



THINKING
SCHOOLS
ACADEMY TRUST

**Academy Advisory Board
Handbook
January 2016**

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 operates in two hubs: Medway 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 and be fulfilled in an ever-changing world.

Mission Statement

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.

The TSAT values and vision statement is:

Child First
Aspire
Challenge
Achieve

TSAT Vision

TSAT is made up of a family of schools that work together to “improve the life chances” of all our children and young people. We share a common mission to nurture successful children 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. Autonomy is earned and relevant to performance with each academy RAG rated and intervention is proportionate to need. TSAT top slice ranges from 3% to 5% of GAG; this is differentiated according to school support and all academies benefit from central services provided by the trust. This support is of the highest quality and we have a proven track record of sustained performance and improvement with no TSAT academy currently in an Ofsted category. The results of each TSAT academy have improved year on year under the leadership of TSAT.

Each hub has an Executive Principal who gives strategic leadership and supports the hub’s development. TSAT enjoys positive relationships with other local schools, providers and Local Authorities. We currently have ten academies and are keen and able to expand further and would be interested in schools ambitious to work within a dynamic and growing trust and those who would be interested in taking a leading role in the shaping of our future in a strong partnership. This could be within our existing hubs or even establishing a new hub geographically near to our existing hubs in Medway/Kent or Portsmouth.

The founding school, The Rochester Grammar School, is graded outstanding by Ofsted, and is an advanced thinking school and a national teaching school. Our teaching school alliance “New Horizons” is successful with a track record of outstanding professional development and school to school support. We pride ourselves on our high expectations and commitment to improve the life chances of all our pupils. This commitment is clearly demonstrated in our passion for cognitive education delivered through high quality teaching and learning that inspires and challenges. Our teachers constantly feed back positively on the quality of our training and support that is provided through our teaching school alliance and our trust lead practitioners and SLEs.

We believe that we are simply stronger together.

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

TSAT Ethos

In order to support our children and young people in achieving their aspirations we believe in supporting them in their thinking and their learning.

This is why we have adopted the Thinking schools’ approach to Teaching and Learning. Research from organisations such as the Sutton Trust has repeatedly demonstrated that when children understand how their brains work and, therefore, use their brain more effectively they achieve better academic and personal outcomes than those who do not. This is known as meta-cognition.

This cognitive approach to teaching and learning across all our schools also means that pupils develop a common language of learning between subjects, teachers and themselves.

“A family of schools that are stronger together.”

Developing thinking across schools needs to be flexible. The TSAT model ensures our family of schools encompasses this by not creating a “one size fits all” where individual schools lose their identity and are subsumed into a corporate image. Instead we pride ourselves in nurturing schools to provide alternatives, possibilities and choices to create pathways of success.

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 and be fulfilled in an ever-changing world.

The Structure of TSAT

TSAT currently has a family of ten schools in two hubs: Medway and Portsmouth. Medway schools are: The Rochester Grammar School, Chatham Grammar School for Boys, The Victory Academy, New Horizons Children’s Academy, All Faiths Children’s Academy, Gordon Children’s Academy, Junior and Gordon Children’s Academy, Infant. Schools in Portsmouth are: Portsmouth Academy for Girls, Newbridge Junior School and Isambard Brunel Junior School.

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



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. Each Regional Governing Body is linked to an Executive Principal; this means that there are three Regional Governing Bodies: Portsmouth, Medway Secondary and Medway Primary. 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 5 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 main purpose of these roles is to enable AABs to be able to express and act on local views and issues – views of parents and the community etc. One of the key purposes of an AAB is to ensure that the Academy is being a good expression of what and who TSAT is in the local community. Therefore, these roles are about ensuring that the TSAT Ethos is “lived” out in the Academy on a day to day basis.

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 Executive Principal will be a member of the relevant RGB and the CEO is an ex-officio 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;
- Liaise with the Academy Advisory Boards

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 financial, ICT, human resources, governance and strategic development for the whole family of TSAT Academies. 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.

The RGB acts as the direct line manager for each Executive Principal in their region. Through line management of the Executive Principal, 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 Executive Principal also attends this.

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. Instead the AAB should be in a position to assess the impact of the Academy locally; how it is contributing to the local community, how it is relating to local families and how it understands local issues. This in turn, will enable the AAB to contribute effectively to decisions which may require AAB involvement.
- 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 familiarized 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, Health and Safety, 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 at the AAB meetings.

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 (formerly CRB) 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 behavior, 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 • Health and Safety • Safeguarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academy Advisory Board members are expected to provide reports, when appropriate, to the AAB on their assessment of the Academy's performance on the areas to which they are linked. • Academy Advisory Board members with link responsibilities are expected to be familiar with the policy relating to their area of work. These policies are available

3.3 Guidance and support

i) Termly Agenda

On a termly basis the Finance Director 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 of a local nature. 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.

3.5 Elections

i) Parents

Any parent or carer with a registered student at an Academy is eligible to stand for election for parent AAB membership at the Academy. A person is disqualified from being a parent academy board member if they are an elected member of the LA or paid to work at the academy for more than 500 hours (i.e. for more than one-third of the hours of a full-time equivalent) in any consecutive twelve month period (at the time of election or appointment).

Those standing for parents AAB membership must be elected by other parents at the Academy. If insufficient parents stand/are nominated for election, the AAB may recommend a parent(s) to the Regional Governing Body for appointment to the AAB.

A "parent" is defined as any individual who has or has had parental responsibility for / cares for or has cared for a child or young person under the age of 18. It includes anyone with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, irrespective of what their relationship is with the child. The reference in the definition must be to someone involved in the full-time care of the child on a settled basis.

A parent AAB member may serve out their term of office when their child/ren leave the Academy.

ii) Staff

Both teaching and support staff paid to work at the Academy are eligible to stand for staff AAB membership. Staff AAB members are elected by the Academy staff and must be paid to work at the Academy. Volunteers are not eligible to serve as staff AAB members. Any election that is contested must be decided by ballot.

Staff Academy Advisory Board members cease to be AAB Members when they no longer work at the Academy. The Principal is a member of the AAB by virtue of his/her office and counts in the membership of the AAB.

iii) Community, Foundation, Sponsor

To be appointed as required by the Regional Governing Body.

iv) Term of Office

The term of office for AAB membership is normally **four years**, subject to reappointment or re-election, in the case of teaching, support-staff and parent AAB members.

v) Qualifications and Disqualifications

An Academy Advisory Board Member must be aged 18 or over at the time of election or appointment. Registered students cannot be Members.

A person is disqualified from being an AAB Member if he/she:

- is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or an interim order or their estate has been sequestrated and the sequestration has not been discharged, annulled or reduced;
- is subject to a disqualification order or disqualification undertaking under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, a disqualification order under Part 2 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, a disqualification undertaking accepted under the Company Directors Disqualification (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, or to an order made under section 429 (2) of the Insolvency Act 1986;
- is included in the list of teachers or workers considered by the Secretary of State as unsuitable to work with children or young people;
- is barred from any regulated activity relating to children;
- is disqualified from working with children or from registering for child-minding or providing day care;
- has been removed from the office of charity trustee or trustee for a charity by the Charity Commissioners or High Court on grounds of any misconduct or mismanagement, or under section 34 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 from being concerned in the management or control of anybody;
- is disqualified from being an independent school proprietor, teacher or employee by the Secretary of State;
- has been sentenced to 3 months or more in prison (without the option of a fine) in the 5 years before becoming an Academy Advisory Board Member or

since becoming an Academy Advisory Board Member;

- has received a prison sentence of 2 or more years in the 20 years before becoming a Academy Advisory Board Member;
- has at any time received a prison sentence of 5 years or more;
- has been fined for causing a nuisance or disturbance on school premises during the 5 years prior to or since appointment or election as an Advisory Board Member;
- refuses to an application being made to the Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) for a criminal records check.

vi) Removal from Office

In line with TSAT's existing practice, reasons for removing an AAB Member include: persistent nonattendance at Academy Advisory Board meetings (i.e. three consecutive meetings with no apologies), failure to fulfil the commitments (as set out above), undermining the mission, bringing the Academy into disrepute, behaving in serious breach of TSAT ethos and values.

The procedure for removal from the AAB is as follows:

- The Chair of the AAB discusses the matter with the Principal/RGB. If the removal of the Chair is under consideration, the Principal will discuss the matter with the RGB.
- The Chair initiates an informal conversation with the member in question about areas of concern and improving standards.
- If the problem continues the Chair will:
 - raise the issue with the RGB, in the first instance, then the Finance Director for information / further action.
 - have a formal conversation with the member in question around improving standards and setting out timescales and consequences if difficulties continue.
- If the problem is not resolved, the Chair will write to the member in question informing him that he is removed from the AAB.

vii) Right to reply

In the interest of natural justice the AAB Member will have the right to submit a statement outlining reason(s) for his/her action(s) which will be considered, both by the Chair/AAB Members in the first instance, then a further discussion with the RGB.

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

The AAB of TSAT academy has no responsibilities regarding meeting with Ofsted inspectors, rather representatives from the RGB will fulfil this responsibility.

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?
<p>Exclusions and Behaviour Statutory</p>	<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 behavior 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?
<p>Health & Safety 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 • Are there strategies in place to support students? • How H & S is generally promoted in the academy?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet safety - how does the e-safety policy link with general safeguarding and child protection? • Are there key strategies that the AAB could be involved in?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities and Inclusion (includes SEN) • 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 • 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</p> <p>Advisory/good practice</p> <p>Maths and numeracy</p> <p>ICT</p> <p>Teaching and Learning</p> <p>English and literacy</p> <p>Humanities, including RE</p> <p>Science</p> <p>Performing Arts</p> <p>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? • What are the success criteria? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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</p> <p>Advisory/good practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does 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?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there effective feedback mechanisms in place? • 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?