

“Together in Achievement”



# Virtual Meeting Policy

Approved by Board of Directors: **13 July 2023**

Revision date: **July 2026**

Version: **3.0**

# Virtual Meeting Policy

## for MAT Board and Local Governing Bodies

### 1. Introduction

Academy Local Governing Bodies

The Aspire MAT Board have determined that the arrangements for maintained schools under [The School Governance \(England\) \(Roles, Procedures and Allowances\) Regulations 2013](#) will apply to the Local Governing Bodies (LGB) within the Aspire MAT and to the Aspire MAT Board. These make provision to approve alternative arrangements for governors to participate or vote at meetings of the governing body including but not limited to by telephone or video conference.

In relation to this the Aspire MAT Board has determined the following arrangements will apply to meetings of the full LGBs and their committees and of the Board.

MAT Board

Any Director/Trustee can attend meetings remotely under the [DfE's model articles of association for academy trusts \(article 126\)](#) as long as:

- They have given notice of their intention to do so and provided the telephone number on which they can be reached and/or the video conferencing platform they will be using at least 48 hours before the meeting, and the other Directors/Trustees have access to the appropriate equipment.
- The model articles add that "if after all reasonable efforts it does not prove possible for the person to participate by telephone or video conference, the meeting may still proceed with its business provided it is otherwise quorate". Refer to your own articles of association.

**Definition:** In the following policy, the term 'member' will apply to members of Local Governing Bodies and to Directors/Trustees of the MAT Board.

### 2. Virtual Attendance at Face to Face Meetings

Where a member wishes to attend a meeting of the LGB or Board by either telephone or video link the chair and clerk must be notified at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting to ensure that appropriate arrangements can be made where possible.

Members will be asked their reasons for not attending the meeting in person and their attendance virtually will be subject to the approval of the LGB or Board at the beginning of the meeting, though this approval will not be withheld without good reason. Where approval is withheld the reason for this will be minuted and the member informed immediately.

Members attending the meeting either by telephone or video conference will be entitled to vote on any issue providing they have been 'present' for the whole agenda item to which the vote relates. Where a secret ballot is required this will be facilitated where possible (e.g. by taking a telephone call off speaker phone and the member sharing their vote orally with the clerk). Where this is not possible the member will be required to abstain.

Members attending the meeting virtually will contribute to the quorum for the meeting. If the technological link is lost, they will cease to contribute to the quorum but this will not prevent the meeting continuing in their absence unless it has become inquorate. The clerk will note the time the connection was lost.

The meeting will be chaired by a governor who is present in person. **\*See note in event of emergency**

If, after all reasonable efforts, it does not prove possible for a member to participate by telephone or video conference the meeting may still proceed with its business provided it is otherwise quorate.

### **3. Virtual Meetings**

The three statutory full LGB meetings and termly scheduled LGB committee meetings and the five or six scheduled MAT Board meetings and associated committee meetings will normally be face to face meetings. However additional and extraordinary meetings can take place via telephone or video conference call as long as the usual quorum of members is 'present' on the call. In emergency situations, where face to face meetings are not possible, virtual meetings can become the norm only for the duration of the emergency. \* See note in event of emergency

Where a meeting is taking place virtually, every effort will be made to enable all members to access the meeting.

Where a meeting is taking place virtually, the usual statutory notice arrangements will apply and all papers to be considered will be circulated at least seven days in advance of the meeting, except where the chair has exercised their right to waive the usual notice in an emergency.

Virtual meetings will be minuted in the same way as other meetings, either by the clerk being present virtually or by a member other than the Headteacher or CEO being present virtually and the minutes will be presented to the next meeting of the full LGB or Board.

\* See note in event of emergency

Virtual meetings shall not be electronically recorded by any governor or Board member or the clerk without the approval of the LGB or Board and for a specified purpose.

**Note:** This protocol does not apply to any formal hearings e.g. pupil exclusion, parental complaint, where all panel members must be physically present. \*See note in event of emergency

**\*Note:** in the event of an emergency such as a pandemic, where the majority or all members are unable to attend a face to face meeting, an exception may be made.

### **4. General issues**

- No specific teleconference or video conference platforms will be specified, although they must be appropriate for the number of members participating. Positive experience has been gained with Microsoft Teams (free, up to 60 minutes, up to 100 users) and Zoom (free for personal account 40 minute meetings, free for school accounts with unlimited time, or subscription for over 40 minutes with unlimited participants).
- Papers will normally be circulated in advance through GovernorHub.

### **5. Review of this Policy**

The policy will be reviewed every three years but any member with any concerns about its operation can request that it is reviewed at any time.

## **APPENDIX: Guidance on Effective Virtual Meetings**

### **1. Provide clear instructions and offer support where necessary.**

Once the form of virtual meeting has been decided participants should be provided with clear instructions on how they will join the meeting e.g. the weblink, phone number, PIN codes that participants need to either dial in or connect to join the meeting. These instructions are best provided by the clerk as part of their duty to convene the meeting and to circulate the agenda papers. The clerk or governance professional may want to draw on experience and expertise from within the school or trust and the board itself to help them and any members who require additional support to access the meeting.

### **2. Test the system platform**

Particularly if it is the first time the LGB or Board has held a virtual meeting then it is worth someone testing that the platform or system being used works in practice before the meeting.

### **3. Pre-meeting preparation by the chair and clerk/governance professional**

The preparation carried out by the chair and the clerk prior to any meeting makes a difference to the way that the business is conducted. Make time to discuss what is on the agenda, how much time is needed for each item, likely questions, required decisions and outcomes. Chairs and clerks should be particularly alert to members for whom electronic communication presents challenges. Arranging a one-to-one session whereby one person can be on the phone talking the other through how to connect and join a meeting can serve to raise levels of confidence and thus maintain inclusivity.

### **4. Set the tone and explain the rules of engagement for the meeting**

Being clear about expectations helps ensure success. Consider making clear the importance of:

- Joining on time
- Signing a digital attendance sheet
- Keeping to the agenda
- Saying your name before speaking
- Using your mute button as appropriate for minimising background noises
- Allowing additional time for participants to refer to documents that they may have open in another application

Many people are surprised that being able to see other meeting participants on screen makes remote communication easier and it keeps everyone more engaged, so it is worth encouraging everyone to use their webcams if at all possible.

### **5. Evaluate and learn from experience**

The more the LGB or Board practises virtual meetings then the more efficient the meetings will become. Do not be deterred by things that do not work perfectly the first time around. Take a note of what worked well and what could work better and apply this this experience at your next virtual meeting.