



Department  
for Education

## Notes of meeting: East of England

Date of meeting: 22 May 2025

### 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

- Jonathan Duff

### Advisory Board (AB) members

- Lawrence Chapman
- Mark Farmer
- Clare Flintoff
- Al Kingsley
- Adrian Rogers
- Sarah Skinner
- Josephine Valentine

### Guests

- None

### Apologies

- Tim Coulson

### DfE senior civil servants

- None

## General discussion points

- The Regional Director gave some general national and regional updates and invited feedback from the board.
- The Regional Director informed the board about the region's upcoming reception-year quality conference.
- The board heard updates on the Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) team.
- The board considered Ofsted judgement outcomes for the previous month.

## Decisions

### Cambridgeshire

#### Trust Changes

**Project: An application for St Mary's Church of England Primary School St Neots [URN: 142034], Cambridgeshire, to transfer from Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust to ACT Multi Academy Trust.**

#### Representations received:

- No representations were made for this project.

#### AB discussion:

- St Mary's Church of England Primary School is located in St Neots, Cambridgeshire. The school has continued to maintain the standards identified at its previous inspection.
- The board was informed that this is voluntary transfer application to transfer St Mary's from Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust to ACT Multi Academy Trust. The voluntary transfer application is supported by both trust boards, the diocese and local authority.
- St Mary's had previously been considered for closure by the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust due to a decline in pupil numbers, which has made the school financially unviable, and concerns over performance.
- ACT Multi Academy Trust has undertaken due diligence and believes it can support keeping the school open by offering more tailored support. For example, the close proximity of another ACT academy, the introduction of an on-site nursery and wraparound care, utilisation of centralised functions, a reduction in top-slice costs and the recruitment of permanent staff.
- The board heard about the challenges around finances and reviewed the educational performance of ACT academies. It was noted that without an approved transfer, St Mary's would likely face closure.
- During the meeting, the Regional Director decided to defer the project and asked the delivery officer to discuss the feedback with the trust and consider other options with the diocese.

- Since the Advisory Board meeting, further information was provided to the Regional Director and the application was approved with a condition.

**Decision:** Approve with conditions

**Conflicts:** None

**Further actions required:** The delivery officer to inform the school and trusts of the decision and to work with them and SFSO on deploying a SRMA as a condition of the transfer.

## Essex

### Converter academy orders

**Project:** An application from Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School [URN: 115119], Essex, to convert and become an academy and join Berlesduna Academy Trust.

**Representations received:**

- No representations were made for this project.

**AB discussion:**

- Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School located in Billericay, Essex achieved strong performance outcomes in 2024 and is rated 'Good' by Ofsted under the previous reporting system.
- The board heard that the department is considering two significant changes outside of the Advisory Board meeting in addition to the voluntary conversion application for Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School.
- The board heard that Regions Group held a strategic conversation with the trust to review their educational performance and growth plans.
- The board heard that Berlesduna Academy Trust has been providing leadership and operational support to Downham with the level of support increasing since April 2023.
- The board heard there is parental confidence in Downham joining Berlesduna and both the diocese and local authority are supportive of the application.

**Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

**Further actions required:** Delivery officer to inform the school and the trust of the decision. Academy Order to be issued and LA to be informed of the decision.

## Decisions taken outside of AB meeting

List of decisions taken outside of AB meetings.

### Converter academy orders

**Project:** An application from Hopton CEVA Primary School [URN: 124703], Suffolk, to convert and become an academy and join Elveden Schools Trust.

**Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

**Further actions required:** Delivery officer to inform the school and the trust of the decision. Academy Order to be issued and LA to be informed of the decision.

### Significant changes to an open academy

**Project:** An application for Bedford Academy [URN: 136085], Heart Academies Trust, Bedfordshire, to make the following change:

- Expansion (increasing physical capacity) from 1440 to 1800 places

**Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

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

**Project:** An application for The Icknield Primary School [URN: 148454], Anglian Learning, Cambridgeshire, to change its age range from 4 to 11 to 2 to 11 and add a nursery.

**Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

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

**Project:** An application for St Mary's Church of England Primary School [URN: 147878], Berlesduna Academy Trust, Essex, to make the following change:

- adding a 4-place SEN unit or resourced provision

**Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

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

**Project: An application for St Nicholas Church of England Primary School [URN: 149617], Berlesduna Academy Trust, Essex, to make the following changes:**

- **expansion (increasing physical capacity) from 145 to 210 places**
- **change of age range from 5-11 to 3-11 and add a nursery**

**Decision:** Defer

**Conflicts:** None

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

**Project: An application for Saffron Walden County High School [URN: 136776], Saffron Academy Trust, Essex, to make the following change:**

- **adding a 40-place SEN unit or resourced provision**

**Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

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

**Project: An application for St Rose's Catholic Infant School [URN: 150799], All Saints Catholic Academy Trust, Hertfordshire, to change its age range from 3-7 to 2-7.**

**Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

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

## **Cases referred to ministers for a decision**

List of decisions that have been made by ministers.

**Project: An application for Brancaster CofE Primary Academy [URN: 148821] to merge with Docking Church of England Primary Academy and Nursery [URN:148822], both of the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust, Norfolk.**

**Minister Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

**Further actions required:** Feedback decision to schools / trust.

**Project: An application for Great Dunham Primary School [URN: 148668] to merge with Beeston Primary School [URN: 144317], both of Unity Education Trust, Norfolk.**

**Minister Decision:** Approve

**Conflicts:** None

**Further actions required:** Feedback decision to schools / trust.