



Department
for Education

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Date: 1 June 2026

Mr Woodroffe
Chair of Trustees
Queen Elizabeth's Grammar Alford - A Selective Academy
Station Road,
Alford,
LN13 9HY

Dear Michael Woodroffe,

Notice to improve: Queen Elizabeth's Grammar Alford - A Selective Academy

We are writing to you in your capacity as the Chair of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar Alford - A Selective Academy (the trust), to inform you that the Department for Education (the department) has assessed that the trust's breaches of the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) relating to financial management, governance and failure to meet the conditions of the warning letter dated 9 October 2024 are significant enough to warrant a Notice to Improve. On that basis, we are issuing the trust with a Notice to Improve on financial governance and management grounds.

As you know, the department has been monitoring the trust's progress towards meeting the actions set out in [REDACTED] letter of 9 October 2024. We recognise the cooperation and extensive discussions that continue to take place between the trust and officials. However, our concerns remain in relation to the weak financial position and financial management at the trust.

This letter and its annexes serve as a written Notice to Improve financial management at the trust (Notice to Improve or "the Notice"). It reflects the weak financial position of the trust and continued concerns on governance and oversight of financial management by the Board.

The trust is required, pursuant to the provisions of the ATH and the Funding Agreement (FA), to comply with the conditions of this Notice. These conditions are set out in Annex A and B.

Being issued with a Notice means that certain delegated authorities, as defined in the ATH, are revoked. All transactions previously covered by these delegations, regardless of their size, must now be approved in advance by the department, specifically:

- special staff severance payments
- compensation payments
- writing off debts and losses
- entering into guarantees, indemnities, or letters of comfort
- disposals of fixed assets beyond any limit in the FA
- taking up a leasehold or tenancy agreement on land and buildings of a duration beyond any limit in the trust's FA
- carry forward of unspent GAG from one year to the next beyond any limit in the FA
- pooling of GAG

If the trust seeks retrospective approval from the department this will be deemed a breach of the ATH. Further details of the approval process will be forwarded to the trust's Accounting Officer upon acknowledgment of receipt of this letter. These delegated authorities shall be returned to the trust once we are satisfied that the requirements of the Notice have been, and will continue to be, complied with to the satisfaction of the Secretary of State.

The department will monitor progress made towards meeting the requirements of this Notice and will keep us updated through regular case reviews. A decision to lift the Notice will be taken when we are satisfied the conditions and/or requirements set out in the Annexes have been met in full.

We will support the trust as it implements the required changes through regular contact and clear routes of escalation to resolve any questions or queries you might have. However, if the trust is unable to deliver the necessary improvement and fails to make sufficient progress against the original conditions, we reserve the right to issue a revised Notice and add further specific conditions. Should it become evident that the trust is unlikely to fulfil the conditions and/or requirements set out in this Notice and/or within the agreed timescales, we will explore the contractual intervention options available.

In the event that the trust fails to meet the conditions and/or requirements of this Notice to our satisfaction, it will be considered to have failed to comply with the terms of the ATH. Failure to comply will be deemed a FA breach and may lead to its termination.

If continued non-compliance with the ATH occurs, we may also refer the case to the Charity Commission and/or Insolvency Service for further investigation, as deemed appropriate in the circumstances.

We should be grateful if you would **acknowledge receipt of this letter** by email within three working days of the date of this letter to [REDACTED], who will be your main point of contact related to this Notice. In line with the requirements set out in our publishing policy, the trust has 10 working days to offer any final comments on factual accuracy to department colleagues before publication. The trust is required to publish the Notice on its website within 14 days of it being published on gov.uk and retain it there until the Notice is lifted. The trust will be notified of the date the Ntl is published.

We recognise that this may be an uncertain time for the trust and its staff. We are mindful of creating additional pressures on individuals involved. Therefore, we ask the trust to

ensure appropriate provision is in place to support all its staff, as necessary. You may find the Education staff wellbeing charter¹ helpful.

We will continue to keep clear and regular lines of communication open with you. As such, [REDACTED], will be in contact shortly to answer any questions you may have, and to discuss the next steps in more detail including any support the trust may require to drive the necessary improvements.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Nigel Minns
Regional Director for East Midlands, Department for Education



Gavin Davies
Interim Director, Schools Financial Support & Oversight, Regions Group,
Department for Education

CC. Glen Thompson, Accounting Officer

Member: John Bennet Chappelle

Member: Julia Kay Barker

Member: Justin Gatenby

¹ Education staff wellbeing charter: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter>

Annex A

Notice to Improve

This Notice to Improve (the 'Notice') is a consequence of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar Alford - A Selective Academy (the 'trust')

- *Failing to maintain robust oversight of the academy trust, including the cash position, bringing into doubt its ability to operate as a going concern as required in the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) paragraphs 1.21, 2.8 - 2.10, and 2.21.*

Conditions

- The trust is required to comply with all conditions set out in Annex B.

Financial management and governance requirements

- The trust is responsible for its own financial management, control and governance and is expected to take appropriate action to strengthen the weaknesses identified and return to compliance with the ATH.
- The trust should take all appropriate actions to ensure the action plan agreed with the department to meet the conditions and/or requirements set out in this Notice is fully implemented.
- The department must be satisfied that the trust is doing everything it can to rectify the weaknesses identified.

Monitoring and progress

- The trust is required to submit the evidence for the specific conditions to the timescales outlined in Annex B to enable the department to monitor compliance and progress.
- Should it become evident that the trust is unlikely to fulfil the conditions and / or requirements set out in this Notice and / or within the given timescales, the department will begin to consider and explore the contractual intervention options available.

Compliance and the end of the notice period

- As outlined in Annex B, the trust is required to submit evidence to demonstrate compliance with the conditions of this notice, which the department will use to monitor the trust's progress. Annex B sets out the detail of the evidence required to fulfil the conditions and the timescales to submit this evidence to the department.
- When the trust meets all the conditions outlined in this Notice, is fully compliant with the most recent edition of the ATH and no other breaches have been identified, we will write to the trust to confirm that the Notice has been lifted.

Annex B -Table of Conditions

	Condition applied	Action/evidence required from trust	By when
1	<p>The trust is required to:</p> <p>Prepare and submit a trust Financial Recovery Plan.</p> <p>The Financial Recovery Plan must, as a minimum:</p> <p>i. Submit a credible plan confirming which of the SRMA’s recommendations will be implemented, and how</p> <p>ii. Include a programme of Integrated Curriculum and Financial Planning (ICFP) and implement its findings.</p>	<p>The plan should be agreed by the trust board and externally validated by an independent expert (such as those available at the Association of School and College Leaders, the National Association of Head Teachers, or the Institute of School Business Leaders).</p> <p>The plan must include, as a minimum:</p> <p>i. How the trust will achieve a balanced budget for 2026/27 and maintain this each year thereafter. This must be supported by robust budget forecasts through to 2028/29 and detail of assumptions used to support the figures.</p> <p>ii. Evidence to support realistic pupil number forecasts contained in the plan.</p> <p>iii. Demonstration of how the trust will achieve the intended SRMA outcomes, such as financial recovery, financial sustainability, improved financial governance, and staffing structures.</p> <p>iv. A clear efficiency and savings plan setting out specific areas where further savings can be made across the trust (considering SRMA recommendations and ICFP findings).</p> <p>v. A cashflow forecast for an 18-month upcoming period.</p> <p>vi. Include detailed explanations of savings made against the</p>	<p>Plan to be shared with the department once validated by an independent expert by 10 July 2026.</p> <p>This should provide details to the department of the actions, timings, and savings to be achieved.</p> <p>Provide monthly updates to the department on the actions taken by 20th of the month.</p>

	Condition applied	Action/evidence required from trust	By when
		SRMA findings including the sixth form findings.	
2	The trust must submit monthly management accounts, cashflow forecasts and the risk and issues register.	<p>A copy of monthly management accounts including cashflow, copies of latest bank statement and aged creditors and debtors to be sent to the department, plus copy of the risk & issues register, with changes highlighted.</p> <p>Management accounts must be compliant with the relevant section of the ATH 2.18 to 2.21.</p> <p>The management reports must be submitted to the department by 20th of the month, until further notice. The frequency of reports thereafter will be determined by the department, based on progress against the recovery plan.</p> <p>If the reports are going to be late, the trust must notify the department setting out the reason for the delay.</p> <p>These should be agreed by the trust board before sharing with the department.</p> <p>The trust must also provide a list of aged creditors and legal notices to the department each month or when new information is received with a plan with deadlines to demonstrate when and how these will be paid.</p>	Copies sent to the department monthly, from June 2026 by the 20th of the month.
3	The trust must ensure all financial recovery proceeds at pace and within the agreed timeline, to ensure robust financial governance (as	As part of the monthly management account submission to the department, the trust must provide evidence it is expediting efficiencies to bring in-year savings, including staff restructuring to secure future efficiencies and budget stability to	Sent to the department monthly, from June 2026 by the 20th of the month.

	Condition applied	Action/evidence required from trust	By when
	outlined in 1.10 of the ATH).	<p>their submitted financial recovery plan.</p> <p>SRMA recommendations, ICFP findings and recovery plan actions must be implemented within the planned timelines, reaching a balanced or in-year surplus for 2026/27.</p>	
4	The trust must accept a further SRMA deployment to start in 2027 (this is separate to the bespoke SRMA deployment implemented in April 2026).	Follow-up SRMA deployment to focus on all efficiencies and monitor implementation of progress with previous recommendations. The department expects the trust to action any recommendations raised in this deployment sharing with the department its plan, including timeline to implement those actions.	<p>Follow-up deployment to start by January 2027.</p> <p>Action plan with timeline to be shared with the department no later than 6-weeks after the SRMA has shared their report. This must be agreed by the trust board.</p>
5	The trust must ensure both the trust board and finance committee meet 6 times a year until further notice to strengthen governance and financial oversight and to ensure effective monitoring and timely response to emerging risks and issues while required improvements are being implemented.	<p>The department receives all trust board meetings, the agenda, and minutes (in particular, all information relevant to the trust's financial or governance position).</p> <p>Copies of the approved minutes along with associated reports submitted to the department no later than 5 working days after approval.</p>	<p>Notice of all trust board meetings and agenda to be provided to the department in advance.</p> <p>Approved minutes provided to the department within 5 days of approval.</p>
6	The trust must provide assurance that its members are effectively holding the trust board accountable for its performance and governance.	<p>Working with members, the trust must provide a report setting out how members provide effective review and challenge of the trust board's performance. The report should include coverage of, but is not limited to, how members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review and challenge the trust board's performance, including through scrutiny of 	<p>By 26 June 2026: The trust must submit a report setting out this evidence to the department accompanied by the approved minutes and supporting papers from the trust's three most recent members' meetings.</p> <p>Following receipt of the report by the department, the trust</p>

	Condition applied	Action/evidence required from trust	By when
		<p>the annual report and accounts, audited financial statements and any governance or external reviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - engage appropriately in the trust's Annual General Meeting - understand and, where necessary, exercise their powers to appoint or remove trustees in order to uphold effective governance and protect the trust's charitable purposes - engage in regular review of the trust's articles of association, and initiate or approve amendments where these are necessary to ensure continued fitness for purpose - maintain sufficient independence from the trust board including through member-led scrutiny and challenge - remain informed of relevant developments in education policy, charity law and governance best practice which may affect the trust <p>The report should also set out how the trust maintains appropriate formal records of member engagement, demonstrating how members have influenced effective governance and assured themselves that the trust is acting in accordance with its charitable objects.</p>	<p>must continue to submit approved minutes and supporting papers until further notice.</p> <p>This documentation must demonstrate that members, acting independently of the trust board, have received, considered, and actively scrutinised information relating to the trust's governance, financial position, and performance, and have provided informed challenge, discussion, and assurance where necessary.</p>
7	The trust to commission an independent, external	The trust must provide to the department the terms of reference	By 19 June 2026: The terms of reference submitted to

	Condition applied	Action/evidence required from trust	By when
	<p>review of the extent to which the trust’s board and executives are operating effectively – both individually and together - to deliver robust financial management and governance and identify any gaps and recommendations for improvement.</p> <p>The terms of reference of the review and the outcome must be shared with the department.</p> <p>The scope of the review should include, but not be limited to, the operational effectiveness of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i)The trust governance arrangements (as a minimum, an assessment of the oversight exercised by the trust board). ii) The executive team and the ways of working between this and the trust board. iii)The trust procedures and policies. iv)The trust operations. v)Personnel records. vi)Contracts and contract management (including the scope for further efficiency savings, 	<p>and outcome report from the independent external review of its financial management and governance arrangements.</p> <p>The trust must also provide evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) having reviewed any recommendations from the external review within a reasonable timeframe, and ii) having developed an action plan to address the recommendations. <p>Should the review identify skills gaps or weaknesses, the trust must set out, in the action plan, how these will be addressed, which must include targeted training where skills can reasonably be developed and/or the recruitment of new independent trustees with suitable skills and experience, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) financial and commercial management. ii) current experience of operating within a strong Academy Trust. 	<p>the department</p> <p>By 3 July 2026: Independent review of financial management and governance to be commissioned, with the review to be completed prior to the end of the summer term 2026.</p> <p>Within 3 weeks of the findings of the review being submitted to the trust: the trust to accept the findings, or provide cogent reasons for any that are not accepted.</p> <p>Within 5 days of accepting the findings: the findings of the review to be submitted to the department.</p> <p>Within one month of accepting the findings: Action plan to be submitted to the department.</p> <p>Updates on actions taken against the action plan to be provided monthly.</p>

	Condition applied	Action/evidence required from trust	By when
	<p>including using economies of scale to reduce staff costs).</p> <p>The review should also include a comprehensive skills audit, to determine to what extent: the trust board and the executives have an appropriate balance of skills and experience to deliver their obligations. For the trust board this should also include appropriate independence to provide effective challenge and hold to account the Accounting Officer, Chief Finance Officer and Executive Leadership Team.</p> <p>The review should also consider the above areas in view of the regulatory framework governing academy trusts and provide assurance on the level of compliance with those requirements. In particular, the trust's Articles of Association, the funding agreement, the ATH, the Companies Act 2006 and the Charities Act 2011.</p>		

	Condition applied	Action/evidence required from trust	By when
8	The trust must commission an independent review of its budget setting and monitoring process in 2025/26 and 2026/27.	<p>Independent review to establish lessons learnt and recommendations for improvement.</p> <p>The terms of reference of the review and the outcome must be shared with the department within 5 days of receipt. The trust must commit to action any recommendations from the review and provide evidence that they have been actioned within 3 months.</p>	<p>Independent review to be commissioned no later 31 July 2026.</p> <p>Terms of reference of the review and who is appointed to be shared with the department within 5 working days of receipt.</p> <p>The trust must share the final report with the department within 5 working days of receipt and agreement by the trust board.</p> <p>Action plan including timings to be shared with the department within 4 weeks of receipt having been agreed by the trust board.</p> <p>The trust must commit to action any recommendations from the review or explain reasons not taking forward recommendations and provide evidence that they have been actioned within 3 months.</p>
9	The trust is required to request approval from the department, in advance, for any actions relating to delegated authorities revoked, as referred to in Part 6.19 of the ATH.	<p>The trust must submit to the department a request for approval for any actions relating to the delegated authorities revoked under the terms of the Ntl.</p> <p>Retrospective approval will be deemed as a breach of the ATH.</p>	Until the Ntl is lifted.

	Condition applied	Action/evidence required from trust	By when
10	<p>The trust must ensure the following support structures are fully operational:</p> <p>i) Active mentoring support is agreed with the department and in place for the trust's CEO and Chair.</p> <p>ii) Mentoring arrangements agreed and confirmed with the department for the CFO urgently.</p>	<p>These support structures/ measures must be demonstrably contributing to improved leadership, governance, and accountability.</p> <p>Evidence submitted to the department may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mentoring agreement or confirmation email - Schedule of mentoring sessions or outline of mentoring arrangement - Summary of mentoring objectives - Quarterly progress reports that are agreed by the mentor and mentee 	<p>For the CEO and Chair, arrangements in place and first meeting taken place by 1 July 2026.</p> <p>Continue to engage with CFO mentoring which commenced in May 2026.</p> <p>Evidence of mentoring agreement, schedule of mentoring/ mentoring arrangement, summary of mentoring objectives to be shared with the department alongside quarterly progress reports.</p>
11	<p>Draw up a plan setting out what future MAT options could look like for the school: The trust must work closely with DfE to determine and work towards a sustainable future for the trust that is in the best interest of pupils and represents taxpayer value for money, including consideration of transferring the academies to a multi-academy trust.</p>	<p>The trust works with the DfE to identify options for joining a high-quality multi academy trust (MAT).</p> <p>The trust provides a detailed breakdown of its assessment of MAT options and evidence these have been scrutinised and discussed by all trustees</p>	<p>The following is to be provided to the department:</p> <p>By 14 July 2026: an update on past and future engagements with prospective MATs.</p> <p>By 30 September 2026: a formal report on the outcome of the trust board's discussions regarding their consideration of MAT options.</p>