



Department
for Education

Notes of meeting: East Midlands Advisory Board

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

- Carol Gray

Advisory Board (AB) members

- Sian Hampton
- Mark Thomas
- Paul Heery
- Paul West
- Julian Scholefield
- Ash Rahman

Guests

- None

Apologies

- Chris Wheatley

DfE senior civil servants

- Kelly Hughes, Deputy Director, East Midlands Regions Group

General discussion points

- No discussion points were raised

Decisions

Derbyshire

Converter academy orders

Project: An application for Sudbury Primary School, URN:112631, Derbyshire, to convert and become an academy and join ACE Derbyshire Trust.

Points raised in discussion:

Sudbury Primary School seeks to voluntarily convert to academy status and join ACE Derbyshire Trust. A resolution has been passed by the school's governing body and supported by ACE Derbyshire's board. ACE Derbyshire Trust is a diocesan trust. Although the school does not have a faith designation, the Diocese of Derby has formally expressed its written support for the partnership.

Sudbury Primary School is a small, rural community school in Derbyshire Dales. In June 2023, the school received a full Ofsted inspection resulting in a "Requires Improvement" judgement across all areas.

In joining ACE Derbyshire Trust, Sudbury will benefit from strengthened collaboration, access to professional networks, and targeted school improvement support. The trust has already been working with the school since autumn 2024, providing pro bono assistance in areas such as curriculum development, safeguarding, leadership coaching, and the establishment of a new nursery provision.

The governors at Sudbury Primary School are confident that ACE Derbyshire has the capacity and local expertise to support the school's improvement journey and long-term sustainability.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the trust, as outlined in the High-Quality Trust Framework, was considered against the school's strategic needs.

Decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Representations received: No representations were received for this project.

Further action required: Feedback decision to the school/trust and Derbyshire Local Authority.

Project: An application from Highfield Hall Primary School, URN:112667, Derbyshire, to convert and become an academy and join Learners' Trust.

Points raised in discussion:

Highfield Hall Primary School seeks to voluntarily convert to academy status and join Learners' Trust. A resolution has been passed by the school's governing body and supported by Learners' Trust. The school has also completed its consultation process.

Highfield Hall is a large community primary school located in Chesterfield, Derbyshire. It caters to pupils aged 3 to 11 and includes nursery provision. In February 2025, the school received an ungraded Section 8 Ofsted inspection, which indicated that aspects of the school's work may no longer be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection. The school was previously judged "Good" in 2016 and again in 2019.

In joining Learners' Trust, Highfield Hall will benefit from strengthened curriculum implementation, improved attendance strategies, and enhanced leadership development. The school has already been working in close partnership with the trust since autumn 2023, receiving support in areas such as curriculum planning, SEN funding, staffing structure, and CPD.

The governors at Highfield Hall are confident that Learners' Trust has the capacity and expertise to support the school's improvement journey. The trust has a strong track record of school improvement, with 17 of its 18 schools rated "Good" or "Outstanding" by Ofsted.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the trust, as outlined in the High-Quality Trust Framework, was considered against the school's strategic needs.

Decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Representations received: No representations were received for this project.

Further action required: Feedback decision to the school/trust and Derbyshire Local Authority.

North Northamptonshire

Trust changes

Caveat: The following 5 projects were discussed as one proposal. The Advisory Board discussion summary follows at the end of the 5 projects listed.

- An application for Hawthorn Community Primary School, URN:146905, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Pathfinder Schools to Symphony Learning Trust.
- An application for Loatlands Primary School, URN:140059, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Pathfinder Schools to Symphony Learning Trust.
- An application for Havelock Infant School, URN:140051, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Pathfinder Schools to Symphony Learning Trust.
- An application for Havelock Junior School, URN:140054, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Pathfinder Schools to Symphony Learning Trust.
- An application for Rushton Primary School, URN:140074, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Pathfinder Schools to Symphony Learning Trust.

Points raised in discussion:

Five primary schools from Pathfinder Schools Trust—Havelock Infant School, Havelock Junior School, Loatlands Primary School, Rushton Primary School, and Hawthorn Community Primary School - are seeking to voluntarily transfer to Symphony Learning Trust. If approved, this transfer will form part of the wider dissolution of Pathfinder Schools Trust and represents a strategic consolidation of provision in North Northamptonshire.

All five schools are primary academies currently rated “Good” or “Outstanding” by Ofsted. The schools serve pupils aged between 3 and 11 and are located within the Kettering parliamentary constituency. The schools have varying levels of pupil need, with some showing high levels of persistent absence and others requiring support to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

The decision to transfer follows Pathfinder’s resolution to close the trust due to challenges in leadership, governance, and financial management. School leaders and governing bodies undertook a comprehensive engagement process, including site visits and strategic discussions, and unanimously selected Symphony Learning Trust as their preferred destination.

Symphony Learning Trust is recognised for its strong school improvement strategy, inclusive education ethos, and collaborative culture. The trust has a proven track record of improving outcomes, particularly in phonics and Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing, and Maths. It also demonstrates strong operational capacity, having recently onboarded three schools and proactively expanded its central team to support further growth.

The schools believe they will benefit from Symphony’s strengths in curriculum coherence, subject leadership, data-driven improvement, and inclusive practice. The transfer will also enable greater collaboration and shared expertise.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to Symphony Learning Trust, as outlined in the High-Quality Trust Framework, was considered against the strategic needs of the schools.

Decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Representations received: No representations were received for this project.

Further action required: Feedback decision to the schools/trusts and North Northamptonshire Local Authority.

Caveat: The following 2 projects were discussed as one proposal. The Advisory Board discussion summary follows at the end of the 2 projects listed.

- An application for Wilbarston Church of England Primary School, URN:140094, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Pathfinder Schools to The David Ross Education Trust.
- An application for Naseby Church of England Primary Academy, URN:140736, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Pathfinder Schools to The David Ross Education Trust.

Points raised in discussion:

Naseby Church of England Primary Academy and Wilbarston Church of England Primary School are seeking to voluntarily transfer to The David Ross Education Trust. If approved, this transfer will form part of the wider dissolution of Pathfinder Schools Trust and represents a strategic move to secure the long-term sustainability of two small church schools.

Both schools are primary academies located in North Northamptonshire and part of the Diocese of Peterborough. They serve pupils aged 4 to 11 and are currently operating well below capacity, with viability concerns due to low pupil numbers. Despite these challenges, both schools have maintained “Good” Ofsted ratings, with Wilbarston’s Early Years provision rated “Outstanding” and Naseby receiving “Outstanding” for behaviour and attitudes.

The decision to transfer follows Pathfinder’s resolution to close the trust due to leadership, governance, and financial challenges. The Diocese and Pathfinder jointly recommended The David Ross Education Trust as the preferred sponsor, citing the trust’s experience with small schools, strong SEND provision, and strategic capacity.

The David Ross Education Trust has a proven track record in supporting schools with similar profiles and has demonstrated success in improving attendance, curriculum coherence, and pupil outcomes. Both schools are expected to benefit from enhanced leadership support, professional development opportunities, and access to a wider network of resources and expertise.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to The David Ross Education Trust, as outlined in the High-Quality Trust Framework, was considered against the strategic needs of the schools.

Decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Representations received: One representation was received in relation to ‘An application for Wilbarston Church of England Primary School, URN:140094, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Pathfinder Schools to The David Ross Education Trust’. When received in time, representations are shared in advance with the RD and the AB members, who consider them when providing advice to RDs.

Further action required: Feedback decision to the schools/trusts and North Northamptonshire Local Authority

Nottingham / Nottinghamshire / Derbyshire

Trust changes

Caveat: The following 6 projects were discussed as one proposal. The Advisory Board discussion summary follows at the end of the 6 projects listed.

- An application for Ironville and Codnor Park Primary School, URN:144607, Derbyshire, to transfer from Shine Multi Academy Trust to Aspire Multi-Academy Trust.
- An application for John Hunt Academy, URN:148284, Nottinghamshire, to transfer from Shine Multi Academy Trust to Aspire Multi-Academy Trust.
- An application for Langold Dyscarr Community School, URN:146963, Nottinghamshire, to transfer from Shine Multi Academy Trust to Aspire Multi-Academy Trust.
- An application for Ranskill Primary School, URN:143797, Nottinghamshire, to transfer from Shine Multi Academy Trust to Aspire Multi-Academy Trust.
- An application for Scotholme Primary and Nursery School, URN:143796, Nottingham, to transfer from Shine Multi Academy Trust to Aspire Multi-Academy Trust.
- An application for Whitemoor Academy (Primary and Nursery), URN:138663, Nottingham, to transfer from Shine Multi Academy Trust to Aspire Multi-Academy Trust.

Points raised in discussion:

Shine Multi Academy Trust is seeking to voluntarily transfer all six of its open academies to Aspire Multi-Academy Trust. If approved, this will result in the closure of Shine MAT and the expansion of Aspire MAT to a 15-school trust serving over 3,200 pupils across Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Nottingham.

The six schools involved in the transfer are:

- Ironville and Codnor Park Primary School
- John Hunt Academy
- Langold Dyscarr Community School
- Ranskill Primary School
- Scotholme Primary and Nursery School
- Whitemoor Academy (Primary and Nursery)

All six schools are primary academies, currently rated “Good” by Ofsted, and serve diverse communities with varying levels of need. Several schools face viability challenges due to low pupil numbers or persistent absence rates, while others demonstrate strong performance and capacity for growth.

The decision to transfer follows Shine MAT’s strategic review and the departure of its substantive CEO. The trust identified Aspire MAT as the preferred destination due to its strong track record in primary education, financial stability, and shared ethos. Aspire MAT’s CEO has also been serving as interim CEO of Shine MAT, facilitating a smooth transition.

Aspire MAT has committed to implementing a hub-based leadership model post-transfer, strengthening local collaboration and support. The trust has demonstrated capacity to improve attendance, curriculum coherence, and outcomes, particularly in schools with high levels of disadvantage or SEND.

The governors and leadership teams of both trusts are confident that the merger will enhance school improvement capacity, operational resilience, and strategic leadership.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to Aspire MAT, as outlined in the High-Quality Trust Framework, was considered against the strategic needs of the schools.

Decision: Approve.

Conflicts: Sian Hampton. Sian is the former CEO of Archway Learning Trust. Sian was conflicted as this discussion involved other diocesan trusts in Southwell and Nottingham. Sian was not in attendance for this part of the meeting, nor was she in receipt of associated project papers.

Representations received: No representations were received for this project.

Further action required: Feedback decision to the schools/trusts and Nottingham, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Local Authorities.

Academy opening approved in principle

List of academies approved to open the following month.

Project: Bridge Street School.

Points raised in discussion: Proposed school opening date – 1 November 2025.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: No action required.

Project: Hunsbury Park Primary School.

Points raised in discussion: Proposed school opening date – 1 November 2025.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: No action required.

Project: Arkwright Primary School.

Points raised in discussion: Proposed school opening date – 1 November 2025.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: No action required.

Project: Castle School.

Points raised in discussion: Proposed school opening date – 1 November 2025.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: No action required.

Project: Priory Junior School

Points raised in discussion: Proposed school opening date – 1 November 2025.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: No action required.

Project: Ridgeway primary School.

Points raised in discussion: Proposed school opening date – 1 November 2025.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: No action required.

Project: Kingsmead School.

Points raised in discussion: Proposed school opening date – 1 November 2025.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: No action required.

Project: Phoenix Infant and Nursery School.

Points raised in discussion: Proposed school opening date – 1 November 2025.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: No action required.

Decisions taken outside of AB meeting

List of decisions taken outside of AB meetings.

Significant changes to an open academy

Project: An application from Bishop Alexander LEAD Academy, URN:140544 (L.E.A.D Academy Trust), Nottinghamshire, to make the following change/s: change of age range (including adding or removing a nursery or sixth form provision) from 3 - 11 to 4 – 11.

Decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school, trust and to Nottinghamshire Council.

Project: An application for Daventry Hill School, URN:142783 (Creating Tomorrow Multi Academy Trust), West Northamptonshire, to make the following significant

change/s: Increasing the number of pupils from 200 to 230 pupils within an existing SEN unit or resourced provision.

Decision: Approve.

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school, trust and to West Northamptonshire Council.

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

Trust changes

Project: An application for Magdalen College School, URN:139158, North Northamptonshire, to transfer from Magdalen College School Brackley Academy Trust to EPA Trust.

Reason for removal: The project was not discussed as further information is being sought to inform future consideration.

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