



THE
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SHEFFIELD
ACADEMIES
TRUST

DSAT Academy Trust

Local School Boards

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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 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 an academy trust offers. We are also enthusiasts for each school retaining something that makes it individual and distinctive. One crucial factor in this is 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 a commitment to providing an excellent education. At every level, DSAT has worked to ensure excellence. This is now reflected in a growth plan demonstrating the capacity and resources for this trust to grow. A critical feature is our local school boards, which are important advisory bodies at the school level.

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

DSAT Trust Governance and Operations Structure

- At the top of the structure, DSAT has five Members covering educational and business skill sets. No employees of DSAT are members, and only one Trustee is also a member, which complies with the Academy Trust Handbook.
- Trustees – DSAT has six Trustees with excellent transferable skills from 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 and SEND. We have two Parent Trustees. If we need to find replacements, we will continue to utilise our network to identify qualified candidates with the necessary skills. These candidates will be interviewed by the Chair and will initially take on a 12-month position pending ratification. We also inform parents of any vacancies through our website.
- Trustee meetings are professionally clerked by a governance professional, and a review of conflicts of interest, or their potential, is always a standard item on the agenda. Trustees maintain robust oversight of the Trust in accordance with the Academies Trust Handbook. The Trustees have access to 'retained' legal education specialists, Wrigleys.
- The Chair leads the Trustees in keeping with DSAT's vision and mission. The DSAT CEO leads the organisation according to the Trustee's intentions and the agreed strategic plan. A Scheme of Delegation outlines how roles are delegated from Trustees to the Executive Team.
- Each Academy is supported by a Local School Board to advise the school and the Executive Team.
- LSBs meet every term and follow a DSAT-approved structured agenda. Copies of all minutes are sent to the DSAT Executive Director of Business & Operations and a summary is prepared for Trustees by a governance professional.
- Several DSAT schools are Church Schools. The trust will seek representation from the foundation onto Schools Boards in these schools. The incumbent (designated priest or minister) in a parish or someone appointed by the Archdeacon to serve in that capacity in relation to the school will always be invited to the School Board.
- 'Stakeholder voice' is a crucial input from the local boards who interface with the DSAT CEO every term via a Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting.

Local operational support and oversight at DSAT

Individual academies in the Trust are overseen by the DSAT Executives with delegated powers, defined by the DSAT scheme of delegation (see website). The Executives and the School are supported by Local School Boards, which operate in an advisory capacity. In addition to their advisory role, they have access to key KPIs to facilitate opportunities for scrutiny and challenge through a termly Headteacher's report. Local School Boards may not decide the curriculum, but they should monitor the delivery to satisfy themselves that it is meeting the community's needs.

Aside from the Head Teacher, members of LSBs are volunteers, chosen for their skills, experience and insights, to whom specific responsibilities are delegated to oversee individual schools. Local Boards are not legally responsible for the schools, so members can focus on school improvement by supporting and challenging the Head Teacher and the wider school leadership team.

Since LSB members are drawn from the local community and usually include parents and staff, their input is essential in informing DSAT's understanding of the local context and individual school performance. The local arrangement is also a supportive forum where the Headteacher can access the insights of people with professional and voluntary experience outside the education sector.

The work of the local bodies

They have key primary accountabilities in supporting the DSAT Executive Team:

1. Safeguarding. It follows that if we see local boards as 'our eyes and ears', the protection of children should be at the core of this. We cannot think of a more critical task for an LSB than bringing together their local community knowledge and knowledge of school practice to ensure that safeguarding is at the core of what we do. The LSB will have access to all relevant information, including the audits that DSAT complete centrally. The LSB should always ask, "Do the audits reflect how the local community view safeguarding at the school?"
2. Monitoring School Performance. DSAT's school improvement protocols mean a school will have support visits throughout the academic year. The Record of Visit will typically focus on the many positive elements we see, but the purpose is to identify areas where support is required. These ROVs (Record of Visits) provide information that can assist the LSB in asking the right questions at LSB's meetings. LSBs can have data to be a better 'critical friend' influencing the outcome, not just reviewing it. The LSB is critical to asking the right questions about school progress, understanding the priorities, and ensuring the community's needs are met. Good data is only meaningful when it is understood. DSAT aims to ensure through training and coaching that LSBs understand the information to which they have access. LSBs are not required to pass comments on classroom practice, judge teaching methods or assess the perceived quality of teaching. DSAT expert practitioners will provide the LSB with this information where it is relevant to do so. At every LSB meeting, the group should ask, "Is this school delivering positive progress for every pupil" asking, "Are relationships with the community and parents supporting this progress?"
3. Recruitment. Other than for Headteacher and Head of School appointments, where we believe DSAT must have a significant input (not exclusive, but significant), it follows that recruitment must remain 'local' and LSB members can support. When recruiting great staff is difficult, the LSB members can help sell the school to prospective applicants. The question for the LSB when on the recruitment panel should be, "Will this person understand our community and gain its confidence?" Regarding Headteacher appointments, a member of the LSB would usually be on the recruitment panel.
4. Parent Complaints/Community Involvement. We want to say we have none, but we do. The LSB is always leading or on the complaints panel where we have them. Complaints can often have a local context, so we need the LSB.
5. Parent Communication. DSAT does not typically write to parents: the relationship is with the school, and the LSB can provide significant advice to the HT on the tone and content. Furthermore, we have identified a need for improved parent engagement.
6. OFSTED Inspection. From the Trust, OFSTED expects clarity on school improvement initiatives, statutory compliance, leadership challenges, curriculum development and how additional school funding is best used. LSBs can expect to meet OFSTED to be questioned on how they support safeguarding, staff welfare, parent engagement, monitor school performance and how they would manage and escalate any concerns.
7. LSBs in our church schools. We are not exclusively church schools, but our LSBs in these schools do, and will always, have a membership that establishes a link to the local Church and will be a focal point in SIAMS inspection. The incumbent (designated priest or minister) in a parish or someone appointed by the Archdeacon to serve in that capacity in relation to the school will always be invited to be a member of the school board. The trust deeply respects the parish for church schools. In DSAT academies, the trust will look to the LSB to discharge the duties of local responsibility concerning Church schools. The LSB should be asking, "Does our theological rationale meet our local needs?" Members of the LSB would play a key role in outlining how effective links are formed with the local community and parish during any SIAMS inspection.

8. Policy approval at the local level. The LSB retains a crucial role in ratifying policies by our ethos, where flexibility can or should be provided to individual schools. Trustees approve some policies that schools must adopt—for example, the DSAT Complaints Policy. In contrast, the local board would authorise the school policy on educational visits and how much financial support would be expected from parents; they would also approve the uniform policy, for example.
9. Grants and Fundraising. School boards, if they so wish, can help increase school funds by encouraging parent involvement, organising fundraising events, and helping schools develop partnerships with local businesses and community groups. Overall, school boards can play a role in assisting schools to raise funds and support their educational programs. By providing guidance, resources, and support, school boards can help schools to organise successful grant applications and fundraising campaigns that benefit the entire community.

Key features of the local board 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 also allow other staff members to report on their work. Over the year, these meetings will cover a wide range of aspects of school life, and the minutes will be substantial evidence of the support and challenge given to the leadership. TLSBs will meet a minimum of six times a year, while LSBs 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. They are the main link between the local board and the Head Teacher, with whom the chair will work to build a strong partnership. They are responsible for liaising with the clerk to manage papers and records for the local board. The Chair is also the main link with the DSAT CEO.

The chair is also responsible for promoting the development of the local board as a whole and will play a decisive part in determining the appointment and re-appointment of School Board Members and ensuring that the local board is effective. The Chair and Vice Chair also represent the local board in meetings with the CEO over Zoom type meeting three times yearly.

Commitment is needed, and local school board members will be expected to attend meetings; visit the school at least once a year and hear a selection of school events where parents are present. There is a need to make time to read papers and prepare questions before meetings. Members should also research or attend training to improve their knowledge and skills. Members might be asked to sit on review panels for exclusions, complaints or disciplinary matters.

The local clerk, typically the School Business Manager, should ensure that records of support and oversight 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 valuable record of meetings is kept.

The only minimum number of members is the Head or HoS, a staff member, a local clergy member, and at least one parent. Members do not have to join for minimum periods and can be co-opted for short periods if required for interim needs. Recommended period of office is two years. The ideal size and composition would be Head or HoS, staff member, member of local clergy, one invited member of the community and two parents. This forms a body of six, with the Chair ideally not an employee of the school.

The individual's role within local boards

Each member plays an essential part in making sure that the local board as a whole works effectively. They must proactively engage with the school and develop their knowledge and expertise.

This document sets out the expectations for all volunteers and sits aside the DSAT Governors Code of Conduct, which, whilst a legacy document, still applies in the context of local boards. Members, typically no less than five with ideally two parents, will be appointed to a local board because they can offer the qualities that it needs:

- Experience – DSAT's network of local board members brings 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 outside the sector can offer from the start.
- Perspectives – local school support and oversight works best when there is a diversity of opinion around the table. Representatives from the local community are essential to helping the school serve its local context.
- Knowledge – while local board members 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 Local Board Application Form. They can be made in response to an advert or enquiry where someone feels they have something to offer a particular local board. They are ratified by the CEO and the People Director, who at its sole discretion can reject an application (or indeed can remove a member at its sole discretion) and will give due regard to skills, knowledge, and experience but also as to the motivations of the person applying. DSAT executives report each school's local board membership and activity to the Board of Trustees, with at least two trustees being involved in ratifying any removal of any unpaid volunteer from a local board.

Pre-appointment checks

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

Everyone will also receive the following:

- 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. Everyone will be expected to undertake statutory safeguarding training.

Visits

Knowing the school and being visible to the school community is essential to supporting, challenging and championing it as part of the governor's role. Meetings and reports from the school's leadership are crucial but must be complemented by visits so that the local board 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, local board members should be invited to undertake a learning walk to know the school's layout and condition and start to get to grips with the terminology.

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 change when a school joins DSAT and are delegated from the Trustees to DSAT Executives.

1. Financial Management. It remains vital that the ELSB or LSB monitors expenditures. DSAT centrally has access to critical financial data, but the LSB plays a role in being the 'eyes and ears' for local-level spend, and as such, we are improving monitoring reports for the LSB. Under the statute, the CEO is deemed the 'Accounting Officer' and has statutory obligations. It is the case that the trust is responsible for the three core governance functions, 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 duplication of work. The LSB 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 three quotes the LSB will ensure are sought 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 governing body would possibly have felt more involved. Still, the 'third party' would have heavily influenced them in practice. DSAT now sets and reviews objectives. The 'external body' of the school is now DSAT. As a single employer, we require greater consistency in appraising performance. Of course, the views of the LSB, notably 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 LSB 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 consistency, and we have no intention to depart from these. That said, there can be occasions when judgements must be applied regarding how our staff are treated (in the case of discipline and grievance, for example). It can also be more comprehensive than this, and COVID highlighted an important point. DSAT is the sole employer, so we must have consistency where judgements are to be made. We cannot treat two people differently in identical circumstances as a single employer. We now have a full-time People Director who, in a very positive and progressive way, will work with the school leadership (and LSBs where appropriate) to provide advice and guidance on process and policy. LSBs 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 LSB, but as a 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 a consensus were not reached. The LSB continue to approve MPS moves for teaching staff.

What other benefits can DSAT bring to local school boards?

When we discussed this with local volunteer members, common themes included training and CPD, networking (Trust wide and locally), peer support for new Chairs and Vice Chairs and clerking support. With clerking support, the Clerk to DSAT Trustees (experienced) will provide a standard suggested agenda and review minutes, advising 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 oversight from local board shoulders so they can focus on the big picture. It supports the organisation, preparation and document storage of all board papers and creates accessible communication for trustees and local governors.

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.

Other Key Sources of Information

DSAT website at www.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