

GOVERNANCE HANDBOOK

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GOVERNANCE HANDBOOK

This Handbook describes the structure, purpose and process of governance within Lingfield Education Trust. Governance within the Trust follows the principles laid down in the Department for Education's (DfE) 'Governance Handbook' (January 2017).

Section 1 of the DfE Handbook sets out six key features of effective governance:

- Strategic leadership that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy.
- Accountability that drives up education standards and financial performance.
- People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity.
- Structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Compliance with statutory and contractual requirements.

Evaluation to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance.

The DfE's Handbook describes the first two features as the core pillars of the Board's role and purpose. The second two are described as the way in which governance is organised, whilst the last two are seen as ensuring and improving the quality of governance.

The Lingfield Education Trust Governance Handbook follows these principles and shows how the Trust ensures that they are met in practical terms. The Code of Conduct is contained in Appendix 1.

INTRODUCTION TO LINGFIELD EDUCATION TRUST

Lingfield Education Trust presently consists of 6 Primary schools, with a Free School being developed. Created in August 2014 from the merger of Heathfield and Hurworth Primary Schools, the Trust has expanded through sponsoring other schools and with schools voluntarily joining it.

The Trust's strategy for growth is built on the belief that expansion of the Trust must stem from a proven track record of improvement and sustained levels of good performance in existing schools of the Trust, and that we will undertake rigorous due diligence in accepting schools into the Trust so as not to compromise these standards. The strategy for growth therefore follows three principles:

- that there are robust and effective Trust wide policies that reinforce the values and ethos of the Trust, supporting Local Governing Bodies (LGB) in their role as 'critical friend' of the Head Teachers / Heads of School and senior team leaders.

- That there is strong and effective central leadership and school improvement capacity in the Trust, supporting Head Teachers / Heads of School in enhancing standards of educational achievement within individual schools. The rate of future expansion of the Trust will be governed by the capacity of the central leadership to maintain high standards within existing schools in the Trust.
- That any schools joining the Trust will be geographically concentrated within easy travelling distance of each other. This will allow for effective central management of the Trust as a whole, for the schools to be able to share good practice and for staff development to take place. Geographical concentration also allows for school leaders to meet regularly in order to spread the benefit of collaboration across all Trust schools.

This handbook outlines the Trust's structures and processes of governance at all levels that translate the aims and aspirations of the Trust into effective practice.

LINGFIELD EDUCATION TRUST'S ETHOS AND VISION

The Trustees' vision for Lingfield Education Trust is to be a highly successful family of schools where children are supported educationally, socially and emotionally in order for them to achieve their highest potential possible in school and in life. We are determined to be a Trust that makes the greatest difference to the whole child, through the dedication of our staff and our links with the local community.

We will deliver our vision by leading and collaborating across our family of schools, sharing expertise and resources and being committed to academic and pastoral excellence. This means:

- Ensuring outstanding outcomes for all children
- Offering outstanding leadership, teaching and learning
- Welcoming families, their aspirations and needs
- Being a positive force in the communities that our schools serve
- Offering a broad and balanced curriculum that enables and enriches the learning experience
- Nurturing young people's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
- Having a core commitment to areas of high social need, enhancing our support for vulnerable families
- Providing and encouraging professional growth that is developmental and peer-based leading to enhanced career pathways.

In all activities the Trust will be guided by the values and principles that we support, and will be open and honest in our communications with all stakeholders.

LINGFIELD EDUCATION TRUST'S VALUES

Aspiration: Trustees and governors believe that anything is possible for a child in our Trust and will not accept excuses where a child's future is at stake.

Putting young people first: we make decisions and conduct relationships with the child's wellbeing at the forefront of our minds.

Service: we all have a role in creating the highest standards of performance and behaviour - for the child, the parent/carer, the teacher. Our work must rest on deep foundations of mutual respect.

Culture: all involved in Trust work must be self-reflecting and self-developing, without exception.

Ethics: in all our dealings with stakeholders, all involved in Trust work must conduct our business according to our belief in transparency and fairness.

LINGFIELD EDUCATION TRUST'S GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The Trust is a Company limited by guarantee and is an exempt charity with charitable status. There are three levels of governance – Members, Trustees and Local Governing Bodies (LGB) within schools. All involved in governance of the Trust will be subject to Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

MEMBERS

The Members are the highest tier in the organisation of the Trust. They can change the Articles of Association of the Trust, subject to Department for Education approval, and through a simple resolution replace any or all of the Trustees. Although Members are Trustees they are not expected to involve themselves in the operational activities of the Trust. Their role is best described as 'eyes-on but hands-off'. Members receive an annual report on the Trust's activities and finances at an Annual General Meeting.

Members' approval is required for any Board appointment.

The Trust has a potential membership of five Members.

TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees is the legally accountable body of the Trust and are all Trustees. Their responsibilities include:

- Determining the strategic mission, ethos and key strategic priorities for the Trust.
- Holding the CEO to account for the Trust's performance.
- Ensuring that appropriate arrangements are in place to secure and monitor sustained educational provision and outcomes in the schools of the Trust.
- Agreeing Trust budgets, delegating school budgets, ensuring that appropriate systems are in place to monitor the Trust budgets, with the Finance Director reporting regularly on the financial health of the Trust and individual schools.
- Delegating appropriate authority to the LGBs, monitoring their effectiveness and removing LGB members when required.
- In conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the relevant LGB, appointing Head Teachers / Heads of School / Deputy / Assistant Head Teachers / any Trust wide leadership posts in the Trust's schools.
- Reviewing the performance and pay of the CEO / Deputy CEO / Executive Head Teachers / Head Teachers and Heads of School and making pay awards accordingly.
- Entering into and monitoring compliance with funding agreements with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) of the Department for Education.
- Ensuring compliance with Company and Charity Commission Law.
- Undertaking regular and relevant training to enhance their performance in their roles.
- Trustees cannot delegate accountability.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board of Trustees currently consists of eight Trustees and the CEO. At present five Trustees are or have been members of LGBs of schools in the Trust. This interface of membership between Board and LGBs allows Trustees to be in touch with the concerns of local parents and staff in individual schools, and to feed this back into Board discussions. Trustees do not represent the school of which they are an LGB member but take a Trust-wide view whilst being informed of the impact of Trust policies on individual schools. Newly-appointed Trustees will be inducted into the Trust's policies and practices.

The Board has a maximum membership of 9 Trustees. The quorum is three or one-third, whichever is the greater.

Newly appointed Trustees will have a range of experience outside of education, especially in business, ideally combined with some educational background. This will strengthen the decision and monitoring roles of the Board. Selection will be based on a skills audit.

COMMITTEES OF THE BOARD

The Board has two Committees: Finance, General Purposes and Personnel; Curriculum, Standards and Pupil Welfare.

These Committees receive reports and Minutes from the LGBs and report to the full Board on a regular basis. They can co-opt non-voting external advisors as required.

THE ACCOUNTING OFFICER

The CEO is the Accounting Officer, with personal responsibility to the Secretary of State for Education and the Education and Skills Funding Agency for the use of resources within the Trust.

LOCAL GOVERNING BODIES

The policy of the Trust is to have a Local Governing Body (LGB) for each school. When an LGB is deemed not to be functioning adequately the Trustees can replace it with an interim Board until the situation is stabilised.

Under the principle of 'earned autonomy' the Board delegates as much responsibility as possible to the LGBs. The ultimate responsibility for LGB performance is that of the Board which ensures, through monitoring and training of governors, that LGBs are capable of and effective in discharging their responsibilities

Responsibilities are delegated to the LGBs through a published Scheme of Delegation. Each LGB normally consists of up to ten governors. Governors undergo induction training when appointed and regular training to update their skills and knowledge. Governor training is provided both in-house and is bought-in when required. A skills audit is held annually to inform recruitment and training needs. The Board of Trustees has ultimate responsibility for approving the membership of each LGB.

The role of the LGB is to:

- Ensure that the school is operating within the ethos and values established by the Trust.
- Monitor pupil outcomes.
- Monitor the teaching and learning standards within the school, including the impact on SEND pupils and other vulnerable or disadvantaged pupil groups.
- Monitor the financial position of the school within the budget set and ensure that the school operates within its budget.
- Monitor safeguarding, issues of inclusion and the Prevent strategy.
- Inform the relevant Committee of the Board of any concerns the LGB has and pass its Minutes up to that committee on a regular basis.
- Enable Governors to engage with wider Trust activities, especially governor development, in order to enhance their monitoring role.

Governors of LGBs are recruited on the basis of skills and experience that strengthen the monitoring role of the LGBs.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNANCE IN FULFILLING CORE FUNCTIONS

Strategic Overview

The hierarchical structure of the Trust ensures that each level is held to account for Trust performance. The Members hold the Board of Trustees to account through their annual review of Trust performance.

The Board of Trustees has the responsibility for: strategy, educational performance, internal systems of control of both educational performance and financial probity, appointment and remuneration of senior staff, Trust-wide Policies, risk management and compliance with Company and Charitable law. The Board undertakes periodic reviews of its performance and that of the CEO from independent assessors.

Local Governing Bodies are responsible for challenge to the Head Teacher / Head of School regarding school performance, for monitoring financial progress against school budget and for ensuring that Trust policies are adhered to.

Accountability

Under the principle of 'earned autonomy', the Board delegates as much responsibility as possible to the LGBs through the Scheme of Delegation. The ultimate responsibility for LGB performance is that of the Board.

The Accounting Officer has responsibility for financial propriety and value for money which cannot be delegated. The Members appoint independent Auditors to undertake annual assessment of the Trust's finances.

The Accounting Officer and all Trustees have responsibility to ensure financial probity, compliance with the Academies Financial Handbook and with the Trust's funding agreements with the DfE. This is undertaken through the establishment of effective performance management and appraisal systems, sound systems of delegated authority for expenditure, the setting of standards and quality management processes, the analysis of financial and performance data, including benchmarking information, information from Committees and LGBs, reports from the Finance Director, the planned budgetary cycle, and internal and external Audits. The Accounting Officer makes an annual report to the Board.

Appraisal Systems

The Board undertakes external assessment of its performance on a regular basis.

The Chair of the Board, with an external independent advisor, undertakes an annual appraisal of the CEO. The CEO, assisted by the Chair of the Board, the Chair of the relevant LGB and an external independent advisor, undertakes the annual appraisal of the Deputy CEO / Executive Head Teachers / Head Teachers / Heads of School in the Trust. Executive Head Teachers / Head Teachers / Heads of School conduct the appraisal of their senior management team, who then undertake appraisal of the teaching staff. Head Teachers / Heads of school also undertake the appraisal of school administrative staff and the Director of Operations undertakes appraisal of Trust central staff.

School Performance

The Board requires each LGB to regularly report on their school's academic and financial performance to the appropriate Committee of the Board. The Board seeks comparative information from external published sources in order to assess performance of Trust's schools against national standards. Upon benchmarking standards not being met, the Board has the responsibility to undertake remedial action. This could involve the removal of the LGB and its replacement by an Interim Board.

The Board and LGBs have responsibility for ensuring that all policies and procedures around safeguarding and Special Educational Needs (SEND) are fit for purpose and adhered to. The Trust is geographically concentrated, allowing the Executive Head Teacher, Head Teachers and Heads of School of the Trust academies to meet fortnightly with the CEO and Deputy CEO to share data and experiences in order to disseminate good practice throughout the schools in the Trust.

Scheme of Delegation

The Scheme of Delegation is published on the Trust website. The Board delegates the running of schools on a day to day basis to the Executive Head Teacher/Head Teacher/Head of School of each academy, subject to the limits and implementation of the Policies determined by the Board and the Academies Financial Handbook.

The delegation to the LGB includes:

- Implementation of the educational vision of the Trust and the monitoring and review of the School Development Plan, on advice from the Executive Head Teacher/Head Teacher/Heads of school
- monitoring and evaluating standards and performance
- appointment of teaching and support staff and participation in the appraisal of the Head Teacher / Heads of School and senior management team
- oversight of financial performance subject to specified limits
- compliance with all relevant regulations, including safeguarding and SEND
- maintenance of the school estate.

Establishment of Free Schools

Free School governance structures will follow the pattern of existing schools within the Trust. Each free school will have an initial 'Shadow' LGB established prior to the school opening, recruited from within the Trust and locally. The 'Shadow' LGB will initially be chaired by a Trustee or a person appointed by the Board. Upon the school opening the LGB will be expanded through the election of two parent governors and a staff governor. As soon as practicable the LGB will choose its own Chair. The LGB will then function according to the principles covering all schools in the Trust.

A skills matrix will be used in the initial selection of 'Shadow' LGB members. Training will be provided for elected and co-opted members as the LGB becomes established.

PROCESS OF GOVERNANCE

The Members meet once a year to receive annual accounts and financial statements of the Trust. The quorum for Members is two.

The Board meets at least once per term to discuss strategy, educational performance, finance, risk management, and any other relevant matter.

The two Committees of the Board each meet at least once a term to consider their areas of responsibility, to receive reports from the LGBs and to report to the main Board. The quorum for each Committee is three Trustees.

Each school's LGB meets at least once per half-term. As there are no standing committees of the LGBs, each meeting has a theme of either standards and performance, or finance, plus any other business that requires transacting. The quorum for LGBs is three Governors. The meetings of the LGBs precedes that of the Board's two Committees and the Committees meet prior to the full Board, to allow for information to be passed upwards.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board monitors any potential conflict of interest within the Trust. The Trust has a relevant Policy in place regarding such an eventuality:

Each meeting of the Board, its Committees and LGBs have a standing item regarding the declaration of any potential conflict of interest.

Each Trustee and LGB governor signs a register of interests regarding potential conflicts of interests on appointment and these are completed at the beginning of each academic year or whenever a material change occurs.

The Trust has a Policy regarding the acceptance of gifts or hospitality from any actual or potential supplier of services to the Trust.

Training is given on securing the highest probity and conformity with the Nolan Principles of public life.

If a potential or actual conflict of interest is declared, the individual must absent themselves from the meeting whilst the issue in question is discussed.

The Trust will not employ any Trustee (other than the CEO) or Member.