

## ***Introduction***

Our trust uses a family model:

- We will thrive working together.
- We want to support each other to succeed.
- We have broadly the same aims.

There is balance to be struck between being close to the family way of doing things, and having the autonomy to make important decisions.

- We want our schools to feel like a family.
- We also want our schools to be individual and have their own personality.

There is good sense in this. If a child finds one of our schools doesn't suit them, we hope that another school in our Trust may be a better match. This is only achievable if schools retain their individuality.

How does this work in practice?

## ***Vision and ethos***

Each Local Governing Body (LGB) working with the school leadership team is accountable to create the vision and ethos of their school.

This is guided by the over-arching vision and ethos of the Trust. An article is planned that will explore this area in detail.

It is important that the school considers how their children, their staff, and their community would most benefit from the Trust's direction, and how this can be reflected in your local vision and ethos.

We rely on the Headteacher, the LGB, and the leadership of the school to have the intimate knowledge that will allow them to define the vision and ethos suitable for the challenges they experience.

## ***Autonomy within delegation***

Article 2 in this series discussed the Scheme of Delegation, and touched on the autonomy point.

One of the concerns of schools joining a MAT is that governors will no longer have a real job, and that the MAT board will make all the important decisions.

At the Southport Learning Trust, we are determined that this will not be the case.

- We want each LGB to take ownership of the authority we have given them.
- That authority brings with it responsibilities, and the same criteria that applies to the Trust board apply to the LGBs.

Recall the main responsibilities of the trustees in a MAT, or of a full governing body of a single school. These responsibilities also apply to LGBs in our MAT.

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos, and strategic direction.
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff.
- Overseeing and ensuring effective financial performance.

At the MAT board we retain visibility of the governance at each school via chairs of governors, who are on the MAT board, and by the outcomes achieved at the school.

Governance contributes to the atmosphere and success of a school, and the effectiveness of the LGB is obvious to an experienced observer.

## ***Earned autonomy***

Our Scheme of Delegation is written as the default for all schools that join our trust, however there is also the concept of earned autonomy that is used in parallel.

If a school joins our trust and needs support, some decisions will be made by the MAT board or the CEO, in partnership with the school leadership and the LGB.

Once the school is settled, established, and performing well, the Scheme of Delegation will apply in full.

The MAT board will intervene should we deem this to be necessary, as a parent would do. Nonetheless, a school that is doing a good job in its governance retains the autonomy described in the Scheme of Delegation.

## ***Link governors***

There is statutory guidance about link governors, and these edicts apply to the MAT board. As the Southport Learning Trust has LGBs, this guidance also applies at that level.

- There must be a safeguarding governor.
- There should be a SEND governor.

Beyond these two roles, each school can decide what link roles best suit their requirement.

These two lists come from different secondary schools within the MAT:

- Quality of education
- Behaviour and attitudes
- Personal development
- Leadership and management

And secondly,

- Curriculum
- Disadvantaged
- Teaching and Learning

Your school has the autonomy to decide your link governors, what value you are seeking to obtain, and to ensure that value is delivered.

The MAT board have discussed the benefits that might be achieved by having the same link governors at each school within the trust, however we have agreed that this decision belongs with each school.

### **Link Trustees**

Some link roles have trustees assigned at the MAT level, and these are:

- Safeguarding
- SEND
- Disadvantaged

The trustee with these responsibilities will ensure they do not disrupt the link governor's role.

In our guidance to the link trustee, we suggest an annual or termly visit to school, in partnership with the link governor, to help them glean a picture of effectiveness across the MAT.

### **Committees**

Apart from the mandatory pay committee, the decision whether to use committees lies with the LGB. You must comply with the Scheme of Delegation when creating committees.

For example: if you create a finance committee to enable more detailed conversation than an LGB meeting permits, ensure the Terms of Reference clearly state that the LGB authorities are delegated to the committee, or perhaps that the committee does not have decision making

powers delegated to them, and must bring recommendations to the LGB.

### **Policies**

Policies fall into three categories:

- **Mandated by the MAT**, and to be implemented without any amendment. Most of the employment policies are this type.
- **Provided by the MAT**, and needing amendment by the schools for details such as names and contact numbers. The safeguarding policy falls into this category.
- **School specific**, where the school leadership and LGB is responsible to create the policy and ensure it is fit for purpose. Your behaviour policy is an example of this type.

The LGB is responsible to ensure all categories of policy are implemented in their school.

### **MAT-wide governance**

We hope that our governors, given autonomy in many areas, will also choose to work across the schools in the MAT when it adds value.

If you have a complaints panel, for example, having a governor from another school on the panel can add an independent view.

You can contact another school LGB through your chair, or via the email address below.

For any comments or suggestions, please send an email to

[governance@southportlearningtrust.org](mailto:governance@southportlearningtrust.org)

### **Website**

<https://www.southportlearningtrust.org/>



# Enhancing Governance

# Autonomy of Trust schools

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