



Notes of meeting: West Midlands Advisory Board

24 October 2024

Attendance

AB members who sent their apologies for the meeting but sent in their comments on agenda items, are listed under the apologies section. These members' views are reflected in the discussions below, unless the AB member(s) declared a conflict of interest.

Regional Director (RD) chair

- Andrew Warren

Advisory Board (AB) members

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

Guests

- None.

Apologies

- None.

DfE senior civil servants

- Dawn Dandy, Deputy Director.
- Parminder Garcha, Deputy Director.

General discussion points

- Secretary of State statement.
- Ofsted.

Warwickshire

Converter academy orders

Project: An application from Coten End Primary School, Warwickshire, to convert and become an academy and join Stowe Valley Multi Academy Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Coten End Primary School, Warwickshire is an Ofsted “Good” school which has requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust.
- Stowe Valley Multi Academy Trust consists of 10 academies across Warwickshire and West Northamptonshire.
- Coten End has a strong, established working relationship with Stowe Valley MAT (SVMAT) and the school recognise the benefits of joining a local MAT, including improved CPD for staff. The Headteacher at Coten End is currently supporting Stowe Valley MAT by providing leadership capacity to their new primary free school, Myton Gardens, which opened on 1 September 2024.
- The conversion of Coten End sits alongside a wider project that also includes the proposed transfer of Myton School to join SVMAT. This is with the aim of creating a hub of SVMAT schools in Warwick, particularly due to the proximity of Coten End and Myton School. This hub would also include the trust’s current all through free school Oakley School and Myton Gardens Primary School. As a well performing primary school, with a strong reputation in the local community, Coten End brings Primary phase capacity to SVMAT and their proposed Warwick hub.
- The trust has a clear school improvement strategy which focuses on the individuality of each school. SVMAT strive to ensure that all schools are at least Good within two years of joining the MAT.
- The board discussed governance at the trust, the geographical spread and its growth plans. They also sought assurances on MAT capacity and pupil numbers.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Trust Changes

Project: A proposal for Myton School, Warwickshire to transfer from Myton School Trust to Stowe Valley Multi Academy Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Myton School is a single academy trust based in Warwickshire.
- Stowe Valley Multi Academy Trust consists of 10 academies across Warwickshire and West Northamptonshire. Myton School have an established working relationship with Stowe Valley MAT.
- Through this proposed transfer, Myton School and SVMAT wish to build upon their collaboration to provide high-quality education for children within Warwickshire. The school hope to access additional support and challenge from the central team at SVMAT and economies of scale to facilitate school improvement. As Myton is a well performing school, they also plan to add capacity to SVMAT's school improvement team through the experience and skills of the leadership team at Myton School. SVMAT recognise the value Myton staff can also provide to essential administrative functions.
- The transfer of Myton School sits alongside a wider project for SVMAT that also includes the proposed transfer of Coten End Primary School. This is with the vision to create a hub of SVMAT schools in Warwick, particularly due to the proximity of Coten End and Myton School. This hub would also include the trust's free schools, including Oakley School (all through school) and Myton Gardens Primary School. Myton School is a well performing secondary school, bringing capacity in this phase to SVMAT and their proposed Warwick hub.
- The board discussed governance at the trust, the geographical spread and its growth plans. They also sought assurances on MAT capacity and pupil numbers.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Dudley

Converter academy orders

Project: An application from Belle Vue Primary School, Dudley, to convert and become an academy and join Windsor Academy Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Belle Vue Primary School, Dudley is an Ofsted "Requires Improvement" school which has requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust.

- Windsor Academy Trust consists of 15 academies across Dudley, Sandwell, Stoke, Staffordshire and Walsall.
- Governors felt that Windsor Academy Trust's vision and ethos best matched their own, in addition the school felt that significant improvements had already been made with WAT via Trust and School Improvement Offer and wanted to continue to work with the trust.
- Windsor High School and Sixth form has a history of supporting a range of schools and issues. The Trust's culture and structure has been positioned around collaboration and effective support.
- The Trust provides a vast array of training for all staff, including primary and secondary teachers, support staff and school leaders. It currently provides training for over two hundred schools in the WM and wider. WAT is now the Regional Network Hub in the Chartered College of Teaching's founding group of Chartered College networks.
- The board discussed capital support and next steps, along with governance at the trust.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Amarjit Cheema did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to a conflict of interest, which is NLE work. Mike Donoghue did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to a personal conflict of interest.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Project: An application from Woodsetton School, Dudley, to convert and become an academy and form a new trust called Ascent Multi Academy Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Woodsetton School, Dudley is an Ofsted "Good" school which has requested to convert and form a new trust called Ascent Multi Academy Trust.
- The proposed trust will initially consist of two special schools in Dudley. It will be led by the current executive head of both The Brier School and Woodsetton School. The Brier School is an Outstanding school which has supported the improvement at Woodsetton School and other special schools both in Dudley and in other local authorities. The proposed trust aims to build on their existing strengths in school improvement and providing an excellent education for SEN pupils.

- The proposed MAT has support from the local authority. There is a need for new high-quality trusts which will drive system-wide improvement and address the needs of local communities, especially in SEN.
- The Brier School and Woodsetton School share an executive headteacher. The two schools wish to build on their current positive collaboration and build on their strong relationship to further improve staff retention, training and business models. The Brier School is a flagship special school in the borough of Dudley with a strong reputation in the local community and beyond.
- The board discussed future plans, governance, staffing and leadership and sought assurances around finance and trust experience.
- The board agreed to a recommendation for the Chief Operating Officer to be supported in assessing the estates and specialist provision/equipment for the SEN provision.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Maureen Brennan did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to a conflict of interest, which is in relation to the proposed trust.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Project: An application from The Brier School, Dudley, to convert and become an academy and form a new trust called Ascent Multi Academy Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- The Brier School, Dudley is an Ofsted “Outstanding” school which has requested to convert and form a new trust called Ascent Multi Academy Trust.
- The proposed trust will initially consist of two special schools in Dudley. It will be led by the current executive head of both The Brier School and Woodsetton School. The Brier School is an Outstanding school which has supported the improvement at Woodsetton School and other special schools both in Dudley and in other local authorities. The proposed trust aims to build on their existing strengths in school improvement and providing an excellent education for SEN pupils.
- The proposed MAT has support from the Local Authority. There is a need for new high-quality trusts which will drive system-wide improvement and address the needs of local communities, especially in SEN.
- The Brier School and Woodsetton School share the same executive headteacher. The two schools wish to build on their current positive collaboration and build on their strong relationship to further improve staff retention, training and business models. The Brier School is a flagship special school in the borough of Dudley with a strong reputation in the local community and beyond.

- The board discussed future plans, governance, staffing and leadership and sought assurances around finance and trust experience.
- The board agreed to a recommendation for the Chief Operating Officer to be supported in assessing the estates and specialist provision/equipment for the SEN provision.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Maureen Brennan did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to a conflict of interest, which is Previous Chief Executive of Matrix Academy Trust.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Shropshire

Converter academy orders

Project: An application from Criftins CofE Primary School, Shropshire, to convert and become an academy and join Marches Academy Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Criftins CofE Primary School, Shropshire is an Ofsted “Outstanding” school which has requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust.
- Marches Academy Trust is an eleven-school minority diocesan MAT operating in the Shropshire area.
- Criftins CoE Primary School is federated with Cockshutt CofE Primary School and Nursery in the Mere’s Edge Federation. An informal partnership already exists between the federation and the trust, and the schools would like to formalise this relationship by joining the trust. Marches Academy Trust includes secondary schools, into which both schools feed. This partnership would aid Criftins and Cockshutt in building a long-term view into their curricula. Criftins would bring capacity to the trust, being able to share its good practice with other Church schools.
- The board discussed the trusts governance, school improvement and pupil outcomes.
- There were discussions around the trusts finances and the plans they have in place, along with its articles of association.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Sarah Finch did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to a conflict of interest, which is CEO of Marches Academy Trust.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Project: An application from Cockshutt CofE Primary School and Nursery, Shropshire, to convert and become an academy and join Marches Academy Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Cockshutt CofE Primary School, Shropshire is an Ofsted “Good” school which has requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust.
- Marches Academy Trust is an eleven-school minority diocesan MAT operating in the Shropshire area.
- Cockshutt CofE Primary School and Nursery is federated with Criftins CofE Primary School in the Mere’s Edge Federation. An informal partnership already exists between the federation and the trust, and the schools would like to formalise this relationship by joining the trust. Marches Academy Trust includes secondary schools into which both primary schools feed. This partnership would aid Criftins and Cockshutt in building a long-term view into their curricula and Cockshutt would add primary capacity to the trust.
- The board discussed the trusts governance, school improvement and pupil outcomes.
- There were discussions around the trusts finances and the plans they have in place, along with its articles of association.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Sarah Finch did not receive any papers and did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to a conflict of interest, which is CEO of Marches Academy Trust.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Staffordshire

Establishing a new academy through the free school presumption route

Project: A proposal for a sponsor for St John’s Grange, Staffordshire.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Staffordshire County Council has identified the need to establish a new mainstream primary school to open September 2025. The new primary free school will have early years provision and be located on the St John's Grange housing development in the south of Lichfield.
- Over time, it is estimated that these developments will yield approximately 320 primary school-aged children and there are other smaller developments in the vicinity of the proposed new school that will generate additional children.
- 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.
- The board sought assurances around the trust's finances, locality and experience with Free Schools

RD decision: Approve in-principle.

Conflicts: Guy Shears did not participate in discussions or provide advice on this project due to a professional conflict of interest.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Birmingham

Trust Changes

Project: An application to form a new multi academy trust (MAT): Aston University STEM Education Academy Trust, Birmingham; and for Aston University Engineering Academy, Birmingham and Aston University Maths School, Birmingham to transfer into the new MAT.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- The Aston University Engineering Academy (AUEA), a UTC, and University of Aston have been awarded the Maths Free School for Birmingham to be known as Aston University Mathematics School and wish to operate the two settings within a new MAT.
- The Free school is to be developed directly over the road from the AUEA at 2 Lister Street and the development will allow AUEA to fund a further development of the Engineering academy in the same building.
- This MAT will look to join with other schools, academies, or MATs to develop an all through provision from Early Years to Sixth Form College.

- This is a voluntary transfer, and the new MAT is the UTC's (AUEA) preferred trust, due to shared ethos and values with Aston University and this includes the new Aston University Maths school that will open in 2025, and the two schools will create this new MAT.
- The board discussed governance and leadership, School Improvement and finances.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Walsall

Converter academy orders

Project: An application from Oakwood School, Walsall, to convert and become an academy and join The Mercian Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Oakwood School, Walsall is an Ofsted "Outstanding" school who have requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust.
- The Mercian Trust consists of 9 academies across Walsall and Sandwell.
- Oakwood Special School, along with Rushall Primary School make up the North Star Federation. Both schools have proposed to join the Mercian Trust. The North Star Federation also includes the North Star Inclusion Advisory Team which provides advice and training to schools to ensure pupil needs are met.
- The Trust is committed to extend its provision beyond mainstream settings and Oakwood will provide the Trust with that initial capacity. The Trust and the Federation have been operating collaboratively and the relationship is firmly established.
- The Mercian Trust is the federation's preferred trust, due to the proposed MAT's ethos and key values surrounding collaboration. In addition, the federation and trust have worked closely for over a year.
- The board discussed trust capacity and it's performance data.

RD decision: Approve.

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

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Project: An application from Rushall Primary School, Walsall, to convert and become an academy and join The Mercian Trust.

Representations received:

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

AB discussion:

- Rushall Primary School, Walsall is an Ofsted “Good” school who have requested to convert and join a Multi Academy Trust.
- The Mercian Trust consists of 9 academies across Walsall and Sandwell.
- Rushall Primary School, along with Oakwood Special School make up the North Star Federation. Both schools have proposed to join the Mercian Trust. The North Star Federation also includes the North Star Inclusion Advisory Team which provides advice and training to schools to ensure pupil needs are met.
- The Trust is committed to extend its provision beyond mainstream settings and Rushall will provide the Trust with that initial capacity. The Trust and the Federation have been operating collaboratively and the relationship is firmly established.
- The Mercian Trust is the federation’s preferred trust, due to the proposed MAT’s ethos and key values surrounding collaboration. In addition, the federation and trust have worked closely for over a year.
- The board discussed trust capacity and it’s performance data.

RD decision: Approve.

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

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust.

Decisions taken between AB meetings

List of decisions taken outside of AB meetings.

Significant changes to an open academy

Project: Ormiston SWB Academy, Ormiston Academies Trust, Wolverhampton

- To increase capacity at Ormiston SWB Academy from 1000 places to 1150 place from September 2025.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: None.

Project: Holy Rosary Catholic Primary Academy, St Francis and St Clare Catholic Multi Academy Company, Wolverhampton

- Change of age range from 4-11 to 3-11 including adding a nursery.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: None.

Project: Corley Academy, Thrive Education Partnership, Coventry

- Change of age range from 4-11 to 3-11 including adding a nursery.

RD decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: None.

Cases referred to ministers for a decision

List of decisions that have been made by the Director General of Regions Group and/or ministers.

Project: None.

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

Project: None.