



SEVERN ACADEMIES
EDUCATIONAL TRUST

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EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Governance Handbook

September 2018
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CONTENTS

- 1. STRATEGIC VISION AND VALUES FOR THE TRUST**
- 2. ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE IN OUR TRUST**
 - 2.1 Our Culture
 - 2.2 Clarity over roles and responsibilities
 - 2.3 Balancing local needs with Trust needs
 - 2.4 Ensuring capacity to grow sustainably
- 3 STRUCTURES, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**
 - 3.1 Members' Duties
 - 3.2 Directors' Duties
 - 3.3 Responsibilities and Duties of the Trust Board and LGB Governors
 - 3.4 Trust Board
 - 3.5 Local Governing Bodies (LGBs)
- 4 RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES OF MATB AND LGB GOVERNORS**
 - 4.1 Values and ethos
 - 4.2 Assigned responsibilities
 - 4.3 Training
 - 4.4 Clear and timely information
- 5 KNOWING YOUR SCHOOL**
 - 5.1 School visits
 - 5.2 School website
 - 5.3 Developing your role
- 6 FURTHER INFORMATION**
 - 6.1 Declaration of Pecuniary Interest
 - 6.2 What to expect at a Governor's Meeting
 - 6.3 Useful websites

APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Please refer to Director and Governor Code of Conduct
Appendix 2	Please refer to Role Profile of Governance
Appendix 3	SAET Core Team
Appendix 4	Please refer to LGB Terms of Reference
Appendix 5	Please refer to SAET Scheme of Delegation
Appendix 6	Please refer to SAET Board of Directors
Appendix 7	Governors Question Bank
Appendix 8	Please refer to SAET Director/Governor Visit Protocol

1. STRATEGIC VISION AND VALUES FOR THE TRUST

Severn Academies Educational Trust (SAET) vision is to create standout schools with clear purpose, direction and ethos. Where quality first teaching is paramount and students enjoy and are engaged in a rich and relevant curriculum tailored to their individual needs ensuring empowerment of all students to achieve their full potential. The Severn Academies Educational Trust's vision is to create and foster a culture of high aspiration and expectation amongst all pupils regardless of their social, economic or cultural background. The Severn Academies Educational Trust leads and supports the drive for excellence, with a strong and open culture of collaboration and engagement that secures outstanding progress for all.

We have a commitment to preserving local school identity and ethos with each school led by its Principal/Headteacher, Local Governing Body (LGB) and other senior leaders, with its own way of doing things. Our academies are driven by a desire to lead rather than follow; to be beacons of local provision, which families believe in and can rely on for excellence. We share in a commitment, through a highly collaborative structure, to adopt strategies for school improvement to give all our young people an excellent education within a happy, caring and supportive environment.

The SAET vision for strategic growth is for schools across all age ranges with a variety of contexts. The Trust envisages these schools will be in a similar geographical area to enable staff and students to interact and benefit from partnerships and collaboration.

SAET's core values underpin the Trusts strategic vision to be a high performing multi academy trust known nationally for the quality of its work. Our values inform key performance indicators and the improvement plans set for all schools. Maintaining a focus on what we consider to be important drives critical conversations, informed by the views of all our stakeholders and all the information we have about our schools. Schools within SAET have a relentless drive to celebrate success, embrace innovation as well as challenging complacency and lack of aspiration.

2. ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE IN OUR TRUST

The SAET Board has a clear purpose which is set out in the following core functions:

- (a) Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- (b) Holding the LGB's to account for the educational performance of the schools in the Trust;
- (c) Overseeing the financial performance of the overall Trust and making sure its money is well spent;
- (d) Ensuring compliance with company law and with the Trust's funding agreement with the Secretary of State; and
- (e) Protecting the positive ethos of our schools and their distinctiveness e.g. Church schools through Diocesan representation on the Board, and on relevant LGBs.

The Trust adheres to the 7 core principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Please see **Appendix 1 – Director and Governor Code of Conduct**.

All Boards within the Trust require clear, definable features which promote effective Governance and are as follows:

- i. To have the right people around the table.
- ii. To ensure each Board member understands the role and responsibilities of the LGB's and the Trust Board.

- iii. To have an effective Chair.
- iv. To have professional clerking.
- v. To enjoy good relationships based on trust and mutual respect.
- vi. To ensure LGB members know their school – data, staff, parents, children and the wider community.
- vii. To ensure the LGB is committed to asking challenging questions and holding senior leaders to account.
- viii. To ensure that the LGB always acts in the best interests of children and young people.

Please see to **Appendix 2** – Role Profile of Director/Governor.

2.1 Our Culture

All SAET schools are focused on continuous improvement and this requires a culture of openness and accurate self-evaluation. The SAET Core Team (**Appendix 3 – SAET Core Team**) is an effective partner in this process, regularly supporting Principals, Headteachers and Governors with views that either challenge or confirm their assumptions. Our key performance indicators and improvement planning process also give us confidence that we will know if a school requires support or challenge.

The Trust delegates responsibilities to the Local Governing Body of the school and operates a culture of autonomy where schools are performing well. The SAET Core Team and Trust Board are not remote from the schools within the Trust and they know individual schools well. Some members of the Core Team sit on LGB's within SAET to offer support. The constitution of the LGB for good or better schools within the Trust is a decision for the individual LGB itself.

Schools within SAET are keen to share excellent practice in all areas of operation. It is inevitable therefore that there is a degree of alignment between the academies. Often these similarities arise naturally through all our schools pursuing excellence and being proud to be a part of the Trust. However, all our academies maintain a unique identity and atmosphere, whilst being part of this larger family of schools.

2.2 Clarity over roles and responsibilities

Governors within SAET need clarity on their roles and responsibilities to ensure they are confident about how they operate within the group.

Clarity about roles and responsibilities is achieved through clear terms of reference for our Governing Boards. Please see **Appendix 4 – LGB Terms of Reference**. Clearly defined accountabilities are published in the SAET Scheme of Delegation. This document is regularly reviewed as the Trust evolves.

Please see **Appendix 5** – SAET Scheme of Delegation.

2.3 Balancing local needs with Trust needs

All academies within SAET recognise that they have a responsibility not only for the children and staff in their own school but across the Trust. Sometimes individual schools within the Trust require more support than others. Communication is critical in managing the balance between local and Trust needs; the SAET Board will always endeavour to make the right decisions for children and young people and to be open and transparent about how these decisions are reached.

2.4 Ensuring capacity to grow sustainably

It is critical to the future of our Trust that any further growth is done sustainably.

Building Governance expertise and capacity

The Trusts Directors Board and LGB's are expected to regularly undertake skills assessment that highlight areas of strength and expertise as well as skill gaps that need to be addressed in the context of the wider needs of the Trust. Governors are expected to attend appropriate training. The Trust arranges regular training for Governors and responds to local need. Governors are also expected to regularly self-evaluate their performance.

As an independent integrity check, The Trust undergoes robust external reviews of its Governance process, its policies and its equality and diversity.

Smooth and professional transition for new schools

The Trust continues to review processes and policies to ensure these are fit for purpose and are consistently applied, where appropriate, across all academies within the Trust. SAET core policies are accessible on the SAET website. We believe that by clearly defining our expectations, we can enable a smooth transition for potential new schools. The Trusts policies and procedures are reviewed as appropriate.

The Trust liaises closely with the DfE and the Regional Schools Commissioner regarding any potential sponsorship of a new school. SAET will always undertake an efficient due diligence process for potential new schools to gain a full understanding of their needs, to ascertain whether the Trust is the best fit to support that schools improvement at that time.

Ensuring school to school support capacity

The Trusts Teaching School Alliance allows SAET to fully exploit the intellectual capital generated by operating as a wider network of schools. The growing number of fully trained Specialist Leaders in Education combined with close working relationships with education consultants, other educational organisations and MAT's, provides a platform to support all schools. The Teaching School Alliance website is regularly updated to reflect the growing expertise within the network.

3. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Members' Duties

Members have ultimate responsibility for overseeing the objectives of the Trust. They are not involved in the day to day running of the Trust as this is the role of the CEO and the Core Team. A current list of Members and Directors is available in **Appendix 6 – SAET Board of Directors**.

They have the following powers:

- Making changes to the Articles of Association;
- Deciding on a change of school category;
- Making amendments to the Master Funding Agreement; and
- Appointing and removing Directors.

3.2 Directors' Duties

There are a number of general duties that SAET Directors are required to undertake:

- (a) To act within their powers (contained in the Articles of Association);
- (b) To promote the success of the company;
- (c) To exercise independent judgment;
- (d) To exercise reasonable care, skill and diligence;
- (e) To avoid conflicts of interest;
- (f) Not to accept benefits from third parties; and
- (g) To declare an interest in a proposed transaction or arrangement.

3.3 Responsibilities and Duties of the Trust Board and LGB Governors

The responsibilities and duties of the Trust Board and LGB Governors differ in a number of ways. This is due to the Trust Board being ultimately accountable under the terms of the Trusts funding agreement. The Trust Board delegates defined responsibilities to LGB's and each LGB is accountable to the Trust Board. Clearly defined accountabilities are essential for effective Governance and these are set out in the Scheme of Delegation as mentioned in 2.2.

3.4 Trust Board

The Trust Board meets at scheduled points during the academic year. The meetings allow the SAET Board to ensure that the CEO and the SAET Core Team are carrying out their functions effectively, and to interrogate the performance of the Trust against its strategic plan. Policies and procedures are reviewed and agreed at these meetings and actions that need to be taken are also agreed.

3.5 Local Governing Bodies (LGBs)

The core function of each LGB is to provide strategic leadership for the school alongside the Headteacher/Principal and senior leaders. The role of a Governor is to know their school well; support the effective management of the school and challenge and question where needed. All Governors across SAET must assist in carrying out the three core functions:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
2. Holding the Principal/Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the school within its allocated/agreed budget and making sure that money is well spent.

Governors are expected to triangulate the information they receive from the Headteacher/Principal with information they generate from their own monitoring, monitoring undertaken by the Trust, and monitoring undertaken by bodies and individuals independent to the Trust.

A good Governor will reflect on their own performance regularly and will undertake additional training to improve areas of weakness.

4. ENSURING LOCAL GOVERNING BODIES ARE EFFECTIVE

We want all LGBs within the Trust to be high performing, efficient and supportive Boards. We believe the following characteristics underpin this aim:

4.1 Values and ethos

Each LGB should follow the values and ethos of our Trust as set out in the introductory sections to this Handbook.

4.2 Assigned responsibilities

The key duties of LGB Governors are detailed in the SAET Terms of Reference as mentioned in 2.2 - **Appendix 4 – LGB Terms of Reference**. It is the Trust's belief that an effective LGB will assign responsibilities to individual Governors, depending upon the practicality given the size and skills of each LGB. At a minimum however we believe the following areas must be assigned at every LGB: safeguarding, finance and health and safety. By assigning responsibility this enables each Governor to develop a deeper understanding in a particular area.

4.3 Training

An annual self-evaluation exercise should be undertaken to assess whether a LGB has the skill sets and expertise that it requires to fulfil its' duties effectively. The current needs of the school should also dictate the overall constitution of the LGB (although certain skills and expertise will always be required).

Undertaking a skills audit will highlight the areas where the LGB have been successful, and those areas that require improvement. It will identify the training and support needs of the LGB, and provide an action plan on how to move forward, The Trust will work with all LGB's to source appropriate training from high quality providers.

4.4 Clear and timely information

To assist the LGB in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities, the Principal/Headteacher must ensure the LGB receives timely and accurate information for all areas for which it has responsibility, and that the LGB has confidence in the robustness of the data and that it is presented taking into account the information needs expressed by the Board.

The Principal/Headteacher must also ensure that there is effective communication to and from the LGB and other key stakeholders, and that the approach, style and contribution of the Principal/Headteacher and their team support effective LGB meetings.

A key feature of effective Governance is the ability of the Board to have the confidence to ask challenging questions. To help each Board do so, we have provided a bank of questions which should be of assistance.

Appendix 7 – Governors Question Bank.

5. KNOWING YOUR SCHOOL

5.1 School visits

If you are new to the LGB a good starting point is to arrange to visit the school during the working day. **Appendix 8 - Director/Governor Visit Protocol**. For more experienced Governors we will still recommend you visit the school to keep up to date with developments. This is usually done with either the Principal/Headteacher or another senior leader. Prior to the visit consider what it is you need to know about the school. You may already know a lot but this will give you the chance to find out more – what are the strengths, aspirations and challenges? Having a deeper understanding of how the school operates will allow you to celebrate the successes as well as provide the correct level of challenge. To arrange a visit at any time please contact the school office.

5.2 School website

You will be able to get lots of information from the school website. Looking at the site is a great way to get to know your school well and keep up to date. It will include information on news, events, the curriculum and also a range of policies. You need to be familiar with the statutory policies schools are required to have. A list can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-policies-for-schools

5.3 Developing your role

School Governors should be continuing to develop their knowledge and understanding as they grow in this important role. Accessing training allows Governors to develop their confidence which means they are better placed to help the school move forward and be a great place for pupils to learn on progress. Please remember that there is no such thing as a stupid question.

6. FURTHER INFORMATION

6.1 Declaration of pecuniary interest

It is a requirement under the Scheme of Delegation that a school maintains a register of pecuniary interests. This is usually done at the start of an academic year, but if you are joining a LGB part way through the year you will need to complete the form at that point.

All Governors and school staff have a statutory responsibility not to take part in the decision making process relating to any contract or agreement in which they have a personal interest. Any such declaration should be minuted. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that the Governors and staff do not benefit personally from decisions made on behalf of the school.

6.2 What to expect at a Governor's meeting

Your school will have a set number of meetings during the year as well as some committee meetings. It is important that all members of the LGB make every effort to attend these meetings. There must be 2/3 thirds of the Governors present at any meeting in order for the meeting to be quorate and decisions implemented. If a meeting is not quorate, recommendations can be made and approved at a later date.

The Clerk is an important resource to the LGB as they will provide advice and guidance. As well as helping to coordinate meetings alongside the CoG and Principal/Headteacher they will also ensure meetings are conducted effectively so no time is wasted. The Clerk is able seek advice from the SAET Core Team on behalf of the LGB as requested – the LGB can also seek advice from the SAET link Governor. The Trust facilitates an annual appraisal of all Clerks' working with Trust schools to ensure the highest standards.

6.3 Useful websites

Further information on Governance can be found at:

<http://www.Governors.uk.com/index.html>

<https://schoolGovernors.thekeysupport.com/>

<https://www.modernGovernor.com/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/Governance-handbook>

<http://www.nga.org.uk>



SEVERN ACADEMIES
EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Governance Handbook

Appendix 1

Please refer to Directors and Governors Code of Conduct



SEVERN ACADEMIES
EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Governance Handbook

Appendix 2

Please refer to the Role Profile of Governance

**Appendix 3
SAET Core Team**

<p>Chief Executive Officer Chris King</p> 	<p>Education Director (Secondary) Jon Sheers</p> 	<p>Education Director & Head (Primary) Jacqui Elwis</p> 	<p>Director of Operations David Knott</p> 
<p>Chief Financial Officer Denise Rizos</p> 	<p>HR Lead & PA to CEO Andrea James</p> 	<p>Director of Teaching School Sara Peace</p> 	<p>Director of Performance & Partnership Ian James</p> 

Headteacher/Principal Group

Baxter College	Matthew Carpenter
Hartlebury CE Primary School	Caroline Unitt
St Bartholomew's CE Primary School	Sue Helps
Stourport Primary Academy	Jacqui Elwis
The Stourport High School & Vith Form College	Lorna Deakin
Wilden All Saints CE Primary School	Francesca Fishwick
Wolverley Sebright VA Primary School	Shelley Reeves-Walters



SEVERN ACADEMIES
EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Governance Handbook

Appendix 4

Please refer to the LGB Terms of Reference



SEVERN ACADEMIES
EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Governance Handbook

Appendix 5

Please refer to the SAET Scheme of Delegation



SEVERN ACADEMIES
EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Governance Handbook

Appendix 6

Please refer to the SAET Board of Directors

Appendix 7

Governors Question Bank

Curriculum

- Are we meeting statutory requirements?
- Are we providing a relevant curriculum?
- Is our curriculum accessible by all pupils?
- Are we well informed about all subjects and do we receive regular information from Heads of Departments / Co-ordinators?
- Are we well informed about all phases and do we receive regular information from Phase Leaders or Co-ordinators?
- Are we providing enrichment and varied extra-curricular activities?
- How well is preparation, planning and assessment (PPA) time covered and used?
- Do we provide adequate study support?
- How is ICT used to maximise educational opportunity?
- Are standards of achievement rising – if not, why not (contextual information)?

Subject or area link including standards

- Is there a school policy on this subject and how is it being implemented?
- How is the teaching of the subject organised in the school?
- How much time each week is devoted to the subject?
- What learning experiences are provided – are they varied?
- Are there schemes of work based on the requirements of the national curriculum and exam specifications?
- How do staff plan – individually/group?
- What use is made of IT to support teaching in this area?
- What resources are allocated, for example, accommodation, staff, and equipment?
- How can resources be improved?
- How is the quality of student work monitored?
- What is the system for ensuring continuity and progression?
- What are the broad trends in the school's achievement in this subject:
 - compared with similar schools
 - compared with national rates of increase
 - compared with national gender picture
- Are there significant differences between:
 - boys and girls
 - pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
 - very able pupils
 - pupils with English as an additional language
 - other vulnerable groups (eg. Travelling families, children in public care)?
- Are there differences in year groups?
- How do results compare with other subjects?
- What have we improved? Do we know why?
- What have we improved? Do we know why?
- What do we need to improve on and what action is being taken to do this?
- How are we monitoring whether these actions are working?
- How are pupils, of all abilities, able to participate fully in the subject?
- Are equal opportunities provided for all children?
- Are appropriate links made between this curriculum area and others?
- What training do staff receive?
- Communication (how are parents kept informed)?
- How are parents encouraged to support children's learning at home?



- How are Governors kept informed?
- Do Governors celebrate the school's successes?

Safeguarding

Does the school have?

- Systems for preventing unsuitable people working with children and young or people: An up to date single record of checks, including preparation for the new Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) requirements for Vetting and Barring, and appropriate vetting/screening of all adults who enter the school.
- Safer recruitment and selection procedures that are robustly followed when recruiting staff and/or volunteers.
- A clear outline of the leadership responsibilities for Safeguarding with well understood roles for Governors, school leaders and the DSL.
- Robust systems for recording child protection issues, storing information securely and transferring records appropriately as needed.
- Systems to ensure the school contributes well to partnership working with other agencies involved in providing services for young people and children.
- An aware culture and an 'it could happen here' attitude.
- Systems designed to promote safe practice and challenge poor or unsafe practice. A staff code of conduct that includes clear instructions and expectations.
- Systems to ensure that pupil voice is heard and appropriately responded to, so that pupils know they can report any concerns and they will be taken seriously.
- A curriculum map that shows when and how children are taught to be safe.
- A safe environment for pupils to learn in (real and virtual).
- An external, expert and timely review of safeguarding.



SEVERN ACADEMIES
EDUCATIONAL TRUST

Governance Handbook

Appendix 8

Please refer to SAET Director & Governor Visits Protocol