



Report to Members of the Trust Board

Presented at the

Annual General Meeting on

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Introduction

This report is designed to provide Members with an overview of the work of the Trust Board over the past 12 months.

It should be read in conjunction with the Statutory Accounts and Audit Report as well as information on the performance of the schools within the Trust, presented separately.

The minutes of Trust Board meetings are available on the WLT website which also includes short biographical information about each Trustee.

<http://wandlelearningtrust.org.uk>

Background

The Wandle Learning Trust (WLT) was formed in January 2018 by two outstanding schools: Chestnut Grove Academy in Balham and Chesterton Primary School in Battersea. Both schools had been working in close partnership for many years, which made the creation of WLT the next logical step in their collaboration. The Headteachers of the founding schools, Christian Kingsley and Mark Siswick, jointly lead the Trust as Executive Headteachers. This model of leadership - rare within Academy Trusts - represents the values of partnership, autonomy and collegiality, which underpin the work of the WLT.

WLT is, however, more more than simply the sum of the two founding schools: through its leadership of the Wandle Teaching School Alliance, the London and South West Maths Hub, Early Years Hub and English Hub it currently provides over 40 schools with access to outstanding leadership, training and support.

More information on both schools in the Trust and the work of the Teaching School Alliance and the Hubs can be found here:

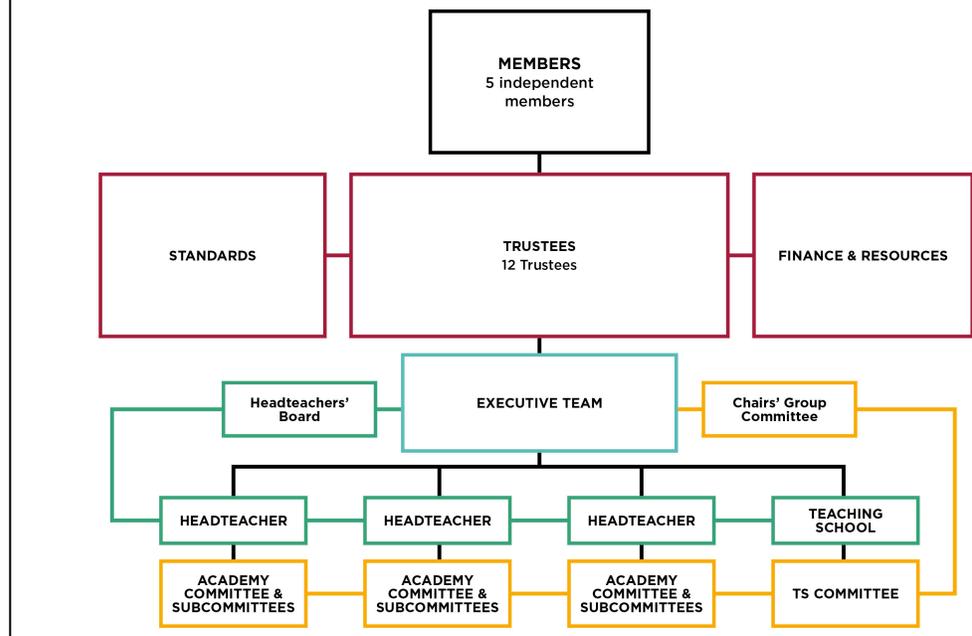
<http://www.chestnutgrove.wandsworth.sch.uk>

<http://www.chesterton.wandsworth.sch.uk>

Overleaf is a diagram outlining the Governance Structure of the Trust.

The following diagram outlines the structure of the Academy Trust.

WLT Leadership & Governance structure:



Structure of the Report

The three core functions of an Academy Board are to:

- Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Hold executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
- Oversee the financial performance of the organisation and make sure its money is well spent.

In order to discharge these functions the DfE has identified six key features of effective governance:

- **Strategic leadership** that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy.
- **Accountability** that drives up educational standards and financial performance.
- **People** with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity.
- **Structures** that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- **Compliance** with statutory and contractual requirements.
- **Evaluation** to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance.

This report takes each of these features in turn in order to provide Members with an overview of the Board's work over the last 12 months.

1. Strategic Leadership

Our ambition is clear: we have the highest expectations for all our pupils in the Trust, both now and in the future. Our time, expertise and commitment are given to help achieve this ambition.

This ambition focuses our energies and has determined our four key priorities.

- To provide outstanding leadership and governance across the Trust;
- To ensure that every pupil in the Trust has access to and benefits from a balanced, rich and aspirational education;
- To ensure the Trust's resources are managed and deployed in ways that effectively support the achievement of its vision; and
- To grow the Trust in a sustainable way and to secure its long-term viability

These priorities are set out in more detail in Annex A.

Our governance structure, established over the past 12 months, provides the strategic leadership framework that enables us to achieve our ambition. Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are distributed across the Trust Board, its committees and the two Local Academy Committees that support the schools in the Trust.

The Trust's Scheme of Delegation and clear terms of reference for each layer of governance formalise this structure. These were reviewed at the start of this academic year to ensure they remained fit for purpose.

Our chair of Trustees is independent of either school, underpinning the fact that we are not a Trust led by one or other school but an equal partnership of two outstanding schools coming together to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

As outlined in the introduction to this report, the Trust also incorporates the Wandle Teaching School Alliance, a Maths Hub and an Early Years Hub. We are the only Trust in the country to operate all these provisions together. This year the Department for Education (DfE) has asked us to open an English Hub. This is a significant achievement and one that further demonstrates our ability and commitment to providing strategic and system leadership not just within the Trust but also across the community of schools and academies in the area.

Over the course of this year the Trust has developed central policies for finance, operations and corporate governance. These are embedded in both schools and provide a strong framework for decision-making and accountability. New schools joining the Trust will adopt these policies, giving them the benefit and

security of becoming part of a strong and robust organisation.

We intend to grow in a balanced way and plan to expand to 8 schools with 5,000+ pupils by 2021. Our Trust will include primary and secondary schools; those who will need our support due to the challenges they face, and good and outstanding schools who will add to our existing expertise and allow us to develop our capacity further.

Robust due diligence processes for assessing schools seeking to join the Trust are in place. While maintaining a strategic role, Trustees are nevertheless sufficiently close to the detail of these processes in order to properly identify, understand and assess the risks and benefits involved of taking on new schools.

The Trust maintains a register of business and pecuniary interests for all Trustees and members of the Local Academy Committees and has approved and adopted a Code of Conduct incorporating the “Nolan Principles”.

Ultimately, we recognise our responsibility and accountability for shaping the society of the future. As such all our policies are underpinned by an ethos and set of values designed to maximise the wellbeing of pupils, provide pupils with an exciting curriculum and engender a joy in learning.

2. Accountably

Our Trust is led by joint Executive Headteachers (EHTs). Christian Kingsley is the designated Accounting Officer and Mark Siswck leads the work of the Wandle Teaching School Alliance and Maths, English and Early Years Hubs

Both EHTs retain headteacher responsibilities for their respective schools and their performance management process is shared between the Trustees and members of their respective Local Academy Committee (LAC).

In line with our commitment to respecting the autonomy of schools in the Trust, responsibility for scrutiny and oversight of educational performance lies with each LAC. Both are experienced in holding their senior leaders to account for the performance of their respective schools and each have a strong track record of overseeing outstanding performance and providing effective governance and leadership.

We have not attempted to replicate the work of the LACs, instead our priority this year has been on establishing the framework, systems, structures and processes that will provide effective oversight of each school in the Trust. Our focus, therefore, has been on identifying those areas where, by working across the Trust, we can genuinely “add value” to the work and outcomes of each school.

For example, the Trust has established a Standards Committee to monitor and scrutinise headline educational data and key metrics reflecting the overall performance of both schools in the Trust. This will allow it to maintain a good understanding of the strengths and areas of focus in each school, pursue lines of inquiry where performance is not meeting expectations and provide effective challenge where necessary. With only two schools in the Trust at present we have the opportunity to embed the work of this committee in advance of welcoming new schools to the Trust. This will ensure that schools joining the Trust, whose performance is not strong, are appropriately monitored, supported and challenged from the outset.

Our Trust-wide Finance and Resources committee is now well established. Terms of reference set out how financial responsibilities are shared between the committee and the two LACs, providing a strong accountability framework. This committee is well supported by our Director of Business and Operations who fulfills the role of Chief Finance Officer. Notable achievements over the year have been:

- the introduction of a single finance system across both schools (schools joining the Trust will migrate their financial operation to this system);
- developing and adopting Trust-wide finance, HR and operational policies;
- establishing a secure budget forecasting process; and
- beginning to develop a central finance team.

We were particularly pleased to achieve a positive audit for the period ending 31st August 2018 – a period during which we combined the financial operations of a maintained school (Chesterton Primary School) with those of an existing academy (Chestnut Grove Academy).

As a group, we are aware that schools that join the trust may need a greater degree of support and challenge than our existing schools. In undertaking proper due diligence prior to any school joining we will be in a strong position to establish a local governance framework appropriate to each school's circumstances.

While programmes of school visits by LAC members are well established in each school, as a Board of Trustees we are yet to establish a regular cycle of such visits. This will be an area for development over the course of the coming year. In doing so we will be careful not to simply duplicate existing processes but identify where our visits can contribute to and support Trust-wide functions. For instance, having appointed Health and Safety and Safeguarding link Trustees, they will be able to play a key role in providing assurance to the Board that there is consistency of practice and approach across all schools in the Trust.

Looking forward to the next 12 months, a priority for us will be to undertake training on the revised Ofsted Framework to ensure all LAC members and Trustees are well prepared for any future inspection.

3. People

The Trust is led by a group of experienced and capable people. Many of the Trustees and LAC members hold or have held senior positions within the public, private or third sector. This makes for a rich diversity of perspectives, which collectively are channeled into supporting and driving forward the work of the Trust.

In establishing the Trust, the two founding schools took a clear and conscious decision to establish a Board that was not dominated by either and which allowed for the appointment of number of new independent Trustees.

Our Board can have a maximum membership of 12 Trustees (10 non-executive Trustees and the 2 joint Executive Headteachers). When originally formed the Trust Board consisted of six non-executive Trustees: four from the two founding schools (the chairs of each, plus one other) and two independent Trustees, one of whom serves as the Chair.

We then ran a competitive and transparent search process, supported by Academy Ambassadors, to appoint a further four non-executive Trustees. All four started attending board meetings in June 2018 and were appointed as co-opted Trustees in October 2018. In identifying the skills needed to complement those of the existing Trustees we have created a Board that has significant capacity and depth of experience to ensure robust decision making and that will be well able to support our growth over the coming few years.

In May 2018 LAC members and Trustees came together for an evening training session. One of our Members, who is also a Chair from another MAT a few years further ahead of us on the journey, provided his perspectives and learning. The joint Executive Headteachers also gave a presentation setting out the key priorities for Trust and its strategic direction.

Notwithstanding the knowledge and expertise of individual Trustees, it was important that we had a common understanding of the legal and regulatory framework of Academy Trusts and the educational performance of both schools. In June 2018 a Board meeting was devoted to a training session led by a lawyer from a firm well experienced in supporting Academy Trusts. This session also included an overview of the educational performance of each school.

In addition, a pack of induction materials was developed for all Trustees, and particularly for those new to Academy Trust governance, which including all of the key national guidance and Trust-specific documentation.

4. Structures

Our governance structure is set out in the introduction to this report (page 4).

It is compliant with the provisions and requirements of our Articles of Association and other DfE guidance. In particular, of the 5 Members of the Trust only one is a WLT Trustee, thereby ensuring the objectivity and independence of the Member group.

The Board has established three Trust-wide committees: a Standards Committee, a Pay and Performance Committee and a Finance and Resources Committee. A Local Academy Committee (LAC) oversees each school in the Trust. This structure reflects the principles set by the founding schools that each should retain a high degree of autonomy. The role of the Trust Board is to take a largely strategic position, overseeing those functions that are most effectively discharged at the center and providing assurance that all statutory functions of the Trust are being complied with.

Each LAC has the delegated authority to determine its size and composition – the only requirement being that each must include at least two elected parents. The LACs delegated responsibilities are set out in the Trust's Governance Handbook and accompanying Scheme of Delegation which can be accessed here.

<http://wandlelearningtrust.org.uk/about-us/finance>

For the Academic Year 2018-19 our cycle of meetings is designed in a way that enables a sensible exchange of information and effective communication to take place between each layer of governance. In general LACs meet in the first half of each term and the Trust's sub-committees and the Trust Board meet in the second half.

We recognise that providing high levels of autonomy to LACs may not be appropriate for all schools joining the Trust in the future. In principle, a Good or Outstanding school would enjoy similar levels of governance responsibilities to those of the existing schools in the Trust. The LACS of schools in more challenging circumstances will have a narrower range of delegated responsibilities to reflect their capacity and support needs. Where necessary we will establish an Interim Academy Board (IAB) to oversee a school's journey out of its Ofsted judgment and towards a Good or better judgment.

In reality, the existing schools in the Trust exercise greatest autonomy in matters of educational performance, pupil and student welfare and community engagement. The Trust Board retains a greater degree of control over financial matters. This simply reflects the legal and regulatory framework Academy Trusts

operate within. Nevertheless, our Scheme of Financial Delegation and associated policies are structured in a way that gives LACs the responsibility to set their annual budgets, subject to Trust Board sign-off, places a duty on them to monitor and manage budget performance through the year within defined parameters and allows them to identify expenditure priorities for the use of any reserves they brought into the Trust – again subject to Trust approval.

While this approach has proved successful so far, it will be kept under review. Trustees fully understand the challenging financial landscape schools are operating in and take seriously their responsibility for ensuring the financial viability of all schools across the Trust.

The Executive Team meets weekly with formal agendas to drive the work of the Trust. The Chair joins these meeting fortnightly to ensure good communication between the executive and non-executive parts of the organisation.

5. Compliance

Trustees and LAC members bring a high degree of knowledge and experience of education, company and charity legislation and regulation. This experience and knowledge is used effectively across the Trust to challenge and support our schools as well as contributing to the strong strategic leadership provided at non-executive level.

Our published governance arrangements and Scheme of Delegation are compliant with the DfE's model Articles of Association. Similarly, our Scheme of Financial Delegation reflects the provisions of the Academies Financial Handbook.

Responsibility for ensuring the Trust remains compliant with education and safeguarding legislation is shared between the Trust Board, the LACs and individual schools.

For instance, with the introduction of the new Keeping Children Safe in Education Guidance (September 2018), the Trust took the decision to review the Safeguarding policy and procedures across both schools. A Trustee and LAC member made valuable contributions in supporting the development of a model Safeguarding policy that each school adapted to their own setting and adopted in September 2018. This approach not only ensured that both schools were operating a compliant and up to date set of policies but represented a significant efficiency saving across both schools. We have taken a similar approach to the requirements of GDPR.

Our *Policy Map* sets out those policies determined at Trust level and those determined at LAC level. In the main Trust wide policies are those that relate to the Trust's statutory duties as an employer, custodian of public funds and with respect to health and safety and data protection matters. While specific responsibilities within these areas are delegated to LACs, consistent and centrally determined policies provide a clear framework of assurance.

The Trust Finance and Resources Committee has a responsibility to define our internal audit activities. They commission the Trust's external auditors to undertake a program of audit and investigation as appropriate over the year. This ensures the Trustees are able to gain external assurance that internal controls and processes are operating inline with Trust policies.

6. Evaluation

As set out in the People section of this report, a competitive search process was run to expand and complete the Board of Trustees.

Working with Academy Ambassadors, a skills audit was undertaken to help identify the specific areas of expertise required. These were: HR, managing business growth, legal, compliance management, property and marketing.

We were fortunate to make four strong appointments to the board that, collectively, had demonstrable track records in all of these areas.

Over the summer of 2018, after 6 months of being in operation, the Chair met with each trustee to take stock of the progress the Board had made and to discuss their ongoing, individual contribution to the work of the Trust.

This resulted in the formalisation of the committee structure of the Board that came into operation in the Autumn Term 2018. We have also appointed “link” Trustees for Health and Safety and Safeguarding. They will play an important role in helping the Board assure itself that policies and practices across both schools, and any new school joining the Trust, are inline with Trust expectations and requirements.

Given we have only been operating for 12 months, the Trust has not yet commissioned an external review of its effectiveness. The Chair of Trustees, however, is undertaking the leadership development course for MAT chairs run by the Confederation of School Trusts and Ambition School Leadership. The support and mentoring provided as part of this program will undoubtedly support the continued development of the Trust.

Finally, all of the meetings of the Board and its sub-committees are minuted and clear records of actions kept. These are reviewed and signed off at subsequent meetings. Board minutes are shared with each LAC and their relevant sub-committees. In turn, the Board receives minutes of all LAC meetings.

ANNEX A

WLT STRATEGIC PLAN - HEADLINES

Strategic Priority 1: Governance and Leadership

Our aim is to provide outstanding governance and leadership across the Trust.

We will achieve this by:

- Establishing a strong and shared vision for the Trust;
- Articulating, communicating and championing the Trust's ethos, strategy and ways of working;
- Developing effective governance structures across the Board and Local Academy Committees that promote the Trust's success;
- Ensuring the Trust is led and governed by people with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity;
- Creating leadership and administrative capacity at the centre to support the Trust's development;
- Embedding a culture of monitoring and evaluation in order to demonstrate the positive impact of the Trust's governance and leadership.

Strategic Priority 2: Improve the Educational Outcomes of pupils in the Trust.

Our aim is to ensure that every pupil in the Trust has access to and benefits from a balanced, rich and aspirational education.

We will achieve this by:

- Enabling leaders to focus on the quality of teaching and learning in their academies;
- Identifying and nurturing talent to ensure leadership capacity and succession;
- Creating high quality, safe learning environments for all pupils;
- Providing outstanding support and development for all staff;
- Creating a WLT School Improvement Strategy;
- Establishing an effective reporting, accountability and performance framework across the Trust;
- Supporting the well-being and resilience of staff and pupils;
- Deploying robust systems and processes that support and intervene if academies are facing challenges.

Strategic Priority 3: Secure the Finances and Resources needed for the success of the Trust

Our aim is to ensure the Trust's resources are managed and deployed in ways that effectively support the achievement of its vision

We will achieve this by:

- Maintaining financial systems that support the effective leadership and management of the Trust and constituent academies;
- Realising efficiencies and economies of scale by consolidating central services (the "Trust dividend");
- Developing infrastructure and capacity in support of the Trust's ambitions to develop a trading strategy;
- Ensuring the stewardship of public money is compliant with all statutory, contractual and regulatory requirements;
- Ensuring that the physical environments of all academies are safe, welcoming and provide appropriate facilities to deliver exceptional education.

Strategic Priority 4: Grow the Trust

Our aim is to grow the Trust in a sustainable way and to secure its long-term viability

We will achieve this by:

- Growing to at least 8 schools/5,000+ pupils by 2021, within a geographically sustainable area;
- Undertaking robust due diligence on schools prior to them joining the Trust;
- Managing the conversion and induction of schools into the Trust efficiently and professionally;
- Ensuring the growth strategy reflects the values of the Trust by supporting the common-good for all schools and pupils in a local community;
- Responding to and engaging positively with RSC and Local Authority priorities for improving and developing local provision;
- Ensuring the entitlement of existing pupils in the Trust is protected while pursuing growth.