



THINKING
SCHOOLS
ACADEMY TRUST

Academy Advisory Board Handbook

February 2021

Child First; Aspire; Challenge; Achieve

1. WELCOME

We are delighted that you have joined the Thinking Schools Academy Trust (TSAT) as an Academy Advisory Board Member. It is an exciting opportunity to be part of the life of your local Academy and all that it offers. This TSAT Academy Advisory Board Handbook sets out the TSAT vision, explaining why we exist and provides information for you about your role as an Academy Advisory Board member and the way Academy Advisory Boards work.

What is TSAT?

TSAT is a school based, cross phase Multi-Academy Trust that currently operates in two hubs: Medway/Kent and Portsmouth. Our fundamental moral purpose as educators is to nurture children and young people to think for themselves and therefore learn skills and develop their knowledge so that they are able to thrive in an ever-changing world.

Mission Statement

The mission statement of the Trust and its schools is: “Improve the life chances of all our children and young people; embed the philosophy of a thinking school through transforming teaching, learning and leadership, that will accelerate learner progress and cognitive development.”

TSAT Vision

All TSAT academies share a common mission to nurture children to be successful, who are confident and can think and act independently. Our cognitive approach to education defines us but does not create a “one size fits all”.

All TSAT academies, whether converter or sponsored, are equal partners in the Trust and have a headteacher/principal and an Academy Advisory Board. Each hub has a Director of Education who gives strategic leadership and supports the hub’s development.

For more information about our Trust, please download a copy of our prospectus. We hope that you find the prospectus informative and we would welcome you to visit any of our academies to see our excellent work in practice.

The Structure of TSAT

TSAT currently has a family of 17 schools: Medway/Kent, Plymouth and Portsmouth. Medway schools are: The Rochester Grammar School, Holcombe Grammar School, The Victory Academy, Cedar Children’s Academy, New Horizons Children’s Academy, All Faiths Children’s Academy, Gordon Children’s Academy, Junior and Gordon Children’s Academy, Infant. The Goodwin Academy is in Deal, Kent. Schools in Portsmouth are: The Portsmouth Academy, Newbridge Junior School, New Horizons Primary, Meon Junior School, Meon Infant School, Moorings Way Infant School and Penhale Infant School. Schools in Plymouth are : Plymouth High School for Girls

Thank you from the Chair of the TSAT Board

We are very grateful to you for joining us. We hope you enjoy your time as an Academy Advisory Board Member and have the satisfaction of knowing that you are playing a part in transforming the life chances of all the children and young people in our Academies.

You can access more information about TSAT from our website or from your Academy's website.

Yours sincerely



Peter Martin

Chair of TSAT Board of Directors

Welcome to TSAT from the CEO



TSAT is a high performing Academy Trust at the heart of which is the belief that the work that we do must transform the life chances of students. We believe that the best way to transform life chances is actively to shape the minds, attitudes and habits of young people through a framework of cognitive education that enables them to become the master of their own destiny.

“We are what we habitually do” (Aristotle); to transform life chances we have to transform habits. The ultimate goal is that every individual, child or adult, in the organisation consciously recognises their own habits, strengths and areas for development and actively seeks to improve themselves, thereby creating transformational change in each individual.

We look forward to working with you to achieve this vision for everyone in our organization.

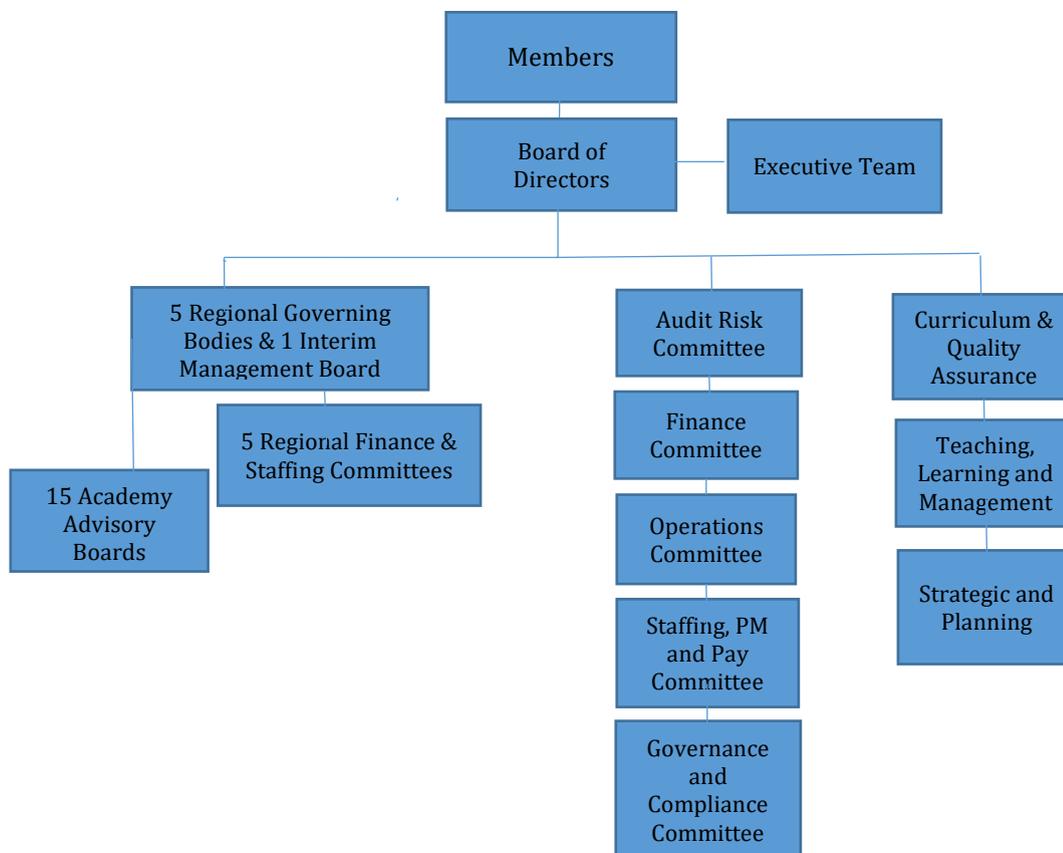


Stuart Gardner
CEO

2. THE TSAT GOVERNANCE MODEL

The TSAT Governance Model is different to the way a governing body in a non-academy or traditional school undertakes governance.

Essentially, there are two elements to the governance of the TSAT academies – local governance that is delivered via the Academy Advisory Board (AAB) and regional governance, delivered via the Regional Governing Bodies (RGB). Each Regional Governing Body is linked to a Director of Education; this means that there are five Regional Governing Bodies: Portsmouth, Fratton, Strood, Chatham and Kent. The Board of Directors is the final decision making body which sits above the Regional Governing Bodies.



2.1 Local Governance - The Academy Advisory Board

The AAB consists of a group of people who could be parents, community nominees, or academy staff, with a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 9 people. A member of the Regional Governing Body may also sit on the AAB if required.

The TSAT Board has established five key roles for Academy Advisory Boards:

- To advise/act as a critical friend to the Principal;
- To advise the Regional Governing Body about local issues they need to consider that affect the academy;
- Represent the interest of the Academy community in the running of the Academy;
- Represent the Academy in its community;
- Provide support to the Principal in undertaking appropriate day to day procedures that are essential to the life of the Academy.

The five roles translate specifically into the following tasks that the AAB undertakes:

- it acts as a key link between the academy, parents and local community;
- it supports the work of the academy in the community;
 - it supports the Principal and Academy Leadership Team in the development and implementation of the Academy Development Plan and other relevant plans, ensuring that the TSAT ethos remains at the heart of the academy community;
 - it helps on the ground with the implementation of certain academy policies;
 - it offers challenging but positive and proactive support to the Principal;
 - it regularly reviews the academy's performance in relation to the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).

2.2 The Regional Governing Bodies

The Regional Governing Bodies consist of a group of eight people who are elected onto the Board for a period of 4 years. This is a skills-based governing body, with people who have skills in Business/Legal, Finance, HR, Estates and Health and Safety, Marketing/Communications and Education. Each Director of Education will be a member of the relevant RGB and the CEO is an ex-officio member. Each AAB Chair which reports into the RGB is also invited to be a RGB member. The key responsibilities of a Regional Governing Body are:

- The day to day oversight of the running of the regional academies;
- Carrying out the MAT's vision, policies and priorities;
- Holding local academy leadership to account for school academic performance, quality of care and provision;
- Overseeing and monitoring the effectiveness of local strategies;
- Seeking value for money and ensuring resources are applied appropriately at regional academy level;
- Supporting the Board in relation to proper use of funds and delivering high quality educational provision;
- Liaising with the Academy Advisory Boards.

The RGB acts as the direct line manager for each Director of Education in their region. Through line management of the Director of Education, each Principal is also held to account – a model which provides professional scrutiny in more detail than some traditional governing bodies are able to achieve. The RGBs will be responsible for undertaking a performance review of the Principal annually and the Director of Education also attends this.

2.3 The Board of Directors

TSAT is a multi-academy trust operating as a single legal entity. Therefore, it entrusts ultimate responsibility for everything that goes on within TSAT to the TSAT Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors oversees educational policy and practice, the standards achieved, the management and deployment of finance, ICT, human resources, governance and strategic development for the whole family of TSAT Academies. The Board of Directors are appointed on a skills basis with people who have skills in Education, Finance, HR, Safeguarding, Facilities, Law, Management, and PR. Chairs of RGBs are invited to attend Board of Directors meetings but do not hold the position of Non-executive director or Trustee. The key responsibilities of the Board of Directors are:

- Strategic oversight, setting vision and policies for the Trust;
- Ensuring appropriate governance and decision making takes place;
- Ensuring compliance with all regulatory requirements;
- Oversight of standards and outcomes of academies;
- Setting appropriate targets and holding the CEO and local leadership to account.
- Reviewing performance across the academies and Multi-Academy Trust;
- Agreeing and monitoring the budgets of all the academies;
- Dealing with contractual relationships with third parties.

2.4 The Members

The Members of the Trust are at the top of the governance pyramid, however they have little strategic or operational responsibility. Their main roles are:

- Appoint the majority of Directors to the TSAT Board of Directors;
- Act as national ambassadors for the Trust;
- Act as a last line of resort in holding the Board to account.

2.5 The difference between TSAT Governance and a traditional Governing Body

By comparison to a traditional school Governing Body:

- The AAB's role is not to "manage" the Academy as such. This is done through the Regional Governing Bodies and Board of Directors. Therefore, the AAB is not required to take decisions on staff or financial matters affecting the Academy. As an AAB Member you should have an understanding of strategic issues that impact on the Academy, and be updated on them regularly by the Principal, but you are not required to have direct responsibility for them.
- As the Regional Governing Body takes responsibility for educational standards, legal

compliance and financial viability, the AAB then has the time to investigate the standards on the ground, to see how they are working, and explore how the TSAT ethos is being understood and expressed in the way the Academy operates. As an AAB Member, your view as a parent or as part of the community is vital in this discussion.

3. HOW THE AAB OPERATES

3.1 Expectations

TSAT understands that the role of an Academy Advisory Board member is voluntary, however, in order for the Academy Advisory Board to function efficiently and effectively, there are certain expectations of AAB members in order to achieve this.

i) Meetings

Meetings of the AAB take place roughly once every term. The meeting is prepared by the Principal and the Chair of the AAB and the process is supported by the secretary or clerk to the AAB. You will receive an agenda and papers in advance of the meeting from the secretary/clerk.

Meetings are usually held in the evenings or at other times as agreed locally by all AAB members.

ii) Contribution at meetings and outside of meetings

Academy Advisory Board members are expected to come to meetings prepared; having read and familiarised themselves with the agenda and accompanying papers as well as being prepared to ask relevant questions (Please see section 3.2 and Appendix 6 for further detail and examples).

iii) Business Interest

Academy Advisory Board members are required to declare any business or other interests in any item being discussed at the AAB meeting. The AAB secretary will have the appropriate form for AAB members to sign.

iv) Link Responsibilities

Academy Advisory Board members are encouraged to be linked with key curriculum and/or other areas of interest/work (e.g. Equalities, SEN, Safeguarding etc.). AAB members should make every effort to visit the Academy during the Academy day; all visits must be planned and focused on areas as agreed by the full Academy Advisory Board. Visits inform the work of the AAB and provide valuable information for support and challenge to the Academy's Leadership Team. AAB members are asked to report on their visit using the appropriate form. This report will be presented at the AAB meetings, and a central record of all visits will be held by the Governance & Compliance Team.

v) Overseeing financial performance

Academy Advisory Boards are not responsible for the setting of Academy budgets but they should help to ensure their Academy's money is well spent. They should do this by asking questions of the Principal such as:

- What is our financial position?
- Are our resources allocated in line with strategic priorities?
- Are we making full use of all assets and efficient use of all our financial resources?

vi) Safeguarding

All Academy Advisory Board members are required to have an up-to-date DBS check, as well as undertake annual safeguarding training as required.

3.2 Focus of Academy Advisory Board Meetings

The table below sets out the key activities and functions that are undertaken throughout the year by the AAB. Good questions to ask in relation to these can be found at the end of this handbook.

Key Activities	Typical Inputs
<p>Understanding the TSAT vision, mission and ethos Improve the life chances of all our children and young people; embed the philosophy of a thinking school through transforming teaching, learning and leadership, that will accelerate learner progress and cognitive development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethos audit • Thinking skills audit • Purpose of hubs • TSAT vision, mission statement and ethos
<p>Understanding the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding what services currently exist and where the gaps are • Understanding local issues and needs • Understanding how the Academy relates to the Local Authority in the context of TSAT as a sponsor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community audit • Parent and student voice • PTA/Friends associations • Local aspirations and community need
<p>Understanding the academy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student attainment and progress • Curriculum • Student behaviour, attendance and safety • Quality of teaching and learning • Continuing Professional Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KPI sheets • Performance data (Raiseonline) • National averages/floor standards • Ofsted reports • Academy self-evaluation (SEF) • Academy visits
<p>Working with the Principal to set the Academy's strategic direction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in setting priorities for Academy improvement • Positively challenge and proactively support the Principal and SLT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academy Development Plan • Local aspirations and community needs • Academy Self-evaluation (SEF) • Parent and student voice
<p>Reviewing actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know the improvement targets and strategies • Know the allocation of resources • Know how to review progress • Know how Pupil Premium is used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academy Development Plan • Budget data • Pupil Premium report
<p>Undertaking specific responsibilities Members of the Academy Advisory Board are encouraged to be linked with key curriculum and/or other areas of interest, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality • Behaviour for learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AAB members provide report on their visit to the AAB on their assessment of the Academy's performance on the areas to which they are linked. The reports will be kept centrally. • AAB members with link responsibilities should be familiar with the policy relating

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Safety • Safeguarding | <p>to their area of work. These policies are available on request from your Academy.</p> |
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3.3 Guidance and support

i) Termly Agenda

On a termly basis the Head of Governance & Compliance sends out a recommended agenda to all Principals, AAB Chairs and AAB Secretaries. We do not insist that all items detailed on the recommended agenda are considered at each meeting, however, there will be some items indicated on the agenda that must be covered over the academic year. It is expected that Principals and Chairs will work together in customising their agenda with items relating to their academy. The Principal reports to the AAB on what has been happening in the Academy; the AAB may also report on how they have carried out their role with linked responsibilities, e.g. through learning walks, in key areas such as:

- Safeguarding, Health & Safety and Child Protection
- Core subjects areas, e.g. English, Maths and Science
- Links with the local community and feedback from parents

ii) Training

Training may be arranged on a regional basis or tailored to meet an individual Academy's needs.

3.4 Evaluation

In preparation for inspection and to improve effectiveness, Academy Advisory Boards should evaluate regularly their own effectiveness. Good AAB Chairs also ask for regular feedback from their Academy Advisory Board to improve their effectiveness.

4. THE ROLE OF ACADEMY ADVISORY BOARDS IN RELATION TO OFSTED

The AAB of a TSAT academy has no responsibilities during an Ofsted inspection and members of the RGB and Board of Directors will meet with inspectors. However, if a member of the AAB wishes to be involved in the meeting, they are very welcome to attend along with their colleagues from the RGB and the Board.

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLE GUIDANCE

Area of Responsibility	<p style="text-align: center;">Good questions to ask/Key Actions</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>This is not an exhaustive list. Academy Advisory Board members can add to this as they see fit</i></p>
General	KPIs are presented at AAB meetings. AAB Members may use these to gain further clarification about percentage increase or decrease and the year forecast.
Ethos (including SMSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well is the ethos lived in the academy? • How well does the AAB connect with the ethos statement? • Are staff and students aware of the ethos statement? • How is the SMSC (Spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development of students promoted?
Exclusions and Behaviour Statutory	<p>Link AAB Members should have a copy of the policy or be directed to it on the website</p> <p>AAB members may explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps between groups, e.g. boys/girls, ethnicity, FSM (Free School Meals), LAC (Looked After Children) and other vulnerable groups etc. • For external exclusions, level of support being given during that time and how they are monitored. • Are exclusions in line with or above national average? • What strategies are in place to prevent exclusions? • What is the behaviour strategy? • Who is responsible? • What are the resources required; do we have them? • Who monitors? • How is it evaluated? • What are the success criteria? • What are the target dates? • When will the strategy be reviewed? • What are our key strengths in this area? • What could we do better?
Health & Safety Statutory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link AAB Members should have a copy of the policy or be directed to it on the website • Are there strategies in place to support students? • How H & S is generally promoted in the academy
Safeguarding Statutory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link AAB Members should have a copy of the policy or be directed to it on the website • Are there any strategies in place to meet the needs of students who are subject to the CP register? • Ask for these to be explained • Number in the Academy (not necessary to know who they are) • How does the Academy work with the LA/other agencies, e.g. Police, Social Services and use of CAFs etc. • Internet safety - how does the e-safety policy link with general

	<p>safeguarding and child protection?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there key strategies that the AAB could be involved in?
<p>Equalities and Inclusion (includes SEN) Statutory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link AAB Members should have a copy of the policy or be directed to it on the website • What are the identified objectives? • Who is responsible for this area within the Academy? Has a member of the AAB met with them in the academic year? • What resources are required and do we have them? • Who monitors? • How is it evaluated? • What are the success criteria? Have we met them? If not, why not? • What are the target dates? • When will the strategy be reviewed? • How many students have an SEN statement? • What are the particular needs of students with SEN? • How are we meeting their needs? • Have we got the resources to meet their needs? • Gaps between groups, e.g. boys/girls, ethnicity, FSM, LAC
<p>Subject Links Advisory/good practice</p> <p>Maths and numeracy ICT Teaching and Learning English and literacy Humanities, including RE Science Performing Arts PE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the identified objectives? • What is the numeracy strategy at Key Stage xx? • Which Examination Board do we use? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Why this particular board? ○ Are there links with other subject areas? ○ How is this subject taught, e.g. one teacher, one year group? ○ Are there any extra-curricular activities associated with this subject? If so, what are they? • Who is responsible? • What are the resources required? Do we have them? • Who monitors? • How is it evaluated? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the success criteria? Have we met them? If not, why not? • What are the targets? • When will the strategy be reviewed? • What are our key strengths in this area? • What could we do better? • What level of success are we expecting in this area? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are we in line to achieve our expected targets? ○ Numbers taking exam and are we satisfied with the results we get? • Gaps between groups, e.g. boys/girls, ethnicity, FSM, LAC • Early entries, etc.
<p>Student Council Link Advisory/good practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do their meetings function? • Are there good responses and involvement with the teaching staff? • What is the student voice structure within the Academy? • Who oversees the pastoral system in the Academy - what is the vision for student voice in the academy? • Are there effective feedback mechanisms in place?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well do students feel they are heard?
Parent/Family Association Advisory/good practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can the AAB and the PFA work together effectively?
Attendance Advisory/good practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there strategies in place to improve attendance, e.g. are students clear about when they are deemed late, e.g. in the building or in tutor groups, classroom etc? • What is the impact of the strategy, e.g. is it working? • Are parents/carers called, if so how soon after the register is taken? • Does the AAB know who the Attendance Lead in the school is?