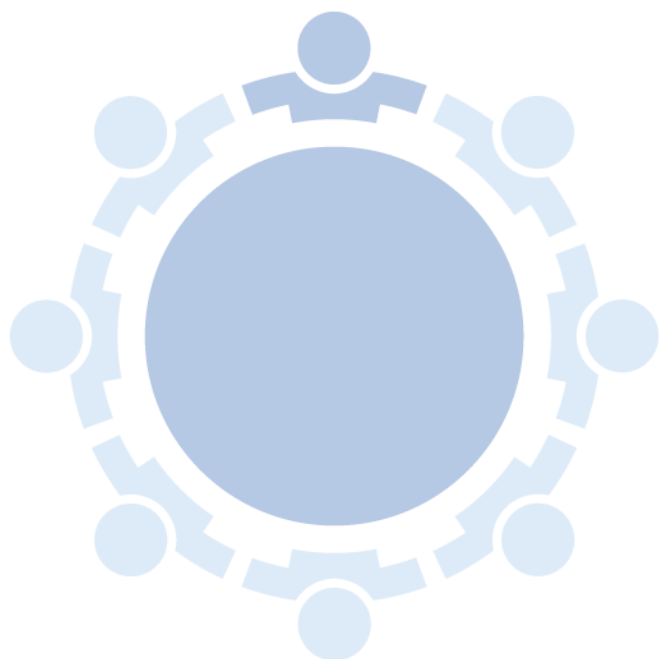


Scartho Junior Academy External Review of Governance

Consultant: Angela Dunkerley

Date: February 2023





National Governance Association

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MAT/Local authority	Single Academy Trust (SAT) in North East Lincolnshire
Membership details	Gold Membership: 1046194 Learning Link: 1046937

Terminology

Although everyone at Scartho still uses the terms ‘governors’ and ‘governing body’, this is a single academy trust (SAT) and therefore this report uses the more precise terms of ‘trustees’ and ‘trust board’.

Reason for commissioning the review

- Significant recent changes to the composition of the board had led to a decision being made to include governance development as a priority in the school development plan (SDP) for 2022/23. Gold membership of the National Governance Association (NGA) and the NGA Online Learning Link had been purchased in May 2022 and NGA were commissioned to carry out an external review of governance (ERG) after the principal and business manager noted the reference in the Academies Financial Handbook (AFH) to this being good practice. The principal, who is totally committed to governance, initiated the review and acted as key contact, but it had been acknowledged by all involved that the review would provide support and a useful external perspective in evaluating how effective governance is currently, helping to focus and prioritise activities in an action plan. It quickly became clear that there was unanimous support for this process from members and trustees.
- The academy is in an area where the vast majority of schools (primary and secondary) have become academies and there is no local authority support at all for governance.
- The principal has informed trustees and staff of his intention to retire in the summer of 2025 and wants to support the further development of strong, confident governance so that the board is in a position to work strategically, making decisions and leading on planning for continued school improvement and addressing future challenges. This includes awareness of the considerations for trusts arising from intentions in the DfE’s White Paper for all educational establishments to be part of strong multi academy trusts (MATs).
- The original thoughts were to begin the ERG in January 2023 but an initial conversation with the principal in July confirmed that if the review began in September, it could be used to assess strengths and areas for improvement and assist in prioritising actions in the development plan.

Background information

- Scartho Junior School became an academy in October 2011. It is situated in a pleasant residential area in the town of Grimsby in North East Lincolnshire.



- The academy is of average size with a pupil admission number (PAN) of 60. Autumn data showed 242 on roll, 29% free school meals (FMS6), 11% special educational needs and disability (SEND), 3% with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and 10% of pupils having English as an additional language (EAL). There are no exclusions and pupil mobility is not an issue.
- The principal has been in post for 19 years, there are two assistant principals, and all staffing is stable although there have recently been some challenges due to staff illness.
- The central team consists of the school business manager (SBM) who is part of the senior leadership team) a senior administrative assistant and an IT officer.
- Available data confirms that academic standards are good.
- Results of a recent parent survey are extremely positive and action was taken immediately to invite constructive suggestions for improving the two minor areas noted for improvement.
- The budget is balanced and showed a very healthy carry forward at the beginning of the year.
- The academy was judged to be good in its last two Ofsted inspections in 2014 and 2018. Comments about governance in the last one were positive but an area for improvement was that “senior and middle leaders should receive more wide-ranging challenge about the impact of their actions on whole-school improvement”. It is also significant that very experienced, active governors have since moved on and the board is in the process of reviewing and further developing its effectiveness and capacity by supporting the development of all members of the team. The board is best described as in a period of transition. All trustees are motivated and enthusiastic about fulfilling their roles as their understanding of governance and board responsibilities develops.

The governance framework

- At the start of the review the academy website showed 10 trustees (three of whom were employed at the school) and four members (two of whom were also trustees). Since that time two trustees have resigned but a recently retired headteacher is in the process of joining the board. One of the staff trustees also reached the end of her term of office in the autumn and a year 6 teacher has taken on the role so there are currently nine trustees. A fifth member with an audit background was also appointed in November meaning that there are now five and those who are not trustees outnumber those who are. Everyone is now fully aware of the need to aim for complete separation of roles.
- There are currently two parent vacancies which are proving difficult to fill.
- The information recorded at Companies House is accurate and just needs the latest appointment to be recorded once it is finalised.
- The articles of association on the website confirm that these are the earliest version of these documents and they still refer to ‘governors’ and ‘the governing body’; terms which the trust still uses.
- There are two committees: Resources, Risk and Audit (RRA) which until last October was chaired by the chair and Pupil Progress (PP) which, until October 2022, was chaired by the vice chair.
- There are named trustees linked to specific tasks such as safeguarding and headteacher performance management.
- Terms of reference, which are reviewed annually, for the trust board and for each of the two committees are published on the website. A scheme of delegation, which is reviewed annually, is also published on the website. The document includes a description of the role of members and trustees.
- The board meets six times a year at the beginning and end of each term. Each committee meets termly.
- The chair had been leading the board for five years and after discussions at the scoping meeting responsibilities were reviewed and the chair and vice chair swapped roles. At the same time two of the relatively new trustees became the committee chairs. However, although all three chairs were enthusiastic and had valuable skills and experience, it was acknowledged by everyone that they would need considerable support in building their confidence and developing their chairing skills and understanding of the roles.



- Following the loss of clerking services from the authority last spring, the academy bought clerking from the school support team at a neighbouring authority. They also signed up to Governorhub.
- The academy operates a hybrid system for meetings which are now mainly face-to-face but with the option of visitors and trustees joining virtually if they cannot attend in person. Due to distance the clerk usually joins virtually, and this system is currently working well.

The external review process

- There was an initial half hour telephone conversation in July with the principal who had initiated the review but with the full support of the board. Background information was exchanged and the approach to be taken in conducting the review was explained. Arrangements were made for the scoping meeting.
- The website was studied prior to the initial meeting.
- A face-to-face scoping meeting on 9 September was attended by the consultant, principal, clerk, chair and vice chair, plus two relatively new trustees. Time was spent getting to know each other and discussing the current context of the academy and governance arrangements. The purpose of, and processes for, the review were discussed and agreed.
- Extensive reading of documentation available on the trust website was subsequently followed up by being given access to all documentation and communication available on Governorhub.
- There were eight responses to the Evalu8 self-evaluation exercise which took place in September/October, but it appeared that comments had only been made by only two people. Although there was considerable positivity in the answers, the fact that a third of ratings were in the neutral, disagree or strongly disagree categories indicated that there was a general acceptance that there was work to be done in developing understanding of effective governance and current expectations. There was agreement that strengths were confidence in managing finances, compliance, understanding performance data and the quality of relationships. Most of the negative ratings were in the sections categorised as 'The right people' and 'Roles and responsibilities.'
- Individual telephone interviews then took place with the clerk, the business manager and three trustees.
- Virtual attendance enabled observation of the annual general meeting (AGM) and a meeting of the RRA committee.
- Numerous emails were exchanged over the course of the review to raise and answer queries on both sides, share information and facilitate each aspect of the interactions.
- There was a two-hour face-to-face development session on 8 December attended by seven trustees and the principal. This was planned to address issues highlighted by the Evalu8 exercise and the interviews. The summary Evalu8 report and consultant analysis of this were shared with trustees in advance and the session focused on further explaining and discussing roles and responsibilities including detailed discussion about the three core functions and eight elements of effective governance. Time was spent considering how the identified strengths could be used to move forward in developing the areas for improvement (which everyone acknowledged and agreed). This included a decision that a separate session facilitated by NGA would be commissioned to focus on vision and strategy. There was also reference to specific, relevant Learning Link modules that trustees might find useful.
- An evening session on 26 January was attended by all but one trustee (who was ill), the principal, two assistant principals, the business manager, and every teacher (a total of 16 people). Although trustees and staff admitted being understandably apprehensive about a three-hour session at the end of a working day, it turned into a very lively event with every person engaging in the group work, contributing ideas and planning how to work together to move this work forward. The benefits of having a clear mission statement, values, ethos, vision and strategic priorities were welcomed once everyone understood the concept. The added bonus to the session was the fact that trustees and staff all acknowledged how positive it had been getting to know each other and being able to all contribute to this strategic thinking.
- Communications received within three working days of the final session confirmed that the discussions 'had galvanised/motivated/engaged everyone', a meeting between the principle and three chairs had



been arranged 'to review where we are strategically' and the principal had commented that 'I don't think everyone will let me not move forward with this as they're now so passionate about the aims/values/vision'. Several complementary copies the NGA guide 'Being Strategic' and also the NGA Resource pack had been provided to support the continuation of this work.

- The agenda posted to Governorhub for the full board meeting due to take place two weeks after the vision and strategy session included several items directly related to acting on work done during the review. Items included:
 - next steps for drafting and consulting on the work done on vision and strategy following the process as explained in NGA's guide 'Being Strategic'
 - a discussion about the monitoring role of trustees
 - consideration of whether the content of the report from the principal is providing the information that trustees want
 - an update on performance management
 - a discussion about developing website content to raise the profile of governance
 - an item to give further consideration relating to decisions that all boards will need to take about being part of a MAT (or not).
- The review process, findings and recommendations are recorded in this quality assured report.

Key message

- Although governance is effective, trustees understanding of roles, responsibilities and current expectations has increased significantly over the course of the review. Trustee commitment to their own development has been clearly demonstrated and there is now agreement on the areas that can be improved in order to ensure that the eight elements of effective governance are firmly in place thereby supporting trustees in being confident about fulfilling their core governance functions. It is essential that the level of motivation, enthusiasm and team spirit evident at the vision and strategy session is maintained and used to complete the governance development plan, prioritising and acting on the recommendations in this report.
- It is commendable how quickly everyone has acted to address issues as they were identified during the review. This especially applies to how the board can become more strategic. It is vital this pace continues to complete work to agree and adopt a long-term vision and agree strategic priorities to be used as the focus of all other activities including trustee monitoring and holding senior leaders to account.
- There should be commitment to maximising benefits of participating in NGA's Leading Governance Development for Chairs programme. All three chairs are in the process of registering for the summer cohort. This has the potential to support efforts to act on all other recommendations. As the confidence of these key people grows, they will be in a strong position to use their clear commitment and develop their own leadership styles, coordinating and facilitating the contributions of every trustee. They should also use participation as an opportunity to establish invaluable contacts and networks beyond their own trust.

Findings

Findings are organised with reference to the three core governance functions and NGA's eight elements of effective governance which were discussed at length during the review.

The core governance functions:

1) Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

- a) Early communication and research indicated that there was an over reliance on the principal and the business manager to provide direction and to facilitate governance activities.



- b) There is no mention of vision on the website although the home page clearly displays the aim of ‘Developing a Lifelong Love of Learning’ and the values as Together, Kind and Evolving. Clicking on the link for Values, Aims and Ethos does reveal an explanation that this means adults and children are encouraged and nurtured to reach their potential. It then goes on to say that when children leave, the academy wants them to be great learners; respectful and kind; knowledgeable about the world and have empathy and understanding for others. This was used as a basis for discussions in the groups at the vision and strategy session.
- c) Answers to the Evalu8 exercise indicated a recognition that work was needed to develop a long-term vision. When discussing the strategic nature of governance at the development session the importance of a long-term vision that everyone was involved in formulating with a clear strategy for achieving this with priorities against which progress could be monitored was fully acknowledged and led to a request for a further facilitated session to work on this. It was recognised that this would then drive board activities and agenda setting.
- d) The fact that trustees, senior leaders and all teachers attended, and actively engaged in, the facilitated vision and strategy session led to lively group discussions on mission, values, ethos, vision and strategy. It was unanimously agreed that ‘Developing a Lifelong Love of Learning’ should actually be the basis of the mission statement and each of the three groups attempted to develop this with surprisingly similar outcomes. The groups then worked on what they felt should be in the vision and plans were made about how to take this work forward and produce a draft for consultation.
- e) As the review progressed, understanding grew about what it meant for governance to be strategic.

2) Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff

- a) Studying documentation on Governorhub, speaking to the clerk and observing meetings confirmed that the trustees receive considerable very relevant information from a variety of sources. These include reports from the principal, SBM, auditors and from external advisers brought in to scrutinise specific things such as the health and safety workplace inspection and a fire inspection. They also engage an organisation called Edtransform who comment on the strengths and areas for development in the curriculum approach at the academy. However, answers to the Evalu8 exercise, comments in interviews and discussions in the face-to-face interactions confirmed understandable concerns about what questions it was appropriate for them to ask.
- b) Reporting by the principal currently focuses on this year’s SDP priorities and after the development and visioning session there is understanding from everyone that this should in future be focused on the long-term vision and the strategic priorities. This should then include detail of progress on annual tasks linked to achieving this. There is more information on this on the NGA website [Executive leader reports - National Governance Association \(nga.org.uk\)](https://www.nga.org.uk/Executive-leader-reports)
- c) Trustees are receiving regular reports on performance management arrangements in the academy including details of the ongoing work to refocus how this is working. This is on the agenda for discussion at the February meeting and the report from the principal gives detailed explanation of the practicalities and thinking behind rebranding this process as ‘Professional Growth’ to reflect its aim of developing the academy as ‘A dynamic learning community’.
- d) Trustees are supported in carrying out the performance management of the principal by an adviser from Edtransform who has been with them for several years and who knows the academy well. The review takes place at the end of the academic year once SAT results and the outcome of the external curriculum review are known. Two further meetings take place during the year to review progress against the objectives that have been agreed. During the face-to-face sessions, discussion about being strategic highlighted the need for high level strategic objectives. One of the trustees involved in this process has now left and trustees will need to nominate another trustee for this role who will



need focused training in order to be in a position to contribute to further developing this process. There are Learning Link modules that will help with this.

- e) There is evidence now of trustees understanding the value of them taking more ownership of influencing what information they receive and in what format rather than simply accepting what is presented.
- f) At present one of the very experienced trustees (who is also currently a member) is named as lead for safeguarding along with one of the staff governors. This raises some concerns about accountability. Whilst recognising the difficulties of recruiting members and trustees with appropriate skills and experience, there is now acceptance that, for the purposes of transparent and effective accountability, individuals should not have dual roles. It is acknowledged that the staff governor will be well placed to understand safeguarding practice in the academy but they are effectively being placed in a position to hold themselves to account.
- g) Understandably trustee visits to help them get to know the academy and to carry out their monitoring have been disrupted by the pandemic but everyone is aware of the importance of reviewing how this will work in future whilst having regard to the competing demands on trustee time and subsequent availability. There is also now an understanding of how this will be linked to the strategic priorities for achieving the long-term vision.
- h) Discussions at the January session attended by both trustees and staff confirmed to everyone the value on both sides of getting to know each other and sharing thoughts.

3) Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent

- a) Although it was not within the scope of the review to include detailed examination of budgetary records, substantial evidence was seen that processes and practice are secure. The annual report and financial statement for year ending 31 August 2022 was seen prior to observing discussion of these at the AGM in November.
- b) The newly appointed chair of the RRA committee had previously worked at the academy as part of the auditing company engaged by members. After moving jobs, he then became a member at the trust, but it was quickly recognised that he could have more impact as a trustee and changed to this role in March 2022.
- c) The SBM has been at the school for many years and her commitment to supporting governance was abundantly clear throughout the review. She has worked with the RRA committee chair in the past when he was in the school as an auditor. They are already working well together to ensure that trustees have the information they need such as monthly monitoring reports.
- d) The internal audit report was seen and discussed with the committee chair during a telephone call prior to the RRA meeting. The initial review had taken place in April/May 2022 with a follow up in July. Initial recommendations had been challenged by the trustee (before he became committee chair) working with the SBM as they were not felt to be valid. The auditor changed the recommendations on the basis of discussions and the final report in October concluded that there was a high level of assurance, and the control framework was robust and working largely as expected. It contained only 12 recommendations all of which were considered low or medium risk.
- e) Observing the AGM and hearing the discussion between the members and the external auditor from Forrester Boyd, with contributions from the SBM, confirmed impressions from reading previous minutes, the ratings in Evalu8 and telephone interviews that all processes for managing finances are effective.
- f) Discussions at the observed RRA meeting a week after the AGM also provided evidence of the challenge taking place in relation to finances and the involvement that trustees have in decisions on spending.



- g) Following the strategy session there is also now understanding of how having clear strategic priorities will play a crucial part in focusing financial spending decisions.
- h) There was discussion about the value of including risks to effective governance on the risk register which the new RRA chair has been using his own background to help in reviewing.

NGA's eight elements of effective governance

1) The right people round the table

- a) It is not always easy to locate everything on the website and the information on trustees does not fully reflect the current situation. It would help raise the profile of governance if the information about the trustees, their activities and impact was expanded.
- b) The fact that three of the nine trustees in post are employed in the academy does raise concerns in terms of capacity and objectivity but this should be addressed when the parent governor vacancies are filled.
- c) Everyone is aware of the need to attract members and trustees with relevant skills, experience and backgrounds that will increase the overall diversity and capacity of the team. This is evidenced in recent successful appointments and there is now a good mix of ages, professional backgrounds, experience, and connections but there is potential for this to be further strengthened by the trustees themselves taking a more active role in seeking to attract parent trustees.
- d) One example of the positive impact of appointing the right people was seen in the depth and relevance of questions from members at the observed AGM. These resulted in responses that were further reassurance about the effectiveness of governance arrangements in overseeing finances.
- e) Minutes and attendance records published on the website show that there is excellent trustee attendance at meetings.
- f) There is evidence of the board increasingly considering how to support each other and share corporate responsibilities amongst them all with emphasis on trustees being linked to their areas of interest or expertise.
- g) It emerged that there was no practice of the chair (or vice chair) speaking to each trustee on a regular basis about their contribution to board performance. This was discussed in the development session with explanation that it should be treated as an opportunity to allow trustees to discuss their ambitions and any concerns. Developing all trustees and supporting them was also considered in discussions about succession planning.

2) Understanding the role and responsibilities

- a) It became clear from the start that trustees (both those who were relatively new and those who had been on the board for some time) were keen to use the review process to evaluate their effectiveness, develop their understanding of roles and responsibilities, clarify insight into what effective trust governance now looks like and hence be in a position to identify and prioritise activities in a governance action plan.
- b) Ratings and comments in the Evalu8 exercise together with impressions from desktop research and comments from individual telephone conversations were used to plan the development session. As already noted earlier in this report, trustees receive a wealth of valuable information but there had been some comments on the telephone about whether it was appropriate, or if a trustee was 'allowed', to ask some of the questions they had. Various reasons for this were mentioned but all could be linked to uncertainties about roles and responsibilities. This was addressed when covering the second core function during the session.
- c) Early in the review it was established that the board would all benefit from an increased understanding not only of what effective trust governance should look like but to be able to make use of finding out about good practice elsewhere. This also included increasing awareness of national issues that could potentially impact on the academy. This should be aided by the fact that one of the members used to be an auditor and now works as business manager at a local multi academy trust and one trustee is the trust accountant at another multi academy trust.



- d) The review highlighted that trustees knew that they needed to develop their communications with stakeholders and this led to discussions about ways of raising the profile of governance. The idea of a regular report was discussed and trustees were directed to the template suggested on the NGA website for this (as well as being given hard copies at the vision session). Ideas for expanding the information on the academy website about trustees and their work were explored and are already being taken forward with trustees preparing short biographies for inclusion rather than just having a name and photograph.
- e) During discussions with individual trustees at face-to-face meetings and in telephone calls, there were several mentions of how the whole board is developing as a team and how the reflection and evaluation of effectiveness is supporting everyone to have the confidence to contribute to planning further improvement together.
- f) There is an item on the agenda for the next meeting related to a demonstration of how to log into Learning Link with reference to the module 'Governance: your role, responsibilities and organisation'.

3) A good chair

- a) There is considerable evidence that the effectiveness of any board is significantly influenced by the strength of the chair who needs to develop positive and productive relationships with those around them. It was evident how this was increasingly recognised as the review progressed.
- b) Telephone conversations with individuals and observations in the AGM and RRA meeting indicated that although the three chairs were very committed to the role, enthusiastic and well informed with valuable transferable skills, they were not yet confident in chairing meetings. The chair of trustees and both committee chairs immediately committed to signing up for the next NGA development programme for chairs in summer 2023.
- c) The fact that the previous, well respected, dedicated and very experienced chair is continuing to give her full support as vice chair will be a huge advantage as will the continuing contributions and insights of another very long serving trustee who is also currently a member. An example of this was the confidence they showed in asking questions and making helpful contributions in the observed committee meeting and AGM.
- d) It was clear that the three new chairs have the respect and full support of other trustees and those they will be working closely with amongst the staff. It will be essential that they cultivate these relationships so that they can develop their own roles in facilitating and leading governance rather than taking on increased workloads themselves. They all recognise the need to gain knowledge and experience of chairing skills that will enable them to plan and control meetings effectively and to ensure discussions lead to clear decisions.
- e) It will be important to review the workload of the board chair to allow concentration on activities linked to leading and facilitating the work of the team.

4) Professional clerk

- a) A clerk (increasingly now referred to as the governance professional) who can offer advice and administrative support is an enormous asset to the board and chairs should draw upon their expertise. Ratings in the Evalu8 exercise indicated that everyone felt that the board did now have this support but noted that it was early days in developing the relationship and maximising the benefits of this service.
- b) A telephone interview with the clerk, who only joined the clerking team at a neighbouring authority in March 2022 but who specialises in supporting academies rather than maintained schools, provided valuable insights into how effective governance is at the academy. All comments were positive and reinforced the view that although there have been significant changes to the board, relationships are excellent, everyone is committed, papers are provided on time and communication is good. There was particular mention of the increasingly collaborative approach to agenda preparation.



- c) The documentation review confirmed that minutes are accurate and well presented.
- d) Access to Governorhub provided ample evidence of the support and information being made available promptly to trustees. Regular postings from the clerk include full governance updates with reference to recent guidance and information available including that coming from NGA. The updates also highlight available training opportunities. Several trustees made comment about how useful they are now finding Governorhub and the ready access this gives them to information.
- e) The clerk is maintaining records of trustee development and training such as on safeguarding.

5) Good relationships based on trust

- a) Relationships throughout the trust are extremely good and reflect the values (Together, Kind and Evolving) that have recently been agreed and which are clearly displayed and known by all. This was evidenced by the parent survey, observations of behaviour and interactions when in the building and in meetings (both virtual and face-to-face), the tone of communications and comments in individual telephone conversations and informally when in the building.

6) Knowing the school

- a) All trustees have chosen to be on the board at this particular academy rather than just seeking a role in governance. They all have some sort of personal connection and are committed to supporting the success of the academy. They know the area and understand the demographics.
- b) Visiting the academy during school hours has proved difficult due to the pandemic and the limitations from the personal work and family commitments of trustees but the benefits of finding ways to undertake even a short visit are fully acknowledged.

7) Committed to asking challenging questions

- a) The review of documentation and comments in telephone conversations indicated that some trustees had been unsure of 'what they were allowed to ask'. There was discussion in some calls about the difficulties of challenging but being supportive and constructive.
- b) Trustees now fully understand that the board is the accountable body and their confidence to ask challenging questions increased as their understanding of roles developed during the review. This was evident in the observed committee meeting, the development session and again at the vision and strategy session.
- c) See also the comments below about courageous conversations.

8) Confident to have courageous conversations

- a) As understanding of their roles as trustees has developed, the discussions that will need to take place about the future and whether to remain as a SAT or to consider becoming a MAT or joining an existing MAT will be an opportunity to test this element. There appears to have been no reason recently to have particularly difficult conversations but increased confidence and understanding as the review progressed supports the view that trustees will now be happy to challenge and have such conversations when necessary.
- b) One example of this happening was at the RRA committee meeting on 7th December. The chair and SBM explained the concerns about the approach and conclusions of the person carrying out the internal audit and gave examples of how initial recommendations had been challenged leading to them being amended. There was then lively and very relevant discussion involving other trustees and the principal.



Recommendations

1) Governance structure and practice

- a) The board should consider increasing its size in order to increase flexibility when committees have to be formed that cannot include trustees who work at the school and also to keep expectations acceptable for trustees with numerous other commitments and busy lives.
- b) There have been changes to the DfE model articles of association and there would be benefits to using the guidance on the NGA website to consider updating those that the trust has had in place since 2011. [Search Results | Site - National Governance Association \(nga.org.uk\)](#)
- c) Existing trustees should become more active in filling the two parent vacancies rather than simply relying on a letter sent out by the academy to invite applications.
- d) Trustees should ensure that any new appointments to the board are made aware that they are entitled to attend the brief 'Welcome to governance' sessions organised by NGA. Further details can be found at [Welcome to Governance LIVE! - National Governance Association \(nga.org.uk\)](#)
- e) Information on trustees on the website should be updated and expanded in order to raise the profile of governance.
- f) Efforts must continue to completely separate roles so that none of the members are also trustees.
- g) Changes must be recorded promptly at Companies House.
- h) Trustees must continue investment in their own ongoing training and development by considering making more use of Learning Link modules and/or attending the training events circulated in regular updates by the clerk on Governorhub.
- i) The benefits of NGA membership should be maximised by at least scanning the weekly e-newsletters, accessing the numerous resources available on the website and registering for some of the conferences, forums and webinars which will increase awareness and understanding of changes and challenges facing everyone as well as opening opportunities to establish supportive contacts and networks. This will help trustees to be alert to national issues that might impact on plans such as any developments in the government drive for all schools to be part of strong multi academy trusts. To manage time trustees could agree sharing attending (either face to face or virtually) events that might increase board understanding of current issues with an agreement on how any learning from this should be shared with fellow trustees, either through written reports or feedback at meetings.
- j) The board should actively continue efforts to further develop the already positive relationship with the clerk so that everyone can work efficiently and collaboratively to ensure that trustees and members have timely relevant information and to maximise support to the chairs in facilitating the work of the trustees.
- k) Everyone involved in governance at the academy will need to continue supporting the three new chairs as they share the learning they acquire through participation in the development programme. They will undoubtedly want to work with others at Scartho to consider whether information from the networks and contacts they establish can further develop practice at the academy.
- l) There needs to be a more structured planned approach to succession planning on the board so that if trustees move on there are colleagues confident to step into their roles ensuring that work continues uninterrupted.
- m) Consideration should be given to introducing a process for either the chair or vice chair having annual conversations with each trustee about their contribution to the board's performance. What have they found to be most rewarding? What aspect (if any) have they found most frustrating? Is there anything else they feel they could contribute if offered the opportunity to do so?

2) Vision, ethos and strategic direction

- a) Trustees should continue working closely with the principal to draft, consult upon and adopt a mission statement and long-term vision.
- b) The vision should then be shared widely so that it is owned by everyone.



- c) The strategy for achieving the vision must then be agreed with priorities and targets that should then be used as the focus of all other activities including trustee monitoring and holding senior leaders to account and performance management discussions for all employees.

3) Monitoring and holding to account; this should cover any issues with performance management

- a) Increased understanding of roles and responsibilities should be used to further develop trustee confidence to challenge, capitalising on the excellent trust and relationships in evidence at all levels.
- b) Trustees should consider using the guidance on the NGA website which offers suggestions on the questions trustees should be asking. [Search Results | Site - National Governance Association \(nga.org.uk\)](#)
- c) It will be important to identify another trustee to be involved in the performance management process for the principal and ensure that they receive appropriate support and development. In reviewing responsibilities trustees are also advised to consider who is linked to monitoring safeguarding.
- d) The principal and trustees should review the information in the termly report and how it is presented to ensure that it focuses on the agreed long term vision when it is approved and is providing the information the trustees require to monitor progress and hold senior leaders to account.
- e) Trustees should commit to preparing thoroughly for meetings by reading, and reflecting upon, all papers circulated in advance in order that they can actively participate in discussions and contribute confidently to the decision making.
- f) Trustees should continue to closely monitor the impact of the work being done by senior leaders to refocus performance management.
- g) A schedule of planned, focused trustee visits should be considered linked to monitoring progress on priorities and also on the effectiveness of agreed policies.
- h) Trustees need to increase ways of directly communicating with all stakeholders as part of their monitoring activities.

4) Financial oversight

- a) Current engagement to further develop the positive relationship between the newly appointed committee chair and the very experienced business manager should continue so that committee members are well informed and ready to engage confidently in discussing finances and making necessary decisions.
- b) Trustees should ensure that once the vision and strategy are agreed, all finance decision making is based on this.

Ongoing support

- The academy has Gold NGA membership and subscribes to the online virtual learning which provides a wealth of ongoing information, support and advice. Gold membership also gives access to a range of conferences, forums and webinars as well as allowing the academy to use the Goldline Advice Service either online or by phone (0121 237 3782)
- For further consultancy support, including external advisors for headteacher performance management, contact consultancy@nga.org.uk

Acknowledgments

It has been a pleasure to conduct this review and thanks must go to everyone at the trust for their time, enthusiasm and commitment to the process. The willingness to provide information, listen to all advice and



suggestions, actively engage in discussions and be open to change has already resulted in considerable progress in strengthening the foundations of effective governance. It is hoped that the outcomes of this review and the additional facilitated session on vision and strategy, will contribute to ensuring sustainable, effective, informed decision making and planning related to further strengthening and future proofing governance structures and processes that will enable the trust to achieve its ambitions and continue its journey of continual improvement.

NGA sign off