



Notes of meeting: South West Advisory Board

Date of meeting: 23 February 2026

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

- Lucy Livings - Regional Director, South West Region

Advisory Board (AB) members

- Adele Haysom
- Margaret Simmons-Bird
- Jennifer Blunden
- Mark Ducker
- Steve Savory
- Rachel Howie
- Stuart Ingram
- Jackie Fieldwick

Guests

- None

Apologies

- None

DfE senior civil servants

- Jessica Trahar – Deputy Director, South West Region

General discussion points

- Lucy Livings, RD presented to the board on the Regions Group and government priorities.

Decisions

Devon

Trust Changes

Project: A proposal for The Promise School (URN 149041), Devon from Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust to transfer to Wave Multi Academy Trust.

Representations received:

- No representations were made for this project.

AB discussion:

- The Promise School is a 4–16 special free school, and supports pupils with identified SEMH needs, many of whom also have additional needs.
- In June 2025, Ofsted placed the school in special measures, identifying significant weaknesses in leadership, curriculum, and behaviour management, this resulted in a termination warning notice being issued.
- Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (DMAT) has taken steps to address the issues identified by Ofsted, but the trust continues to face challenges.
- Wave MAT runs eight regional alternative provision academies, two medical provision academies, and a specialist academy for pupils with social communication and interaction needs. It has a strong record of high quality SEMH and complex needs provision, supported by effective leadership, governance, and therapeutic safeguarding and behaviour systems.
- After the Special Measures judgement, DMAT formalised external school improvement support by Wave MAT
- The transfer from Dartmoor MAT to Wave MAT will secure high quality, sustainable SEMH provision and enable the school to realise its original vision of providing a safe, aspirational environment where pupils can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.
- The board members considered the details of the project and did not raise any concerns/comments in relation to the recommendation.
- It was noted that, following the significant fire at The Promise School on Sunday 22 February, both trusts must continue working to ensure pupils' education is maintained. Regions Group will work closely with all parties to ensure plans are robust and continuity of learning is secured.

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Gloucestershire

Trust Changes

Project: A proposal for Abbey View (URN 139660), Gloucestershire from CCT Learning (SAT) to transfer to Aspire Schools.

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:

- Abbey View is an Alternative Provision (AP) SAT located in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire. The school was rated Requires Improvement at their last Ofsted inspection May 2024.
- Since March 2024, Trustees at Abbey View have explored joining a MAT, considering several local trusts before approaching Aspire Schools to provide support to the school, and as a trust to merge into.
- Through a service level agreement Aspire has provided CEO oversight, as well as HR, Finance, IT, Payroll, and School Improvement functions for the purpose of strengthening governance, leadership capacity, and curriculum development.
- Aspire have provided support over the past year and established positive relationships with local schools and the LA, leading to increased commissioning.
- Aspire's footprint is 81 miles from Abbey View. Aspire provide outreach support to organisations in the South East and West Midlands.
- AB members discussed the risk of geographical distance between the two organisations and the operational, financial and logistical challenges of running a trust of the proposed size and footprint.

Decision: Defer for the two trusts to consider how the proposal could be more geographically coherent working with provision around Abbey View.

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

North Somerset

Trust Changes

Project: A proposal for the following four academies from The Priory Learning Trust to merge with Castle School Education Trust:

- Castle Batch Primary School Academy (URN 145630), **North Somerset**
- Priory Community School (URN 137300), **North Somerset**
- St Anne's Church Academy (URN 145631), **North Somerset**

- Worle Community School (URN 143137), **North Somerset**

Representations received: ** all projects for The Priory Learning Trust merge were discussed together.

- No representations were made for this project.

AB discussion:

- Refer to the notes for Somerset

Decision: Approve with conditions

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Somerset

Trust Changes

Project: A proposal for the following seven academies from The Priory Learning Trust to merge with Castle School Education Trust:

- Berrow Primary Church Academy (URN 149851), **Somerset**
- Burnham-On-Sea Infant School (URN 150952), **Somerset**
- East Huntspill Primary Academy (URN 148023), **Somerset**
- Pawlett Primary School Academy (URN 147015), **Somerset**
- St Andrew's Church Junior School (URN 150953), **Somerset**
- King Alfred School An Academy (URN 146439), **Somerset**
- West Huntspill Primary Academy (URN 148531), **Somerset**

Representations received: ** all projects for The Priory Learning Trust merge were discussed together.

- No representations were made for this project.

AB discussion:

- This is a voluntary proposal from The Priory Learning Trust (TPLT) and Castle School Education Trust (CSET), to merge and restructure, combining their respective strengths to form a single MAT and enhance the overall offer for children.
- The proposed trust would include 20 academies (14 primary and 6 secondary) across Somerset, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. With three Church of England primary schools, the trust's vision and values would align with Church of England educational principles, supported by the Diocese of Bath and Wells.
- The merger would create a larger, more resilient trust with shared values and complementary strengths, offering a strong platform for raising standards. It would also increase capacity to improve vulnerable schools through stronger SEND and disadvantage support, a more coherent curriculum, and better operational resilience.

- This proposal builds on a collaborative culture established through sustained joint working between TPLT and CSET from 2023.
- The growth strategy of the trust was discussed. Regions Group will discuss growth plans with the trust and make future growth decisions based on the High-Quality Trust Framework as well as considering clear and sustained improvement in KS2 and KS4 attainment, as well as in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils across the newly merged trust.
- The Trust's school improvement model was discussed and the importance of this developing as the trust grows. It was recommended that the Trust undertakes a review of the school improvement model and how to develop this in line with trust growth to ensure it is clear on their ambitions for outcomes and key milestones.
- AB members questioned the proposed board and leadership structures. They highlighted the need for stronger educational expertise, questioned the viability of a model with so many directors, and reducing the board size while planning six sub-committees. It is considered more work is needed to ensure governance and leadership can operate effectively in a larger trust.

Decision: Approve with conditions

- CSET and TPLT to commission an external review of school improvement and submit it to Regions Group at least three months before the transfer. Regions Group to agree the choice of reviewer in advance, and the review should be carried out by a strong trust with a proven record of improving results across phases, including for disadvantaged pupils.
- CSET and TPLT must commission an external review of governance. Before commissioning, the trusts must share their proposed reviewer with Regions Group and obtain approval.

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: A proposal for the following six academies from Beacon Education MAT Ltd to merge with Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership:

- Danesfield Church of England Voluntary Controlled Middle School (URN 140631), **Somerset**
- Minehead First School (URN 142800), **Somerset**
- Minehead Middle School (URN 136774), **Somerset**
- Old Cleeve Church of England First School (URN 140636), **Somerset**
- St Michael's Church of England First School (URN 142819), **Somerset**
- St Peter's Church of England First School (URN 140645), **Somerset**

Representations received:

- No representations were made for this project.

AB discussion:

- This is a voluntary application for Beacon Education Trust (BET) to transfer all its academies into Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership (MNSP).
- BET operates in and around Minehead, Washford and Williton in West Somerset, a geographically remote area in the South West.
- Regions Group has been working with BET for several years due to poor educational performance, as well as issues related to governance, leadership, and safeguarding. Minehead Middle School, Minehead First School and Danesfield Middle School have all been subject to formal intervention.
- MNSP is a high-quality trust that has a strong track record of transforming vulnerable schools into successful educational establishments – delivering strong standards and maintaining secure finances. MNSP is committed to strengthening cohesion across the West Somerset community, with better transitions and collaboration to overcome the challenges specific to the area.
- MNSP has been working with BET for over 12 months and has a good understanding of the geographic area and the specific needs of the schools.
- The board members considered the details of the project and did not raise any concerns/comments in relation to the recommendation.

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: A proposal for the following seven academies from Bridgwater & Taunton College Trust to merge with Quantock Education Trust:

- Bridgwater College Academy (URN 138375), **Somerset**
- Brookside Community Primary School (URN 136848), **Somerset**
- Brymore Academy (URN 139655), **Somerset**
- Hamp Academy (URN 139717), **Somerset**
- Maiden Beech Academy (URN 137118), **Somerset**
- Otterhampton Primary School (URN 146243), **Somerset**
- Stanchester Academy (URN 137080), **Somerset**

Representations received:

- No representations were made for this project.

AB discussion:

- This is a voluntary merger between two Somerset trusts, Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust (BTCT) and Quantock Education Trust (QET) which have been collaborating since early 2025 to align their schools and strengthen their combined educational offer.
- Seven of the BTCT academies will transfer to BET. West Somerset College has been approved to transfer to Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership.

- The merged trust will be led by a CEO with a Deputy CEO / Director of Education and a Director of Primary. The trust is still working to finalise key areas.
- AB members discussed the proposed trust board structure and highlighted the value of increasing representation from individuals with educational expertise to strengthen both support and the quality of challenge.
- AB members asked about the support planned for the CEO and senior leadership team, recommending that the trust seek guidance from a trust and CEO with prior experience of managing a merger of this scale.
- The Trust's school improvement model was discussed and the importance of this developing as the trust grows. It was recommended that the Trust undertakes a review of the school improvement model and how to develop this in line with trust growth to ensure it is clear on their ambitions for outcomes and key milestones.
- The growth strategy of the trust was discussed. Regions Group will discuss growth plans with the trust and make future growth decisions based on the High-Quality Trust Framework.

Decision: Approve with conditions

- The trusts to provide a clear plan at prior to the date of the merger laying out the details of key appointments and models across executive leadership, school improvement and governance arrangements.
- The trust to commission an external review of school improvement, focusing on the revised SI model and the integration of BTCT/QET schools.
- The trust to commission an external governance review to ensure roles are filled by individuals with appropriate skills - particularly primary expertise and finances - to hold School Improvement Leads, the CFO and CEO to account.
- BTCT and QET to submit a draft budget forecast to Schools Financial Support and Oversight (SFSO). QET must also provide SFSO with a detailed financial plan for the boarding provision at Sexey's School.

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: A proposal for West Somerset College (URN 136791), Somerset from Bridgwater & Taunton College Trust to transfer to Midsomer Norton School Partnership.

Representations received:

- No representations were made for this project.

AB discussion:

- The board members considered the details of the project and did not raise any concerns/comments in relation to the recommendation.

Decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Academy opening approved in principle

List of academies approved to open the following month.

This is a list of schools expected to open on the first of the month following the date of this planned meeting. They must have been given agreement in principle to open.

Project: Tiverton High School, Devon (Blackdown Education Partnership)

Points raised in discussion: No questions or concerns were raised.

Opening date 1 March 2026

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: The Purbeck School, Dorset (Wessex Multi Academy Trust) to make the following change:

- retrospective change to add a 14 place SEN unit for pupils with communication and interaction needs

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: Mulberry Park Educate Together Primary Academy, Bath and North East Somerset (Educate Together Academy Trust) to make the following change:

- to add a SEMH resource base

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: Blandford St Mary Church of England Primary School, Dorset (Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust) to make the following change:

- to change the age range from 4-11 to 2-11 to add nursery provision

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: St Bartholomew's Primary Academy, Wiltshire (Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust) to make the following change:

- to change the age range from 4-11 to 2-11 to add nursery provision

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: North Star 265°, Bristol, City of (North Star Academy Trust) to make the following change:

- to change the age range from 8 -16 to 5 -16

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: Henbury Court Primary Academy, Bristol, City of (Amplify Education) to make the following change:

- to add a resource base for pupils with Communication and Interaction needs, particularly ASC and SLCN

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: Marpool Primary Academy, Devon (Cornerstone Academy Trust) to make the following change:

- to change the age range from 3 - 11 to 0 - 11

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

Project: St Thomas of Canterbury CofE Primary School, Devon (Chulmleigh Academy Trust) to make the following change:

- to change the age range from 2 - 11 to 0 - 11

RD decision: Approve

Conflicts: None

Further actions required: Delivery officer to inform the schools, trust and Diocese (where relevant).

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

None

© Crown copyright 2026