



Notes of Meeting: South West

19 February 2024

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.

Interim Regional Director (RD) chair

- Lucy Livings

Advisory Board (AB) members

- Mark Ducker
- Jennifer Blunden
- Margaret Simmons-Bird
- Steve Savory
- Jackie Fieldwick
- Adele Haysom
- Stuart Ingram

Guests

- Maureen Boston - Deputy Director: Operational Practice and System Response

Apologies

- Rachel Howie

DfE senior civil servants

- Matthew Stevenson

Representations received

- None

General Discussion Points

Regional Director Update

- AB members shared local intelligence and provided insight on the challenges being faced by the sector.
- The High Quality Trust framework was discussed and feedback from AB members.

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: To discuss Poole High School, **Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole** converting to academy status and joining Twynham Learning.

Points raised in Discussion:

Strategy:

- Poole High School (PHS) is a strong school whose educational performance is consistently above the national average.
- PHS has a well established relationship with Twynham Learning.
- Twynham Learning is a cross phase MAT that currently has 6 academies located in East Bournemouth and Christchurch.
- PHS joining Twynham Learning will strengthen the overall educational performance and secondary offer to pupils locally.

Governance:

- The diversity of the trust board and the financial expertise was discussed. Regions Group will review this with the trust.

Finance:

- The financial position of PHS and Twynham Learning was discussed. The ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) are working collaboratively with the trust.
- Discussion around the condition survey that Twynham Learning commissioned for PHS.

RD decision: Approve with conditions

- Provide an additional 2–3-year financial plan setting out how the trust will manage its reserves and Poole High School when it joins.
- Agree to a School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA) deployment to identify any financial efficiencies.
- Recruit an additional trustee with MAT financial oversight expertise.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: To discuss Two Mile Hill Primary School, **Bristol** converting to academy status and joining The Leaf Trust.

Points raised in Discussion:

Strategy:

- Two Mile Hill is a 4 -11 community primary school. The school was graded Requires Improvement at its Ofsted inspection in June 2022.
- Two Mile Hill have been working closely with The Leaf Trust since May 2023 and a formal partnership will enable greater collaboration.
- The Leaf Trust is made up of 13 primary schools and was formed at the start of the academic year 2023 – 2024, this will be the first school to join and the first located outside of South Gloucestershire. Two Mile Hill was initially considered to join Leaf when the trust formed in September 2023.

Governance:

- AB members commented on the active engagement of the CEO with the support networks that are available.

School Improvement (SI):

- The SI model of the trust was discussed and the support and development of the leadership team.
- It was commented that Two Mile Hill is currently judged as RI and will require much support from Leaf.

Finance:

- No concerns.

Other:

- The growth strategy for Leaf was discussed, including the importance of now embedding the structure and their SI model. Regions Group will continue to review growth with the trust.

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: Margaret Simmons-Bird is the Chair of Trustees for the Leaf Trust and did not receive the papers and was not present for the discussion.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: To discuss the following academies converting to academy status and joining Tarka Learning Partnership:

- West Down School, **Devon**
- Berrynarbor Church of England Primary School, **Devon**
- South Molton Community Primary School, **Devon**

Points raised in Discussion:

Strategy:

- West Down Primary School is a 2-11 community primary school located in Ilfracombe. The school is part of the Westberry Federation with Berrynarbor CofE Primary. West Down had a full Ofsted inspection in October 2019 and received a Good judgement.
- Berrynarbor Church of England Primary School is a 4-11 voluntary controlled Church of England Primary School located in Ilfracombe. The school is part of the Westberry Federation with West Down Primary School. Berrynarbor had a full Ofsted inspection in November 2011 and received an Outstanding judgement.
- South Molton Community Primary School is a 4-11 community primary school. South Molton Community Primary School had a full Ofsted inspection in December 2023 and received a Good judgement.
- All three schools have been working in partnership with Tarka Learning Partnership (Tarka) and feel that Tarka's visions and values align strongly with their own. There is strong collaborative working across the Trust that all three schools are already benefitting from.
- Tarka formed in July 2018 and is a well-established Trust with a good track record of improving school outcomes.

Governance:

- The diversity of the trust board and educational expertise was discussed. Regions Group will review this with the trust.

School Improvement (SI):

- Tarka has a network of central support services focusing on schools and a clear school improvement strategy.
- Tarka works with a range of external partners, locally and regionally.

Finance:

- No concerns. Good financial controls are in place.

Other:

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: To discuss Pimperne Church of England VC Primary School, **Dorset** converting to academy status and joining Hamwic Education Trust (HET).

Points raised in Discussion:

Strategy:

- Pimperne is a rural school within 15 miles of the primary schools in Hamwic Education Trust's (HET) South West hub, Pimperne has strong leadership, good teachers, and a strong curriculum.
- Pimperne joining Hamwic is a good strategic fit for the trust both geographically and educationally.
- HET has the financial capacity and leadership to support Pimperne maintain its excellent educational outcomes. The strengths and expertise of Pimperne will support the delivery of HET's strategic plan.

School Improvement (SI):

- The SI model for the trust was discussed and the importance of this developing and being secure as the trust grows.

Finance:

- The financial position of the school was discussed. Due diligence has been undertaken by HET, the trust is aware of the financial challenges and will be working closely with the school.

Other:

- The trust relationship for Hamwic is led by Regions Group South East. Future growth in South West will be reviewed by both the Regions Group teams and discussed with the trust as part of the regular strategic conversations.

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: To discuss Croscombe Church of England Primary School, **Somerset** converting to academy status and joining Wessex Learning Trust.

Points raised in Discussion: ** This project was discussed together with Stoke St Michael Primary School, **Somerset** joining Wessex Learning Trust.

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: To discuss Trinity Church of England First School, **Somerset** converting to academy status and joining Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership.

Points raised in Discussion: The board members considered the case and did not have any further comments in relation to the proposal.

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: To discuss Wanborough Primary School, **Swindon** converting to academy status and joining The Blue Kite Academy Trust.

Points raised in Discussion: The board members considered the case and did not have any further comments in relation to the proposal.

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: To discuss the following schools converting to academy status and joining Equa Multi Academy Trust:

- North Bradley CofE Primary School, **Wiltshire**
- Southwick Church of England Primary School, **Wiltshire**
- Bellefield Primary and Nursery School, **Wiltshire**
- St Barnabas Church of England School, Market Lavington, **Wiltshire**
- Studley Green Primary School, **Wiltshire**
- The Grove Primary School, **Wiltshire**

Points raised in Discussion: ** This project was discussed together with the three academies from The Mead Academy Trust, **Wiltshire** transferring to Equa Multi Academy Trust.

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Trust Change

Points discussed in relation to academies moving to another trust.

Project: To discuss the following three academies from The Mead Academy Trust, **Wiltshire** transferring to Equa Multi Academy Trust:

- The Mead Community Primary School, **Wiltshire**
- River Mead School, **Wiltshire**
- Castle Mead School, **Wiltshire**

Project: To discuss the following schools converting to academy status and joining Equa Multi Academy Trust:

- North Bradley CofE Primary School, **Wiltshire**
- Southwick Church of England Primary School, **Wiltshire**
- Bellefield Primary and Nursery School, **Wiltshire**
- St Barnabas Church of England School, Market Lavington, **Wiltshire**
- Studley Green Primary School, **Wiltshire**
- The Grove Primary School, **Wiltshire**

Points raised in Discussion: **all projects for Equa Multi Academy Trust (trust change and converter academy orders) were discussed together.

Strategy:

- The transfer of Mead Academy Trust (The Mead) to Equa Multi Academy Trust (Equa) will bring together the individual strengths of both trusts to improve the overall offer available to children.
- The new trust will change its name to EquaMead Academy Trust (EMAT) reflecting the trusts' commitment to a shared vision and values and to form a united trust. The two trusts are already working together ahead of the transfer.
- The 6 Local Authority Maintained (LAM) schools are applying to voluntarily convert and join the newly merged EMAT. There are already established working relationships between 5 out of the 6 converting schools.
- The Mead consists of three primary converter academies and Equa consists of seven primary and two secondary converter academies. The six schools applying to convert are all primary schools, including two nurseries.
- All the schools in both trusts, as well as those applying to convert, are in close geographical proximity.

Governance:

- It is recommended for the newly merged trust, to ensure that the planned external review of governance (ERG) takes place within 18 months from the date of the merger.

School Improvement (SI):

- For continuing professional development for the SI team to have a focus on disadvantage and inclusion, including SEND and EAL.
- For lead trustees on SEND, disadvantage and inclusion to have appropriate training in these areas.
- To ensure the sharing of expertise from all schools joining the base trust, particularly the significant resource base experience

Finance:

- The current CFO of Equa will remain the CFO of EMAT and has strong experience in educational finance. A new senior finance partner has been appointed.
- It is recommended that a School Resource Management advisor (SRMA) be accessed for support with finance management relating to the merger and the converting academies.

Other:

- AB members discussed the naming of EquaMead, and Regions Group will refer with the trust.
- It was recommended for the CEO of the newly merged trust to engage in peer mentoring, for the next 12 months, with a CEO who has faced similar challenges following a trust merger.
- The future growth for EMAT was discussed and the requirement of the trust to evidence improved performance within the schools that are currently performing below the national average. Future growth plans will be reviewed with Regions Group.
- To provide, through termly updates, more detailed background and information on how the merged trust plan to and are progressing in building a shared vision and culture which is inclusive of all phases.

RD decision: Approve with conditions

- For there to be at least one trustee on the board with substantial experience and expertise in SEND, disadvantage, and inclusion.

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Sponsored Route

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

Project: To discuss Stoke St Michael Primary School, **Somerset** joining Wessex Learning Trust (WLT).

Project: To discuss Croscombe Church of England Primary School, **Somerset** converting to academy status and joining Wessex Learning Trust (WLT).

Points raised in Discussion: **all projects for Wessex Learning Trust (sponsor and converter academy orders) were discussed together.

Strategy:

- Croscombe and Stoke St Michael's, are two schools that federated in 2014.
- Stoke St Michael's has received two successive Requires Improvement (RI) Ofsted inspections in May 2023 and June 2019.
- Croscombe has applied to convert voluntarily and has received two successive Requires Improvement (RI) Ofsted inspections in Nov 2023 and June 2019.
- Stoke St Michael is a small school in Radstock and Croscombe is a 4-11 primary located in Wells.
- Wessex Learning Trust (WLT) was set up in June 2016, as a sponsor trust and has 17 schools, in Somerset and North Somerset.
- WLT have been supporting Croscombe and Stoke St Michael in a TSI (Trust and School improvement) arrangement.
- The trust has experience in working with small schools and their communities.

Governance:

- WLT have a strong governance model with a wide distribution of skills. There are no governance concerns, and the trust governance is stable.

School Improvement (SI):

- WLT have a newly expanded team, an experienced Primary Lead, and a stable Ofsted profile of schools.
- Both of the schools are 2RI, and two highly vulnerable schools joining the trust simultaneously will bring challenge for WLT, however the trust has SI capacity across the team to improve the schools.

Finance:

- The financial position of both schools and the financial plans of WLT were discussed.
- The ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) and Regions Group are working closely with the trust and recommend the trust engage with an SRMA (School Resource Management Advisor).

Other:

- Subsequent to the voluntary conversion published on the February draft AB agenda, Croscombe is subject to intervention following a 2nd requires improvement judgement and sponsor funding has been agreed.

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Free School Presumption – sponsor approval discussion

Points discussed in relation to free school approval.

Project: Whether to approve Gloucestershire County Council's (GCC) recommended sponsor for a new all-through special school at Wheatridge East in Abbeydale for children aged 4 – 16 with moderate and additional learning difficulties, **Gloucestershire**.

Points raised in Discussion:

Strategy:

- Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) has identified the need to establish a new 200-place special school for pupils aged 4-16 years with Moderate and Additional Learning Difficulties (MALD) to open in January 2026.
- GCC launched a free school presumption invitation, seeking a strong, experienced and inclusive academy sponsor to open and operate the new special free school.
- Further to the expression of interest and interview, it was concluded that Reach South was the preferred sponsor and ratified by GCC.
- Reach South's bid was strong and the trust is likely to gain the confidence of parents, the local community and partner schools. The trust already has a presence in Gloucestershire
- Reach South Academy Trust has been considered under High-Quality Trust Framework.

Governance:

- There is confidence in the trust board, trust leadership and governance is strong.

School Improvement (SI):

- The trust has a good track record of improving vulnerable schools.
- The geography and distance of Reach was discussed, the trust has one school within Gloucestershire. The trust's vision is to create a hub of schools in Gloucestershire which fits within the overall strategic plan for the area.

Finance:

- The School Financial Support and Oversight (SFSO) team are working with the trust in regards to the financial position.
- There is a School Resource Management Adviser (SRMA) deployment in progress.

Other:

- The growth strategy for Reach was discussed, the trust has taken on two challenging sponsorship projects within the last 18 months. Regions Group will continue to review growth with the trust.
- This is an 'in-principle' agreement, subject to the presumption process progressing.

RD decision: Approve with conditions:

- That External Expert reports and Ofsted inspections of the trust's other Special academies, in the period prior to the funding agreement for this school being signed, demonstrate ongoing improvement and that the trust's model for specialist provision continues to work effectively.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Academy Opening Approved in Principle

List of academies approved to open.

All of the projects have gone through previous Advisory Board meetings for consideration and discussion. These projects are checked for any legal inconsistencies to ensure they are in line with departmental requirements and that all conditions are met.

Project: Cubert School, **Cornwall** (ASPIRE Academy Trust).

Points raised in discussion: No questions or concerns were raised.

Opening date 1 March 2024.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: No action required.

Project: Norton-sub-Hamdon Church School, **Somerset** (Diocese of Bath and Wells Multi Academy Trust).

Points raised in discussion: No questions or concerns were raised.

Opening date 1 March 2024.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: No action required.

Project: St Nicholas CofE Primary School, Henstridge, **Somerset** (Diocese of Bath and Wells Multi Academy Trust).

Points raised in discussion: No questions or concerns were raised.

Opening date 1 March 2024.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: No action required.

Project: West Chinnock Church School, **Somerset** (Diocese of Bath and Wells Multi Academy Trust).

Points raised in discussion: No questions or concerns were raised.

Opening date 1 March 2024.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: No action required.

Decisions taken between AB meetings

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

Project: To discuss a significant change for Beacon ACE Academy, **Cornwall** (Kernow Learning Multi Academy Trust) to increase capacity of the SEN Resource Base from 10 to 15 pupils.

Decision type: Significant Change.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools and trust.

Project: To discuss a significant change for Yeo Moor Primary School, **North Somerset** (Futura Learning Partnership) to change the age range from 4 -11 to 2 – 11 to incorporate nurse provision.

Decision type: Significant Change.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools and trust.

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.

None

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