

Board of Trustees

Autumn Term Report 2021

The autumn term continued to be challenging for many of our schools as the effects of the pandemic continued to impact. Our trust and school leaders worked tirelessly ensuring schools were safe and education focussed on addressing gaps in learning.

Strategic Priorities

The priority for much of this term is about setting out the 2021/22 strategic focus as part of the longer-term strategic goals. These areas have developed from the discussions at the strategy day which I reported on last term. Our focus areas for 2021/22 are:



Richard Bettsworth
Chair

Strategic Goals 20-24	2021/22 Focus
1. Excellence for all	Provide cover and structure to release teachers to develop their practice through coaching focused on improving outcomes for disadvantaged children. Teacher Development Time
2. Effective central services	Ensure all services are able to meet new structure of a SEND cluster and the developing primary school needs. Share expertise and talent between clusters to raise outcomes for children
3. Effective partnerships	Identify key areas of focus for SEND cluster integration, development and growth. Establish core areas of autonomy and shared systems
4. Build a sustainable organisation	Develop succession planning and career paths for talent within the Trust. Expand central team structure for growth for future expansion
5. Removing barriers to learning	Ensure Discovery has a clear Recovery Strategy for all children with a particular focus on disadvantaged children and a Digital Learning strategy to maximise opportunities

We know that disadvantaged pupils have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Trust data tells us that the gap between disadvantaged and all children needs to decrease more significantly. So as you can see, as a board we have supported improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils as a high priority in the 201/22 strategic plan.

This term, we finally welcomed Keyham Lodge and Millgate School to the Discovery partnership. It has been a long and complicated conversion process compounded by the pandemic. The integration of the SEND schools and achieving the long-term financial sustainability of the SEND cluster is also a key strategic focus this year.

Board changes

The board will monitor the progress of each of the strategic foci through the committee structure. The addition of the recently formed SEND Cluster Committee will provide governance and oversight of the developing cluster. The new committee will be chaired by Mihir Trivedi.



The Board set out to recruit a Trustee with SEND expertise and we are delighted that Chris Bristow has been appointed. Chris has worked in the SEND sector for 40 years and is committed to social justice and the rights of children and young people. Having originally trained and practiced as a special needs teacher in the 80s & 90s, Chris spent many years in senior SEND focused positions within Leicestershire County Council. He now works for the University of Derby as a senior lecturer in SEND. Chris attended his first meeting yesterday of the Send Cluster committee and is already making a great contribution with his expertise.



In addition, Ruth Malkin has joined the board this term. Ruth has had a long association with Discovery as a former governor at Danemill Primary School which joined the Trust in 2013. Ruth has an excellent insight of both local and board governance. She has served as chair of the School Improvement Committee and is currently the chair of the Advisory Board at Captains Close. Ruth's skills and experience will complement the existing board and her appointment governance experience will be invaluable..

Local governance

This term we have seen some changes to the chairing arrangements of our school advisory boards. I would like to express my gratitude for the contribution of our retiring chairs and welcome their successors. The role of chair is pivotal to effectiveness of the board, and I recognise the additional commitment that it brings.

School	Retiring chair	Incoming chair
Captain's Close	Stephen Hilton (5 years)	Ruth Malkin
Danemill	Martha Moger (2 years)	James Lewitt
Farndon Fields	Julie Simpson (6 years)	Richard Kyle
Mowmacre	Jill Craig (2 years)	Helen Stockill
Redlands	Vanessa Dakin (3 years)	Simon Dalby

The value of inclusion

As a Trust we are committed to diversity and inclusion. The review of the mission, vision and values last year was underpinned by this commitment. However, the Equality Consultative Group felt the commitment should be more explicit and made a request to the Board to consider adopting 'Inclusion' as a Trust value.

The Board fully supported the proposal recognising the importance of inclusion if we are to achieve our goal of excellence for all. True excellence requires that each individual be able to work and learn in an atmosphere of respect, dignity, and acceptance. It was therefore agreed that 'Inclusion' would replace 'Altruism'.



Regular engagement, dialogue with and feedback from stakeholders in this way is important. Understanding stakeholders' views informs and assists our decision-making processes and helps drive progress towards the achievement of our aims, objectives and strategy.

To find out more about the work of the equality group including meeting reports, you can visit the [trust website](#).

Finance

The Board signed off the 2020/21 accounts at the December meeting – a copy of the accounts is available on the trust website.

Over 92% of the Trust's income is derived from the central government grant to support its educational objectives, broadly based on pupil numbers attending individual academies within the Trust. The Trust has delivered a £318k revenue surplus during the year (after pension movements have been excluded) which included an agreed investment of excess reserves in technology and to support the delivery of the strategic aims.

As with all organisations, COVID-19 has had a detrimental effect on Discovery's 20/21 outturn due to incurring unexpected unrecoverable COVID-19 related costs and a loss of planned income.

Despite this, the Trust continues to maintain reserves at both an operational and strategic level above the Reserves Policy. These additional reserves are earmarked for the planned SEND Cluster growth and recovery from COVID-19 through supporting and enhancing teaching and learning by providing additional teacher development time.

The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee were pleased with the outcome of the external audit and commended the work of the Finance Team led by Emma Clarke. The audit identified just one low risk audit point which is impressive for the size and complexity of our organisation.

Finally

I hope you find this board report a useful snapshot of what has been achieved this term. Whilst I aim to keep the report to two pages this has proved challenging this time around. This is testament to the unrelenting drive across the trust to achieve the very best outcomes for our pupils.

Richard Bettsworth
Chair of the Board