

The Link Academy Trust  
Board of Trustees/Directors

Minutes: 8 February 2021

T/31/21, 4.00 pm

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

**Trustees/Directors:**

Cheryl Mathieson – in the chair	Dominic Course	Jane Collings
Nicola Dunford	Paul Waterworth	Roy Gillard
Jason Hayward-Jones	Sarah Cox	Fiona Walters

Absent without apology: Mike Fisher

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

1. **Welcome**

Sarah Cox and Paul Waterworth were welcomed to the Board of Trustees.

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 and undertakes company secretarial duties for Stock Props Limited, a dormant property rental business. 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.

3. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting T30/20 held on 7 December 2020 were approved.

4. **Matters arising**

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

The TBM advised that the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2020 had been signed off by the Board of Trustees Chair, Mrs Isabel Cherrett, and the CEO in December 2020 and received by the ESFA prior to their submission deadline. A copy has been posted on the Link Academy Trust's website and Bishop Fleming will be posting a copy at Companies House.

The TBM advised that SDMAT's actuary pension valuation relating to the three Moorland schools has now been completed. The CEO and DC will be attending a South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust meeting at which the final accounts will be formalised. The CEO added that she had asked for the papers and accounts for this meeting and would send a copy to DC.

**Action CEO**

4.2 **Item 4.1 Ilsington Primary School**

The TBM advised that building works had commenced at Ilsington Primary School to extend the Early Years area and will run to 31 July 2021.

4.3 **Local Boards**

- The CEO reported that a draft document detailing Local Board (LB) membership is now filed in MSTeams and will be placed in SharePoint once finalised. New Governors have joined the LBs. Governor numbers at Bearnas could be stronger. Ilsington and Hennock have improved Governor participation.
- Standards & Curriculum (S&C) Terms of Reference (ToR) to be dovetailed with ToRs for Local Boards. The CEO advised that this has been completed. It had been discussed at an LB Working Party meeting and at an S&C committee meeting.
- Feedback from local boards – pro-forma to be devised. The CEO advised that the pro-forma has now been drawn up.

- Appointment letter for new governors to be drawn up. The CEO advised that this has not been actioned. All new governors receive the 'Principal Role of a Governor' document when they join the Trust. The HR Officer then sends paperwork to cover their appointment, which includes an appointment letter, Covid-19 conduct, DBS, contact details etc. This system is working well. New governors sign the appointment letter as well as the Covid-19 conduct letter. *JHJ commented that it was good news to hear that new Governors were joining the Trust and questioned what the Link had done differently to attract them.* The CEO replied that advertising in local community newsletters had been useful and that the Diocese had also become involved in the recruitment drive.

#### 4.4 Item 9 Business Plan 2021-22

The CEO advised that the 2021-22 Business Plan had been circulated to Trustees in December 2020 and forms Agenda Item 8 below.

#### 4.5 Item 6.3 Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) bids

The TBM reported. The Trust has submitted CIF bids for nine schools this year with an approximate Trust contribution level of £326,000. Outcomes of the bids should be received by March/April 2021. An external third party writes the bids.

#### 4.6 Item 11 Claim notification received by third party employee

The TBM advised that a claim notification had been received by a third party employee. The ESFA had appointed a loss adjuster who advised that the employee should take the matter up with her employer rather than with the Trust.

### 5. **Chief Executive Officer's Report**

The CEO was thanked for her comprehensive report.

The CEO highlighted the Blended Learning plan. Discussion between Academy Heads (AHs) and the Executive Improvement Team (EIT) had commenced in June 2020. Following training, the Blended Learning plan had commenced in September 2020. It has been successful in most schools, particularly those with sufficient IT provision. E/AHs and the EIT are currently monitoring provision and engagement with a particular focus on SEND. AHs have received comprehensive training from the Improvement and Inclusion Hub Lead about the requirements of Special Needs children and this is being delivered to all schools and assists with provision mapping. The TBM and CEO are promoting a paper that researches how learning will change over the next three years to further incorporate blended learning.

2020-21 projects will focus on IT.

The annual MAT review with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) had been postponed for 2020 and did not take place in 2019. The TBM and CEO have discussed growth, strategic and school improvement across the Trust with a representative from the RSC. The TBM and CEO have asked the RSC to direct any small schools with a similar vision and values, and who might be experiencing difficulties, towards the Trust.

*JHJ asked what the plan was for new schools joining the Link?* The CEO replied that the Trust currently has a management partnership agreement with Morchard Bishop School with a view to them joining as an Academy. This is further discussed under Agenda Item 8 below. Two pre-schools have expressed an interest in joining the Link. This would result in the age range for Widecombe and Stoke Gabriel Primary schools increasing to three to eleven.

*JCO asked for clarification on pupil attendance in January 2021 as detailed within the report as it looked as if there were anomalies.* The CEO advised that Academy administrators have been asked to clarify how they were entering attendance data. The Trust's Data and Standards Lead will also review how this information is transferred from SIMS.

*JCO referred to flexible working requests and issues around consistency of education for pupils, and asked if the Trust had a percentage number of part time staff that they employed?* The CEO replied that the employment structure of part-time staff was looked at on an individual school basis. Staffing structures for the Trust will be reviewed in March in preparation for the following September.

*DC noted that the four and one day split of part-time staff can work if there is a strong HLTA in place.* The CEO agreed, adding that when possible the Trust liked to accommodate part-time working requests but that unqualified teachers were not encouraged to take responsibility for a class for any length of time.

## 6. **Governance**

A Governance paper, written by the CEO, had been circulated to Trustees prior to the meeting. The CEO highlighted aspects of this paper.

The CEO, through discussion with the Aspire Academy Trust in Cornwall, had met online with the Link Academy Trust School Improvement Lead (ATSIL) Sarah Clarke (SC) and Vanessa Bragg, ex-officio Trustee and CEO of Aspire, to discuss governance.

In order to make it clear that the Local Board is no longer a decision making entity, Aspire has replaced the name Local Board with Hub Council and replaced the name Governors with Councillors. Each Aspire Academy is accountable to the Trust Board. The Hub Council is positioned to facilitate this and to ensure the Academies within it can realistically meet the requirements of the Aspire Academy Trust.

At a Working Party meeting SC explained this structure to the Link Local Board (LB) Chairs and discussion took place as to whether it would be a suitable format to adopt. The LB Chairs understood the reasoning behind the proposition and were favourable to a change of name and Associate Committee or Local Committee had been suggested as possible alternatives. LB Chairs had also suggested the name Partner or Associate instead of Governor.

The CEO advised that no formal decision has been made to a name change and that it would be best for any changes to be proposed by the LBs.

DC re-iterated that other Chairs were keen to drop the word Board. *However, training provided by Babcock and the Diocese is for Governors. This name is also used in the Academies Financial Handbook and DC queried whether a name change could be confusing?* The CEO replied that the Link no longer sends Governors to Babcock training as it differs from the Trust's requirements.

*JHJ added it was important that a uniform name was used for training, induction and within the Scheme of Delegation, and to remember that at local level Governors were responsible with Trustees for governance.*

*PW commented that in the past the Link had experienced some difficulty obtaining support from volunteers. People like to be valued and hold a position that holds respect and responsibility. The Trust should be able to define precisely the role of a Governor and if this was done accurately there should not be a problem.* The CEO replied that the Trust did have documents in place to define the role of a Governor but there was a need for this to be understood before the formal appointment took place.

FW suggested linking a title - such as custodian governor - and noted that the responsibilities of a Governor had changed with the development of Academies.

*SC added that it was important for new Governors to understand their role and could an induction with either Trustees or E/AHs take place?* The CEO replied that an induction is held but conceded that this has been better more recently than in the past. She agreed with JCO's point that it was important for those newly appointed Governors to understand that it was a different role from that of a Parent Forum.

RG's view was that the role was more aligned with that of an associate and he was in favour of a change of name as long as it went alongside a thorough explanation of the definition of the role and the reasoning behind it.

The Chair added that she approved of a name change and that some may prefer an associate role.

The CEO advised that her choice was the name Partner. She would now report back to the LB Working Party advising that Trustees had agreed they would be happy to explore the terms that LBs would like considered.

#### **Action CEO**

JHJ added that the role was more important than the name. The role of LBs and Governors in relation to Ofsted should remain clear. The CEO added Governors also need to have an in depth understanding of how their local schools worked.

#### **7. IT Provision and Strategy**

A paper titled IT Provision and Strategy, written by the CEO with the TBM, had been circulated to Trustees prior to the meeting. The CEO highlighted aspects of this paper.

Online learning and IT requirements within education have strengthened and developed within the last twelve months and the Link Academy Trust should ensure their Academies are prepared for the future. The Trust would be best advised to build a future around the highest possible online learning provision, balanced with experiential learning and sport. The CEO further advised that, with the TBM, she would like to develop a strategy, create a vision, work with E/AHs and produce a three year plan to be presented to Trustees about this subject.

The TBM added that it would be wise to remember the position the Trust had been in when this journey had started due to the pandemic. All schools had joined at varying levels of IT provision. The one limiting factor is based on location. As the Academies within the Trust are rural, internet connection is largely poor. The Trust is engaging with other providers but this does not necessarily mean a better connection. What the Link can physically deliver is limited due to poor internet connection.

DC added, as the portfolio holder for IT, his concern had been about the speed of equipment roll out to children. The TBM replied that the best scenario would be for the current Y5s into Y6s to receive the first laptops and for Y3 and Y4s to have lesser devices. The Trust is currently engaging with the Microsoft education team and Widecombe and Hennock are trialling new devices. The training of staff was as equally as important as engagement.

JHJ added that in his view it was the hardware enabler that was key to ensuring all academies had equal opportunities.

The CEO asked Trustees to consider how online education could develop. She further advised that she had continued to collaborate with Broadclyst as an Edutech school.

PW commented that it was important to have clarity around the purpose for devices. The CEO replied that she thought this would differ. Robust devices were required for Early Years children. Ys 5 and 6 could do more research. Online safety was a factor to be considered.

PW added the Trust should ensure a laptop did not take away from other school activities. Children could learn the use of a laptop quickly, but learning social skills was less immediate. The CEO agreed, adding that Academies would also continue to work hard on experiential learning.

DC agreed with the TBM's comments about access to the internet. It would seem as if the education system had become two-tiered, and part of the strategy should look at levelling it.

*JCO asked if the strategy could also incorporate SEND and inclusion.*

It was agreed that the TBM and CEO would continue to work on the strategy and invite DC to comment.

**Action TBM/CEO/DC**

8. **Business Plan**  
**Growth & Capacity – CEO/PW**

**Growth and Morchard Bishop Primary School**

The CEO asked Trustees to consider whether they wished the Trust to continue working towards Morchard Bishop Primary School joining the Link Academy Trust as an academy. At present the Trust has a management partnership agreement with this school. Trustees agreed that the school fitted with the Link's vision and values. Morchard Bishop has visited all the Link academies and likes the way in which the Link supports central business and HR and also that the Trust does not 'dictate'; a shared approach is enjoyed by both parties. The Link has spent the previous twelve months successfully working with this school. Morchard Bishop requires a good succession plan as the Head Teacher and Deputy Head are due to leave at the same time. The Link would enjoy many benefits from joining with the school, including setting up a Hub kitchen to feed three other schools within the Trust. Morchard Bishop is a Diocese school and they (the Diocese) are in support of the transition. The TBM has already worked with the school's business manager on budget matters. The Link Academy Trust would undertake a due diligence process before the transition occurred.

**Proposed RG/Seconded DC that the Link Academy Trust continues to develop the partnership with Morchard Bishop Primary School with the intention that this school transitions to join the Trust as an Academy at the appropriate time.**

**CARRIED**

**Capacity and the opening up of Academies post lockdown**

The CEO advised that pre-schools are preparing for opening at the end of lockdown.

*DC asked whether it was anticipated that there could be issues around capacity for the central administration team?* The CEO replied that capacity had been built into the strategy to open and added that to retain good staff the Trust should allow them the opportunity to grow professionally.

*JHJ asked whether a Trustee should work with the CEO on the Business Plan in case, post lockdown, the Trust could not meet targets?* The CEO replied that the heavy workload of the TBM had already been identified and as a result a support team developed. By September 2021 the TBM's role will be aligned with that of a Deputy CEO. When this occurs an apprentice role will be created. *JCO asked whether Trustees' skills could continue to be assessed as there remained a need for an educational strategist.*

RG assured those present that the Link had the financial expertise to support new schools joining the Trust. The TBM and his finance team also had the experience to undertake the due diligence process.

*JCO asked whether a school's geographical position underpinned any potential for partnership growth?*

The CEO replied that she thought the Trust would divide into two Hubs in the future. The Link should respond to change without jeopardising what it has and that due diligence is a good process for this.

**Workforce Strategy – Cheryl Mathieson**

The Chair referred to her paper distributed prior to the meeting. This paper explores the HR processes and the four main objectives for the year. Consistency with the reference process will be developed and standard responses defined. Staff appraisals will be reviewed and consistency with the targets set by E/AHs developed to ensure that they operate at similar levels. Another objective is to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all staff. The HR Officer will produce a termly bulletin addressing the five strands of wellbeing. The first bulletin was distributed in December 2020.

The Chair advised that SC will now lead the Vision and Values portfolio within the Business Plan.

It was agreed that one or two Trustees would give a brief update at each Board meeting of progress within their portfolios.

9. **Risk Register**

- 9.1 Minute 14.1 of T30/20 Infrastructure – Business Unit  
The TBM advised that this section had been updated.
- 9.2 Minute 14.2 of T30/20 Q&E11  
Trustees approved IJC and CM's updates to section Q&E11 of the Risk Register.
- 9.3 R&SC section reviewed by Audit committee on 20.01.21. Amendments were approved.
- 9.4 Quality & Reputation  
This section was reviewed by IJC in December 2020.

It was agreed that the review dates within the Risk Register required alteration.

**Action All**

DC advised that he would be taking over responsibility for the Risk Register. The TBM reminded Trustees that the Risk Register should remain a living document and be reviewed and updated at each meeting.

*SC asked whether the software packages currently under review by the F&GP committee could be suitable for maintaining the Risk Register?* The TBM replied that the Trust was looking at Every and this could be the next phase.

DC added that E/AHs were also developing a Risk Register for each school.

## 10. Audit Committee

### 10.1 Minutes A/1/21 - 20 January 2021

The Chair of the Audit committee advised that the internal audit is now underway and that he would report back to Trustees on progress at the next meeting.

**Action DC**

## 11. F&GP Committee

### 11.1 Oral update from Chair of F&GP/1/21 - 5 February 2021

The Chair of the F&GP committee thanked the Finance team for receipt of the month 5 Directors Dashboard. All schools were performing satisfactorily financially. Lockdown measures have affected preschool numbers and wrap around care. Capital Improvement Fund (CIF) bids have been submitted. The Trust has submitted a maximum contribution to the CIF bid for the classrooms at Diptford. Sufficient reserves are held by the Trust if CIF bids prove successful.

**The Board of Trustees received and noted the financial data presented.**

JHJ left the meeting

## 12. Standards & Curriculum Committee

### 12.1 Minutes of S&C/1/21 – 27 January 2021

The Chair of the S&C committee advised that this had been the second meeting held where local governor partners had taken responsibility for drawing up the agenda. The committee had reviewed Blended Learning and looked at how teams were tackling Covid-19 issues with a particular focus on wellbeing for staff, pupils and families. Good questioning had taken place on Pupil Premium (PP), SEND and Safeguarding issues. The committee had touched on the work of LBs and how they fed into the S&C committee and Board of Trustees and how evidence could be triangulated.

The Chair of the Board of Trustees noted that the committee had been impressed with how the Executive Improvement Team (EIT) and Blended Learning were working.

JCO added that a parent survey had been undertaken during the summer months of 2020 which had fed into the key improvement strategy. A further survey will be sent out before the Spring half term. DC added that it had been a positive meeting. A comment had been made by the Chair of the Totnes LB that Governors now felt as if it was their Trust and that they were supported.

JCO added that it was important to allow LBs to decide what they wanted to be called in the future.

13. **Local Boards**

The following summaries and minutes of recent Local Board meetings were received:

- 13.1 Newton & Teign Local Board: Meeting 16 December 2020
- 13.2 Totnes Local Board: Meeting 10 December 2020
- 13.3 Woodleigh Local Board: Meeting 2 December 2020
- 13.4 Raleigh Federation: Meeting 8 December 2020
- 13.5 The Moorland Schools & Newton & Teign inaugural meeting: 16 December 2020

**Local Board Summaries**

The Chair noted that Newton & Teign had expressed concerns about the safety of the fencing at Hennock. JCO added that they had also raised concerns about the welfare of staff. The Chair advised that she has sent an email to all E/AHs thanking them for the work that they are doing.

The Totnes LB now seem to be mainly positive about the changes at Broadhempston Primary School having initially expressed concerns. Governors have written to their local MP about the state of the classrooms at Diptford.

The Moorland Schools and Newton & Teign have held their first joint meeting.

*SC noted that Drakes had used memory sticks for sharing their Nativity play. SC asked if they could be requested to use different and safer methods.*

**Action CEO**

Corinna Tigg, Chair of the Raleigh LB mentioned that learning was going well within the schools.

*DC asked if the Trust could monitor attendance as an ongoing picture?* The CEO replied that this could be a useful exercise.

The CEO added that, with reference to staff wellbeing, she had written a letter to all parents thanking them for the work they had undertaken during lockdown and that she had also quoted a positive letter received from a parent. *DC asked if it was possible to post a copy of all Trust communication with parents on SharePoint?* The CEO agreed to this.

**Action CEO**

The Chair noted that LB minutes should be posted on school websites and a copy sent to the HR Officer for uploading to the Link website. The CEO agreed to ask the ATSIL to monitor this.

**Action CEO/ATSIL**

14. **Safeguarding**

The CEO advised that there were no major issues to report. A situation with social workers in Newton Abbot was being well monitored.

The Chair added that the Autumn Term Safeguarding Report and Action Plan had been received.

15. **Health and Safety**

The CEO reported that the main issue was the security fencing at Hennock Primary School which had been discussed above.

16. **Governance Review**

- 16.1 Scheme of Delegation (SoD). The CEO reported that the SoD had been substantially updated in 2020 by the Chair of Trustees and was due for a half year review to check that it is fit for purpose. The CEO asked Trustees to let her know of any changes.
- 16.2 Morchard Bishop joining the Trust Vote. Please see item 8 above.
- 16.3 Recommendations for Trustees. The Chair asked Trustees to put forward any recommendations for potential new Trustees. FW had recently nominated a medical registrar

- in dermatology. JCO reiterated that a Trustee with education experience was required to sit on the S&C committee and the Chair agreed that this was a priority.
- 16.4 Local Board Governors. Trustees **approved** the following appointments.  
 Peter Reed – Community Governor, Newton & Teign Local Board  
 Shaun Elliott, Parent Governor Moretonhampstead  
 Vivienne Hodges, Community Governor, Moretonhampstead  
 Kyle Brooke, Parent Governor Hennock  
 Robin Tugwell, Foundation Governor Ilsington  
 Paul Brassley, Community Governor Ilsington  
 Carmel Brady, Parent Governor Ilsington

The Chair noted that the two Moretonhampstead Governors were transferring over from SDMAT. The remaining Governors were new to the role. The Clerk advised that the Ilsington Governor had also transferred from SDMAT. FW asked if due diligence had been undertaken for these candidates as she was nervous of governors that came from an organisation that had been bankrupt and they were not impartial of governance on that basis. The CEO advised that the ATSIL has interviewed these Governors online. They had submitted applications and had not been involved with the financial aspects of SDMAT.

## 17. Policies for approval

The following Policies have been reviewed and updated and were presented for approval:

### 17.1 Recommended by the Finance & General Purposes Committee

17.1.1 Fair Processing **Approved**

### 17.2 Recommended by the Standards & Curriculum Committee

17.2.1 Looked After Children **Approved**

17.2.2 Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development **Approved**

17.2.3 Safe Collection of Children **Approved**

17.2.4 Attendance **Approved**

17.2.5 Missing Child **Approved**

17.2.6 Equal Opportunities **Approved**

17.2.7 Pre-School/Nursery Admissions Policies x 8 **Approved**

### 17.3 Recommended by the Audit Committee

17.3.1 Data Management and ICT Security Policy **Approved**

17.3.2 Data Protection Policy **Approved**

17.3.3 Individual Rights Policy **Approved**

17.3.4 Subject Access Requests Policy and Subject Access Request form. The CEO advised that the policy required minor amendments. Subject to these amendments the Policy was approved. Clerk to forward the policy to the CEO.

**Action CEO**

17.3.5 Records Retention and Disposal Policy. The CEO advised that this policy required further amendments. Subject to these amendments the Policy was approved. Clerk to forward the policy to the CEO.

**Action CEO**

### 17.4 Trustee Policies

17.4.1 Admissions 2022/2023 x 15 schools **Approved**

The CEO will update the Vision and Values aspect of these policies in the future.

**Action CEO**

17.4.2 Exclusions. It was agreed that the CEO would amend this policy following the meeting and that it would be approved by Trustees via email. JCO asked if the Policy could be dovetailed with the current SoD.

**Action CEO**

It was agreed that policies should be looked at in detail by Trustees at committee level, with any changes tracked, prior to coming to the Board of Trustees for approval. The Trust Clerk will check for correct formatting before emailing to the committees for review.

RG asked if committee Chairs could look at policy renewal dates to ensure they can be spread evenly across the year. Clerk to email the master policy document to committee Chairs.

**Action Clerk/Trustees**



18. **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.

T 32 24 May 2021

T33 12 July 2021

T34 19 July 2021 – AGM