

MINUTES OF MEETING



Academy: The Aspire Multi- Academy Trust
Meeting title: Meeting of the Board of Directors
Date and time: Wednesday 28th April 2021 at 6:00pm (started at 6.10 pm)
Location: Virtual via ZOOM

Membership

'A' denotes absence

	Mr K Daniell	KD
	Mr M Skinner (CEO)	MS
	Mr P Golightly (Chair)	PG
	Mrs C Meese	CM
A	Mr M Fielding	MF
	Mr C Anderson	CA
	Mr R Sewell	RS

In attendance Mrs. S Harrison -Clerk to the Board
Mrs H Detheridge – MAT Finance and Business Manager HD/MFBM

Glossary

ABC	Archbishop Cranmer CofE Academy
ABM	Academy Business Manager
BJ	Brown Jacobson (Solicitors)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DBE	Diocesan Board of Education
DDE	Diocesan Director of Education
EBSP	East Bridgford St Peter's CofE Academy
FWC	Finance & Workforce Committee
GPS	Gunthorpe CofE Primary School
KWS	Kirkby Woodhouse Primary School
LA	Local Authority
LGB	Local governing body
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
MFBM	MAT Finance & Business Manager
RSC	Regional Schools Commissioner
SJS	Sir John Sherbrooke Junior School
OTS	Oak Tree Primary school
WPS	Winthorpe Primary school

Opening Prayer led by RS

Action

BD/21/15 Apologies for absence

Apologies from MF.

BD/21/16 Conflicts of interest

HD and MS declared an interest in BD/21/28

PG declared a conflict of interest in respect of IT Contract update (BD/21/22) as chair of an LGB.

BD/21/17 Minutes of last Board meeting

The minutes of the previous Board meeting held, 4th February 2021 having been previously circulated, were approved and electronically signed by the chair

BD/21/18 Matters arising (*not otherwise on agenda*)

BD/21/06- CA queried progress on the statement that the MAT SIP model outlined that MS would work with academies to address quality control of teaching and learning however consideration was being given to a project that would utilise an external reviewer (a working OFSTED inspector) to work alongside MS in this.

MS noted that following consideration this was not necessary in this term as MS had the skills to support the individual academies in relation to 'Deep Dives.'

BD/21/07 -CIF bids. HD informed that an update on the submitted bids was still awaited.

BD/21/10 MAT policies. PG informed that the Anti-Corruption and Bribery policy (incorporating Gifts & Hospitality) had been reviewed following Directors comments at the previous meeting and the sum of £25 could be increased to £50 if Directors supported this increase. Directors unanimously

AGREED to increase the sum of £25 to £50 in relation to gifts.

PG agreed to amend the policy to reflect this.

PG

BD/21/19**Communication with LGBs**

PG highlighted that there was no clear strategy for communication between the Board and the LGBs. A triple strand of communication was proposed as;

- 1- Chair of the Board to LGB Chairs
- 2- CEO to HTs
- 3- MFBM to ABMs

PG agreed to share a template to show the formal routes of communication following Board meetings. Directors unanimously

AGREED to the proposed communication lines.

Directors discussed the issue of sharing the Board minutes minus any confidential items both in draft and approved formats. Following the discussion Directors

AGREED that PG would set up a mechanism for sharing the draft minutes with HTs and LGB chairs when they had been agreed by the chair of the Board.

PG

The availability of approved Board minutes minus any confidential items via the MAT website was discussed. Directors

AGREED that approved Board minutes minus any confidential items could be shared via the MAT website.

BD/21/20 CEO's report including MAT Expansion

The CEO's report had been previously circulated for consideration. MS highlighted:

He had visited five of the seven academies in the first 2 weeks of the term and had started teaching Y6 at OTP part time, which had been a very positive experience.

Pupil Performance Data- SATs were cancelled for 2021, however all schools were encouraged to undertake robust assessments for Y6 children. Assessments would be as consistent as possible, utilise previous SATs papers under test conditions, and carried out at the end of June. Current attainment projections were generally very positive. Each academy's strengths, challenges and priorities were outlined for Directors.

Ofsted inspections had been discussed at the previous Standards Committee meeting as ABC and EBSP were due for inspection and had previously achieved 'Outstanding' ratings when they were last inspected some years ago. The committee had discussed the percentage of schools which achieved an 'Outstanding' rating in the years that the schools were last inspected in comparison to current percentages. Further analysis by MS supported that on average 4-8% of schools inspected would achieve an 'Outstanding' rating, however in the year that EBSP was last inspected this figure was 13% compared to just 2% in 2019/20.

MS considered that the evidence available at this time would support that both ABC and EBSP would achieve a very 'Good' Ofsted rating. To achieve an 'Outstanding' rating would be a challenge for any of the academies given that the percentage who achieved this in 2019/20 was 2%. MS thought that it was therefore likely that both schools could receive a strong 'Good' with some elements considered to be 'Outstanding'. MS suggested that the schools may wish to communicate with parents on this at some point.

CA queried if the timing of the assessments had been standardised across the academies, to ensure that the children were given the best opportunity to achieve their potential.

MS planned to meet with the HTs the following day and asked Directors for their thoughts on consistency and timing of assessments; the last week in June was proposed to allow children to reach their potential whilst allowing time to also concentrate on end of year activities.

Directors unanimously

AGREED with the proposal to maximise learning opportunities for the children and to suggest rather than mandate a date for assessments.

MAT Expansion- Progress relating to MAT expansion and the CEO's priorities for the summer term were itemised within the report.

PG asked MS if he had any idea if the RSC would allocate a school to the MAT in the autumn term.

MS responded that Ofsted were unlikely to delay inspections after Autumn 2021, and therefore the RSC may approach the MAT in the Autumn term but would most likely do so within the next academic year.

PG asked how quickly the academisation process would be triggered if a school was considered to be failing.

MS and CM agreed that if a school was considered to be failing in the autumn term a conversation regarding academisation would begin, however this may not then be completed until the summer term.

See Confidential note

BD/21/21

Oak Tree Primary IEB

PG informed Directors that the IEB minutes could now be accessed via GovernorHub.

CA informed that the social worker would be joining the next meeting to update Directors on progress since starting in post.

PG noted that the IEB were planning a gradual transition from an IEB to an LGB so that this would be in place when needed.

BD/21/22 Performance & Standards

Minutes from the meetings held on 30th March 2021 and 21st April 2021 had been circulated prior to the meeting.

OTP HT had attended the March meeting to give an update, however the projections had been better than anticipated. MS was teaching half of the Y6 cohort on a part time basis and had been impressed at the progress in comparison to his time spent teaching the Y6 group in 2018. The HT was prioritising quality control of teaching and supporting teachers to be outstanding so that the children achieve their potential.

RS acknowledged the very positive report from MS but queried how this would be maintained from September when MS withdrew his teaching support. MS informed that recruitment was ongoing to find someone to continue with this level of support for Y6 from September

BD/21/23 Finance & Workforce (including report from FWC meeting)

HD reported:

The outturn reports for the year had been suspended possibly due to the pandemic and had been combined into the 3-year budget forecast return which would need to be submitted by 23rd July, when a more accurate outturn would be available.

Directors **AGREED** that this could be reviewed at FWC and circulated to the remaining Board members prior to the submission date to allow appropriate challenge.

HD shared a report on screen showing the current outturns for all academies highlighting that that the figures were constantly changing, explaining the underlying reasons for the figures.

KD queried the figures for EBSP and WPS.

WPS had recently academised which accounted for their figures.

EBSP were doing a reforecast as they were one of the schools that experienced a significant reduction in income along with KWS due to the pandemic. It was anticipated that the figures would present as more favourable when the reforecast was completed.

Directors discussed that the financial incentives to academise were no longer available, as the grant had remained at £25,000 whilst conversion costs had risen which resulted in a cost to schools if they wished to academise.

HD shared the Management Accounts Report on screen highlighting the variances in income, and the end of March figures in comparison to the forecast.

IT Contract update

The Board had approved a MAT wide contract with RM 2 years ago and had previously been made aware of some ongoing issues with the contract.

In the first 18 months of the contract RM failed to meet expectations and the support was not good. New staff had been put in post at RM and the service had improved significantly however for some HTs this was considered to be too late. Currently some HTs were looking to access individual IT contracts from alternative providers, some were happy to extend the contract with RM for a further 12 months and then review, and some were undecided what course of action to take. The Scheme of Delegation would allow the Board to mandate the contract for all academies however this would not be well received by HTs.

Directors discussed the issue at length covering the following points:

A benefit of being part of a MAT is to benefit financially from centralised contracts. The pros and cons of mandating that academies be part of centralised contracts, and that this could not be done retrospectively.

The different levels of autonomy allocated to the different academies dependent upon their rating.

The possibility of a collective contract between two or more academies and a service provider if not all academies agreed to a centralised contract.

The time, effort and skill set involved in facilitating a tendering process for contracts.

The development of standard specifications needed for the tendering process.

The time commitment required from the central team to negotiate central contracts and the feasibility of this if not all academies were involved.

Service providers should have the resilience to account for staff illness or unexpected eventuality in order to be able to maintain an effective service.

The quality of the service received and the actions taken to address any issues.

The measures RM could take to encourage academies to extend their current contracts.

It was likely that any IT contract would have to be for a minimum of 2 years due to the infrastructure involved with such contracts.

Alternative service providers identified by HTs.

Some schools may view a non centralised contract for IT as a negative factor when deciding on which MAT to join.

Any centralised contract should offer a quality service at a reduced cost than would be available to any academy individually.

KD left the meeting due to technical difficulties at 7.40 pm.

BD/21/23 MAT policies discussed at this point

KD re-joined the meeting at 7.47pm

Directors concluded that:

MS would discuss the situation with RM once again to establish their final offer with the detailed financial implications to present to HTs.

Individual academies had the autonomy to source their own IT contracts for two years only but must be able to provide evidence that the correct tendering process had been followed.

LGBs would be accountable for ensuring that the tendering process was transparent and must withstand scrutiny by the Board.

All academies would be expected to join a MAT wide centralised contract following a full tendering process.

MS

BD/21/24 MAT policies

The following draft policies had previously been circulated to Directors for consideration:

Children with health conditions who cannot attend school.
Managing underperformance.
Complaints policy

Directors **APPROVED** the Children with health conditions who cannot attend school policy.

A meeting with the trade unions was planned for June to consult on the Performance Management policy (which had previously been approved by the Board) and Managing Underperformance policy, both of which would then be subject to staff consultation and ready for implementation by September 2021.

Directors **APPROVED** the Managing underperformance policy pending union consultation.

PG noted that a further eight HR policies had been available via GovernorHub however as there had been no changes in law or regulations in respect of the policies union consultation regarding these policies was not required.

Directors **APPROVED** the eight HR policies which had been available to view on GovernorHub prior to the meeting.

The Complaints policy had previously been discussed at the meeting on 3rd December 2020 and approved via email on 3rd March 2021. PG informed that an appendix had been added for dealing with unreasonable or vexatious complainants. Feedback from Directors had suggested reorganisation of the content but no change to the content.

KD re-joined the meeting at 7.47pm

Directors **RATIFIED** the appendix to the Complaints policy pending minor reorganisation of the content.

Audits of academy websites had highlighted that a few inconsistencies remained with some academies in relation to policies that were no longer relevant and websites that did not link to the MAT website. PG agreed to raise the issue at the LGB Chair's forum.

PG

BD/21/25 Expansion of MAT Board and Trust Members

Deferred to a later meeting due to time constraints

Agenda

BD/21/26 Revision of Articles and MFA

Deferred to a later meeting due to time constraints

Agenda

BD/21/27 Approval of new LGB members

CM left the meeting at 8.13 pm

Directors **APPROVED** the following LGB members:

EBSP -Sarah Fisher- Parent governor
GPS- Rani Karim -Governor status to be confirmed following consultation with the Diocese.

CM re-joined the meeting at 8.16 pm

BD/21/28 AOB

None.

BD/21/29 CEO resignation and replacement

- Trust Members meeting
- MAT sustainability
- External MAT review
- Stakeholder consultation
- Recruitment

PG informed Directors that the Board would need to look at the MAT's financial and expansion sustainability, which would probably be best achieved through an external MAT review; last done in 2018. Trust Members had enquired about an external review.

The DDE had advised that the MAT try to get the RSC review (which had been due in May 2020) completed this term, as the CEO would be the person best placed to complete the review with the RSC and he was leaving at the end of the term. The Members Board had also suggested a peer to peer review by another MAT CEO to provide an overview of governance, finance, performance, and leadership roles. It was considered that it would be appropriate for an external peer to peer review to be undertaken from someone outside of the Nottinghamshire area. The Members considered that this would be crucial during the summer term so that MS could facilitate as he had the depth of knowledge needed to complete the review. This would incur costs for 1-2 days.

Directors unanimously **AGREED** to an external peer to peer review. PG agreed to liaise with the DDE to source a suitable person to undertake the review.

PG

MS left the meeting at 8.24 pm

HD outlined the anticipated savings from one term CEO salary and the recruitment costs. When considering the cost of the review and the cost of recruitment it was thought that recruitment costs could be deferred until the time of appointment which would support the budget.

HD left the meeting at 8.27 pm.

PG reported that:

The Members had been very supportive of the Board, agreed with the steps taken and the outcomes that they had reached.

It was known that small MATs were experiencing some difficulties and were merging with larger MATs.

Members supported the development of a plan, they wanted to be involved in the process and then to inform the RSC

Expansion of MAT Board and Trust Members would be discussed at the next meeting.

The DDE had been supportive of the decisions made and supported the peer to peer and RSC reviews.

The DBE and DDE would be fully engaged with the recruitment process for the CEO.

It was unlikely that an appointment would be made by the autumn term; it was important to take the time to recruit the right person, therefore an interim arrangement would be needed.

The priorities for the autumn term would need to be reviewed, and if the priority was preparation for Ofsted they would need to look at the expertise within the MAT or the option to buy in that specific support.

Other specific CEO responsibilities e.g. accounting officer would need to be sourced either from within their own leadership team or from another MAT.

A CEO partner for a limited time period could be sourced from either within or outside the Diocese.

The DDE had informed that a new Diocesan Strategy was due to be published in the autumn which would look at allocation of academies and converting academies.

Two LGB chairs had offered their expertise, and all had been very supportive. Recruitment agencies had been discussed and preliminary contact had been made with the consultants.

Anthony Collins solicitors had advised that the cost to rewrite the Articles of Association would be £1500, which would include rewriting of the Master Funding Agreement. This would need to be done before another academy could be allocated to the MAT. This would be addressed further at an interim meeting of the Board.

The HTs had a meeting planned for 13th May to discuss how they would like the future of the MAT to develop and this would be fed back to the Board.

The CEO job description and person specification would need to be reviewed.

Directors **AGREED** in principle pending further discussion with HTs and LGBs to recruit another full time CEO.

An interim Board meeting to be held to consider the feedback from HTs and LGBs on **Monday 17th May at 6 pm**. PG agreed to invite the DDE to attend the meeting from 6.30 pm

PG

PG and KD to convene an initial meeting with a recruitment agency.

PG/KD

CM highlighted the need to be clear about the purpose of the consultation with staff and LGBs as the Board and the Members supported recruiting a full time CEO. Consultation would need to concentrate on the strengths and challenges of the MAT and the skill set of the person needed to address those challenges.

PG to discuss sourcing a supportive consultant CEO for the autumn term with the DDE.

PG

BD/21/30 Dates of meetings for 2021/22

- Tuesday 20th July 2021 at 6.30 pm
- Thursday 16th September at 6.30 pm
- Thursday 2nd December at 6.30 pm
- Thursday 3rd February 2022 at 6.30 pm
- Thursday 7th April 2022 at 6.30 pm
- Tuesday 24th May 2022 at 6.30 pm
- Thursday 14th July 2022 at 6.30 pm

BD/21/ Determination of confidentiality of business

Directors **AGREED** that one item under **BD/21/20** be deemed confidential

The meeting closed at 9 pm.

Signed (chair) Date