



Acorn Education Trust Governance Handbook
September 2021

Acorn Education Trust Governance Handbook

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Useful links:

AET Scheme of Delegation:

<https://acornmat.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/Acorn-Education-Trust-Scheme-of-Delegation-1.pdf?t=1589980728>

AET Terms of Reference:

<https://acornmat.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/Acorn-Education-Trust-Terms-of-Reference.pdf?t=1589980604>

Governance Handbook (Oct 2020):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925104/Governance_Handbook_FINAL.pdf

Academies Financial Handbook:

<https://acornmat.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/Academies-Financial-Handbook->

Competency Frame for Governance:

[A competency framework for governance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/925104/A_competency_framework_for_governance.pdf)

Ofsted Inspection Framework:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/education-inspection-framework>

Message from the CEO

The Acorn Education Trust was formed in August 2014 to create a local solution to a national strategy. Through close collaboration and a shared vision, we believe each school will achieve great things while retaining their individual identity. Underpinning this close collaboration is a strong belief in our core purpose.

As CEO of Acorn Education Trust, I have the privilege to work with our board, governors and teaching staff to provide the best education for all students in a rapidly changing educational landscape. Our staff work tirelessly to shape the culture and ethos of our schools/nurseries, so every individual feel valued and has the opportunity to contribute.

Each Acorn setting is equally important and we ensure the following core values are clearly visible:

Active and visible leadership
Care, Support and challenge
Opportunities for all
Respect, resilience and rewards
Needs of all are paramount

By working collaboratively we've been able to create an effective and efficient organisation and business model that allows school/nursery leaders and teachers to focus all their attention on the students. We work together in a supportive network to evaluate, challenge and improve practice inside and outside of the classroom. We want our students to grow into fully equipped individuals who make meaningful contributions to society and our staff to reach their full professional potential.

Governors play a key role in the success of our schools and the Trust as a whole and we are proud to support them in their roles. This Governance Handbook aims to set out their key roles and the Trust's expectations that their work, alongside that of the Trustees, Members and staff helps to prepare young people for their world in their time.

Sara Edwards
CEO, The Acorn Education Trust

Schools within the Acorn Education Trust

The Avenue and Children's Centre, Warminster
Clarendon Academy Secondary School, Trowbridge
Dilton Marsh Church of England Primary School
Great Wishford Church of England Primary School
Heytesbury Church of England Primary School
Keevil Church of England Primary School
Kingdown Secondary School, Warminster
New Close Primary School, Warminster
Rowde Church of England Academy, Devizes
St John's Church of England Primary School, Warminster
Wansdyke School, Devizes
West Ashton Church of England Primary School

Introduction

The Acorn Education Trust believes that Academy Council Governors play a key role in the success of our schools and the Trust as a whole. Governors are one of the largest volunteer forces in the country and the role of the Academy Council is key to the effectiveness of a school. Effective governance should be local, taking in to account knowledge of the whole community and the best outcome for governance for all of our schools will depend upon communication and collaboration.

This guidance is designed to give advice and information specific to the Acorn Education Trust and should be read in conjunction with the Articles of Association, Scheme of Delegation and may be supplemented by guidance published from time to time by the Department of Education or Ofsted.

As explained in the Competency framework for Governance:

The principles and personal attributes that individuals bring to the board are as important as their skills and knowledge. These qualities enable board members to use their skills and knowledge to function well as part of a team and make an active contribution to effective governance. All those elected or appointed to boards should fulfil their duties in line with the seven principles of public life (the Nolan principles). They should also be mindful of their responsibilities under equality legislation, recognising and encouraging diversity and inclusion. They should understand the impact of effective governance on the quality of education and on outcomes for all children and young people.

In addition, all those involved in governance should be:

Committed: *Devoting the required time and energy to the role and ambitious to achieve best possible outcomes for young people. Prepared to give time, skills and knowledge to developing themselves and others in order to create highly effective governance.*

Confident: *Of an independent mind, able to lead and contribute to courageous conversations, to express their opinion and to play an active role on the board.*

Curious: *Possessing an enquiring mind and an analytical approach and understanding the value of meaningful questioning.*

Challenging: *Providing appropriate challenge to the status quo, not taking information or data at face value and always driving for improvement.*

Collaborative: *Prepared to listen to and work in partnership with others and understanding the importance of building strong working relationships within the board and with executive leaders, staff, parents and carers, pupils/students, the local community and employers.*

Critical: *Understanding the value of critical friendship which enables both challenge and support, and self-reflective, pursuing learning and development opportunities to improve their own and whole board effectiveness.*

Creative: *Able to challenge conventional wisdom and be open-minded about new approaches to problem-solving; recognising the value of innovation and creative thinking to organisational development and success.*

The Role of the Acorn Education Trust Members

Members are similar to a company's shareholders, they sit above the board of Trustees and have a largely hands-off role. Their key responsibilities include appointing the Trustees and holding them to account for the successful governance of the Trust. Through reports at the Annual General Meeting, supplemented by other reporting arrangements considered necessary, the Members will receive information to enable them to assess the effectiveness of the Board in its governance and leadership of the Trust.

The Role of the Acorn Education Trust Board of Directors/Trustees

Board members are referred to as both Trustees as the Trust is a charity and as directors as the Trust is also a company limited by guarantee. The Trust has a scheme of delegation that sets out both responsibility and accountability and how together the board, Trust executive, local Academy Council Governors and school leaders work together to achieve the ambitions for each school in the Trust. Trustees are bound by both charity and company law, the terms 'Trustees' and 'Directors' are often used interchangeably.

The AET Trust Board is ultimately accountable for the three core functions of governance as defined by the Department for Education.

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Holding the leadership of the Trust and the schools to account for the educational performance of the schools and their pupils
- Overseeing the financial performance of the Trust and making sure money is well spent.

<https://www.acorneducationtrust.com/893/trust-members-and-directors>

The duties of the Board of Directors (Trustees) are:

Strategic Leadership

1. Establishing and maintaining the Trust's purpose, vision and ethos.
2. Providing the strategic direction of the Trust, including medium and long-term goals.
3. Establishing structures and procedures to set and manage financial and operational risk appetite and tolerance.
4. Championing research and development into best practices in teaching and learning.

Accountability

5. Maintaining oversight of the educational performance of the Trust through analysis of pupil progress and attainment data.
6. Performance managing executive leaders in alignment with defined strategic priorities.
7. Maintaining oversight of the performance management of all other Trust employees, their pay framework and conditions of service.
8. Ensuring that controls for managing financial resources are in place and that regularity, propriety and value for money is achieved.

People

9. Recruiting Trustees with the right skills, experience, qualities, capacity and diversity of perspective to ensure that the Board remains effective and advising on the suitability of their appointment to the Members.

Structures

10. Implementing appropriate board and committee structures to ensure sufficient and robust oversight of key priorities and effective and proper governance.
11. Ensuring that processes for communicating with all Trust stakeholders are in place to promote transparency of decision-making.
12. Ensuring that complementary and non-duplicative roles for the Board, committees, executive structures and local advisory groups hold school-level leaders to account.
13. Ensuring that effective and proper governance takes place at all levels of Trust operations.

Compliance

14. Maintaining awareness of and adherence to the Trust's responsibilities under education, employment, charity and company law.
15. Adhering to the requirements of the Academy Trust Handbook (Academies Financial Handbook).
16. Approving Trust operational and educational policies.

Evaluation

17. Undertaking skills audits, self-evaluation and external reviews of effectiveness to ensure continual effectiveness.
18. Appointing a suitably qualified person to conduct an external review of governance.

The role of Trust Board Committees

In line with the latest Academy Trust Handbook (formally the Academies Financial Handbook), the Board of Directors have a Finance committee, a Risk & Audit committee, a Remuneration committee and a Standards & Improvement committee. The membership (there must be at least three Trustees) and responsibilities of board committees are set out in the committee's Terms of Reference. The Trust Board has appointed board committee chairs and committee members according to their skills.

Audit and Risk Committee

- Promote the highest standards of propriety in the use of public funds and encourage proper accountability for the use of those funds
- Advise the Board on the appointment and remuneration of external auditors and internal audit arrangements
- Review the external financial statements including the external auditor's opinion, advising the Board on audit aspects and monitoring management action in response to issues raised by external audits.
- Promote a climate of financial discipline and control
- Receive the financial statement to form part of the annual report of the Trust Board to stakeholders and for filing as per the Companies Act, Charity Commission and Funding Agreement.
- Review the report and recommendations made through the internal audit programme
- Oversee the Trust policies on Fraud, data protection, health and safety, freedom of information and whistle blowing.
- Receive reports on the outcomes of investigations of suspected or alleged impropriety.
- Review the effectiveness of internal controls, governance and risk management systems.
- Identify key risks in the Trust and agree actions to reduce each risk.
- Must produce an annual report of the committee's conclusions to advise the board of trustees and members, including recommendations on the reappointment or dismissal or retendering of the external auditor, and their remuneration.

Finance and Estates Committee

- Assess implications of the indicative funding from DfE for each Academy in advance of the financial year, drawing any matters of significance/concern to The Board.
- Ensure key spending links to the Trust Development plan and the School Development Plans.
- Receive and make recommendations on the broad budget headings and areas of expenditure to be adopted each year.
- Liaise with and receive reports from appropriate committees and make recommendations to those committees about the financial aspects of matters being considered by them.
- Consider requests for supplementary expenditure and make appropriate recommendations to the Trust Board.
- Review financial policy
- Monitor and review expenditure on a regular basis, ensure compliance with the overall financial plans and DfE regulations, and draw matters of concern to the attention of the Board.
- Monitor and review procedures for ensuring effective implementation and operation of financial procedures.

- Monitor and review the Health & Safety policy to ensure compliance and effective implementation.
- Monitor and follow the Department's Health and Safety: responsibilities and duties for schools' as well as Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance for Education.
- Strategically manage and maintain the trust's estate in a safe working condition.

Remuneration Committee

- Annually review the salary of the CEO.

Safeguarding, Standards and Improvement Committee

- Hold the Senior Executive to Account for Self-Evaluation, Quality Assurance and School Improvement
- Benchmark the performance of all schools and nurseries against national expectations and targets
- Agree the framework for target setting at school and nursery level
- Monitor and evaluate the educational aspects of the Trust Development Plan
- Monitor improvements in schools and nurseries alongside key performance risks, as identified on the risk universe and register.
- Monitor local governance effectiveness
- Monitor admissions in all schools and nurseries.
- Reviews the impact of the pupil premium spend and the PE and Sport Grant. (Covid catch up)
- Reviews the impact of the pupil premium spend and the PE and Sport Grant. (Covid catch up)
- Monitor's progress of all students in all schools including the most vulnerable, SEND and Looked After children.
- Safeguards and promotes the welfare of children.
- Has regard to any statutory guidance on safeguarding issued by the Secretary of State.
- Ensures the suitability of staff, supply staff, volunteers, contractors and proprietors with guidance from the Trust Safeguard Lead.

Academy Councils

Academy Councils are a formal part of the Acorn Education Trust governance structure and each Council is responsible for maintaining the unique identity, community ethos and culture in their school. Academy Council Governors provide an essential link between the Trust, the school, parents and the community.

The total membership of an Academy Council shall not be less than 3 governors or more than 14. Meetings of the Academy Council shall be quorate if three or one-third of Governors are present (whichever is greater) and should consist of:

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- 2 staff governors, one of which is the Headteacher as an ex-Officio
- 2 community governors
- 2 parent governors: (these can be parents or guardians of children in the AET schools)
- A member of the Senior Executive when appropriate
- Foundation governors (Church of England schools only) are appointed by the Trust Corporate Member and SDBE (Salisbury Diocese Board of Education).

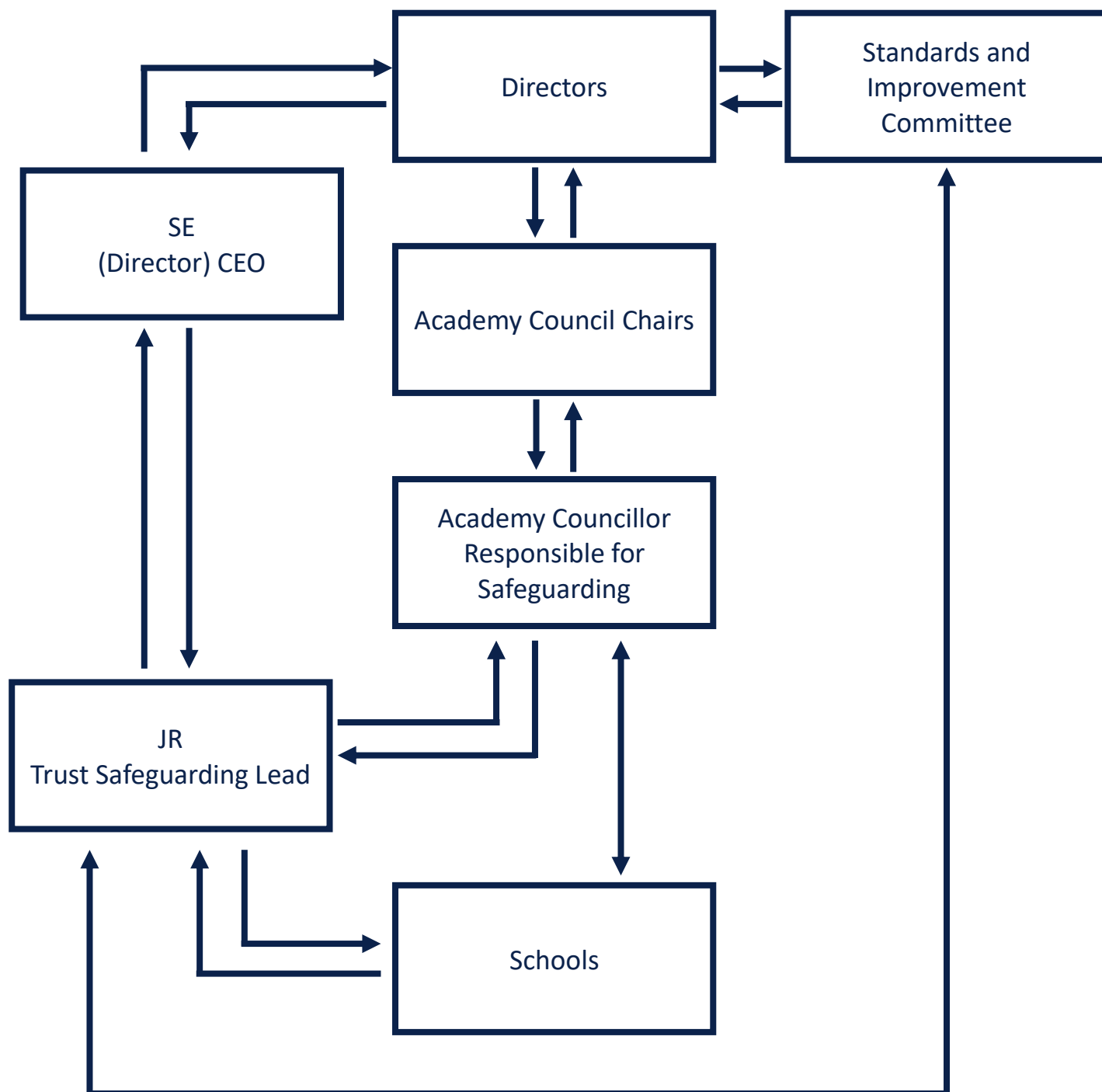
In schools that were previously named 'Voluntary Aided' (VA) the Academy Council must be 50% 'Foundation' i.e. those that will support and ensure the Christian vision and Character of the school. For schools that were previously known as 'Voluntary Controlled' (VC) they must be 25% Foundation.

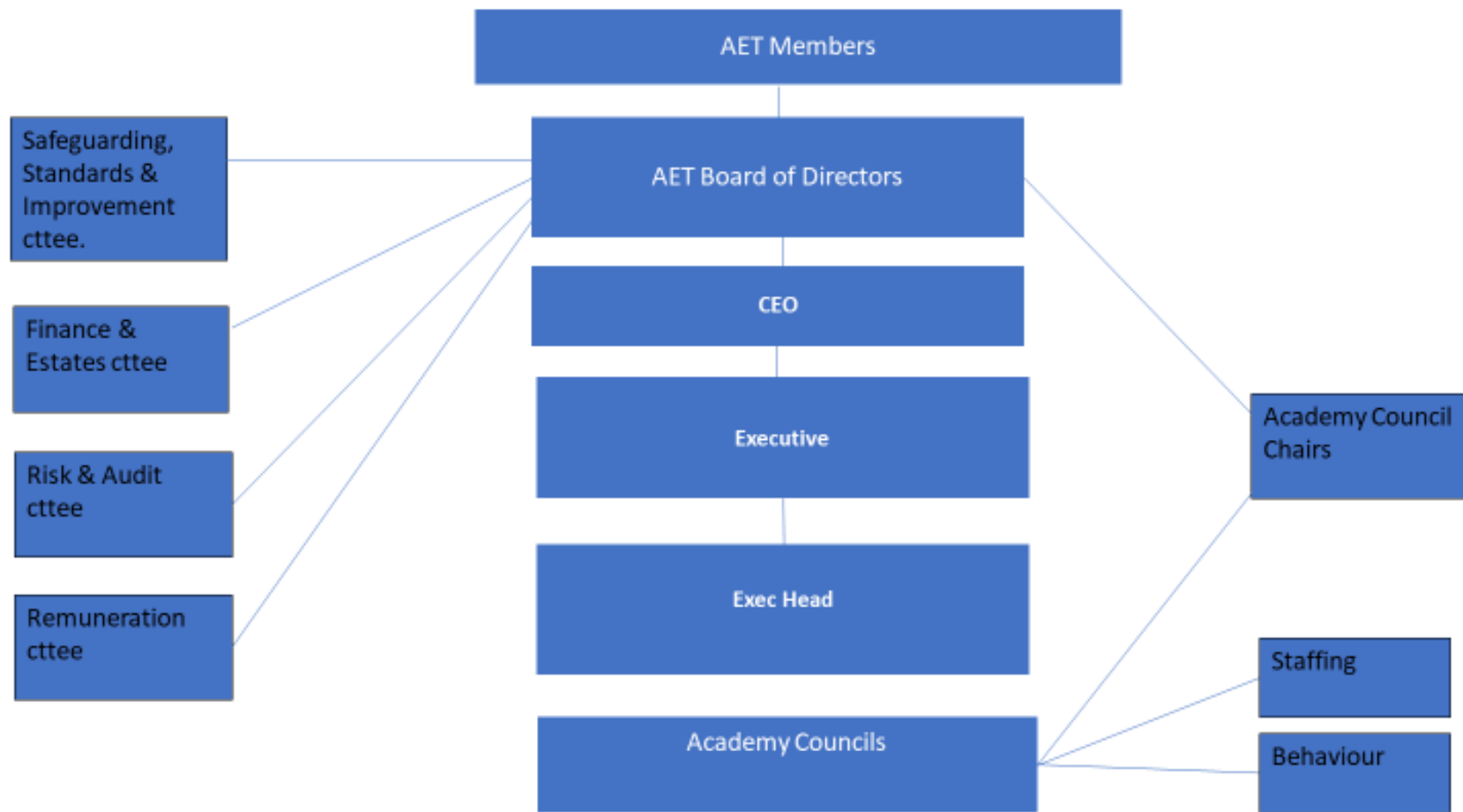
Responsibilities of the Academy Council:

- The Academy Councils will receive a Data Dashboard three times a year that will summarise the Self Evaluation form of the school and the subsequent 360 meeting.
- To ensure parental engagement runs smoothly and assist the head teacher with complaints, questionnaires, parental challenge and supportive feedback.
- Commitment to the local community to promote a positive school perception and feedback
- To promote and implement positive behaviour and reward systems aligned with the vision of the school to encourage strong learning.
- Promote positive communication, marketing and perception of the school to encourage new pupils. Assess a negative situation and where necessary help build its reputation looking closely at key areas: website, Ofsted.
- Encourage extra-curricular activities and ensure they are aligned with the vision of the school and AET.
- To monitor the vision and values of the school and their implementation throughout the school's work. In Church of England Schools this includes a deep understanding of the SIAMS Inspection framework and the school's work on this.
- Culture, vision and ethos: to promote the school's vision and ensure it is lived and acted out by ALL staff; children and the parental community. For Church schools this is the delegated responsibility of SIAMS and the vision, ethos and culture as a Church of England school.
- Ensure (where appropriate) school SIAMS criteria is an integral part of the school culture
- Review progress against SIAMS SEF criteria of CofE schools
- Participate in staffing panels to support the executive staff
- Approve pupil behaviour policies

- Participate in behaviour panels to support the Headteacher and executive staff
- Exclude a pupil more than 15 days or permanently
- Review exclusion on appeal
- To supply Academy Council Governors to fulfil cross Trust roles connected to Performance, Standards and Safeguarding.
- Participate in the appointment of Headteachers.
- To have a Safeguarding Academy Council Governor who, working with the Trust Lead on Safeguarding ensures processes and procedures are being followed. Safeguarding Governors are required to undertake Safeguarding Training within the first year of their term of office. All Academy Council Governors are required annually to read Section 2 of Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Safeguarding Governance within AET





Academy Council

Role of the Chair

The role of the Chair is to act as critical friend to the Headteacher and their relationship is crucial to effective governance. While they must work in close partnership sufficient professional distance needs to be kept which will allow the Headteacher to run the school while the Chair and Academy Council holds him/her to account. The Chair is elected by the Academy Council each September.

Key responsibilities include:

- Attending the 360 Review meetings
- Managing the Academy Council
- Attending the Chairs' of Acorn Education Trust meetings
- To develop and sustain positive professional relationships with the Headteacher and the Academy Council, Directors and the Governance Adviser.
- Attend regular agenda planning meetings with the Headteacher and Assistant Governance Adviser.
- Chair meetings, facilitating involvement of all members and summarising the outcomes of discussion under each agenda item.
- Ensure meetings are quorate (3 governors) and follow up any attendance issues.
- Approve and sign minutes
- Provide a brief verbal report at each council meeting on outcome of actions noted at previous meeting
- Be familiar with relevant sections of the Governors' Handbook, Scheme of Delegation, Terms of Reference and Academy Trust Handbook (formally the Academies Financial Handbook)
- Identify training/support needs of individual members and research appropriate solutions with the assistance of the Governance Adviser and Asst Governance Adviser
- Along with the Vice Chair assist the school with the outcome of the annual parents' questionnaire.

Role of the Vice Chair

The Vice Chair is elected by the Academy Council annually. S/he deputises for the Chair of the Academy Council and may be delegated specific roles by the Chair. For example:

- Collating evidence of Academy Council Governors work and impact
- Building links with wider school community
- Assist the school with the outcome of the annual parents' questionnaire.

Co-Chairing

An Academy Council may choose to have a Co-Chair model which would mix the roles of Chair or Vice-Chair. Please speak to the Acorn Governance and Executive Governance Leads if this is model the Academy Council wishes to pursue.

Role of Parent governors:

Parent governors bring an important perspective and have the same responsibilities to the Trust as other local governors and need the same skills. Their role is to support the Trust, rather than act as parent representatives. Having parents on the Academy Council is not a replacement for engagement with parents more broadly.

Role of the Community governors:

Community governors usually live or work in the community of the school area and bring their own particular expertise to the governing body.

Role of the Staff governors:

The Headteacher is a staff governor by virtue of their office. Other staff, both teaching and support may become governors.

Role of Foundation governors:

With Church of England schools, the Diocese exercises general oversight and provides support. For VA and VC church schools the Salisbury Diocesan Board of Education (SDBE) Corporate Member is responsible for making nominations for the role of local Foundation Governor, Foundation Trustees and Foundation Members. The Board of Education is responsible for making the appointments.

Whilst the list below is comprehensive, in summary the role of a Foundation Academy Council Governor is to ensure that the school lives its vision and values, this is a role that most who volunteer can carry out.

As representatives of the church's role in the school, Foundation Governors must:

- Fully support, cherish, preserve and develop the distinctive Anglican and Christian ethos of the school, ensuring that the school has a distinctive Anglican and Christian vision and values which lead to effective practice and outcomes
- Preserve and strengthen the links between church, school and Diocese
- Take an active role in the school's self-evaluations of progress against the 'Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools' (SIAMS) schedule
- Ensure that collective worship and religious education at the school follow the appropriate guidelines and/or syllabus
- Ensure that collective worship at the school is in accordance with the tenets and practices of the Church of England
- Encourage, support and challenge the school towards aspirations that are transformational
- Ensure that collective worship and religious education at the school are appropriately monitored
- Ensure that the distinctive Anglican and Christian ethos of the school is encouraged and supported throughout its local community and is reflected in its policies and protocols, its curriculum and activities
- Ensure that their own attitudes and behaviour in relation to the school reflect its distinctive Anglican and Christian ethos
- Make sure that the School Improvement Plan includes strategy for the development of areas reflected in the school's SIAMS self-evaluation document
- Inform the SDBE when the Headteacher post becomes vacant and, in partnership with the Chair of Governors, invite a representative of the Diocesan Director of Education to advise and attend throughout the appointment procedure

- Support and challenge the leadership within the school in their links with the wider parish(es) and community and to promote support for school activities and initiatives relating to its Christian distinctiveness and effectiveness.

What does it take to be a good Academy Council Governor?

- Committed to the critical friend role (not inspector/head role)
- Open minded
- Empathetic and sensitive
- Respectful of confidentiality
- Effective communicator
- Interest in/enthusiasm for advancing pupil learning
- Sense of humour
- Ability to focus on 'the big picture'
- Engage in training on a regular basis.

Acorn Executive Governance Lead

The Acorn Governance Lead sits on the Executive of the Trust and, with the direction of the CEO, has oversight of the Academy Councils.

Governance Advisers to the Academy Councils

The Governance Adviser works with the Board and Trust committees while overseeing the Assistant Governance Adviser.

The Assistant Governance Adviser works across the majority of the schools in the Acorn Education Trust ensuring a high level of consistency. As well as supporting the Chair and assisting new Academy Council Governors the Assistant Governance Adviser attends planning meetings, prepares agendas and takes and circulates action focussed minutes for the Academy Council meetings.

Agenda model

Acorn Education Trust Academy Council Common Agenda. Please refer to new Local Governance Model.

NB: The agenda should reflect the year and different priorities within that, i.e. Questionnaires will dominate a meeting at a given point in the year. The Acorn Governance lead will advise and assist.

School	
Date	
Chair and Clerk	
Academy Councillors present.	

1. Apologies (Time)
2. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising (Summary and time)
3. Declaration of interest (Summary and time)
4. Vision and ethos. Church Schools - SIAMS review (Summary and time)
5. Dashboard summary (Summary and time)
6. Parental engagement (Summary and time)
7. Local Community (Summary and time)
8. Communication, Vision and Ethos. Number on roll. Autumn - parents being shown round, estimates on applications (Summary and time).
9. Behaviour and reward (Summary and Time)
10. Extra-Curricular (Summary and Time).
11. Trust Housekeeping: Governor Training, Skills Audits, Governor SEF's, Annual Forms, Governor Visits

Academy Council Governor Induction; documents and information:

Please find below links and relevant information for new Academy Council Governors.

[Academy Council Governor Application form](#)

[Academy Council Governor Induction checklist](#)

[Academy Council Code of Conduct](#)

[AET Privacy Notice for Trustees and Governors](#)

[AET Virtual Meeting Policy](#)

Pecuniary Interests form

All members and directors of the governing board and Academy Council governors have a duty to ensure that no real or perceived conflicts of interest can arise from their professional, personal or family interests that may benefit them or a person they are directly or indirectly connected to. This may include familial relationships, business relationships or friendships. The Board of Directors and Academy Councils must always ensure that decisions are only made in the best interests of pupils and the organisation.

There is no requirement for a conflict of interest to be made in writing or signed, but any declared actual or potential conflict should be recorded. At the start of each academic year, all Members, Directors and Academy Council governors are asked to declare any conflicts of interest. This process is now done via a Teams form and information is held by the Governance Adviser. Thereafter, at the beginning of every Board, Committee and Academy Council meeting attendees are asked to declare any business interests.

All governors must declare any conflicts of interest prior to their participation in decisions which directly affect their interests or the interests of a person they are directly or indirectly connected to. Any governor must withdraw from any subsequent discussion if they consider, or if it may be perceived by other interested parties, that they are unable to remain objective.

Pecuniary Interest forms are now completed on-line via Teams.

GIAS (Get information about schools)

GIAS is the DfE's register of all educational establishments and there is a requirement for everyone involved in the governance of schools to be listed on the database. The application form sent to new governors collects all the relevant information needed to update the GIAS website, this is updated by the Governance Adviser.

Governors are requested to provide the following information:

- Full name – including title
- Postcode
- Date of birth
- Any previous names
- Nationality
- Direct email address for the chair of the board and Academy council.

Skills Audits

It is a requirement set out in the 'Academy Trust Handbook' for the governing boards of Academy Trusts, and any local governors appointed, to undertake an annual review of the skills of the board. Trusts are required to include in their annual governance statement actions taken to review the board's membership and effectiveness, including the skills of the board. The board should identify the skills and experience needed to function effectively. Skills audits are completed annually and are used by the board and Academy councils to identify any gaps in skills, knowledge and behaviours.

Skills Audits are now completed on-line and the information is collated by the Asst. Governance Adviser.

Declaration of Disqualification

Schools and local authorities must have regard to this when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under: 1. section 175, of the Education Act 2002 2. This form is completed on-line each September by the AET Board and Academy Council governors

Training log

A training log will ensure there is adequate coverage of skills and knowledge across the board and training is a standing item on the agendas of the Academy Councils. The Assistant Governance Adviser collates all training undertaken and highlights relevant courses to the Academy Councils.

School Monitoring visits

If Academy Council Governors wish to visit a school they should speak with the head teacher or their link teacher to arrange a suitable date and time so long that due consideration has been taken. Reference to the school's risk assessment, and how the health and safety of any visitors, alongside staff and pupils, will be protected must be considered.

Formal monitoring visits are where Academy Council Governors discuss the progress of the school in a particular area with the relevant staff member. The form can be used as a reminder of what to look for and what to ask.

[School Monitoring visit form](#)