



Governance: Code of Conduct

Review Due:	September 2029
Last Review	September 2026
Applicable to:	All Trust Schools
Reviewed By:	AC
Approved By:	Board of Trustees September 2026

Comments:

Updated to reflect current DfE academy trust governance expectations and the Trust's governance model. Changes strengthen collective responsibility, delegated authority, professional conduct, conflicts of interest, safeguarding, information and cyber security, social media, protected disclosures and arrangements for addressing breaches.

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1. Aims, scope and principles

This Code sets out the standards of conduct expected of all Trustees and Local Governors of The Partnership Trust.

Trustees and Local Governors are expected to carry out their roles with honesty, integrity, professionalism and respect, and to act at all times in the best interests of the Trust and its pupils.

The Code is based on the Academy Trust Governance Guide and Academy Trust Handbook and should be read alongside the Trust's Articles of Association, Governance Plan and Scheme of Delegation, Standing Orders and relevant Trust policies.

The Code is not exhaustive. Where a situation is not specifically covered, Trustees and Local Governors are expected to exercise sound judgement, act in accordance with the Seven Principles of Public Life and seek appropriate governance advice where necessary.

Trustees and Local Governors will confirm annually that they have read, understood and agree to abide by this Code.

2. The Seven Principles of Public Life

Trustees and Local Governors will uphold the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) (the Nolan Principles):

- **Selflessness** - act solely in the public interest.
- **Integrity** - avoid placing ourselves under obligations to people or organisations that might seek to influence us inappropriately; declare and resolve interests and relationships.
- **Objectivity** - act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability** - be accountable to the public for our decisions and actions and submit ourselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness** - act and take decisions openly and transparently, withholding information only where there are clear and lawful reasons.
- **Honesty** - be truthful.
- **Leadership** - exhibit these principles in our own behaviour, actively promote and support them, and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

3. Our governance responsibilities

The purpose of governance within an academy trust is to provide strategic leadership, accountability and assurance, and strategic engagement. In fulfilling our role, we will:

- Act in the best interests of the Trust as a whole and its pupils, rather than representing or advocating solely for an individual school, constituency or personal interest.
- Understand and respect the distinction between governance and executive or operational leadership.
- Understand the respective roles of Members, Trustees, Local Governing Committees and executive leaders, and operate within the Trust's Scheme of Delegation.
- Understand that governance authority rests collectively with the relevant Board or Committee. We have no individual authority to act or speak on its behalf unless specifically authorised or delegated to do so.
- Accept collective responsibility for properly made decisions of the Board or Committee, while retaining the right and responsibility to raise legitimate concerns through appropriate routes.
- Set and maintain high expectations for conduct, professionalism, educational standards and organisational culture.
- Promote equality, equity, diversity and inclusion and comply with the Equality Act 2010.
- Preserve and develop the character of the Trust and, where applicable, the religious character of its schools.
- Uphold fundamental British values and support the Trust in meeting its Prevent duty.
- Operate in the best interests of pupils, informed by appropriate engagement with pupils, parents/carers, staff and communities.
- Comply with relevant legislation, statutory guidance, the funding agreement, constitutional documents and Trust policies.

- Support effective risk management, financial stewardship and appropriate use of public funds.
- Participate in evaluation of governance effectiveness, constitution and skills, and undertake training and development appropriate to our role.

4. Working with others and professional conduct

We will:

- Provide constructive challenge and support to leaders while respecting the distinction between governance and operational management.
- Conduct ourselves professionally, courteously and respectfully, including where there is disagreement.
- Challenge constructively and appropriately, focusing on issues, evidence and assurance rather than individuals.
- Listen to and respect different perspectives and contribute to an inclusive culture in which appropriate challenge is welcomed.
- Not behave in a way that could reasonably be perceived as intimidating, bullying, discriminatory, harassing or deliberately undermining towards a Trustee, Governor, employee, pupil, parent/carer or other stakeholder.
- Respect agreed communication routes and not make unreasonable demands on Trust or school staff, seek information directly from staff outside agreed governance arrangements, or become involved in operational matters.
- Raise concerns through the appropriate governance, complaints, safeguarding, whistleblowing or Trust process rather than seeking to investigate or resolve matters independently.
- Support the effective operation and reputation of the Trust while remaining willing to raise legitimate concerns where necessary.

5. Commitment to governance

We will:

- Attend meetings wherever possible and provide suitable notice and an explanation when unable to attend.
- Understand and accept the time and workload commitments associated with our role.
- Prepare for meetings, read papers in advance and make informed, relevant contributions.
- Share responsibility for governance work and take an active role appropriate to our position.
- Undertake assurance activity appropriate to our governance role in accordance with the Trust's School Visit Policy and Scheme of Delegation. Local Governors may undertake planned assurance as part of delegated LGC responsibilities; Trustees are not routinely expected to undertake school assurance visits.
- Undertake required induction and ongoing training, including safeguarding and child protection training appropriate to our role, and keep our knowledge and skills up to date.
- Engage appropriately with governance self-evaluation and development.

6. Conflicts of interests, gifts and hospitality

6.1 Interests and conflicts

To support impartial and transparent decision-making, we will:

- Provide complete and accurate information for the Trust's register of interests and update it promptly when circumstances change.
- Declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest as soon as it becomes apparent, including interests arising between meetings.
- Declare relevant interests at meetings and comply with the Chair's or meeting's determination about participation, withdrawal and voting in accordance with the Trust's constitutional documents and procedures.
- Not use our governance position, information or influence to secure an improper advantage for ourselves or another person.

6.2 Gifts and hospitality

We will declare and manage gifts and hospitality in accordance with the Trust's Gifts and Hospitality Policy and ensure that any required declarations are recorded on the appropriate register. We will not accept any gift, hospitality, benefit or inducement where it could reasonably be perceived as influencing our judgement or decisions, and we will never accept a bribe.

7. Openness and transparency

We accept that the Trust must publish and maintain governance information required by legislation, statutory guidance, the Academy Trust Handbook, Companies House and Get Information About Schools. We will provide accurate information needed for these purposes, including information about appointments, terms of office, relevant interests and attendance where required.

We understand that the Trust may collect diversity information for governance purposes. Where provision of such information is voluntary, this will be made clear and information will be handled in accordance with data protection requirements.

We recognise the Trust's duties of openness and transparency, including the requirement to make governance documents and information available where required, subject to lawful confidentiality and data protection restrictions.

8. Confidentiality

In the course of our role we may receive sensitive or confidential information. We will:

- Observe confidentiality in relation to information designated confidential or which by its nature should reasonably be treated as confidential.

- Not disclose information about named individuals, sensitive Trust matters, or individual contributions and voting at meetings unless authorised or legally required.
- Use confidential information only for the purpose for which it was provided and never to humiliate, embarrass, threaten or disadvantage another person.
- Take appropriate care when discussing governance matters outside meetings and when using email, messaging applications or other communication channels.
- Continue to observe confidentiality after leaving office.

Nothing in this Code prevents or restricts a Trustee or Local Governor from reporting a safeguarding concern, making a protected disclosure, reporting suspected wrongdoing to an appropriate authority, or otherwise making a disclosure required or protected by law.

9. Safeguarding

We recognise safeguarding as a core governance responsibility. We will undertake safeguarding and child protection training appropriate to our role, including training required by Keeping Children Safe in Education, and will maintain an appropriate strategic understanding of the Trust's safeguarding responsibilities.

Any safeguarding concern or disclosure encountered in the course of governance activity must be reported immediately through the appropriate safeguarding route. We will not investigate safeguarding concerns ourselves. Our duties of confidentiality do not override our responsibility to report a concern where a child may be at risk of harm.

10. Data protection, information and cyber security

We will:

- Comply with the Trust's data protection, information security and cyber security policies, processes and instructions.
- Use Trust-approved systems and accounts where required and take reasonable steps to protect governance information from unauthorised access, loss or disclosure.
- Maintain secure passwords and use multi-factor authentication where required.
- Store, share and dispose of personal or confidential information securely and only for legitimate governance purposes.
- Promptly report suspected personal data breaches, phishing, compromised accounts, lost devices or other information/cyber security incidents through the Trust's agreed reporting route.
- Complete any cyber or information security training required for our role.

11. Social media and public communications

The standards in this Code apply to social media, messaging applications, online forums and private or closed groups as well as public communications.

We will:

- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries and consider how our online activity may affect confidence in our governance role and the reputation of the Trust.
- Apply the same standards of confidentiality and data protection online as we would in meetings or other governance activity.
- Exercise caution when joining school-related parent/carer groups or accepting online connections that could create conflicts, blurred boundaries or inappropriate access to governance matters.
- Not accept friend/follow requests from pupils where this would be inappropriate to our role or create a safeguarding concern.
- Not use social media or other public forums to disclose confidential information, criticise or discuss confidential matters relating to individuals, or make inappropriate, discriminatory, abusive or offensive comments about members of the Trust community.
- Not purport to speak on behalf of the Trust, Board or LGC unless authorised to do so.
- Report harassment or abuse connected with our governance role through the appropriate Trust route.

12. Concerns and breaches of the Code

Concerns about a possible breach should be raised promptly with the Chair of the relevant governance body or the Trust's Governance Manager, as appropriate. Where the concern relates to the Chair, it should be referred to the Vice-Chair or the Trust's Governance Manager. Safeguarding, whistleblowing, fraud, data protection or other specialist concerns should be referred through the relevant Trust procedure.

The Trust will seek to deal with concerns fairly, proportionately and, where possible, informally in the first instance. Depending on the nature and seriousness of the concern, action may include:

- clarification or a reminder of expectations;
- an informal or formal meeting;
- support, mentoring or training;
- an agreed improvement plan or other proportionate action;
- restriction from involvement in a particular matter where a conflict or other concern exists;
- a formal investigation; or
- consideration of suspension or removal where permitted by the Trust's constitutional and governance arrangements.

Where investigation is necessary, an appropriate person who is sufficiently independent of the matter will be appointed. Depending on the circumstances, this may be the Chair, Vice-Chair, another Trustee, a Member or an appropriately appointed external person. Anyone with a material conflict of interest in the matter will not determine the outcome.

The individual concerned will normally be informed of the substance of the concern and given a reasonable opportunity to respond before a decision is made, subject to any safeguarding, legal or regulatory considerations.

Any consideration of the suspension or removal of a Trustee or Local Governor will be undertaken in accordance with the Trust's Articles of Association, Governance Plan, Scheme of Delegation and any applicable law. The appropriate appointing/removing body will be identified before action is taken.

Serious or repeated breaches may include conduct inconsistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life; serious misconduct; persistent failure to undertake required training or fulfil the role; conduct that brings or is likely to bring the Trust or school into serious disrepute; serious or repeated incompetence; bullying, harassment or discrimination; breach of confidentiality; unmanaged conflicts of interest; or conduct significantly detrimental to effective governance or the operational efficiency of the Trust.

For the avoidance of doubt, legitimate challenge, raising concerns through appropriate routes, reporting safeguarding concerns, or making a protected disclosure will not in itself constitute bringing the Trust into disrepute.

13. Monitoring and review

This Code will be reviewed annually and sooner where there are significant changes to legislation, statutory guidance, the Trust's constitutional arrangements or governance practice. It will be approved by the Board of Trustees.

14. Annual declaration

All Trustees and Local Governors are required to confirm annually, at the start of each academic year, that they have read, understood and agree to abide by this Code of Conduct.

This confirmation will be completed and recorded electronically through GovernorHub. Trustees and Local Governors are responsible for ensuring that their annual confirmation is completed promptly when requested.

15. Related policies and documents

- Articles of Association
- Governance Plan and Scheme of Delegation
- Standing Orders
- Trustee and Governor School Visits Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Gifts and Hospitality Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Information/Cyber Security policies and procedures
- Online Safety Policy