



## Notes of Meeting: West Midlands Advisory Board

Date of meeting – 23 June 2022

### 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 Schools Commissioner (RSC) chair

- Andrew Warren

### Advisory Board (AB) members

- Sajid Gulzar
- Sir Mark Grundy
- Dame Mo Brennan
- Mike Donoghue

### Guests

- Guy Shears
- Lizana Oberholzer
- Dan Parkes
- Sarah Finch
- Amarjit Cheema
- Tom Leverage

### Apologies

- Sinead Smith
- Margaret Yates
- Kate Brunt

### DfE senior civil servants

- Dawn Dandy
- Claire Trewartha

## **Representations received**

- 6; Smestow School, Wolverhampton, Trust Change.

These representations were shared in advance of the meeting with all attendees and considered alongside their corresponding item.

## **General Discussion Points**

### **Local Update**

- The RSC and AB members discussed the current climate in schools across the West Midlands Region.

### **AB member reflections**

- AB members reflected on current attendance levels across the region and rising Covid levels. There was also conversation on The Commonwealth Games and the effects it is having on the local area.

## Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

**Project:** Whether to issue an Academy Order to Blythe Bridge High School, Staffordshire, to convert and become an academy and join John Taylor MAT.

### **AB discussion:**

- Blythe Bridge High School located in Staffordshire, is an Ofsted rated 'Good' school as of 2016.
- John Taylor Multi Academy Trust is built up of 15 schools situated across Staffordshire and Derbyshire.
- The trust has built up a strong relationship with the school as part of this arrangement. The latter benefited from a range of Professional Development opportunities, through the former Teaching School and now the Teaching School Hub.
- The trust has identified curriculum strengths within the school that could be adopted by the Trust, as well as this, they share similar ethos based on pride, respect and pastoral support.
- Members discussed the other schools within the trust, including their current educational performances and governance.
- The board supported the recommendation.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** Mike Donoghue.

**Further actions required:** Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and DCS to be informed of the decision.

**Project:** Whether to issue an Academy Order for The Forge Secondary Short Stay School, Worcestershire, to convert and become an academy and join Central Learning Partnership trust, Worcestershire.

### **AB discussion:**

- The Forge Secondary Short Stay School is an 11-16 Pupil Referral Unit based in Redditch, Worcestershire. It holds a current Ofsted rating of 'Good' as of 2018.
- Central Learning Partnership trust (CLPT), consists of 15 academies across 3 geographical hubs including Wolverhampton, Rotherham and Worcestershire. This is a voluntary conversion as its felt the school will benefit from the support and improvement from the Trust.
- The school's specialism in Special Educational Needs (SEN) education is recognised in Worcestershire which will benefit the school after a LA review.
- The Trust have submitted a report to the department accounting its forecasted financial spend over the coming years.
- The board discussed the current governance structure at the trust including the number of trustees and the stance of the current interim head teacher.
- The board supported the recommendation.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and DCS to be informed of the decision.

## **Sponsored Route:**

Points discussed in relation to a school's sponsor status.

**Project:** Whether to approve a sponsor for Rushwick CofE Primary School, Worcestershire.

**Reason for Academy Order:** Ofsted Category 4

### **AB discussion:**

- Rushwick CofE Primary School is located in West Worcestershire; the proposal is for Rushwick to become sponsored by the Diocese of Worcester Multi-Academy Trust.
- Rushwick had previously applied for voluntary conversion to join DoWMAT where there was a positive response shared by the local community. The school was then rated 'Inadequate' by Ofsted in 2022 due to safeguarding concerns, leading to the need for a sponsor.
- DoWMAT has 15 academies placed across 3 hubs, with the majority of schools being primary with some first and middle schools.
- The trust has an expanding school improvement team with additional capacity to support a school such as Rushwick, particularly with curriculum and safeguarding.
- Staffing costs were seen to be high at the MAT however this has enabled capacity to work with not only it's current schools but also Rushwick. The board also discussed the trust's financial position and its governance model.
- The board were supportive of this recommendation and the RSC put in place a recommendation for an external review of governance.

**RSC decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** To inform the school and trusts.

## Free School Presumption – Sponsor Approval

Points discussed in relation to a free school's sponsor status.

**Project: The Arthur Terry Learning Partnership, Staffordshire.**

### **AB discussion:**

- The proposal is for Staffordshire County Council to establish a new free school under the name of 'Deanslade Farm Free School' and for it to be awarded to The Arthur Terry Learning Partnership.
- The free school will be located in Deanslade Farm, Lichfield and will operate as a mainstream primary school with early years provision, opening in 2023.
- The proposed school will mitigate the impact of a new housing development and other smaller developments within the Deanslade area.
- ATLP currently consists of 15 schools, 5 of which are in the Lichfield area. The trust provided a clear and concise plan to the LA, which listed the broad and balanced curriculum that would be in place to suit the needs of all learners.
- The board discussed the recommendation of the trust and its current stance in the local hub of Lichfield; the Trust's governance model was reviewed as well as its motion in consolidating its governance ahead of the White Paper announcement.
- The board were supportive of this recommendation.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** Sajid Gulzar.

**Further actions required:** To inform the LA and Trust.

## Significant Change

Points discussed in relation to significant changes application(s).

**Project:** Whether to approve an expansion at Queensbury School, Birmingham.

### **AB discussion:**

- Queensbury is a special school based in north Birmingham with a current Ofsted rating of “Inadequate”.
- The school have put in an expansion request including the use of a satellite site as a sixth form.
- The Local Authority (LA) have lead on this proposal due to severely constrained high needs sufficiency in Birmingham.
- The board requested assurances on school improvement which were provided; as the school has since created an action plan and have sought an external school improvement advisor.
- Recruitment of the trustee board was also discussed, as they now have 6 as two have recently left post and are looking to begin recruitment for a 7<sup>th</sup> post.
- The board agreed with the recommendation.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** To inform the school.

**Project:** Whether to approve an age range increase at Woodfield Infant School, Shropshire.

### **AB discussion:**

- Woodfield Infant School is a primary located in Shrewsbury, Shropshire with a current Ofsted rating of ‘Outstanding’ as of 2013.
- The proposal is to increase the age range which would enable the trust to open a nursery school on the site. The nursery is being proposed as a standalone building with planning permission still pending approval.
- The LA’s pupil planning forecast has predicted oversubscription at the school within the next 5 years due to high demand in the area.
- A consultation was held with no concerns raised and a large proportion in favour of the proposal.
- The board discussed staff expertise held at the school and how this will reinforce the school improvement plan that had been put in place.
- The board supported the recommendation.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** Mike Donoghue.

**Further actions required:** To inform the school.

**Project:** Whether to approve an increase in capacity and expansion at Belgrave St Bartholomews academy, Stoke-on-Trent.

**AB discussion:**

- Belgrave St Bart's Academy, Stoke-On-Trent, has sought approval of a retrospective proposal to establish an Early Years SEN Unit on site.
- The site opened in 2018 at Belgrave St Barts, with an additional unit being opened at Kingsland Academy with both sites being run as one entity.
- Stoke LA proposed this change to the Trust who agreed there is a need for additional SEN places in the area to meet demand and avoid out of area placements for an independent provision.
- This proposal was discovered when the additional places were proposed by The Avenue. The original case was progressed due to an oversight in departmental process.
- There were discussions on the number of board members held at the school with focus on finances and forecasting.
- The board supported the recommendation and the RSC set a recommendation of a Schools Management and Resource Advisor (SMRA) deployment.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** To inform the school.

**Project:** Whether to approve an increase in age range at St Mary's CofE Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent.

**AB discussion:**

- St Mary's CofE Primary School, located in Stoke-on-Trent currently holds an Ofsted 'Outstanding' judgement from 2017.
- The school is proposing to increase its age range from September 2022 due to a large proportion of younger children in the area who would see a positive impact on their development if approved.
- As there is already a nursery on site, there would be no financial implications on staff recruitment and capital.
- A consultation has been held, resulting in support from all parties including Stoke LA due to the local demand.
- A discussion was held surrounding the current structure of the Trustee board, specifically the variety of expertise and skillsets of the members.
- The board members supported the recommendation and the RSC set a condition for compliance of the Academies Handbook by dismissing a current staff member from their board.

**RSC decision:** Approve with condition.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** To inform the school.



## Trust Change

Points discussed in relation to academies moving to a new trust.

**Project:** Park Hall Junior Academy to Loriners Multi Academy Trust.

### **AB discussion:**

- Park Hall Infant Academy and Park Hall Junior Academy are both seeking to move and form The Loriners Multi Academy Trust. Both schools would like to formalise their partnership after recognising and establishing alignments in their working partnership to improve outcomes.
- As good and outstanding providers, PHIA and PHJA have collaborated to establish a joint capacity for curriculum development, strengthening teaching and learning. Sharing commonalities in pupil context, they already use their existing partnership to strengthen provision, educational outcomes and to maximise efficiencies.
- The board posed questions on growth plans, concluding that there was capacity for growth for the trust. The LA have no Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision at the present time, with schools who want to join a Multi Academy Trust having to look outside the borough.
- Park Hall, the infant academy, was the first primary school in the country to academise. With both schools now oversubscribed.
- The board members supported the recommendation.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** To inform both Trusts.

**Project:** Smestow School, University of Wolverhampton MAT to Matrix Academy Trust

### **AB discussion:**

- University of Wolverhampton MAT (UWMAT) have proposed to remove both Smestow School and Wednesfield High Academy due to recognising their strengths to drive improvement in Primary phase schools.
- Both schools are Ofsted 'Requires Improvement' catering for students in Wolverhampton.
- Matrix Academy Trust are a sponsor trust consisting of 5 secondary schools in the areas of Walsall, Birmingham and Warwickshire. The Trust has a track record of school improvement in secondary phase having taken some of its current schools from 'RI' to 'Good/Outstanding'.
- A number of consultation responses were received, all responses requested further clarification as to why the schools would be moving to Matrix. Clarification was sought from the CEO, with all responses being reassured.
- The members discussed the new CEO and the capacity of school improvement expertise now held at the Trust. The board were confident that the trust will enable the 2 schools to progress through its track record of improvement strategies.
- The board members supported the recommendation and the RSC set a recommendation for the deployment of an SMRA.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** Mo Brennan.

**Further actions required:** To inform both Trusts.

**Project:** Wednesfield High School, University of Wolverhampton MAT to Matrix Academy Trust

**AB discussion:**

- University of Wolverhampton MAT (UWMAT) have proposed to remove both Smestow School and Wednesfield High Academy due to recognising their strengths to drive improvement in Primary phase schools.
- Both schools are Ofsted 'Requires Improvement' catering for students in Wolverhampton.
- Matrix Academy Trust are a sponsor trust consisting of 5 secondary schools in the areas of Walsall, Birmingham and Warwickshire. The Trust has a track record of school improvement in secondary phase having taken some of its current schools from 'RI' to 'Good/Outstanding'.
- A number of consultation responses were received, all responses requested further clarification as to why the schools would be moving to Matrix. Clarification was sought from the CEO, with all responses being reassured.
- The members discussed the new CEO and the capacity of school improvement expertise now held at the Trust. The board were confident that the trust will enable the 2 schools to progress through its track record of improvement strategies.
- The board members supported the recommendation and the RSC set a recommendation for the deployment of an SMRA.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** Mo Brennan.

**Further actions required:** To inform both Trusts.

**Project:** Higham Lane Secondary School to Central England Academy Trust.

**AB discussion:**

- Higham Lane School has proposed to merge with Central England Academy Trust to form a mixed trust with both special and mainstream provision; this will bring them in line with Warwickshire LA's SEND strategy.
- The trust board now considers that Higham Lane would be best placed as part of an established Multi Academy Trust with an experienced CEO, in which the school would be a significant capacity-giver at secondary phase.
- Central England Academy Trust consists of two special schools: Oak Wood Primary School and Oak Wood Secondary School, both based in Nuneaton, Warwickshire. Both schools are Ofsted 'Good'.

- Warwickshire LA is expanding SEND capacity across the county, with a focus on increasing capacity of resourced provision within mainstream settings.
- The members spoke on the current trustee board structure and current staffing costs.
- The board members supported the recommendation and the RSC set recommendations of an SMRA deployment, the trust to have an external review of governance, and to work with departmental colleagues to find an appropriate mentor for the current CEO.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** To inform both Trusts.

## Decisions taken between AB meetings

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

**Project:** Blue Coat School, Coventry.

**Decision type:** Significant Change – Physical expansion with the addition of a Sixth Form Block.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** To inform the school.

**Project:** Oakfield Primary Academy, Warwickshire.

**Decision type:** Significant Change – Retrospective proposal to for an physical expansion.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** To inform the school.

## List of projects listed on the published draft agenda, but were removed before the meeting

List of projects that were on the published draft agenda but not discussed at the AB meeting.

**Project:** Broad Oak Primary School, Manchester & Aspire Educational Trust.

**Type of decision:** Converter Academy Order.

**Reason for why it was taken off agenda:** Insufficient information to present at AB.

**Project:** The Forge Secondary Short Stay School, Worcestershire.

**Type of decision:** Converter Academy Order.

**Reason for why it was taken off agenda:** Insufficient information to present at AB.

**Project:** Diocese of Worcestershire Multi-Academy trust, Worcestershire.

**Type of decision:** Sponsor Application.

**Reason for why it was taken off agenda:** Insufficient information to present at AB.

© Crown copyright 2022.