



Chair of Trustees - Annual Report 2023

Introduction

Following the considerable strategic work last year, this year saw the Trust focusing on the implementation of key actions to take us forward towards our strategic aims. Our work can be summarised as focusing on two key areas – the expansion of the trust and the strengthening of our existing schools, encapsulated by the phrase “growth from strong foundations” which was a working mantra for the year.

Expansion of the Trust

At the start of the year, the trust used its Growth Strategy as a basis for identifying and approaching potential joiner schools. Three best-fit schools were identified and one of these, Bannockburn Primary School, was most interested in the opportunity of joining PolyMAT. Positive engagement led to a formal application to the DfE Regional Board and the transfer was approved in the summer term. Following the process of due-diligence and commercial transfer arrangements, the transfer was concluded on November 1st 2023 when we became a trust of three schools – a very significant moment for PolyMAT.

Since then, the integration of Bannockburn has proceeded well. The commercial transfer has run smoothly, with funding, finance, payroll and HR integrating well. Relationships are developing strongly and we look forward to the deeper aspects of integration – curriculum and student/staff experiences – progressing for the rest of this year.

The headteacher of Bannockburn, Rachel Ford, has joined the Trust Executive team as Director of Primary and will play a key role, alongside Karenann Spencer, in creating the Primary foundations which we hope will lead to further growth in this phase. We have identified and begun to make contact with potential schools to join this coming year and will be pursuing this in-line with the aims of our Growth Strategy.

Another key aspect of our expansion has been the growth of the Sixth Form at WPSfB, in-line with our commitment to provide equal opportunities for both the boys at WPSfB and the girls at WPSfG to progress into post-16 education with us. This required an application for a Significant Change to the DfE to increase our post-16 PAN and a bid to the Post-16 Capacity Fund to help finance the necessary capital build of 8 new classrooms. Both these applications were successful and this, combined with the prudent increase of the trust’s reserves, means that we are in a position to increase numbers from September 2024. This year will see the building works progressing and the development of the curriculum and staffing in order to realise the expansion.

Strengthening of our existing schools

Constant improvement of the schools within our trust is our primary responsibility. We made good progress in this area during the year. Woolwich Polytechnic School for Girls received its first Ofsted inspection where it was judged as Good with a very positive report. Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys received two external audits, commissioned by the trust, to support it in its main aim of the year which was improving student behaviour. Strong progress was made by the school which is in a much better position as a result. In the summer public examinations, WPSfB gained results in-line with national averages at Key Stage 4 which is positive when we remind ourselves that boys' achievement is typically below national averages. Key Stage 5 outcomes were mixed and this is an area for improvement this year.

The improvement of both schools has been accelerated by the process of harmonisation which has reduced workload and increased clarity of expectations. In particular, both our secondary schools are now aligned in the delivery of Key Stage 4 assessments and this means that data can be shared and compared with confidence and the two schools can collaborate and share best-practice easily.

The work of the School Improvement Team has been instrumental in the strengthening of our schools. In the autumn term, good progress has been made in establishing the "PolyMAT Foundations", co-created with senior leaders within the schools. These are the expected standards that the trust will use to hold our schools to account and direct support where necessary and will lead to each school being summarised on a "School On A Page" document, supported by evidence towards each Foundation. We expect the Trust Standards Committee to see the first of these documents in the spring term in 2024. By the end of this academic year, we expect the Foundations to be in place for both Secondary and Primary phases and this will help us provide a clear framework for school improvement and an effective support-mechanism for existing and future schools.

Other key developments and priorities

The trust also made other key steps forward in a number of areas. Maybe most significantly, our governance structure and personnel is in a much strengthened position after excellent strategic and operational work by the Director of Innovation and Systems. This was supported by a successful and useful external review by the NGA. Governance is a crucial area for our success and will always be a focus for improvement and we are extremely grateful for the time and expertise provided by our volunteers at all levels.

Our priorities for the coming year are captured by our Wildly Important Goals (WIGs) which were reviewed and updated by the Trust Board in September. Our WIGs for this year are:

WIG 1

Growth: To successfully integrate Bannockburn Primary School, establish the Trust as cross-phase and enter into a formal transfer process with at least one further school

WIG 2

Standards: To have all our schools demonstrate at least Good practice for all standards, be harmonised where beneficial and have strong outcomes in public examinations*

WIG 3

Growth: To be ready, in all aspects, to open the expanded Sixth Form provision at WPSfB in September 2024

** positive P8 scores at KS4 and ALPS 3 or better at KS5 - tba for KS1 and KS2*

Governance Arrangements

Role	# in post	# capacity	# vacancies
Members	4	5	1*
Trustees	11	11	0
WPB ACMs	11	12	1**
WPG ACMs	11	12	1***
Bannockburn ACMs	12	12	0

* A Member vacancy has arisen following the resignation of Tracy Russell

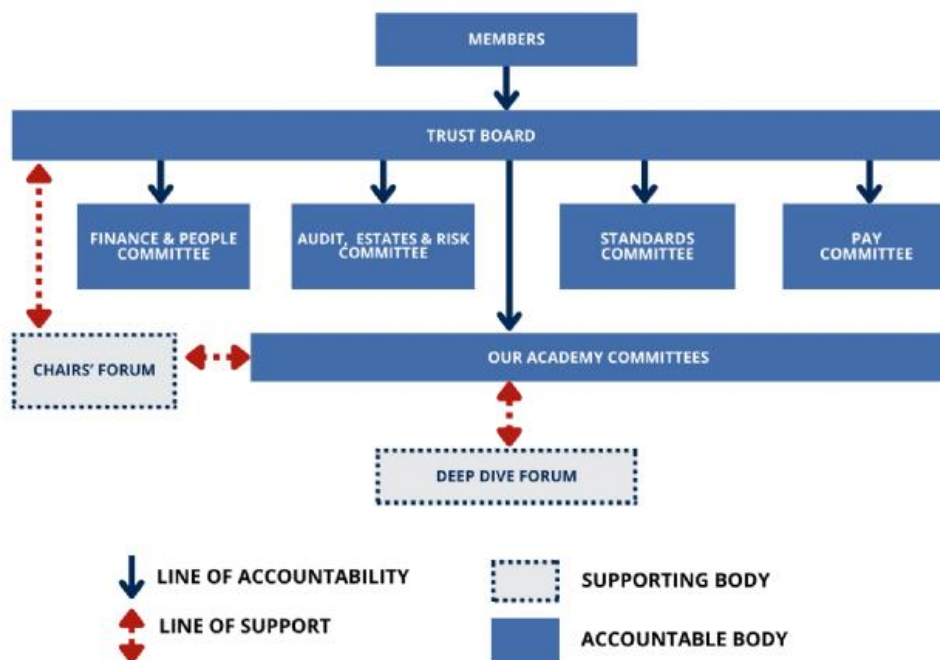
** A Parent ACM vacancy will have been appointed to following an election by the date of the AGM

*** A new vacancy has now arisen following an ACM deciding not to take up their role. Richard Kashoro has also been appointed as an Associate ACM for WPSfG.

There are no Trustees or ACMs for WPSfB or WPSfG whose terms of office are due to expire. There are 2 Bannockburn ACMs whose terms of office will expire before the next AGM – Sue Kimmins and Briget Fosang (October 2024).

Governance Structure

A new Governance Structure has been implemented for 2023/24:



In addition, there has been significant work to update the articles of association, scheme of delegation, terms of reference, role descriptions, the governance handbook and other governance related policies.

External Review of Governance

The Trust Board commissioned an external review of governance which was undertaken by the National Governance Association (NGA) in Spring/ Summer 2023. The review was very positive about the work that has been undertaken to further improve governance across the Trust and ensure it is scalable as the Trust grows. There were however a number of recommendations, and the Trust has developed an action plan to respond to these over the coming year.

Board Diversity

PolyMAT is committed to recruiting Trustees and Academy Committee Members who have a diverse range of skills, experiences, qualifications, characteristics, perspectives, and who are from different backgrounds and settings.

Diversity in governance helps to provide sufficient perspectives to enable robust decision making, and will have a positive impact on setting the strategic direction for the organisation. This will also enable the board/ committees to have full understanding of the context of the school and the community it serves.

The Trust will be asking all Members, Trustees and ACMs to complete the NGA's Diversity Indicators form in the Spring term ahead of publishing diversity information about governors on our websites. The form, which we also ask Members to complete, can be found here:

<https://forms.office.com/e/bYE6MZfmWR>

We have only had partial completion of this so far, and are in the process of collating the data for Bannockburn Primary School. We will then be able to publish this information on our websites later in 2024.

Skills Audit

PolyMAT seeks to ensure a balance of skills within the Trust Board and its Academy Committees, and uses this information when seeking to recruit.

A full Skills Audit was undertaken in September 2023. The main priority coming out of this was the importance of enabling all in governance to better know our schools/ the Trust, and we are recommending changes to the way in which Trustees/ ACMs and potentially also Members are able to participate in visits to the schools and thus build this knowledge. Other priorities for training included succession planning for chairing in particular, diversity and policy management.

We will be collecting data (in the form above) that will enable us to better understand where we have coverage of the following areas. There has been a lot of change in the constitution of all bodies, but the data below is correct to the best of our knowledge at this time.

	# Trust	# WPB LAC	# WPG LAC	#Bannockburn LAC
Education and pedagogy	6	5	5	4
Analysing data/ KPIs	2	2	1	8
Finances & Value for Money	4			
HR & Recruitment	1			

	# Trust	# WPB LAC	# WPG LAC	#Bannockburn LAC
Risk Management	2	1	2	2
Legal	1			
Health & Safety	1	1	2	2
Information Technology	2	2	2	3
Project Management	3	2	3	5
Health & Wellbeing	1	2	2	2

Items shaded in Black are those for which responsibility is retained by the Trust Board.

Governance Summary

Trust Board - Key Achievements

- Governance restructure
- Governance Review
- Summer Training Day inc. Governance Action Plan
- Annual Conference
- Trust Executive expansion
- Growth to 3 schools
- Safeguarding Training
- Established and monitored the local academy committees
- Appointment of Lead Trustees, Link ACMs & Visits
- Recruitment of ACMs/ Trustees
- Access to training and resources for Trustees/ ACMs

Trust Board - Key Challenges

- Administrative support/ Governance Professional role
- DBS and Other Checks for Governors