



THE
DIOCESE OF
SHEFFIELD
ACADEMIES
TRUST

DSAT Academy Trust
Local Governance Guidance
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Foreword

DSAT began in 2013 when, in response to the coalition government's drive for schools to become academies, the Diocese of Sheffield worked with a group of schools and trustees drawn from different backgrounds with the vision of establishing a trust that would secure the benefits offered to schools by working together in a multi-academy trust, while also maintaining the personal and local nature of each individual school. This is, in part, because of the experience of working with a church school, all of which retain a strong link to their parish and community. We believe schools can best thrive in a local setting that allows each of them to grow their own individual ethos and identity. This is the vision for education we brought to the academy business.

As a Diocese, we are committed to making the most of the opportunities offered by an academy trust, but also enthusiasts for each school retaining that particular something that makes it individual and distinctive. One important factor in this is the fact that DSAT is a mixed trust. From its inception it has never been a trust of church schools, and while the majority come from this background the DSAT vision is to remain open to all schools, and to respect and maintain the identity of a school as it is, on joining our trust.

Above all this, there is the commitment to providing an excellent education. At every level, DSAT has worked to ensure excellence, and this is now reflected in a growth plan that demonstrates the capacity and resources in place for this trust to grow.

Huw Thomas
Chair of DSAT
Diocesan Director of Education, Diocese of Sheffield

As DSAT has grown, and considering legal and statutory duties, some duties that resided with LGBs outside a MAT structure are centrally owned. For example, budget setting, procurement and HR. This does not exclude the LGB in collaborative involvement. We will retain an absolute commitment to local involvement. Our strategic intent to keep schools local cannot be achieved without LGBs being our 'eyes and ears' on the ground, sharing and escalating successes and concerns. The legal and statutory context does transfer some responsibilities from a school level to DSAT centrally but the LGBs are a critical to us. By providing parental feedback and by full involvement in recruitment, LGBs ensure that every school meets DSAT's ambition for it to serve the community needs.

Andrew Waldron
Chief Executive Officer

DSAT Trust Governance and Operations Structure

- At the top of the structure DSAT has five Members covering both educational and business skill sets. No employees of DSAT are members and only one Trustee is also a member.
- Trustees – DSAT has eight Trustees with excellent coverage across education and business. The CEO is the only employed Trustee but has no voting rights. The Trustees meet six times per year. Within the Trustee group we have identified individuals responsible for safeguarding, finance, HR and risk. We have two Parent Trustees. Should we be required to source replacements we would maintain the practice of using our network to identify high calibre individuals, with the required skills, who are interviewed by the Chair and who initially assume a 12-month position before ratification. We advertise on our website for parent volunteers and notify parents of the vacancy.
- Trustee meetings are professionally clerked and a review of conflicts of interest, or the potential for, is always an item. A key feature of the Trustee activity is to reference the Academies Financial Handbook and to reference KPIs as defined in the DSAT KPI checklist. The Trustees have access to 'retained' education legal specialists, Wrigleys.
- The Chair leads the Trustees in keeping with DSAT's vision and mission. The DSAT CEO leads the organisation in accord with the Trustee intentions and in accordance with the agreed strategic plan.
- Where local governance arrangements are judged as strong a Local Governing Body (or an Executive Local Governing Body, covering more than one school) is in place with delegation in accord with the scheme of delegation. Where for any reason the Trustees feel that there is need for a higher level of support, guidance or direction a Trust Governing Body (TGB) is established. Most governors of the TGB will be from the DSAT's central team, or other senior DSAT personnel from outside of the school concerned, but additional governors will join to ensure the local body's graduation to a Local Governing Body (LGB).
- LGBs and TGB's meet every term and follow a DSAT approved structured agenda. Copies of all minutes are sent to the DSAT Head of Business Operations. We expect a key feature of all meetings to be pupil progress and attainment and a review of milestones as defined by the school SEF and DEP. Budgets are set centrally but LGBs play a key role in scrutinising spend at local level ensuring good procurement practice and no conflicts of interest.
- An Executive Local Governing Body (covering two or more schools) will follow the structured agenda. Governorship of the Executive LGB will have at least two clearly identifiable governors who have direct links, and responsibility, to a single school that is within the Executive structure. Ideally these will be parents.
- 'Stakeholder voice' is a key input from the LGBs who interface with the DSAT CEO every term via a LGB Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting. TGB's meet with the CEO and Deputy CEO as required.

Local Governance at DSAT

Individual academies in the Trust are overseen by a local arrangement with delegated powers, defined by the DSAT scheme of delegation. (See website)

There are three types of local arrangement and in practice the responsibilities of each type of arrangement do not differ greatly and, whichever type of local body someone joins, the principles for the work are the same.

Local Governing Body (LGB) - these bodies are the dominant feature in DSAT and have a much lower level of Trust representation and are deemed to be more sustainable and, in time, to be in the best position to contribute strategically to the wider governance network within the Trust.

Executive Governing Body (EGB) – these are bodies that operate in a similar manner to LGB's but will have accountability for more than one school. In **all** cases schools with a EGB structure will be within a local vicinity, have a similar context and will always be under the leadership of one Executive Headteacher. They will meet at the same interval (one meeting per term) but the meeting is likely to be of slightly longer nature. Critically they will in all cases have two governors who represent a single school within the cluster and ideally, we will seek for these to be parents.

Aside from the Head Teacher, governors of LGBs and EGB's are volunteers, chosen for their skills, experience and insights, to whom certain responsibilities are delegated for oversight of individual schools. Local Governing Bodies are not legally responsible for the schools, so governors are able to focus on school improvement by supporting and challenging the Head Teacher and the wider school leadership team.

Since EGB and LGB governors are drawn from the local community, and will usually include parents and staff, their input serves an essential part in informing DSAT's understanding of the local context and individual school performance. The local arrangement is also a supportive forum in which the Headteacher can have access to the insights of people with professional and voluntary experience outside the education sector.

Trust Governing Body - the final and third type of arrangement is a local body established for schools who need a higher level of support, guidance, or direction from DSAT's central team. In the early stages, most governors of the TGB will be employees of the Trust, either from the central support team or from leaders and specialists from other DSAT schools. Additional volunteer governors will join to ensure the local body's graduation to a Local Governing Body (LGB). The needs of each individual school will be assessed to place the right skills mix required to fulfil their duties/responsibilities.

All arrangements as described above will follow the same agenda structure that is distributed by DSAT each term.

The work of the local bodies

Local bodies act on behalf of the Board of Trustees within each school. They have ten main accountabilities:

1. Safeguarding. It follows that if we see LGBs as 'our eyes and ears', the protection of children should be at the core of this. Indeed, we are investing in training to provide LGBs with greater skills in this area. We cannot think of a more important task for an LGB than bringing together their local community knowledge, and knowledge of school practice, to ensure that safeguarding is at the core of what we do.
2. Monitoring School performance. This is where LGBs can make a bigger impact within DSAT because they can have better information in a timelier way. Pre a school joining DSAT, it is not uncommon for us to hear that no external scrutiny has taken place for years, let alone months. DSAT's school improvement protocols mean that a school will have support visits throughout the academic year. The Record of Visit will typically focus on the many positive elements that we see, but the purpose is to identify areas where support is required. These ROVs (Record of Visits) provide real time information that can assist the LGB in asking the right questions at LGB's meetings. In our opinion, LGBs can lack clarity in their role for monitoring school performance, often focussing on the assessment of past performance (from SATs data). In DSAT, LGBs can have better data to be a better 'critical friend' influencing the outcome, not just reviewing it. We believe that everyone benefits from a clarity of role. The LGB is critical to asking the right questions about school progress, shining the light on what the priorities are, being the 'critical friend' to support the Head Teacher but to ensure that the needs of the community are being met. Feedback from LGB's has been very positive with regards the training that we provide. Good data is only meaningful when it is understood. DSAT aims to ensure through training and coaching that LGBs understand the information to which they have access. As with all LGBs, in any school context, LGBs are not required to pass comment on classroom practice, judge teaching methods or assess the perceived quality of teaching. DSAT's expert practitioners will provide the LGB with this information where it is relevant to do so.
3. Linked with point (2) we encourage governors to take on roles within the LGB. Most commonly these relate to Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Special Educational Needs, Educational Performance (including specific cohorts, such as Pupil Premium, SEN, male/female). Linked to monitoring school performance, we have examples where governors have helped significantly in a focused area of monitoring and ensuring that up to date policies are adopted by the school.

4. Recruitment. Save for Headteacher and Head of School appointments, where we do believe DSAT must have a significant input (not exclusive, but significant). Schools are about people and if we want the school to support and identify with the local community it follows that recruitment must remain 'local'. With regards Headteacher appointments, a member of the LGB would always be on the recruitment panel and DSAT would be very reluctant to implement any leadership model where there was not consensus with the LGB.
5. Parent Complaints/Community Involvement. We would like to say we have none, but we do. Where we have them, the LGB is always leading, or on the complaints panel. Complaints can often have a local context, so it goes without saying that we need the LGB.
6. Parent Communication. DSAT does not typically write to parents: the relationship is with the school and the LGB can provide significant advice to the HT on the tone and content. Furthermore, we have identified a need for improved parent engagement. A DSAT Parental Survey has been launched across all schools and the outcome of the parental questionnaire can form a discussion for the governing body for local action.
7. Discipline and Grievance matters. There is a need for some level of consistency across the Trust, but the LGB still plays a significant part when these matters are being considered at a local level. We are pleased to say though that these matters are few and far between, especially if we get point (4) correct, hence its importance.
8. OFSTED Inspection. From the Trust they expect clarity on school improvement initiatives, leadership challenges and curriculum development. Where a LGB or EGB is in place they can expect to be questioned on safeguarding, staff welfare, parent engagement, and on how the LGB know how then school is performing and how they would manage any concerns. This is not a definitive list but is based on our actual real experience.
9. LGBs, TGBs and EGB's in our church schools. We are not exclusively church schools but our LGBs in these schools do, and will always, have governorship that establishes a link back to the local Church and our core values. In a Church school governors are responsible for the theological vision of the school. As a result, the governing body will be the 'go to' level of governance in a SIAMS inspection.
10. Policy approval at local level. In accord with our ethos, where flexibility can or should be provided to individual schools, it follows that the LGB retain a key role in ratifying policies.

Key features of the local arrangement

Meetings are the main opportunities for local bodies to come together to share their work and for the Head Teacher to update governors on the school's performance. They are also an opportunity for other members of staff to report on their own work. Over the course of the year, these meetings will cover a wide range of aspects of school life and the minutes will be important evidence of the support and challenge given to the leadership. TGBs will meet a minimum of six times a year, while LGBs and EGBs are asked to meet at least three times a year with at least one meeting not via a zoom type arrangement.

The Chair convenes and leads and chairs meetings. He or she is the main link between the local body and the Head Teacher, with whom the chair will work to build a strong partnership. He or she is responsible for liaising with the clerk on the management of papers and records for the local body.

The chair is also responsible for promoting the development of the local body as a whole and will play a decisive part in determining the appointment and re-appointment of governors as well as ensuring that the local body is effective. The Chair and Vice chair also represents the local body in meetings with the CEO which take place over zoom three times per year.

Commitment is needed and governors will be expected to attend meetings; to visit the school at least once a year (twice per year for link governors for Safeguarding, Special Educational Needs and pupil premium) and will they record the purpose and outcome. There is a need to make time to read papers and to prepare questions in advance of meetings. Governors should also make time to undertake research or attend training in order to improve their own knowledge and skills. Exceptionally, governors might be asked to sit on review panels for exclusions, complaints or disciplinary matters.

The local clerk should be trained to ensure that records of governorship are kept up-to-date, that meeting papers and other important documents are shared in an accessible and timely manner and that an accurate and useful record of meetings is kept.

Note: More than one link role can be held by the same person, but it is better to share the workload and to encourage other governors to get more involved in the local bodies work. Where responsibilities are largely held centrally, the local body does not need to appoint a link member. For example, finances are closely monitored by the central team and the Trust Finance Committee, so a link role in this area is unlikely to be a local governors best use of time and expertise.

The individual role of each governor

Each governor plays an essential part in making sure that the local body as a whole works effectively. They will need to be proactive about engaging with the school and developing their own knowledge and expertise.

This document sets out the expectations for all volunteers and sits aside the DSAT Governors Code of Conduct. Governors will be appointed to a local body because they can offer qualities that it needs:

- Skills – these are an important contribution to the work of the local body. These can be technical skills, such as data analysis, or inter-personal skills that allow the group to function effectively, engage with parents or persuade potential donors to contribute to the school.
- Experience – DSAT’s network of local body governors bring together a wide range of professional, academic, voluntary and life experiences. New volunteers are often concerned that they do not know enough about education, but schools hugely value what people from outside the sector can offer right from the start.
- Perspectives – school governance works best when there is diversity of opinion around the table. Representatives from the local community are an essential part in helping the school serve its local context.
- Knowledge – while local body governors might have no specific knowledge of education when they begin the role, there is an expectation that they will actively seek to develop this knowledge over time by accessing training and reading on the subject to understand better what it is they govern and why.

Applications

Applications must always be made using the DSAT Governor Application Form. They can be made in response to an advert or as an enquiry where someone feels that they have suffered to offer a particular local body. They are ratified by the Board of Trustees, who at its sole discretion can reject an application and will give due regard to skills, knowledge, experience but also as to the motivations of the person applying.

Pre-appointment checks

Once appointment is confirmed, governors of local bodies will be asked to complete an appointment pack, which includes privacy information, a register of interests and a skills audit. The Governor code of conduct will be issued, and a self-disclosure form will be required.

Everyone will also receive:

- Confirmation of the dates of their term of office
- Dates of all scheduled future meetings
- Links to relevant governance resources
- In addition to holding this information, the Trust will also undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to ensure that no one poses a risk to children, and everyone will be expected to undertake statutory safeguarding training.

Visits

Knowing the school and being visible to the school community are essential to being able to support, challenge and champion it as part of the governor's role. Meetings and reports from the school's leadership are an important part of this but must be complemented by visits so that the local body shares a deep understanding of school life.

The main principle of effective school visits is that they should be purposeful. As part of the introduction to the school, governors should be invited to undertake a learning walk so that they know the layout and condition of the school and so that they can start to get to grips with the terminology.

These visits should have a specific focus – for link governors, this focus will be informed by the relevant role description; for others, people should ask the Headteacher or the local body what area of school life it would be useful to report back on. A visit might also include a meeting with someone other than the Headteacher and talking to children and recording their comments about the school can be vital.

Four areas of local governance responsibility that do change when a school joins DSAT.

1. Financial Management. It remains important that that the EGB or LGB monitors expenditure. DSAT centrally has access to significant financial data, but the LGB plays a role in being the 'eyes and ears' for local level spend and as such we are improving monitoring reports for the LGB. Under the statute, the CEO is deemed to be the 'Accounting Officer' and has statutory obligations. It is the case that the trust is responsible for the 3 core governance functions performed by the LGB with #3 being 'Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent'. As such, the setting and 'sign-off' of the budget has become a central trust role which does indeed avoid a duplication of work. The LGB continue to play a role when the budget is set, in that the Headteacher may propose to invest in areas that will have been discussed locally to reflect a local need. For purchases over £5,000 the 3 quotes that the LGB will ensure we week will be sent to DSAT centrally for approval.
2. Head Teacher Appraisal. Pre-academisation a school would be required to engage with a third party to support the appraisal process and the LGB would possibly have felt more involved, but in practice they would have been heavily influenced by the 'third party'. DSAT now set and review objectives. The 'external body' to the school is now DSAT. As the single employer, we require a greater level of consistency in appraising performance. Of course, the views of the LGB, particularly the Chair, must be aligned and we cannot recall in the last two years, following the shift in responsibility, any difference of opinion between DSAT and the LGB and the views of the Chair are included on the appraisal document as a matter or record.
3. Employment Law matters. The application of national Trade Union agreements sets the tone for a level of consistency, and we have no intention to depart from these. That said, there can be occasions when judgements must be applied with regards how our staff are treated (in the case of discipline and grievance, for example). It can also be wider than this and COVID continues to shine a light on an important point. DSAT is the sole employer and as such where judgements are to be made, we must have a level of consistency. As the single employer we cannot treat two people differently in identical circumstances. We now have a full time People Director who, in a very positive and progressive way, will work with SLTs (and LGBs where appropriate) to provide advice and guidance on process and policy. LGBs will influence decision-making according to the Scheme of Delegation.
4. Authorising Pay Progression. Again, in the tussle between our intent for schools to retain a high level of individuality, but within legal parameters, the legal framework wins. Head Teachers continue to make recommendations for pay progression and we want and need the input of the LGB but as the single employer we must have consistency. As such DSAT has guidelines for individual academies including 'DSAT's Career Stage Expectations' document which our Head Teachers helped produce and ratify, but the final 'sign-off' for SLT and UPS progression can only reside with DSAT. We would stress though that the process is open with communications channels open and flowing both ways. It would be a collective failure if consensus was not reached. The LGB continue to approve MPS moves for teaching staff.

What other benefits can DSAT bring to Local Governing Bodies

When we discussed this with LGBs common themes included, training and CPD, networking (Trust wide and locally), peer support for new Governors (Chair of Governors and Vice Chairs) and clerking support. With regards clerking support, the Clerk to DSAT Trustees (who is very experienced) will provide a standard suggested agenda and review minutes, providing advice to the Chair and Head Teacher on areas where recorded items may be improved.

In addition, DSAT provides full access to the GovernorHub. GovernorHub is an online tool that lifts the chores of school governance from local body shoulders so they can focus on the big picture. It supports the organisation, preparation and document storage of all board papers and creates easy ways for trustees and local governors to communicate with each other.

Finally, we also arrange full access, via GovernorHub to The Key for School Governors. The website has jargon-free articles to understand how legislation and statutory requirements affect schools and the governing body.

Other Key Sources of information

DSAT website at dsat.education

DSAT Scheme of Delegation (essential reading alongside this document) and available under the policies section on the DSAT website

Academy Trust Handbook, available on the gov.uk website

The DSAT Governor Code of Conduct on GovernorHub

