all academies nationally that the Auditors had highlighted at the December closing meeting.

Following a three-year review of the Teachers' Pension Scheme, the actuaries had recommended all schools should increase the employers' contributions to the pension scheme by 5% and that no provision of additional funding had yet been made by the government and that if that remained unchanged, the increase in pension contributions would put financial pressure on all school's existing budgets.

The EHT reported the key areas with the highest risk that were being closely monitored were the number of children with high education needs and the impact on resources and staffing, admissions at GCPA, with the lower number of pupils in the current Reception Class and the impact on future funding offset by the potential demand for places across all years with the increase in the number new houses being built in the village and the increase in the number of pupils at DPA and its impact on the school's infrastructure and staff resources.

Paul Gray reported the Audit and Risk Committee had raised attendance as a significant risk to the Trust's education standards due to a change in culture and employment practices following the pandemic with many parents working remotely at home and asked whether attendance levels would return to pre-Covid levels.

The EHT reported that this was a national trend, but overall attendance at both Academies was improving. The national trends reflected the new working practices of parents working at home on Mondays and Fridays that led to a reduced impetus for those parents to get their children to school.

Also, the overall attendance at GCPA was being adversely affected by a small group of pupils with chronic attendance levels despite the school and a number of external agencies working with the families to help them improve their children's attendance levels. The overall school's attendance level and trend was good when this small group was excluded from the data.

79/23 EHT Report

The meeting received and noted the EHT's termly report.

No questions were raised.

80/23 GDPR

The meeting received and noted the findings of a recent IGS - Information Governance Audit.

The EHT highlighted both schools had maintained their score of good assurance as achieved last year that was to be congratulated.

81/23 Policies

The meeting received, noted, and **approved** the following policies and regulations:

- Trust Pay Policy
- Attendance Policy
- Finance Regulations
- Data Protection Policy
- GDPR Policies
- Pay Policy
- Executive Pay Policy Appendix

82/23 Finance

a) Audit Findings Report to the Trustees following the audit to 31 August 2023

Paul Gray reported the Audit and Risk Committee had reviewed the Auditors' findings following the audit for the financial year ended to 31 August 2023 at its last meeting.

EHT

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.

The main focus of the discussions with the auditors was on section 3, minimum to medium weaknesses in the accounting and internal control systems and section 4, minor housekeeping points identified during the audit. The report included proposed recommendations together with the management responses and actions that either had already been put in place or were planned to address those findings and recommendations.

The recommendations had been picked up and included on the work and monitoring program of the recently appointed Internal Auditor (formerly known as the Responsible Officer).

The auditors had commented on the thoroughness of the Internal Auditor and the Trust's effective internal control system and procedures.

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

b) The draft audited Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31 August 2023

The meeting received and noted the draft audited Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31 August 2023.

It was agreed to:

- Approve the draft audited Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31 August 2023.
- Approve the Value for Money Statement included in the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

c) Management Accounts for the year ended 31 August 2023 for the MAT, GCPA and DPA

The meeting noted the Management Accounts for the year to 31 August 2023 for each Academy and the MAT were not available as the auditors had not yet provided the adjustment journals by school. They were expected in January 2024. Until they are received the Finance Manager could not finalise the management accounts for the year.

a) Requests for expenditure above EHT approval limit

None.

The EHT highlighted the Board would be receiving a request from GCPA to approve spending capital money from the Trust's reserves to carry out a redesign and refurbishment of the KS1 playground that had recently been assessed as a health and safety issue.

The school was currently considering asking three companies to provide costed specification each that would be considered prior to being presented to the board for approval.

Applications for grant funding would be made.

EHT

ROUTINE BUSINESS

83/23 Chairman's action

The Chair reported that apart from approving the appointment of governors already noted, she or the Vice-Chair had not taken any urgent action since the last meeting.

84/23 Correspondence

No correspondence for the attention of the Directors was reported.

85/23 Committee Reports

a) GCPA

The meeting received and noted the minutes of the GCPA LGB meetings held on 14 September 2023 and 14 November 2023.

b) DPA

The meeting received and noted the minutes of the DPA LGB meetings held on 21 September 2023 and 23 November 2023.

c) Audit & Risk Committee

The meeting received and noted the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 7 December 2023.

86/23 Any other business

a) Staff Pay Progression [*Confidential Minute*]

b) Recruitment of a new Clerk

The meeting noted the Clerk would be standing down as the Board's and each Academy's LGB's Clerk at the end of the current academic year and discussed the options available on recruiting a replacement.

It was **agreed** to draw up a draft advert to recruit a professional clerk.

c) Headteachers' Performance Management

The EHT reported the Trust's independent Education Advisor had led the performance management reviews of the Trust's headteachers and Head of School and that they had all been completed.

87/23 Date/time of future meetings

- Thursday 25/04/2024
- Thursday 18/07/2024

All meeting to commence at 19:45 hrs

EHT

Approved by the Board on 25 April 2024