



THE
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ACADEMIES
TRUST

DSAT Academy Trust

Local School Boards

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Foreword

DSAT began in 2013 when, in response to the coalition government's drive for schools to become academies, the Diocese of Sheffield worked with a group of schools and trustees drawn from different backgrounds with the vision of establishing a trust that would secure the benefits offered to schools by working together in a multi-academy trust, while also maintaining the personal and local nature of each school. This is, in part, because of the experience of working with a church school, all of which retain a strong link to their parish and community. We believe schools can best thrive in a local setting that allows each of them to grow their own individual ethos and identity. This is the vision for education we brought to the academy business.

As a Diocese, we are committed to making the most of the opportunities an academy trust offers. We are also enthusiasts for each school retaining something that makes it individual and distinctive. One crucial factor in this is that DSAT is a mixed trust. From its inception, it has never been a trust of church schools, and while the majority come from this background, the DSAT vision is to remain open to all schools and to respect and maintain the identity of a school as it is, on joining our trust.

Above all this, there is a commitment to providing an excellent education. At every level, DSAT has worked to ensure excellence. This is now reflected in a growth plan demonstrating the capacity and resources for this trust to grow. A critical feature is our local school boards, which are important advisory bodies at the school level.

Huw Thomas
Chair of DSAT
Diocesan Director of Education, Diocese of Sheffield

As DSAT has grown and considered legal and statutory duties, some duties that resided with LGBs outside a MAT structure are centrally owned. For example, budget setting, procurement and HR. This does not exclude our local school boards from collaborative involvement. We will retain an absolute commitment to local participation. Our strategic intent to keep schools local cannot be achieved without local school boards being our 'eyes and ears' on the ground, sharing and escalating successes and concerns. The legal and statutory context does transfer responsibilities from a school level to DSAT centrally, but our local arrangements are critical to us. By providing parental feedback and by total involvement in recruitment, our local school boards ensure that every school meets DSAT's ambition for it to serve the community's needs.

Andrew Waldron
Chief Executive Officer

DSAT Trust Governance and Operations Structure

- At the top of the structure, DSAT has five Members covering educational and business skill sets. No employees of DSAT are members, and only one Trustee is also a member.
- Trustees – DSAT has nine Trustees with excellent coverage across education and business. The CEO is the only employed Trustee but has no voting rights. The Trustees meet six times per year. Within the Trustee group, we have identified individuals responsible for safeguarding, finance, HR and risk. We have two Parent Trustees. Should we be required to source replacements, we would maintain the practice of using our network to identify high-calibre individuals with the required skills who are interviewed by the Chair and who initially assume a 12-month position before ratification. We advertise for parent volunteers and notify parents of the vacancy on our website.
- Trustee meetings professionally clerk, and a review of conflicts of interest, or their potential, is always an item. A vital feature of the Trustee activity is referencing the Academies Financial Handbook and KPIs defined in the DSAT KPI checklist. The Trustees have access to ‘retained’ legal education specialists, Wrigleys.
- The Chair leads the Trustees in keeping with DSAT’s vision and mission. The DSAT CEO leads the organisation according to the Trustee’s intentions and the agreed strategic plan. A Scheme of Delegation outlines how roles are delegated from Trustees to the Executive Team.
- Where local support arrangements are judged as strong, a Local School Board (or an Executive Local School Board covering more than one school) is in place to advise the school and the Executive Team. Where for any reason, the Trustees or Executives feel that there is a need for a higher level of support or guidance, a Trust School Board (TSB) is established. Most members of the TSB will be from the DSAT’s central team or other senior DSAT personnel from outside the school concerned, but additional members will join to ensure the Trust School Board’s (TSB) graduation to a Local School Board (LSB).
- LSBs and TSBs meet every term and follow a DSAT-approved structured agenda. Copies of all minutes are sent to the DSAT Head of Business Operations. We expect a crucial feature of all meetings to be pupil progress and attainment reviews and a review of milestones defined by the school SEF and DEP. Budgets are set centrally, but LSBs play a role in scrutinising spending at the local level, ensuring good procurement practices and no conflicts of interest.
- An Executive Local School Board (covering two or more schools) will follow the structured agenda. Executive Local School Board members will have at least two identifiable members with direct links and responsibility to a single school within the Executive structure. Ideally, these will be parents.
- Several DSAT schools are Church Schools. The trust will seek representation from the foundation onto Schools Boards in these schools. The incumbent (designated priest or minister) in a parish or someone appointed by the Archdeacon to serve in that capacity in relation to the school will always be invited to the School Board.
- ‘Stakeholder voice’ is a crucial input from the local boards who interface with the DSAT CEO every term via a Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting. TSBs meet with the CEO and Deputy CEO as required.

Local operational support and oversight at DSAT

Individual academies in the Trust are overseen by the DSAT Executives with delegated powers, defined by the DSAT scheme of delegation. (See website). The Executives and the School are supported by the School Boards, which operate in an advisory capacity. In addition to their advisory role, they have access to key KPIs to facilitate opportunities for scrutiny and challenge. School Boards may not decide the curriculum, but they should monitor the delivery to satisfy themselves that it is meeting the community's needs.

There are three types of local arrangements, and in practice, the responsibilities of every kind of arrangement are similar. Whichever type of local board someone joins, the principles for the work are the same.

Local School Board (LSB) - these bodies are the dominant feature in DSAT and have a lower level of Trust representation and are deemed more sustainable and, in time, to be in the best position to contribute to the broader oversight and support network within the Trust. There may be subtle differences in how these boards contribute across DSAT with a level of 'earned autonomy' based on the skill and knowledge of each school board.

Executive Local School Board (ELSB) – these bodies operate similarly to LSBs but will have accountability for more than one school. In **all** cases, schools with an ESB structure will be within a local vicinity, have a similar context, and always be under the leadership of one Executive Headteacher. They will meet at the same interval (one meeting per term), but the meeting will likely be slightly longer. Critically they will, in all cases, have two members who represent a single school within the cluster, and ideally, we will seek for these to be parents.

DSAT Trustees have determined that ideally, within one year of a school becoming part of an Executive Headteacher Structure, its local support arrangements will be within an Executive Local School Board arrangement. This will be a decision for the Executive Head Teacher.

Aside from the Head Teacher, members of LSBs and ELSBs are volunteers, chosen for their skills, experience and insights, to whom specific responsibilities are delegated to oversee individual schools. Local Boards are not legally responsible for the schools, so members can focus on school improvement by supporting and challenging the Head Teacher and the wider school leadership team.

Since ESB and ELSB members are drawn from the local community and usually include parents and staff, their input is essential in informing DSAT's understanding of the local context and individual school performance. The local arrangement is also a supportive forum where the Headteacher can access the insights of people with professional and voluntary experience outside the education sector.

Trust School Board - the final and third type of arrangement is a local board established for schools that need a higher level of support, guidance, or direction from DSAT's central team. In the early stages, most TSB members will be Trust employees, either from the central support team or from leaders and specialists from other DSAT schools. Additional volunteer members will join to ensure the local body's graduation to a Local School Board (LSB).

All arrangements described above will follow the same agenda structure distributed by DSAT each term.

The work of the local bodies

They have ten primary accountabilities in supporting the DSAT Executive Team:

1. Safeguarding. It follows that if we see local boards as ‘our eyes and ears’, the protection of children should be at the core of this. Indeed, we are investing in training to provide LSBs with more incredible skills in this area. We cannot think of a more critical task for an LSB than bringing together their local community knowledge and knowledge of school practice to ensure that safeguarding is at the core of what we do. The LSB will have access to all relevant information, including the audits that DSAT complete centrally. The LSB should always ask, “Do the audits reflect how the local community view safeguarding at the school?”
2. Monitoring School Performance. DSAT’s school improvement protocols mean a school will have support visits throughout the academic year. The Record of Visit will typically focus on the many positive elements we see, but the purpose is to identify areas where support is required. These ROVs (Record of Visits) provide information that can assist the LSB in asking the right questions at LSB's meetings. LSBs can have data to be a better ‘critical friend’ influencing the outcome, not just reviewing it. The LSB is critical to asking the right questions about school progress, understanding the priorities, and ensuring the community's needs are met. Feedback from LSBs has been very positive regarding the training we provide. Good data is only meaningful when it is understood. DSAT aims to ensure through training and coaching that LSBs understand the information to which they have access. LSBs are not required to pass comments on classroom practice, judge teaching methods or assess the perceived quality of teaching. DSAT expert practitioners will provide the LSB with this information where it is relevant to do so. At every LSB meeting, the group should ask, “Is this school delivering positive progress for every pupil” asking, “Are relationships with the community and parents supporting this progress?”
3. Recruitment. Save for Headteacher and Head of School appointments, where we believe DSAT must have a significant input (not exclusive, but significant), it follows that recruitment must remain ‘local’ and LSB members will support. When recruiting great staff is difficult, the LSB members can help sell the school to prospective applicants. The question for the LSB when on the recruitment panel should be, “Will this person understand our community and gain its confidence?” Regarding Headteacher appointments, a member of the LSB would always be on the recruitment panel, and DSAT would be very reluctant to implement any leadership model where there was no consensus with the LSB.
4. Parent Complaints/Community Involvement. We want to say we have none, but we do. The LSB is always leading or on the complaints panel where we have them. Complaints can often have a local context, so we need the LSB.
5. Parent Communication. DSAT does not typically write to parents: the relationship is with the school, and the LSB can provide significant advice to the HT on the tone and content. Furthermore, we have identified a need for improved parent engagement. A DSAT Parental Survey has been launched across all schools, and the outcome of the parental questionnaire can form a discussion for the local board for local action.
6. Discipline and Grievance matters. Consistency is needed across the Trust, but the LSB still plays a significant part when these matters are being considered locally. We are pleased to say that these matters are few and far between.
7. OFSTED Inspection. From the Trust, OFSTED expects clarity on school improvement initiatives, statutory compliance, leadership challenges, curriculum development and how additional school funding is best used. Where an LSB or ESB is in place, they can expect to meet OFSTED, with the DSAT executives to be questioned on how they support safeguarding, staff welfare, parent engagement, monitor school performance and how they would manage and escalate any concerns.

8. LSBs and ESBs in our church schools. We are not exclusively church schools, but our LSBs in these schools do, and will always, have a membership that establishes a link to the local Church and our core values and will also play a focal part in SIAMS inspection. The incumbent (designated priest or minister) in a parish or someone appointed by the Archdeacon to serve in that capacity in relation to the school. The trust is deeply respectful of parish and mission area oversight for church schools. In DSAT academies, the trust will look to the LSB to discharge the duties of local responsibility concerning Church schools. The LSB should be asking, “Does our theological rationale meet our local needs?” Members of the LSB would play a key role in outlining how effective links are formed with the local community and parish during any SIAMS inspection.
9. Policy approval at the local level. The LSB retains a crucial role in ratifying policies by our ethos, where flexibility can or should be provided to individual schools. Trustees approve some policies that schools must adopt—for example, the DSAT Complaints Policy. In contrast, the local board would authorise the school policy on educational visits and how much financial support would be expected from parents; they would also approve the uniform policy, for example.
10. Grants and Fundraising. School boards, if they so wish, can help increase school funds by encouraging parent involvement, organising fundraising events, and helping schools develop partnerships with local businesses and community groups. Overall, school boards can play a role in assisting schools to raise funds and support their educational programs. By providing guidance, resources, and support, school boards can help schools to organise successful grant applications and fundraising campaigns that benefit the entire community.

Key features of the local board arrangement

Meetings are the main opportunities for local bodies to come together to share their work and for the Head Teacher to update governors on the school's performance. They also allow other staff members to report on their work. Over the year, these meetings will cover a wide range of aspects of school life, and the minutes will be substantial evidence of the support and challenge given to the leadership. TLSBs will meet a minimum of six times a year, while LSBs and ESBs are asked to meet at least three times a year with at least one meeting, not via a Zoom-type arrangement.

The Chair convenes and leads and chairs meetings. They are the main link between the local board and the Head Teacher, with whom the chair will work to build a strong partnership. They are responsible for liaising with the clerk to manage papers and records for the local board. The Chair is also the main link with the DSAT CEO.

The chair is also responsible for promoting the development of the local board as a whole and will play a decisive part in determining the appointment and re-appointment of School Board Members and ensuring that the local board is effective. The Chair and Vice Chair also represent the local board in meetings with the CEO over Zoom type meeting three times yearly.

Commitment is needed, and local school board members will be expected to attend meetings; visit the school at least once a year and hear a selection of school events where parents are present. There is a need to make time to read papers and prepare questions before meetings. Members should also research or attend training to improve their knowledge and skills. Members might be asked to sit on review panels for exclusions, complaints or disciplinary matters.

The local clerk, typically the School Business Manager, should ensure that records of support and oversight are kept up to date, that meeting papers and other important documents are shared in an accessible and timely manner and that an accurate and valuable record of meetings is kept.

The only minimum number of members is the Head or HoS, a staff member, a local clergy member, and at least one parent. Members do not have to join for minimum periods and can be co-opted for short periods if required for interim needs. Recommended period of office is two years. The ideal size and composition would be Head or HoS, staff member, member of local clergy, one invited member of the community and two parents. This forms a body of six, with the Chair ideally not an employee of the school.

The individual's role within local boards

Each member plays an essential part in making sure that the local board as a whole works effectively. They must proactively engage with the school and develop their knowledge and expertise.

This document sets out the expectations for all volunteers and sits aside the DSAT Governors Code of Conduct, which, whilst a legacy document, still applies in the context of local boards. Members, typically no less than five with ideally two parents, will be appointed to a local board because they can offer the qualities that it needs:

- Experience – DSAT’s network of local board members brings together a wide range of professional, academic, voluntary and life experiences. New volunteers are often concerned that they do not know enough about education, but schools hugely value what people outside the sector can offer from the start.
- Perspectives – local school support and oversight works best when there is a diversity of opinion around the table. Representatives from the local community are essential to helping the school serve its local context.
- Knowledge – while local board members might have no specific knowledge of education when they begin the role, there is an expectation that they will actively seek to develop this knowledge over time by accessing training and reading on the subject to understand better what it is they govern and why.

Applications

Applications must always be made using the DSAT Local Board Application Form. They can be made in response to an advert or enquiry where someone feels they have something to offer a particular local board. They are ratified by the CEO or Deputy CEO and the People Director, who at its sole discretion can reject an application (or indeed can remove a member at its sole discretion) and will give due regard to skills, knowledge, and experience but also as to the motivations of the person applying. DSAT executives report each school's local board membership and activity to the Board of Trustees, with at least two trustees being involved in ratifying any removal of any unpaid volunteer from a local board.

Pre-appointment checks

Once an appointment is confirmed, members of local boards will be asked to complete an appointment pack, which includes privacy information, a register of interests and a skills audit. The Governor's code of conduct will be issued, and a self-disclosure form will be required.

Everyone will also receive the following:

- Confirmation of the dates of their term of office
- Dates of all scheduled future meetings
- Links to relevant governance resources
- In addition to holding this information, the Trust will also undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check to ensure that no one poses a risk to children. Everyone will be expected to undertake statutory safeguarding training.

Visits

Knowing the school and being visible to the school community is essential to supporting, challenging and championing it as part of the governor’s role. Meetings and reports from the school’s leadership

are crucial but must be complemented by visits so that the local board shares a deep understanding of school life.

The main principle of effective school visits is that they should be purposeful. As part of the introduction to the school, local board members should be invited to undertake a learning walk to know the school's layout and condition and start to get to grips with the terminology.

A visit might also include a meeting with someone other than the Headteacher, and talking to children and recording their comments about the school can be vital.

Four areas of local governance responsibility change when a school joins DSAT and are delegated from the Trustees to DSAT Executives.

1. Financial Management. It remains vital that the ELSB or LSB monitors expenditures. DSAT centrally has access to critical financial data, but the LSB plays a role in being the 'eyes and ears' for local-level spend, and as such, we are improving monitoring reports for the LSB. Under the statute, the CEO is deemed the 'Accounting Officer' and has statutory obligations. It is the case that the trust is responsible for the three core governance functions, with #3 being 'Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent'. As such, the setting and 'sign-off' of the budget has become a central trust role which does indeed avoid duplication of work. The LSB continue to play a role when the budget is set in that the Headteacher may propose to invest in areas that will have been discussed locally to reflect a local need. For purchases over £5,000, the three quotes the LSB will ensure are sought will be sent to DSAT centrally for approval.
2. Head Teacher Appraisal. Pre-academisation, a school would be required to engage with a third party to support the appraisal process, and the governing body would possibly have felt more involved. Still, the 'third party' would have heavily influenced them in practice. DSAT now sets and reviews objectives. The 'external body' of the school is now DSAT. As a single employer, we require greater consistency in appraising performance. Of course, the views of the LSB, notably the Chair, must be aligned, and we cannot recall in the last two years, following the shift in responsibility, any difference of opinion between DSAT and the LSB and the views of the Chair are included on the appraisal document as a matter or record.
3. Employment Law matters. The application of national Trade Union agreements sets the tone for consistency, and we have no intention to depart from these. That said, there can be occasions when judgements must be applied regarding how our staff are treated (in the case of discipline and grievance, for example). It can also be more comprehensive than this, and COVID highlighted an important point. DSAT is the sole employer, so we must have consistency where judgements are to be made. We cannot treat two people differently in identical circumstances as a single employer. We now have a full-time People Director who, in a very positive and progressive way, will work with the school leadership (and LSBs where appropriate) to provide advice and guidance on process and policy. LSBs will influence decision-making according to the Scheme of Delegation.
4. Authorising Pay Progression. Again, in the tussle between our intent for schools to retain a high level of individuality but within legal parameters, the legal framework wins. Head Teachers continue to make recommendations for pay progression, and we want and need the input of the LSB, but as a single employer, we must have consistency. As such, DSAT has guidelines for individual academies, including 'DSAT's Career Stage Expectations document, which our Head Teachers helped produce and ratify, but the final 'sign-off' for SLT and UPS progression can only reside with DSAT. We would stress, though, that the process is open with communications channels open and flowing both ways. It would be a collective failure if a consensus were not reached. The LSB continue to approve MPS moves for teaching staff.

What other benefits can DSAT bring to local school boards?

When we discussed this with local volunteer members, common themes included training and CPD, networking (Trust wide and locally), peer support for new Chairs and Vice Chairs and clerking support. With clerking support, the Clerk to DSAT Trustees (experienced) will provide a standard suggested agenda and review minutes, advising the Chair and Head Teacher on areas where recorded items may be improved.

In addition, DSAT provides full access to the GovernorHub. GovernorHub is an online tool that lifts the chores of school oversight from local board shoulders so they can focus on the big picture. It supports the organisation, preparation and document storage of all board papers and creates accessible communication for trustees and local governors.

Finally, we also arrange full access via GovernorHub to The Key for School Governors. The website has jargon-free articles to understand how legislation and statutory requirements affect schools.

Other Key Sources of Information

DSAT website at dsat.education

DSAT Scheme of Delegation (essential reading alongside this document) and available under the policies section on the DSAT website

Academy Trust Handbook, available on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website

The DSAT Governor Code of Conduct on GovernorHub