



Department
for Education

Notes of meeting: South East Advisory Board

20 November 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

- Kate Dethridge

Advisory Board (AB) members

- Sue Samson
- Claire Lowe
- Paul James
- Stuart Gardner
- Sarah Bennett
- Sarah Brown

Guests

- None

Apologies

- None

DfE senior civil servants

- Paul Schofield

General discussion points

- No discussion points were raised.

Decisions

West Sub-Region

Converter academy orders

Project: To discuss the application from John Watson School, Oxfordshire, to convert and become an academy and join Propeller Academy Trust

Representations received:

- No representations were made for this project.

AB discussion:

- AB members queried if there was any special school data to benchmark against
- Members agreed that this was a positive application for the school.
- School Improvement Strategy was discussed and considered to be positive.
- The reasons for the school running at a deficit was discussed and it was clarified why this was deliberate, with a surplus available.
- Leadership at the school is now considered stable, following improvements.
- Propeller's outward facing approach was viewed positively.

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

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

Kent, Medway and Surrey Sub Region

Project: To discuss the application for the transfer of Sandwich Technology School (SAT), Kent, to Inicio Educational Trust (MAT).

Representations received:

- One representation was received for this project
- When received in time, representations are shared in advance with the RD and the AB members, who considered them when providing advice to RDs.

AB discussion:

- The board considered Sandwich Technology School's (STS) recently published Ofsted monitoring report noting that whilst leaders have made progress to improve the school, more work is necessary for the school to no longer be judged as requiring special measures.
- The board recognised Inicio Educational Trust's (IET) strengths including overall trust performance, financial position, governance and its commitment to STS.
- The board discussed that, whilst IET schools are all good, it does not yet have a successful track record in improving underperforming schools.

- The board considered performance at Charles Darwin School (IET), acknowledging the time the school had been in the trust.
- The high level of deprivation in STS's local area was considered. The number of pupils eligible for FSM is much higher at Sandwich than IET's existing schools.
- The board raised concerns relating to STS being isolated from the main trust (at distance of approximately 71 miles), and the trust's potentially limited scope for growth in the local area.
- The board discussed the compounded risk of the IET's inexperience in improving underperforming schools and the distance between the two trusts.
- The board sought assurance that alternative strong trust options were available.

Decision: Decline

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Feedback decision to the school/trust and local authority detailing the rationale for deciding.

Decisions taken outside of AB meeting

List of decisions taken outside of AB meetings.

Converter Academy Order

Project: Wickhambreaux Church of England Primary School, Kent, to convert and join Deal Education Alliance for Learning Trust.

Decision: Approve with conditions

- School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) to be deployed to the trust.

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, diocese and local authority.

Project: Grayshott Church of England Controlled Primary School, Hampshire, to convert and join The Good Shepherd Trust.

Decision: Decline

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, diocese and local authority.

Project: Churchill Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Kent, to convert and join Aquinas Church of England Trust.

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, diocese and local authority.

Project: Worplesdon Primary School, Surrey, to convert and join South Farnham Educational Trust.

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, and local authority.

Project: Wood Street Infant School, Surrey, to convert and join South Farnham Educational Trust.

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, and local authority.

Project: Burford School, Buckinghamshire, to convert and join Marlow Education Trust

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, and local authority.

Project: Marlow Infant School, Buckinghamshire, to convert and join Marlow Education Trust

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, and local authority.

Significant Change

Project: Pluckley Church of England Primary School, The Kemnal Academies Trust, Kent, to make the following changes:

- Change of age range (including adding or removing a nursery or sixth form provision)

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, diocese and local authority.

Project: Europa School UK, Oxfordshire, to make the following changes:

- Expansion (increasing physical capacity including increasing sixth forms and nurseries)

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, and local authority.

Project: St Michael's CofE Primary School, Abingdon Learning Trust, Oxfordshire, to make the following changes:

- Change of age range (including adding or removing a nursery or sixth form provision)

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None.

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, diocese and local authority.

Cases referred to ministers for a decision

List of decisions that have been made by ministers.

Project: Bradstow School, Kent, to convert and join Cygnus Academies Trust

Minister Decision: Decline

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Inform the school/trust, and local authority.

Academy opening approved in principle

List of academies approved to open the following month.

St Crispin's Community Primary Infant School, The Stour Academy Trust, Kent.

Points raised: N/A.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: Inform the school/trust, diocese and local authority.

St Philip's Catholic Primary School, Arundel, Bosco Catholic Education Trust, West Sussex.

Points raised: N/A.

Conflicts: None.

Further action required: Inform the school/trust, diocese and local authority.