

Notes of Meeting: South East Advisory Board

Thursday 19 October 2023

Attendance

Attendance data is published annually on the GOV.UK website.

AB members who sent their apologies for the meeting have, where possible, been consulted on all projects before the meeting. Their views are reflected in the discussion at the meeting (where appropriate). This excludes items where that member declared a conflict of interest.

Regional Director (RD) chair

- Dame Kate Dethridge

Advisory Board (AB) members

- Sarah Bennett
- Dame Yasmin Bevan
- Sarah Brown
- Sir Andrew Carter
- Stuart Gardner
- Paul James

Apologies

- Claire Lowe
- Sue Samson MBE

DfE senior civil servants

- Paul Schofield, Deputy Director, South East Regions Group

Representations received

- No representations were made for any items discussed at this meeting.

General Discussion

- Conflicts of interest were confirmed for Sir Andrew Carter and Dame Yasmin Bevan. These are indicated against the projects to which they relate. These members were not present for the item when discussed and were not sent the papers for their conflicting item.

West Sub-Region

Converter Academy Order

Project: Brooksward School and Drayton Park School, Milton Keynes, to convert and join The Denbigh Alliance.

AB discussion:

- AB members discussed the need to bring in primary expertise on the trust board at The Denbigh Alliance.
- AB members discussed the need for evidence of the trust's primary school focus, and the need for primary school improvement capacity within the trust.
- AB members discussed the financial position of both schools.

RD decision: Approve with conditions:

- Trust to appoint a practising primary leader on the board.
- Trust to appoint individual(s) with primary experience in their central team.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the schools, local authority, and trust of the RD decision.

Trust Change

Project: Addington School (Wokingham), Manor Green School (Maidenhead), Brookfields Special School (Reading), Foundry College (Wokingham) to form The Ascendancy Partnership.

AB discussion:

- This item was brought for discussion in order to provide feedback before being brought back to another Advisory Board for a final decision.
- AB members discussed the proposal presented and felt a more targeted school improvement and growth strategy is needed.
- AB members discussed the finances of the project due to challenges this could present for the schools.
- AB members felt the trust should liaise with others trust leaders to get support and advice.

RD decision: Defer.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the schools and local authority of the RD decision.

Trust Change

Project: The Piggott CofE School (Wokingham) and Altwood CofE School (Windsor and Maidenhead) proposal to form the Agape MAT a new Diocesan Trust.

AB discussion:

- AB members discussed whether the schools had considered joining an already established MAT, or whether other schools had shown interest to join the MAT.
- AB members discussed the potential growth of the MAT.
- AB members noted the schools have been working in partnership already.
- AB members discussed the finances of both schools.
- AB members discussed the governance structure of the proposed MAT.
- The RD requested the need for primary experience on the trust board.

RD decision: Approve with conditions:

- Proposed MAT to appoint independent, local primary experience on the trust board.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the school, local authority, and trust of the RD decision.

Discussion on Academy, Free School, UTC and Studio School Performance (not for decision)

Project: Inkpen Primary School, West Berkshire, application to revoke their academy order.

AB discussion:

- AB members discussed the representations from the school.
- AB members discussed the governance at Inkpen Primary School.
- AB members queried what support the local authority were giving the school.
- AB members discussed the areas of improvement made at the school.
- AB members discussed the school's finances and their published Ofsted outcomes.
- RD felt the school has made progress since their previous inspection, however the improvements to the curriculum are not yet fully embedded.

RD Decision: Defer.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Decision to return to RD following confirmation that the decision lays with RD and not the Minister.

Kent, Medway and Surrey Sub-Region

Converter Academy Orders

Project: English Martyrs' Catholic Primary School, Medway, to convert and join Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership.

Project: St Thomas of Canterbury RC Primary School, Medway, to convert and join Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership.

AB discussion:

- AB members discussed Kent Catholic Schools' Partnership's growth and capacity.
- AB members discussed the performance of the schools currently within the trust.
- AB members discussed the school improvement capacity of the trust.
- AB members discussed the governance structure and skills set of the trust.
- The RD was content for these two schools to join the trust. However, ahead of any further growth, the RD would like greater assurance on the sufficiency of primary expertise on the trust board; on the sufficiency of school improvement capacity, and in relation to the performance of some academies within the trust.

RD decision (English Martyrs'): Approve.

RD decision (St Thomas of Canterbury): Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the schools, local authority, trust, and diocese of the RD decision.

Converter Academy Orders

Project: St Martin's CofE controlled Primary School, Surrey, to convert and join The Alliance Multi-Academy Trust.

Project: Powell Corderoy Primary School, Surrey, to convert and join The Alliance Multi-Academy Trust.

AB discussion:

- AB members discussed both St Martin's CofE controlled Primary School and Powell Corderoy Primary School including their financial positions and the potential risks to the trust if both joined.
- The RD requested the trust appoint a School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA) to help ensure the trust remains in a stable financial position as it grows.
- AB members discussed the trust's capacity to deliver school improvement as they grow further.

RD decision (St Martin's): Approve with conditions:

RD decision (Powell Corderoy): Approve with conditions:

- The Alliance Multi-Academy Trust to agree to an SRMA deployment.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the schools, local authority, trust, and diocese of the RD decision.

Coastal Sub-Region

Sponsored Route

Project: Manor Field Primary School, West Sussex.

AB discussion:

- AB members were presented with sponsor options for Manor Field Primary School.
- AB members discussed the distance of the school from the Multi Academy Trusts considered.
- AB members discussed the finances of some of the trusts considered.
- AB members discussed Durrington MAT's school improvement capacity to take on the school.

RD decision: Approve Durrington MAT as the proposed sponsor match with a condition:

- Trust to revise governance arrangements to ensure that no employees of the trust other than the senior executive leader are on the trust board.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the school, local authority, and trust of the RD decision.

Converter Academy Orders

Project: St Peter's CofE Primary School, West Sussex, to convert and join Hurst Education Trust.

Project: Balcombe CofE Controlled Primary School, West Sussex, to convert and join Hurst Education Trust.

AB discussion:

- AB members discussed both of the applications to convert from St Peter's CofE Primary School and Balcombe CofE Controlled Primary School.
- AB members discussed the finances and governance structure of Hurst Education Trust.

RD decision (St Peter's): Approve.

RD decision (Balcombe): Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the schools, local authority, trust, and diocese of the RD decision.

Converter Academy Order

Project: Chantry Community Primary School, East Sussex, to convert and join Diocese of Chichester Academy Trust.

AB discussion:

- AB members acknowledged the rationale for this project and the school's close working relationship with a partner school who joined DCAT earlier this year.
- The RD had no follow up questions.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the schools, local authority, trust, and diocese of the RD decision.

Free School Presumption – Sponsor Approval

Project: Waterlooville, Hampshire.

AB discussion:

- AB members were presented with University of Chichester Academy Trust (UniCAT) as the potential sponsor of the free school.
- AB members discussed the level of SEN experience at UniCAT.
- AB members discussed the school improvement capacity of UniCAT.
- The RD wished to understand what assessment the local authority had made of the trust's ability to meet the challenge of opening free schools.
- The RD wished to understand what assessment the local authority had made of the trust's attainment and progress results.

RD decision: Approve with conditions:

- Local authority to provide assurances it had taken into consideration the trust's attainment and progress data and is confident in UniCAT's ability to deliver a successful school.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the local authority of RD decision and the approval condition and seek reassurance from the local authority.

Free School Presumption – Sponsor Approval

Project: Wellesley, Aldershot, Hampshire.

Project: Hounscome, Basingstoke, Hampshire.

AB discussion:

- AB members were presented with Engage, Enrich, Excel Academies (EEEEA) as the potential sponsor for the Aldershot and Basingstoke free schools.
- AB members discussed the governance structure and skill set of the EEEA trust.
- AB members discussed the financial capacity of the trust in taking on two free schools.
- AB members discussed the need for both primary and SEND expertise on the trust board.
- The RD wished to understand what assessment the local authority had made of the trust's ability to meet the challenge of opening two new free schools.

RD decision (Wellesley, Aldershot): Approve with conditions:

RD decision (Hounscome, Basingstoke): Approve with conditions:

- Local authority to provide assurances it has fully assessed the trust's capacity to meet the challenges of opening two new schools and is confident the trust would be able to deliver both schools successfully.

Conflicts: Sir Andrew Carter. CEO of South Farnham Education Trust - potential sponsor. This member was not present for the item when discussed and was not sent the papers for this item.

Further actions required: Inform the local authority of RD decision and the approval condition and seek reassurance from local authority.

Trust Change

Project: Mother Teresea Catholic Academy Trust, Hampshire, to merge with Frassati Catholic Academy Trust.

AB discussion:

- AB members discussed the need for a School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA).
- AB members discussed the Diocese of Portsmouth's supportive interventions such as restructuring to provide greater financial security, educational performance and school improvement.

RD decision: Approve with conditions:

- Trusts to provide a detailed merger plan to the RD's office.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the trusts and the diocese of the RD decision.

Trust Change

Project: Gosport and Fareham Multi-Academy Trust (GFM), Hampshire, to merge with King's Group Academies.

AB discussion:

- AB members discussed the capacity of King's Group Academies (KGA) in supporting the merge of GFM schools.
- AB members discussed the KGA's school improvement strategy and were confident that, if approved, financial and governance support would be improved.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Dame Yasmin Bevan. Trustee at United Learning – potential sponsor. This member was not present for the item when discussed and was not sent the papers for this item.

Further actions required: Inform the trusts of the RD decision.

Decisions taken between AB meetings

List of decisions taken by the RD outside of AB meetings.

Project: Woodcot Primary school, Hampshire, to lower its school's age limit and include Woodcot Preschool.

Decision type: Significant change.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: None.

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