



Notes of Meeting: North East Advisory Board

Thursday 14 March 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.

Regional Director (RD)

- Katherine Cowell (RD)

Deputy Director (DD) chair

- Matt Beer (DD)

Advisory Board (AB) members

- Elizabeth Horne (AB)
- Dame Maura Regan (AB)
- Jo Heaton (AB)
- Anita Bath (AB)
- Colin Lofthouse (AB)
- Dame Nicola Stephenson (AB)
- Jason Brine (AB)

Apologies

Robert Tarn (AB)

DfE senior civil servants

- Maureen Boston (Deputy Director, Academies Operational Practice Unit)

Representations received

- No representations were made for any items discussed at this meeting.

General Discussion Points

RD welcomed board members to the meeting and provided an update on the approved sponsor match of Carville Primary School, North Tyneside to North East Learning Trust (NELT). Following due diligence NELT have agreed for Carville to join the trust and have developed detailed plans to support the school.

Following a recommendation made in October 2023 Advisory Board, an update on the further growth of Melrose Learning Trust was provided. The board was informed that a letter was issued to the CEO on March 8th 2024 confirming that the financial position of the trust has improved and that further growth will be considered, subject to each new application being assessed on its own merits.

The RD confirmed that from 1 April 2024, there will be a change to the membership of the AB and thanked Elizabeth Horne and Rob Tarn, members who are leaving, for their service and contribution. New AB members will be Jane Wilson (Deputy CEO) Northern Education Trust and Christina Jones (CEO) River Tees Multi Academy Trust.

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for Esh Winning Primary School, St. Andrews Primary School and Thornley Primary School, County Durham to convert and join WISE Academies.

AB discussion:

- All three schools are judged 'Good' by Ofsted.
- All three schools are carrying forward a financial surplus.
- The board was informed that this proposal is in line with the strategic plan outlined in the Department for Education's published trust development statement for County Durham.
- WISE comprises 13 primary academies across 4 local authorities.
- Despite a predicted fall in pupil numbers the trust's financial position remains healthy.
- The board heard that WISE has a clear trust and school improvement strategy and is already working with all three schools on curriculum and school improvement.
- An offer of a supportive SRMA (School Resource Management Adviser) deployment was recommended as the trust has not previously had one.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform school/trust and LA of decision.

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for Gainford Church of England Primary School and Pre-School, County Durham to convert and join Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (DNDLT).

AB discussion:

- Gainford Church of England Primary School is a small rural primary school.
- The school was judged Ofsted Good at its most recent inspection.
- DNDLT is an 18 primary school MAT with schools across 7 local authorities, 4 of these academies have been rated by Ofsted as Outstanding and 12 as Good.
- The board was informed that this proposal is in line with the Diocesan strategy around conversion and growth, particularly given the close proximity to another of the trust's schools.
- The trust has previously had a supportive SRMA deployment but may want to consider whether additional school level deployments would be helpful.
- The board discussed the potential of the CEO working with a CEO of a trust of similar scale and size so they could share experiences and knowledge.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform school/trust and LA of decision.

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: This is a proposal for Henshaw Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School and Greenhead Church of England Primary School, Northumberland to convert and join Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust (DNDLT).

AB discussion:

- Henshaw Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School and Greenhead Church of England Primary School are both small rural primaries.
- The two schools have been in a federation since 2014 and share an executive headteacher and a single governing body.
- Both schools are judged Ofsted Good.
- The board discussed how this proposal is in line with the Diocesan strategy around conversion and growth, and particularly in supporting smaller, rural schools to join trusts in hub models.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform school/trust and LA of decision.

Trust Change

Points discussed in relation to academies moving to another trust.

Project: Oxclose Primary Academy and Oxclose Community Academy (Discover Learning Trust (DLT), Sunderland to transfer to The Laidlaw Schools Trust.

AB discussion:

- DLT comprises two schools based in Washington, Oxclose Community Academy (secondary) and Oxclose Primary.
- Both schools have provision for children with physical disabilities and operate almost as an all through primary and secondary facility.
- Outcomes at both KS2 and KS4 (P8 and A8) are around the national average, but the percentage of children achieving a G5 in English and Maths is below.
- The board were informed that a memorandum of understanding has been in place between DLT and The Laidlaw Schools Trust since October 2023 and both trusts are confident it is benefitting all parties.
- The board were informed that this proposal is in line with the department's published trust development statement for Sunderland.
- The board discussed performance outcomes across the Laidlaw Schools Trust, noting that several schools need to make significant improvements, and discussed the trust's school improvement approach and capacity. The RD noted that we would want to see the impact of recent changes before further secondary growth is approved.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform school/trust of decision.

Trust Change

Points discussed in relation to academies moving to another trust.

Project: Biddick Academy, Sunderland to transfer to North East Learning Trust (NELT).

AB discussion:

- Biddick Academy is an oversubscribed single academy trust with an Autism Spectrum Disorder resource provision, based in Sunderland.
- Biddick was inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and judged to be Good.
- Performance data for Progress, Attainment and % Pupils achieving grade 5+ in English & Maths is below the national average.
- NELT currently has 11 schools across 4 local authority areas.
- NELT has taken on 6 inadequate/RI schools and successfully improved 4 to Good or Outstanding. The remaining 2 are still to be inspected.
- The board discussed NELT's recent growth and were informed that this proposal is in line with the published trust development statement for Sunderland.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Anita Bath (CEO Bishop Bewick CET, trustee on board is deputy CEO of NELT) was not present and did not receive papers for this item.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform school/trust of decision.

Trust Change

Points discussed in relation to academies moving to another trust.

Project: The 1590 Trust, Stockton on Tees to transfer to Vision Academy Learning Trust (VALT).

AB discussion:

- The 1590 Trust is a 6 academy trust, 1 secondary and 5 primaries, based in Stockton on Tees.
- VALT is an 8 academy trust, with 3 secondaries and 5 primaries operating in 3 LAs.
- All schools that have been inspected since joining their respective trusts are judged Ofsted Good or above.
- The board heard that if approved the 1590 Trust will join VALT and the name of the trust will change to Vision 1590 Academy Trust.
- The board discussed the new trust governance structure and leadership.
- The board agreed with the proposal and suggested that the trust might benefit from speaking to other trusts who have gone through this process.
- The trusts have provided a combined projection of finances that result in the prediction of a cumulative surplus over the next 5 financial years.

RD decision: Approve with conditions

- trust accepts an offer of SRMA during the 1st or 2nd term following transfer.
- trust confirms its governance model with DfE prior to proposed opening date.

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform school/trust of decision.

Sponsored Route:

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

Project: Sponsor match for Wallsend St Peters Church of England Aided Primary School, North Tyneside.

AB discussion:

- This proposed sponsor match was deferred at AB in February pending further information.
- The board discussed the geographical context, the diocesan strategy and the needs of the school.
- The board reflected on how NEAT academy trust had been working with the school and what impact this has had, specifically around improved performance data.
- The board were told of significant changes to school leadership, governance and staff with signs of improvements being identified in the most recent Ofsted report.
- The board discussed the Trust's school improvement capacity and asked for assurances around the support for NEAT's secondary schools.
- The board was satisfied that the department is working closely with the trust to ensure the proposed growth is managed carefully and to see evidence of school improvement.

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: Jo Heaton was not present and did not receive papers for this item due to being the CEO of Northern Lights Learning Trust, one of only a few CofE trusts in the region that the school could be considered to join.

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform school/trust, LA and Diocese of decision.

Academy Opening Approved in Principle

List of academies approved to open.

Project: Fishburn Primary School, Durham

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/04/2024

Further actions required: No further action required.

Academy Opening Approved in Principle

List of academies approved to open.

Project: Middleton-in-Teesdale Nursery and Primary School, Durham

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/04/2024

Further actions required: No further action required.

Academy Opening Approved in Principle

List of academies approved to open.

Project: Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Darlington

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/04/2024

Further actions required: No further action required.

Academy Opening Approved in Principle

List of academies approved to open.

Project: St Aidan's Church of England Primary School, Gateshead

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/04/2024

Further actions required: No further action required.

Academy Opening Approved in Principle

List of academies approved to open.

Project: Whitehouse Primary School, Stockton On Tees

AB discussion: Proposed opening date 01/04/2024

Further actions required: No further action required.