



Notes of Meeting: West Midlands Advisory Board

Date of meeting – 23 May 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) chair

- Andrew Warren

Advisory Board (AB) members

- Dame Mo Brennan
- Mike Donoghue
- Sarah Finch
- Amarjit Cheema
- Tom Leverage
- Steve Taylor
- Dan Parkes
- Guy Shears

Guests

- None.

Apologies

- None.

DfE senior civil servants

- Dawn Dandy, Deputy Director, West Midlands Region

Representations received

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

General Discussion Points

- The RD and AB members discussed the current climate in schools across the West Midlands region.

Local Update

- None.

Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

Project: To discuss the application from St Mary's Bluecoat CofE (VA) Primary School, Shropshire, to convert and become an academy and set up a new trust called Shropshire CE Academies Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- St Mary's Bluecoat CofE (VA) Primary School, Shropshire is an Ofsted "Good" school who have requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust to centralise existing resources and expertise, benefitting from a collaborative structure which targets these specific needs.
- The formation of Shropshire CE Academies Trust was approved at the October 2023 advisory board, with five initial schools proposed to join. Since then, The Trinity Federation (St Mary's Bluecoat CofE Primary, Worfield Endowed CofE Primary School, and Beckbury CofE Primary School) has voted to proceed with academisation, with Shropshire CE Academies Trust as their preferred choice.
- All eight schools feel that they face similar area-based challenges across Shropshire, particularly in relation to rural deprivation and the impact of sparsity.
- A core understanding of small, rural church school challenges will underpin the trust from the outset.
- There is a pressing need for additional majority article trusts in Shropshire, and Shropshire CE Academies Trust proposes to fulfil this strategic need, addressing the shortage of majority article MAT capacity across both the Diocese of Lichfield and Diocese of Hereford.
- All parties have a clear understanding of the needs of small rural schools, and aim to meet these through pooled resources, strong partnership working and specialist support.
- The West Midlands team presented the Shropshire inclusion plan, which included the current picture, planned provisions, the Shropshire academisation strategy and diocesan multi-academy trust capacity challenges.
- The board discussed leadership and staffing and the trusts future plans, governance, the geographical spread of the trust and the majority articles.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Sarah Finch did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and Director of Children's Services to be informed of the decision.

Project: To discuss the application from Worfield Endowed CofE Primary School,

Shropshire, to convert and become an academy and set up a new trust called Shropshire CE Academies Trust.

AB discussion:

- Worfield Endowed CofE Primary School, Shropshire is an Ofsted “Good” school who have requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust to centralise existing resources and expertise, benefitting from a collaborative structure which targets these specific needs.
- The formation of Shropshire CE Academies Trust was approved at the October 2023 advisory board, with five initial schools proposed to join. Since then, The Trinity Federation (St Mary’s Bluecoat CofE Primary, Worfield Endowed CofE Primary School, and Beckbury CofE Primary School) has voted to proceed with academisation, with Shropshire CE Academies Trust as their preferred choice.
- All eight schools feel that they face similar area-based challenges across Shropshire, particularly in relation to rural deprivation and the impact of sparsity.
- A core understanding of small, rural church school challenges will underpin the trust from the outset.
- There is a pressing need for additional majority article trusts in Shropshire, and Shropshire CE Academies Trust proposes to fulfil this strategic need, addressing the shortage of majority article MAT capacity across both the Diocese of Lichfield and Diocese of Hereford.
- All parties have a clear understanding of the needs of small rural schools, and aim to meet these through pooled resources, strong partnership working and specialist support.
- The West Midlands team presented the Shropshire inclusion plan, which included the current picture, planned provisions, the Shropshire academisation strategy and diocesan multi-academy trust capacity challenges.
- The board discussed leadership and staffing and the trusts future plans, governance, the geographical spread of the trust and the majority articles.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Sarah Finch did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and Director of Children’s Services to be informed of the decision.

Project: To discuss the application from Beckbury CofE Primary School, Shropshire, to convert and become an academy and set up a new trust called Shropshire CE Academies Trust.

AB discussion:

- Beckbury CofE Primary School, Shropshire is an Ofsted “Good” school who have requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust to centralise existing resources and expertise, benefitting from a collaborative structure which targets these specific needs.
- The formation of Shropshire CE Academies Trust was approved at the October 2023 advisory board, with five initial schools proposed to join. Since then, The Trinity Federation (St Mary’s Bluecoat CofE Primary, Worfield Endowed CofE Primary School, and Beckbury CofE Primary School) has voted to proceed with academisation, with Shropshire CE Academies Trust as their preferred choice.
- All eight schools feel that they face similar area-based challenges across Shropshire, particularly in relation to rural deprivation and the impact of sparsity.
- A core understanding of small, rural church school challenges will underpin the trust from the outset.
- There is a pressing need for additional majority article trusts in Shropshire, and Shropshire CE Academies Trust proposes to fulfil this strategic need, addressing the shortage of majority article MAT capacity across both the Diocese of Lichfield and Diocese of Hereford.
- All parties have a clear understanding of the needs of small rural schools, and aim to meet these through pooled resources, strong partnership working and specialist support.
- The West Midlands team presented the Shropshire inclusion plan, which included the current picture, planned provisions, the Shropshire academisation strategy and diocesan multi-academy trust capacity challenges.
- The board discussed leadership and staffing and the trusts future plans, governance, the geographical spread of the trust and the majority articles.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Sarah Finch did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and Director of Children’s Services to be informed of the decision.

Project: To discuss the application from Swanshurst School, Birmingham, to convert and become an academy and to form West Midlands Academy Trust.

AB discussion:

- Swanshurst School, Birmingham is an Ofsted “Outstanding” school who have requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust.
- “West Midlands Academy Trust” are proposing to become a three school MAT, all secondary, with a footprint in Birmingham, namely Kings Norton, Hall Green and Billesley (South Birmingham).
- The group of schools are setting out to create a new MAT that delivers an outstanding, connected provision for the collective communities served by the member schools; creating and growing strength at a local level to meet local needs as well as adding capacity to the regional system for school improvement.
- The creation of a MAT would formalise the currently informal collaboration and partnership working, adding internal accountability, providing security, stability and continuous school improvement for member schools into the future; achieving educational and economic stability for children through the benefits of being a MAT.
- This formation of a new MAT will come from the initial 3 schools (Hall Green, Kings Norton and Swanshurst), additional schools will look to join following.
- The three schools have individually and collectively been involved in a number of discussions about forming or joining MATs over recent years, which intensified following the 2022 white paper. Through these discussions, the three schools became aware of their similar vision / ethos and collaborated to develop more detailed proposals.
- This work (between leaders and governors) has identified a shared set of educational beliefs, and shared aspirations for the future development of the trust which underpin this proposal.
- The board discussed the trusts leadership and future growth plans, governance and finance.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Guy Shears did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to previous employment at the school.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and Director of Children’s Services to be informed of the decision.

Project: To discuss the application from Christ Church CofE Primary School, Walsall, to convert and become an academy and join St Bartholomew’s CE MAT.

AB discussion:

- Christ Church CofE Primary School, Walsall is an Ofsted “Good” school who have requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust.
- St Bartholomew’s CE MAT consists of 9 academies across Staffordshire, Wolverhampton and Dudley.
- Christ Church will benefit from access to St Bartholomew’s high-performing school improvement team, CPD opportunities for staff and access to shared services and

economies of scale. Additionally, Christ Church will be able to add SEN/Behaviour expertise to the MAT through its specialist resource base.

- St Bartholomew's is the schools preferred choice and aligns with the Diocesan strategy.
- There was a discussion around pupil forecasts. The board members agreed that the school will benefit from the support of the MAT.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Amarjit Cheema did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project as the CEO of St Bartholomew's CE MAT is a governor of Perry Hall Multi Academy Trust.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and Director of Children's Services to be informed of the decision.

Project: To discuss the application from Huntingtree Primary School, Dudley, to convert and become an academy and join Stour Vale Academy Trust.

AB discussion:

- Huntingtree Primary School, Dudley is an Ofsted "Good" school who have requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust to further empower the senior leadership team to continue to improve the school.
- Stour Vale Academy Trust consists of 10 academies across Sandwell, Dudley and Worcestershire.
- The school can provide capacity to the trust through inclusion and curriculum design as they support a high number of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with additional needs.
- The board discussed Ofsted and sought assurances around School Improvement.
- There were also discussions around performance, governance and leadership and capacity.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Guy Shears did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to providing National Leaders of Education work through the School Improvement Offer at one of the trusts schools. Steve Taylor did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to being part of a working party with Stour Vale Trust's CEO.

Further actions required: Converter Academy Order to be issued to Chair of Governors. Trust and Director of Children's Services to be informed of the decision.

Sponsored Route:

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

Project: To discuss the proposal for The Mercian Trust to sponsor New Leaf Centre, Walsall.

AB discussion:

- New Leaf Centre, Walsall is an Ofsted rated "Inadequate" school who require a sponsor to develop improved school outcomes.
- The Mercian Trust consists of 9 schools placed across Walsall and Sandwell.
- New Leaf is a Pupil Referral Unit in Walsall, providing alternative provision ("AP") with a capacity of 80 places.
- By joining The Mercian Trust, New Leaf would benefit from the Trust's experience and track record in the AP sector. The Mercian Trust has a footprint in Walsall and Sandwell and its 13-18 AP free school, The Ladder School, was judged as good in July 2023. The Trust has experienced leaders and expertise in AP and SEND along with a bespoke SEND and AP Improvement Plan.
- Mercian is providing Trust School Improvement Support (TSI) to New Leaf and working closely with the newly appointed headteacher to put in place an action plan to provide rapid school improvement.
- The Mercian Trust is diverse, mixed phase secondary MAT that operates across Walsall and Sandwell. The Trust has 6 secondary schools in Walsall, including 2 Outstanding selective schools and 3 schools in Sandwell following the Mercian and Q3 merger.
- The West Midlands team went through the trusts top three priorities. The board discussed Ofsted and performance and looked into School Improvement, trust capacity, finances and leadership.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Dan Parkes, CEO of The Mercian Trust, did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to a professional connection.

Further actions required: To inform the School, Sponsor and DCS.

Project: To discuss the proposal for Accordia Academies Trust to sponsor Blackmarston School, Herefordshire.

AB discussion:

- Blackmarston School, Herefordshire is an Ofsted rated "Inadequate" school who require a sponsor to develop improved school outcomes.
- Accordia Academies Trust consists of 2 schools located across Herefordshire.
- The Trust is a SEN provider and caters for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Severe Learning Difficulty (SLD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty (PMLD). Blackmarston School currently caters for the same diverse needs

of pupils as the trust. Accordia is based at Barrs Court School, which is under 3 miles away (10-minute drive). Barrs Court School is currently Ofsted Outstanding, whereas the other school, The Beacon College (A Free School Special) hasn't been inspected since opening in September 2021.

- Blackmarston School was inspected in June 2023 and moderated into an Ofsted inadequate category in September 2023.
- Blackmarston is the main feeder school in the area for Barr's Court, and the CEO is currently working collaboratively with senior leaders to offer support and development in key areas of concern.
- The board discussed trust capacity and its plans to increase this, which included discussions around finance, leadership and School Improvement. There were also discussions around Governance, staffing and the primary strategy.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform the School, Sponsor and DCS.

Trust Change

Points discussed in relation to academies moving to another trust.

Project: To discuss the proposal for Hall Green Secondary School, Birmingham to move from Hall Green Secondary School to form West Midlands Academy Trust.

AB discussion:

- "West Midlands Academy Trust" are proposing to become a three school MAT, all secondary, with a footprint in Birmingham, namely Kings Norton, Hall Green and Billesley (South Birmingham). The school's area located within the Parliamentary constituency areas of Selly Oak and Hall Green.
- Two of the schools, Hall Green School and Kings Norton Girls School are SATs. The final school, Swanshurst School is a LA maintained community School which would convert to academy status.
- All three schools are within 5.4 miles of each other (17 minute drive).
- The group of schools are setting out to create a new MAT that delivers an outstanding, connected provision for the collective communities served by the member schools; creating and growing strength at a local level to meet local needs as well as adding capacity to the regional system for school improvement.
- The creation of a MAT would formalise the currently informal collaboration and partnership working, adding internal accountability, providing security, stability and continuous school improvement for member schools into the future; achieving educational and economic stability for children through the benefits of being a MAT.
- This formation of a new MAT will come from the initial 3 schools (Hall Green, Kings Norton and Swanshurst), additional schools will look to join following.

- The three schools have individually and collectively been involved in a number of discussions about forming or joining MATs over recent years, which intensified following the 2022 white paper. Through these discussions, the three schools became aware of their similar vision / ethos and collaborated to develop more detailed proposals.
- This work (between leaders and governors) has identified a shared set of educational beliefs, and shared aspirations for the future development of the trust which underpin this proposal.
- The board discussed the trusts leadership and future growth plans, governance and finance.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Guy Shears did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to previous employment at Swanshurst School.

Further actions required: To inform the Trusts.

Project: To discuss the proposal for Kings Norton Girls' School, Birmingham to move from Kings Norton Girls' School to West Midlands Academy Trust.

AB discussion:

- "West Midlands Academy Trust" are proposing to become a three school MAT, all secondary, with a footprint in Birmingham, namely Kings Norton, Hall Green and Billesley (South Birmingham). The school's area located within the Parliamentary constituency areas of Selly Oak and Hall Green.
- Two of the schools, Hall Green School and Kings Norton Girls School are SATs. The final school, Swanshurst School is a LA maintained community School which would convert to academy status.
- All three schools are within 5.4 miles of each other (17 minute drive).
- The group of schools are setting out to create a new MAT that delivers an outstanding, connected provision for the collective communities served by the member schools; creating and growing strength at a local level to meet local needs as well as adding capacity to the regional system for school improvement.
- The creation of a MAT would formalise the currently informal collaboration and partnership working, adding internal accountability, providing security, stability and continuous school improvement for member schools into the future; achieving educational and economic stability for children through the benefits of being a MAT.
- This formation of a new MAT will come from the initial 3 schools (Hall Green, Kings Norton and Swanshurst), additional schools will look to join following.
- The three schools have individually and collectively been involved in a number of discussions about forming or joining MATs over recent years, which intensified following the 2022 white paper. Through these discussions, the three schools

became aware of their similar vision / ethos and collaborated to develop more detailed proposals.

- This work (between leaders and governors) has identified a shared set of educational beliefs, and shared aspirations for the future development of the trust which underpin this proposal.
- The board discussed the trusts leadership and future growth plans, governance and finance.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Guy Shears did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to previous employment at Swanshurst School.

Further actions required: To inform the Trusts.

Establishing a new academy through the free school presumption route

Project: To discuss and consider the sponsor for the new free school in Staffordshire.

AB discussion:

- Staffordshire County Council has identified the need to establish a new mainstream primary school to open by the earliest date of September 2025. The new primary free school will have early years provision and be located on the Burleyfields housing development in Stafford.
- Over time, it is estimated that this development will yield approximately 315 primary school-aged children and there are other smaller developments in the vicinity of the proposed new school that will generate additional children. The county council will keep under review the data on the need for school places, and if the development grows more slowly than expected, would consider delaying the opening of the school.
- The school will be a mainstream, co-educational primary school for Reception to Year 6 children (aged 5-11). The new school will be established as a 1FE primary school with 210 places. To meet future population need, the school will have 2FE capacity (or 420 places).
- The local authority's preferred sponsor is The Creative Learning Partnership Trust (CLPT).
- SCC are supportive of CLPT as the strongest bidder, Regions Group and School Financial Support and Oversight colleagues support the choice of CLPT for this project.
- The board sought assurances around pupil forecasts, and discussed staffing and performance.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform the LA and Trust.

Decisions taken between AB meetings

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

Project: Cherry Trees School, Staffordshire

Decision type: Significant Change - To increase capacity from 30 to 60.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform the school of the decision.

Project: Radbrook Primary School, Shropshire

Decision type: Significant Change - To change the age range of the academy to 3-11 to add a 'pre-school' nursery provision of 15 places to the school. This is a Tier 1 recommendation.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Project: Christ Church Academy, Staffordshire

Decision type: Significant Change - To increase capacity from 484 to 566.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Project: Gig Mill Primary School, Dudley

Decision type: Significant Change - The trust wish to lower their age range from 3-11 to 2-11, adding nursery provision for two-year-olds in place for September 2024.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Project: Withymoor Primary School, Dudley

Decision type: Significant Change - The trust wish to lower their age range from 3-11 to 2-11, adding nursery provision for two-year-olds, in place for September 2024.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Project: Finham Park 2, Coventry

Decision type: Significant Change - Finham Park 2 had a Significant Change agreed in April 2023 for an additional 30 places for year 7 from September 2023 and September 2024. There is now the requirement for an extra 30 places in Year 7 for September 2024, meaning a total of 60 additional places in September 2024. The PAN will increase from a previously agreed 150, to 180 from September 2024.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: To inform the school of the decision.

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: None.

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