

The meeting was held online using MS Teams due to the current Government restrictions and was recorded from item six

Trustees/Directors:

Cheryl Mathieson – in the chair
Nicola Dunford

Dominic Course
Paul Waterworth

Jane Collings
Roy Gillard

In attendance: Matt Matthew, Business Manager
Rachel Hill, Clerk to the Trust

1. **Apologies**

Mike Fisher, Jason Hayward-Jones, Sarah Cox, Fiona Walters

2. **Declaration of Business Interests**

The CEO is a Trustee of South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (SDMAT) and also a Trustee for the Bearnas Education Foundation. Mr Roy Gillard is a Director of Labyrinth Accountancy Limited, Mr Michael Fisher is a Foundation Director of Bailey Partnership LLP, Amethyst Property Ltd, and Adorn Development Ltd, property consultancy and management companies. Mr Dominic Course is a Trustee of SDMAT and Director of DACORS Ltd.

The meeting moved to Part II minutes

The meeting returned to Part I minutes

3. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting T31/21 held on 8 February 2021 were approved: Part I only

4. **Matters arising**

4.1 **Item 2.2 Annual Report and Financial Statements for year ended 31 August 2020**

- SDMAT's actuary pension valuation relating to the three Moorland schools. The CEO advised that SDMAT final accounts will not be signed off until a solar panel issue is resolved. DC noted that no further refunds will be received from SDMAT in relation to Moretonhampstead Primary School as originally understood.

4.2 **Item 6 Governance Paper**

CEO to update Trustees on progress regarding potential new name for Local Boards. The CEO advised that the name Local Hubs is being used. The Board agreed to this name change.

Agreed

4.3 **Item 8 Business Plan and growth**

The CEO updated on the transition of Morchard Bishop Primary School to join the Trust. Morchard Bishop has a conversion date of the 1 October 2021. The Trust met with the Schools Organisation and Governance Group for the Diocese on 5 May 2021. On the 25 May it went to the Head Teachers Board and the transition should take place from 1 October. The school will join the Trust with an age range from two to eleven. Parent consultations will now commence. There is a minimal risk around School House and safeguarding but this will be incorporated into the due diligence paperwork.

The Chair noted that a Working Party Group for the transition has been formed. At their last meeting they wished to place thanks to the CEO and TBM who have given above and beyond what was expected of them in welcoming this school to the Trust.

The CEO advised that Morchard Bishop will join the Woodleigh Local Hub and this is in process. Their Clerk will remain in post. Governors can become associate governors whilst the transition takes place.

4.4 Item 17 Policies for Approval

CEO to update on progress for Subject Access Requests Policy and Form, Records Retention and Disposal Policy and Exclusion Policy. The Chair noted that these policies had been approved in principal. The Subject Access Request Policy is now on the website. The grid in the Records Retention and Disposal Policy requires updating and the CEO advised that the Data Protection Officer has completed this. The CEO advised that updating the Exclusions Policy remains in progress.

The CEO requested assistance with policy amendments for capacity reasons. The Chair noted that Trustees had agreed that each committee would allocate Trustees within their committee to review and amend policies. Trustees were asked if they could update policies in track changes. Trustees asked for training in this.

Action TBM

5. Chief Executive Officer's Report

The CEO's report had been circulated prior to the meeting. The Chair asked the CEO if there was anything she would like to highlight.

The CEO drew the committee's attention to national changes. The Regional Schools Commission (RSC) is currently sounding out Academies for capacity. The Trust has been asked to present to a Federation of three schools in Ivybridge. One of the schools used to have a unit for autistic children which would work well with the Trust's Inclusion Hub. An enquiry had also been received from Christina Mabin of the Diocese concerning the Trust providing support to some schools in Tiverton. *DC asked whether location played a role for schools wishing to join the Trust?* The CEO replied that ideally the Trust would like to have schools along the A38/M5 corridor from Plymouth to the borders of Devon. The CEO added that if expansion continues the Trust should strategically plan for two Hubs. *DC asked if the Trust's support of a school is looked at as a path to expansion for the Trust or whether the Trust makes recommendations to other Trusts.* The CEO replied that as a certain amount of time is invested by the Trust when supporting a school, ideally the school would become part of the Trust in due course. However, supporting a school provides an opportunity for the Trust to carry out some due diligence and the Trust would only take on schools that fitted its vision and ethos. A support Trust also provides a small amount of income generation. *DC queried whether the income generated was adequate given that the Trust lost a day of the CEO's time.*

Paul Waterworth (PW) asked for acronyms to be explained in full for the newer Trustees. Jane Collings (JC) agreed to send PW an acronym buster.

Action JC

The CEO advised that the Trust has signed up for a pilot peer to peer Multi Academy Trust (MAT) review. The Link has been partnered with the Bridge Schools Trust from Bodmin, Cornwall. The MATs will scrutinise the operations of their partner Trust and recommend improvements that can be actioned. There is a tight structure around the review to ensure positivity and usefulness.

The TBM/HR Officer and CEO have been working on updating the website to ensure information about how the Trust operates is public for parents and other Trusts. Trustees were asked to forward any comments they may have to the CEO.

The Chair reported that JHJ had emailed to advise that he had read the CEO's report, and was comfortable that at this crucial stage of the academic year, and coming out of lockdown, the Link is performing well, with some areas of concern highlighted and being addressed.

6. **Digital Learning Strategy and Vision 2021-24**

The CEO reported that the Digital Learning Strategy and Vision had been discussed at the Finance & General Purposes meeting of the 26 April 2021. The finances had been robustly challenged by the committee. The CEO and TBM had presented the strategy as Phase 1 to the Standards & Curriculum committee on the 28 April 2021. Since then a meeting with the Curriculum Leadership Group has been held to develop the learning strategy element. The Standards & Curriculum committee would like to be involved in this aspect and have requested a further presentation.

7. **Business Plan**

Update from portfolios holders on:

- Governance – Jane Collings
Jane Collings (JC) had provided Trustees with a Governance update paper. JC advised that recruitment in Local Hubs is good however the Trust still needs to strive to recruit and induct new Members and Trustees. The role of Members needs revisiting and training for Members and Trustees organised. The CEO advised that she had contacted Isabel Cherrett (IJC) this week to enquire if she was interested in becoming a Member. IJC had advised that she would have to wait a clear twelve months from being a Trustee before she could be considered as a Member. As one of its objectives, the Workforce Strategy Group will be looking at putting together training plan for Trustees, which will also include induction training. JCO asked for involvement with this and added that the best training is mentoring.
- Financial Strategy & Control – Roy Gillard
Roy Gillard (RG) had provided Trustees with a Financial Strategy & Control update paper. Focus is being placed on ensuring that the financial business systems are up to date. *DC noted that within the F&GP minutes it had been recorded that some of the longer term contracts with payroll were increasing in spend as the Trust grew and asked at what point would the contracts be renegotiated.* RG replied that the Trust should ensure that any potential new systems were easy for staff to use and the issue of how and who would transfer the data required planning.

It was agreed that Jason Hayward-Jones would be asked to update on Quality Assurance and Data at the next meeting of the Board of Trustees and that the CEO and TBM would work together to see if they could move the Central Business and Property Plan forward in the absence of Mike Fisher.

Action JHJ/CEO/TBM

8. **Risk Register**

8.2 The updates completed by the CEO to the Education Standards and Achievement (ES&A) section following discussion at the F&GP meeting on 7 May 2021 and the S&C meeting on 28 April 2021 were approved. RG advised that this section will be updated on an annual basis commencing September 2021.

Approved

DC advised that the individual school risk registers are now filed within the Risk Register folder in Share Point and risk themes are evident.

8.3 The updates completed at the January 2021 Audit committee meeting to the Regulation and Statutory Compliance (R&SC) section were approved.

Approved

A ten minute comfort break was taken at this point in the meeting.

9. **Audit Committee**

9.1 The minutes of the meeting A/2/21 held on 12 May 2021 were received. DC reported that the main point to draw Trustees attention to was the clean internal audit from payroll. This is impressive as it runs across 15 sites.

10. **F&GP Committee**

The minutes of the F&GP committee meeting held on 5 February 2021 were received. A verbal update had been received by Trustees at the February 2021 meeting of the Board. The minutes of the F&GP committee meeting held on 6 March 2021 were received by Trustees.

The minutes of the F&GP committee meeting held on 26 April 2021 to discuss the Digital Learning Strategy were received.

The minutes of the F&GP committee meeting held on 7 May 2021 were received. The Chair of F&GP gave a short report on the issues arising.

- Each school had been asked to provide a Wishlist of needs. The TBM is costing some areas. The success of CIF bids will play a part in available finances. *DC asked whether needs were mainly for equipment or manpower?* The TBM replied both.
- The budget for the Digital Learning Strategy was approved, but not the amounts. This will be done annually.
- The Stoke Gabriel multi use games area (MUGA) can't proceed until confirmation of 106 Funding.
- Future F&GP meetings will be held online until the end of term and continue in this manner unless face to face meetings are necessary.

2020/21 Financial Performance: Month 8 to 30 April 2021. The Directors' Dashboard had been circulated prior to the meeting. No real issues were highlighted.

11. **Remuneration Committee**

11.1 The Chair gave a verbal report from RC/1/21 – 26 March 2021. There were no major issues arising. Staff planning was discussed and moves to strengthen schools. Lizzie Lethbridge will be moving full time into a Standards and Outcome role in EIT. The Trust had advertised internally for a Head at Diptford and an applicant has been appointed as from September. The committee had looked at the EIT going forward and potential expansion. They had talked about the central business unit and how this could be expanded. The Inclusion Hub had been discussed. This is at capacity and it was agreed to strengthen the team. Becky Humphreys will be moved into a leadership role and observations undertaken by others. The Chair advised that it is the intention to start offering courses at the Inclusion Hub for outside customers as income generation. Succession planning for Trustees had been briefly discussed. This needs to be followed up by the Board.

11.2 The Trust Business Manager's Job Profile had been updated. The committee had agreed this should be approved for this year and reviewed annually. The Board of Trustees approved this action.

Approved

12. **Standards & Curriculum Committee**

12.1 Minutes of S&C/2/21 – 28 April 2021.

The LB Chairs had collated a summary of issues and questions. The Board went through each point in turn to respond to Governors' concerns. The outcome of the discussion is at Appendix 1.

13. **Finance**

13.1 Outline Budget for 2021/22 – key assumptions.

The TBM has produced a draft budget. Maintaining pupil numbers is key for the future. The draft budget uses assumptions which may change before it is brought to the next meeting of Trustees. The biggest concern is potential government clawback of funds following Covid. The Chair asked for any questions. *JCO asked if the marketing strategy for pupil numbers could be reviewed.* The TBM replied that school websites and facebook pages were being refreshed. Leaflet drops to housing

developments had been made. The importance of pre-schools and toddler groups has been for-fronted and AHs asked to continue marketing these areas.

Each individual school budget has been given to Academy Heads and one to one sessions with AHs and administrators held. A three year budget wish list and year to date report is being used as part of the discussion. *JCO asked whether all school websites were mobile compatible?* The TBM replied affirmatively. *DC asked that all AHs fully were made aware of their responsibilities for recruitment and retention of pupils.* The TBM replied that sessions with AHs have taken place about dealing with parents as a customer. RG noted that he had attended a meeting with AHs and was impressed that it was a major concern for them to increase pupil numbers. *DC also asked whether Ofsted visits could be seen as an opportunity not a threat.* *PW asked if Devon County Council population figures were taken into account when assessing pupil numbers.* The CEO replied affirmatively.

14. **Local Board Summaries**

The Chair advised that Local Boards are now producing summaries for S&C meetings. The summaries prepared by Chairs for the Standards & Curriculum meeting on 28.04.21 were received: The more detailed minutes of Local Board meetings can be found in SharePoint and on the website.

Received

15. **Safeguarding**

The Spring Safeguarding Summary from Alex Waterman (AW) was received. AW will update all AHs on how bullying is to be reported.

Received

16. **Health and Safety**

The CEO reported that there were no issues to raise. The Trust is working well to ensure compliancy.

17. **Governance**

17.1 Trustees:

Property and education experience are required at Trustee level. People with a broad range of skills would also be welcomed.

17.2 Governors:

Robin Tugwell was **approved** as a Foundation Governor for the Totnes Local Board.

Carmel Skinner was **approved** as a Parent Governor for Ilsington.

Richard Charley was **approved** as a Staff Governor for Harbertonford

17.3 Training:

It was noted that on Thursday 29th April Link Administrators had training undertaken with Babcock Safeguarding expert, Jonathan Galling, for advice and guidance around completing and maintaining the schools Single Central Records.

18. **Policies**

18.1 **Recommended by the Finance & General Purposes Committee**

18.1.1 Equality Statement. This had been approved in principal by the F&GP committee at their meeting of 26 March 2021 and placed on the Link website.

Approved

18.1.2 Professional Development Policy

Approved

18.2 **Recommended by the Standards & Curriculum Committee**

18.2.1 SEND

Approved

18.3 **Recommended by the Audit Committee**

18.3.1 Risk Management Policy.

Approved

18.4 Trustee Policies

18.4.1 Register of Business Interests.

Approved

18.4.2 Freedom of Information.

Approved

18.4.3 DBS Disclosure

Approved**19. Dates of future Meetings 2021-22**

- The November Audit committee date has been changed to later in the month to enable the committee to receive the audited accounts.
- *JC asked if S&C meetings could return to a 4pm start.* PW suggested arranging a time to suit the committee members.
- It was agreed that in future a blended approach would be taken as to whether meetings should be held online or face to face.

20. Meeting Dates 2020-2021

The following dates have been agreed for 2021; meetings will commence at 4.00 pm, except for the AGM which will start at 6.00 pm.

T33 12 July 2021

T34 19 July 2021 – AGM

Appendix 1

Local Board Reports:

The following concerns were raised by Local Board Chairs for the attention of the Board of Trustees at their 24 May 2021 meeting.

1. It was noted the Inclusion Hub provides exemplary practice but only has the same capacity as when the LINK had six schools. Now there are 15 schools will it be expanded?
The CEO reported that expansion of the Inclusion Hub was underway. Hours of staff members have been increased and further additions to the team are planned.
2. Concerns were raised over limited provision for Gifted and Talented pupils.
The CEO advised that this is being picked up as a project next year by Alice Eeles, Academy Head at Stoke Gabriel Primary School. Alice will have 0.1 time allocated to identify Gifted and Talented pupils and plan interventions.
3. Concerns were raised over the 0 -25 DCC Children's Services and their lack of action after Section 47 and MASH referrals.
4. There have been GDPR breaches by the 0-25 team.
5. Local Boards are keen for Trustees to write to Devon County with the concerns raised in points three and four above.
The above three points were discussed at length. It was agreed that the Local Boards would be asked to provide further details of the issues (with some examples) so that the Chair of the Board of Trustees, with assistance from Jane Collings and the CEO, could write a constructive letter to Dawn Stabb, Head of Education & Learning of Devon highlighting the Trust's concerns. To also send to LADDO and Head of Children's Services.

Action JC/Chair/CEO
6. Local Boards requested Trustees ask for a staff survey to be conducted following the two parent surveys already undertaken.
The CEO advised that staff surveys tend not to be as formal as parent surveys. It was agreed that Jane Collings would ask Local Hub Chairs for question recommendations which were short and specific. Survey to be sent after half term.
7. Concerns were raised over the workload of Academy Heads who also had the SENDCo role. One Academy Head was SENDCo of two schools. SENDCos are also required to have the SENDCo award within three years. Local Boards stated that Academy Heads have limited capacity for this role.
The CEO advised that this had been discussed with Academy Heads and the Executive Improvement Team. It has been found that employing external SENCos has not been a good use of time and this is being gradually phased out. The Trust SEND Lead feels it is the duty of the Academy Head (AH) to know the SEND children in their schools. Not all AHs need to do a qualification in SEND. It is their responsibility to manage their time in order to know their SEND pupils. It was agreed that the Workforce committee would keep this matter high on their agenda and it would be discussed again in September.
8. Local Boards are keen to see volunteers and governors return to schools as they play a vital role. It was noted that they could return in a COVID secure manner with Lateral Flow Tests and increased vaccination.
Volunteers are welcome back into schools in a COVID secure manner. This is an individual school and volunteer decision. Some Academy Heads have already put this into action.
9. Local Boards asked how complaints were monitored by the Board of Trustees and how any themes were identified.
The CEO advised that Academy Heads mainly deal with complaints and they can discuss issues at Academy Head meetings. Complaints are then usually fed back in the CEO's report. The CEO expressed concern that by asking AHs to monitor complaints this would increase their workloads. Paul

Waterworth suggested that the relevant Trust policies should be adhered to and complaints dealt with at the appropriate level. Confidence that complaints are being dealt with appropriately should be held at committee level and with the CEO. The Chair noted that the Scheme of Delegation should also be followed.

10. The Standards & Curriculum committee were asked to strategically commit to diversifying the history curriculum in relation to Black History and BLM.
This was noted.

11. It would be useful to gather some evidence of how the Link Academy Trust has worked effectively through the pandemic in case there is a general review of MATs in the future.
This was noted.