

Great Oak Multi Academy Trust
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 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
John Saxon		TBA
Andrew Taylor	Chair	31/08/2025

In attendance:

Tom Bennett	Clerk
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* *indicates absence*

The Rev John Saxon opened the meeting with a prayer

32/22 Apologies for absence

None.

33/22 Notification of AoB

- Board Membership *[covered under matters arising]*

34/22 Notification of business interests

Gary Benn declared he worked for Eddisons who provided property advice, design, and project management services to the Trust.

No other 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.

MAIN BUSINESS

35/22 Governance

a) **LGBs**

The meeting **agreed** to appoint the following as members of each Academy's Local Governing Body from September 2023.

GREAT CHESTERFORD [CoE] PRIMARY ACADEMY

Membership	Type	Office	Term
Andrew Farrimond	Foundation		01/09/2024
Alex Jeewan	Foundation	Incumbent	Ex-Officio
Laura Saunders	General Member		26/06/2027
Jayne Greenwood	General Member		01/09/2024
Wazz Mughal	General Member		05/07/2026
Nick Patterson	General Member		05/07/2026
Andrew Pickering	General Member		05/07/2026
Vacancy	Parent		
Joe Edwards	Parent		14/05/2025
Sarah Mitchell	Co-Headteacher [Joint]		Ex-Officio
Amy Sargeant	Co-Headteacher [Joint]		Ex-Officio
Natalie Starbuck	Staff		21/02/2025

Action

EHT

DEBDEN PRIMARY [CoE] ACADEMY

Membership	Type	Office	Term
Rev. John Saxon	Foundation:	Incumbent	Ex officio
Tom Caster	Foundation		02/02/2026
Sarah Belchambers	General Member		27/03/2026
Rachel Stoddart	General Member		TBC
Sarah Mitchell	General Member	Executive Headteacher	Ex officio
Lin Stephenson	General Member		01/01/2025
Vacancy	General Member		
Isobel Tunnecliff	Parent		14/07/2025
Marcus Hayakawa	Parent		04/11/2026
Matt Hawley	Headteacher	Head of School	Ex officio
Sarah Bailey	Staff		11/07/2026

b) Chairs for the LGBs

GCPA

The GCPA LGB had nominated Jayne Greenwood as Chair for a further term of office.

It was **agreed** to appoint Jayne Greenwood as the GCPA LGB Chair for the 2023-24 Academic Year.

DPA

The DPA LGB had nominated Tom Caster as the Chair for 2023-24 following the decision of Lin Stephenson to stand down as Chair after many years as the Chair of both the LGB and T&L Committee.

It was **agreed** to appoint Tom Caster as the DPA LGB Chair for the 2023-24 Academic Year.

36/22 Strategy/ Future Plans

a) Update on the growth/ expansion of the Trust

Sarah Mitchell, the EHT, advised that the pupil numbers at DPA continued to rise and with the low number of Year 6 pupils leaving at the end of the summer term and the higher number of new pupils joining in September, the total number of pupils would be in the region of 151.

Following the Board's approval to re-instate the number of classes back to six from the current five to accommodate the higher number of pupils, a new class teacher had been recruited to teach the new class from September.

The EHT reported she and the DPA leadership had had a meeting with the Essex CC to discuss the expansion of the school. It had been confirmed that academies were not required to consult and obtain the agreement from their Local Authorities [LAs] for re-structuring but consultation is required if the school wished to increase its PAN (published number to admit). Following any consultation, LAs could appeal to the ESFA following the decision by an academy to increase the PAN if they were not in agreement.

It was noted Essex CC were supporting the academisation and inclusion of Wimbish Primary School, within the Anglia Learning Multi Academy Trust. Wimbish Primary Academy was a local school and could be regarded as having competition with DPA for pupils.

Alison Meadows asked whether this would have a significant impact on DPA.

It was noted Essex CC did not support schools expanding when there were places at other local schools, however they did acknowledge that parents have a choice on which school to send their children if places were available.

The Chair felt there may be an appetite for growth.

Alison Meadows asked whether the Trust should keep the Essex CC better informed of the

Trust's growth and expansion plans.

It was **agreed** to ensure Essex CC were fully consulted on future development plans.

EHT

b) Risk registers

The Board meeting received and noted the risks register for the MAT and each Academy recording the major risks facing the Trust and Academies and the actions in place or planned to mitigate their likelihood and impact on the running of the Trust and Academies.

EHT highlighted the following Trust risks that had been updated:

MAT

- A new Governance Risk had been added being the potential risk that the Trust was not meeting the statutory expectations set by the ESFA on the Trust's governance and the respective responsibilities of the Trust's members, Board Directors, and Local Governors. The Directors had carried out a review of these responsibilities and lawyers had been instructed and had drawn up amended Articles of Association to comply with the ESFA's guidance regarding Members of the Trust . Both Chelmsford Diocese and the DFE need to approve these changes.
- Strategic Risk – Admissions - Increased monitoring was taking place as slightly lower number of pupils were expected for GCPA's Reception class in September that could have an impact on future funding. Admissions were also being closely monitored at DPA, particularly on mid-year applications with some classes becoming full and the implementation of the new class structure.
- Strategic Risk – Loss of key persons – The likelihood and impact of this arising had been reduced following the successful recruitment of a new qualified Trust Finance Manager, Helen Edwards.
- Financial Risk - Financial information accuracy – The risk of inaccurate management financial information had been reduced to reflect the appointment of the new Responsible Officer and the appointment and successful hand-over to the new Trust Finance Manager.
- Financial Risk – Funding gap – In spite of the improvements in the current year's financial forecasts and planned budget surpluses for 2023-24, monitoring continued due to the pressures on the trust from increases in costs of living, planned capital projects and the potential for unfunded staff pay awards.
- Operational Risk – Industrial Action – The total risk had been reduced to reflect the low number of teaching staff taking industrial action and lower impact on each academy's operations.

Alison Meadows asked why each academy was facing different admissions risks, DPA being oversubscribed while GCPA's Reception September intake being low.

The EHT reported that there was a low birth rate across the area including GCPA's catchment. Children from outside the catchment were joining Reception Class 2023. DPA had now become the school of choice for parents both within Debden and beyond and particularly with families at Carver Barracks.

Lilly Baker asked why the risk of COVID, and a pandemic was still included as an operational risk.

The EHT reported that GCPA had been affected by ongoing outbreaks of COVID.

Paul Gray reported the Audit and Risk Committee had reviewed the risks registers for the MAT and each Academy and were content that all significant risks had been identified and were being managed satisfactorily and acknowledged that some assessments on likelihood and impact of the same risk differed at each academy, reflecting the differing local circumstances, such as on COVID and Industrial Actions risks facing each one, that would be closely monitored.

c) **2022-23 School Development Plans**

The meeting received and noted the actions taken during the summer term and the progress made to deliver the key priorities for the current academic year.

d) **2023-24 School Improvement Plans - Key Priorities**

(Refer to EHT's report)

37/22 Policies

The Meeting received, considered, and **agreed** to approve the amendments made to the appendix on the Executive Pay Policy included in the Trust's Pay Policy approved in December 2022. The policy had been updated to bring it line with the Academies Trust Handbook. *[Note - the EHT declared a conflict of interest and did not vote.]*

EHT

38/22 Executive Head Teacher [EHT]

The EHT introduced her termly report on the operation and performance of the MAT and highlighted the following:

Attendance

Attendance levels had not returned to pre-Covid levels at above 96%. However, the Ofsted inspectors reported, at their recent inspection at DPA, that attendance levels of between 94% - 95% was good as a lot of schools nationally had lower attendance levels.

The Trust had a consistent approach across both academies when dealing with pupils absent. GCPA's attendance had been affected by pupils from a couple of families who were often late for roll call resulting in them being recorded as absent for the full morning session.

Achievement - Pupil progress and standards

The summer term outcomes were provisional and had not been validated by the Local Authority. Any borderline results would be validated by staff to see if there were grounds for an appeal for them to be upgraded.

Early Learning Foundation Stage

85% of GCPA's Reception achieved Good Level of Development [GLD] despite having four pupils with high education needs. DPA's Reception only achieved 65% overall due to three children out of twenty not being entered due to specific social, emotional, and educational needs that would be addressed in the Autumn term.

Key Stage 1 [SATS 1]

The results for this cohort highlighted the impact of the measures put in place to contain the spread of Covid including closing schools and providing home learning. The cohort would need further support to catch-up to the levels they should have achieved if they had not missed a lot of in-class teaching and learning.

A further assessment of the results would be carried out when national KS1 data is published.

Year 4 Multiplication Check/25

The results for this year for both academies were better than the previous year. National data had not yet been published.

Key Stage 2 [SATS 2]

The results had only been recently received. The results for pupils achieving expected standard were significantly higher than the targets set at the beginning of the academic year and the national averages.

The areas that needed focusing on for both academies were pupils working at greater depth, particularly in Maths.

SDP priorities for 2023-2024

DPA

- 1) Quality of Education - To ensure that all areas of the curriculum are coherently planned and sequenced towards cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills, with particular development in PE, MfL, RE and Music.
- 2) Quality of Education - To further develop consistency of pedagogy and expectations, to ensure that pupils' work across the curriculum is consistently of a high quality.
- 3) Behaviour and Attitudes - To further develop metacognitive approaches and wider behaviour for learning strategies, to ensure that pupils demonstrate high levels of self-control and consistently positive attitudes to their education.
- 4) Personal Development - To reinforce and further develop the school's Christian vision, to continue to promote the extensive personal development of pupils.
- 5) Leadership and Management - To use professional development and rigorous monitoring to further teachers' subject and pedagogical knowledge, translating into improvements in the teaching of the curriculum.

These covered the areas identified by Ofsted and internal monitoring as areas for improvement.

GCPA

- 1) Quality of Education - To further develop consistency of pedagogy and expectations in maths, to ensure progress is at least expected for all pupils including those with SEND.
- 2) Quality of Education - To further develop consistency of pedagogy and expectations in English, to ensure progress is at least expected for all pupils, including those with SEND.
- 3) EYFS – To ensure the curriculum is coherently planned, sequenced, and delivered to build on the children's knowledge and skills through a range of well-resourced and ambitious activities.
- 4) Behaviour and Attitudes - To further develop the children's positive attitudes and commitment to their education to ensure they are highly motivated and persistent in the face of difficulties.
- 5) Personal development – To further develop pupils' spiritual, moral, and cultural development within the context of our Christian vision and values.

Paul Gray felt the report highlighted the opportunities for coherence in shared learning and practices.

The Chair felt priority 5 needed to reflect on the new senior leadership and management structure at DPA, in addition to the subject leadership.

39/22 Safeguarding

The meeting received and noted the annual Safeguarding report for each Academy.

The EHT reported the Leadership Team and Learning Support Staff at GCPA had spent a considerable amount of time supporting children with high educational and behavioural needs and the impact of this on other pupils and staff. There had been more safeguarding referrals than in previous years reflecting cost-of-living and additional external pressures on families.

The level of high education and behavioural needs at DPA was lower. Ofsted had carried out a comprehensive review and had assessed the school's safeguarding policies and practices as robust.

Both academies used the same approach to safeguarding.

The Chair asked about the increasing number of referrals and impact at GCPA.

The EHT reported that the referrals related to concerns on children’s welfare outside the school. The main impact was time required by the Designated Safeguarding Lead for attendance at meetings and providing support to individuals and families.

If the incident leading to a referral occurred within school, an individual risk assessment was immediately carried out and measures were put in place to prevent any further harm to the pupil and others.

40/22 SEND

The meeting received and noted the annual SEND report for GCPA and that DPA’s would follow. SEND has remained an incredibly high need at GCPA this academic year as detailed in the report.

EHT

41/22 Finance

a) Management Accounts

The meeting received and noted the managements accounts for the 9 months to 31 May 2023 showing the actual income and expenditure totals to date and the forecast for the year-end that showed both academies would have a surplus at the year end.

No questions were raised.

b) Reserves Policy

The meeting received and noted the updated reserves policy.

The EHT reported the Board needed to approve the total amount of reserves the Trust needed to hold and the specific purposes for what holding them.

The EHT and Trust Finance Manager had reviewed the academies’ revenue and capital needs and proposed that the Trust should hold £407k for the following purposes.

Reserve Balance Details

	£'000s	
<i>Specific Building Projects</i>		
GCPA Budgeted capital spend	124.5	2023-2024 Budget
DPA Budgeted capital spend	25.0	2023-2024 Budget
	149.5	
<i>Strategic Development of Trust</i>		
MAT Developments	5.0	
Growth of existing schools in the Trust	45.0	Extra Class from 2023-2024
	50.0	
<i>Contingency</i>		
Reduced Income due to decreasing pupil numbers or forecast deficit, unfunded pay increases and other cost rises	207.6	15% of GAG GCPA (£806) + DPA (£578)
Total Reserves	£ 407.1	

EHT

It was **agreed** to approve proposed level of reserves and designated purposes.

c) 2023-24 Budget

The meeting received and noted the draft 2023-24 Budgets for the MAT and each Academy.

The EHT reported the government had significantly increased the General Academy Grant [GAG] for each Academy that had allowed them to reverse a number of expenditure cuts made in the 2022-23 Budget to balance the budget.

This had allowed each academy to invest more into learning resources and support, teaching training, CPD and support.

EHT

It was **agreed** to approve the 2023-24 following budgets:

GOMAT

	2022-2023 Budget	2022-2023 Forecast	2023-2024 Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Surplus	£2	£0	£0
Total Income	£100	£103	£107
Total Expenditure	£98	£103	£107
Total Staff Costs	£81	£82	£88

GCPA

	2022-2023 Budget	2022-2023 Forecast	2023-2024 Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Surplus	£3	£5	£20
Total Income	£1,036	£1,058	£1,090
Total Expenditure	£1,033	£1,053	£1,070
Total Staff Costs	£764	£778	£742

DPA

	2022-2023 Budget	2022-2023 Forecast	2023-2024 Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Surplus	£6	£11	£15
Total Income	£690	£706	£813
Total Expenditure	£684	£695	£798
Total Staff Costs	£480	£491	£577

The meeting noted the 2024-25 and 2025-26 projected GAG income assumed only a 1% increase p.a. when it was reasonable to assume and include increases in funding in line with CPI of 2.5% for each year.

It was **agreed** to increase the protected GAG income in line with CPI

EHT

2023-24 Capital Funding

The meeting received and **agreed** to approve the following draft 2023-24 Capital Budgets.

EHT

	<u>2022-23</u>		<u>2023-24</u>
	Budget	Forecast	Budget
GCPA	£	£	£
Net Capital Income/(expenditure)	(164,966)	(52,366)	(117,966)
Capital Income	6,284	21,084	6,284
Total Capital Expenditure	171,250	73,450	124,250
	<u>2022-23</u>		<u>2023-24</u>
	Budget	Forecast	Budget
DPA			
Net Capital Income/(expenditure)	(25,341)	(13,275)	(10,000)
Total Capital Income	5,159	17,225	5,700
Capital Expenditure Total	30,500	48,000	15,700

d) Expenditure requests exceeding the EHT's approval limit

The EHT reported that both academies had received additional Devolved Capital Formal funding to fund capital projects that provided environmental benefits. GCPA had agreed to use the funding [£13k] to replace windows in the school building with better insulated windows and had approached three companies specialising in fitting windows.

The GCPA Finance and Premises Committee had reviewed the quotes and had agreed to select to second cheapest quote on the grounds of the reputation of the company in fulfilling the project; a more detailed specification and the ability to obtain the required materials.

It was **agreed** to approve the quote agreed by the GCPA F&P Committee

EHT

ROUTINE BUSINESS

42/22 Minutes of the previous meetings

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 2 May 2023 were approved as an accurate and true record of the meeting.

43/22 Matters arising

Minute 6/23(a) New Directors

The EHT reported she had approached the GCPA governors and other interested parties to identify any who would like to become a director on the board. Nobody had expressed an interest as yet.

It was **agreed to** the advertise the vacancy among the parents of pupils at the school.

The Chair reported the amended articles currently being consulted on, made provision to allow parents to elect representatives onto the board.

John Saxon reported that due to relocating, he would need to stand down as a director at the end of the current academic year.

44/22 Minutes/reports of committees

a) GCPA LGB

The meeting received and noted the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Great Chesterford [CoE] Primary Academy Local Governing Body held on 27 June 2023

b) DPA LGB

The meeting received and noted the unconfirmed minutes of the last meeting of the Debden [CoE] Primary Academy Local Governing Body held on 6 July 2023

c) Audit and Risk Committee

The meeting received and noted the confirmed minutes of the Audit Committee held on the 26 January 2023 and the unconfirmed minutes of the committee's meeting held on the 29 June 2023.

Paul Gray reported the appointment of the new Responsible Officer and enhanced role in monitoring the Trust's governance and financial operations was a "big step-up." The attendance of the Responsible Office and new Trust Finance Manager provided added value to both the committee and trust at these meetings.

45/22 Any other business

None

46/22 Date/time of future meetings

It was **agreed** to meet on Wednesday 6 September 2023 at 19:45 and to change the meeting provisionally scheduled for the 7 December 2023 to 14 December 2023 to allow the Audit and Risk Committee to meet on the 7 December 2023 to consider the audit of the Trust's Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2023.

All

Approved by the Board on 6 September 2023