

Becoming a Wadebridge School Parent Trustee

February 2025

If you are reading this, you have expressed an interest in becoming a trustee at Wadebridge School – welcome!

This is a brief guide written about the secondary school that you know, but very much from a governance perspective. It is in three sections and is deliberately written with a view to provoking some questions in your mind and beginning the journey as a parent trustee at Wadebridge School. The three sections are:

- the school and the community we serve;
- statutory responsibilities of all academy trust boards;
- key points and information specific to being a parent trustee at Wadebridge School.

The school, and the community we serve:

Wadebridge School is a Single Academy Trust (SAT). This means that we are a charitable company with a board of trustees that is accountable directly to the Secretary of State. As a charity we have a single, all-encompassing responsibility to ensure that the school advances education to the public benefit. A SAT has a single funding agreement with the SoS, although some aspects of funding and provision remain with the Local Authority – school transport, some elements of special education needs funding, for example.

The national education landscape has become increasingly complicated in recent years with four different legal types of school structure now existing, and every county in England has a different mix of the four:

- Maintained, Local Authority (LA) school – up until c. 2010 all state funded schools fell into this category. Each had their own governing body that was accountable to the Local Authority who in turn was accountable to the Secretary of State. During the last twenty five years, three different types of state funded schools have also now developed:
- Foundation Trust schools, where the governing body is the employer
- Single Trust Academy (SAT)
- Multi Academy Trust (MAT) where a single trust exists in the same way as a SAT, but there is more than one school within that trust. Some of the largest in the country have over sixty schools.

In Cornwall, over 85% of schools are now academies. This is higher than most of the country. The majority are in MATs; of Cornwall's thirty two secondary schools, there are three SATs. Some Cornish schools are in MATs that cover Devon and Plymouth as well as Cornwall. There are pros and cons to being a SAT or being in a MAT, and our trust board has taken a conscious decision to remain as a SAT although we are always re-evaluating and assessing the best strategic decisions in this regard for the school. Different governments have a different stance on this, too, with policy changes that reflect their own position, so as a board we must always be alert. As trustees we are stewards of the school and have a responsibility to future generations of students and staff; stewardship is a key aspect of the trust board's work. A good, recent example of this is the decision taken a few years ago by the board to close the Sixth Form and cease providing post 16 education. Nobody wanted to do this, but it was a necessary decision to ensure the sustainability of the school and to be able to maintain and further improve the quality of education that we were able to provide to our 11-16 year olds both now and in the future.

Why have we chosen to remain as a SAT?

Wadebridge is a well-regarded school with a strong reputation. The majority of students and parents speak favourably of us, as do staff. But, we all know that good reputations are hard earned and easily lost – we are always looking to improve and aim for 100% 'satisfaction'. As a SAT, we retain our autonomy and remain in control of our 'own destiny'. We make our own decisions and that decision making is centred on our own students and the community that we serve – it is not diluted in anyway by needing to serve a greater number of schools. That does not mean that we are isolationist in any way at all – we work with lots of schools that are both in MATs and those that aren't.

Here is a map of our 'designated area' sometimes referred to as the 'catchment area' – the area (the orange line) is maybe bigger than you might at first expect, reach out in directions that may not be logical (very close to Bodmin, for example) and covers a significant number of hamlets and individual



farms and properties (which in some cases straddle the orange line!). As trustees, the whole concept of designated areas is an important one and is of strategic significance. School transport arrangements illustrate why. Parents can apply for a place in any secondary school that they choose. The Local Authority (Cornwall Council) pays for school transport to Wadebridge School for anyone that needs it living within our designated area. However, if parents living outside the designated area select Wadebridge School, then they become responsible for providing and paying for transport themselves. In a rural

area, therefore, you will understand that the majority of parents select their designated school – hence, we are even more ethically and morally bound to ensure we offer the best possible education that we can.

What does this mean as a trustee?

Here is the paragraph again – but this time with the type of questions that we would be asking as trustees.

Wadebridge is a well-regarded school with a strong reputation – *is that true, and how do we know?* The vast majority of students and parents speak favourably of us, as do staff – *again, is this true or fanciful assertion? What do they speak favourably about? What are the areas that may not be as well received? Are there any groups of parents that don't speak well of the school?*

But, we all know that good reputations are hard earned and easily lost - *how do we ensure that we maintain our strong reputation* – we are always looking to improve and aim for 100% 'satisfaction'. As a SAT, we retain our autonomy and remain in control of our 'own destiny'. We make our own decisions and that decision making is centred on our own students and the community that we serve – it is not diluted in anyway by needing to serve a greater number of schools. *So, if that is the case then why are so many schools in MATs? Are we missing out on potential benefits by remaining as a SAT? How can we be sure that we are coming out on the right side of the 'pros and cons' balance?*

That does mean that we are isolationist in any way at all – we work with lots of schools that are both in MATs and those that aren't. *Our trust board encourage our leaders and our staff to engage with regional and national bodies. We invite other school leaders into Wadebridge to give an external perspective to our monitoring and evaluation work.*

Here is a map of our 'designated area' sometimes referred to as the 'catchment area' – the area (the orange line) is maybe bigger than you might at first expect, reach out in directions that may not be logical (very close to Bodmin, for example) and covers a significant number of hamlets and individual farms and properties (which in some cases straddle the orange line!). *How can we be sure that children from every part of the designated area are getting an equitable deal? Is the school well placed to manage an increase or decrease in population numbers across our area?*

As trustees, the whole concept of designated areas is an important one and is of strategic significance. School transport arrangements illustrate why. Parents can apply for a place in any secondary school that they choose. The Local Authority (Cornwall Council) pays for school transport to Wadebridge School for anyone that needs it within our designated area. *How does this work in practice? Who decides, the school or the Council what that provision is?* However, if they live outside the designated area then they become responsible for providing and paying for transport themselves. In a rural area, therefore, you will understand that the majority of parents select their designated school – hence, we are even more ethically and morally bound to ensure we offer the best possible education that we can. *But, what if we fill up the school with children from outside our area and people moving into our designated area can't then get a place? Who controls this – us, as an academy, or the Local Authority?*

So, remaining a 'school of choice' is strategically important and is very important to us as a board - not just because it's nice and we always strive to be the best we can be for every student, but, to put it crudely, schools' funding is based almost exclusively on the number of students on roll.

Some basic facts and figures relating to our admissions criteria:

- All state funded schools across the country have a capacity limit called the Published Admission Number (PAN), agreed with the Local Authority and the government – ours is 210 in each year group (ie 7 classes of 30, although the real world is never quite as clear cut as that!) and we have increased to 230 in some year groups in the recent past. The Local Authority has asked us to consider increasing again, so we have to constantly balance the benefit of taking more students (and getting increased income) against the quality of education and wider provision that we give (and risk diminishing it and ceasing to be a school of choice).
- Our current number on roll is 1075.
- Our current budget is just over £7 million. This is taxpayers' money, and we are accountable for ensuring that it is properly spent and accounted for. You will often read and see in the media that schools are 'massively underfunded'. The truth is that the picture across England is extremely variable because every county and urban borough is funded at a different rate! Cornwall is amongst the lowest funded authorities; Wadebridge School is in a healthier position than many in the county.

I am hoping that just these few paragraphs have put lots of questions into your mind. What are your initial thoughts and questions resulting from these few paragraphs? Yours will be different to mine; I have spent my entire working life in secondary education with thirty years as a senior leader in four different schools in Doncaster, Birmingham and Cornwall; it is with that set of skills and experiences and through that lens that I approach being a trustee. You will bring an entirely different viewpoint to the trust board – yes, you are a current parent (my three boys attended the school some years ago!) but your life experiences since you left school will all be very different, and the skills and perspectives that you bring will be wholly different to mine and other trustees – your input will be valuable to the board.

In a nutshell, wrestling with these questions and challenges is why being a school trustee is so interesting and rewarding. I mentioned that stewardship is important – we talk at school and board meetings of our Vision 2035; what do we need to be doing now to ensure high quality and relevant education is safeguarded for the current Year 1 children across local primary schools when they leave us at the age of 16 in 2035? Become a trustee, and you will be making a significant contribution to the public services of our area and the future life chances, employability and wellbeing of our children.

Statutory governance responsibilities of academy trust boards

The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility for governance across the Trust – we are the primary decision-making body and hold the legal responsibilities as both the statutory body and the employer.

Our functional responsibilities are laid down in the government's Academy Trust Handbook – they are the same for all academies whether SAT or MATs. Our three key statutory functions, and against which school governance is inspected by OfSTED are:

- **Strategic leadership of the trust** – “the board defines the trust vision for high quality and inclusive education in line with its charitable objects. It establishes and fosters the trust's culture and sets and champions the trust strategy”
 - **Accountability and assurance** – “the board has robust effective oversight of the operations and performance of the academy trust, including the provision of education, pupil welfare, overseeing and ensuring appropriate use of funding and effective financial performance and keeping their estate safe and well-maintained”
- Engagement** – “the board has strategic oversight of relationships with stakeholders. The board involves parents, schools and communities so that decision-making is supported by meaningful engagement.”

All trustees are volunteers – it is important that despite this fact you understand that there is a high level of accountability on trust boards – hence, our desire at Wadebridge to ensure a diversity of views and experiences are sat around the table that will help ensure rigour and challenge in our decision making.

All academies have their Articles of Association which are determined with the Secretary of State when they convert to academy status and move out of Local Authority control – our Articles can be found under the Trustee tab on our website, as can the annual financial reports that we are required to have externally audited and submit to the government on an annual basis. Our Articles include a requirement that a proportion of the board be elected by the parent body, and it is these seats at the board table that we are looking to fill on this occasion – we are hoping to appoint four parent elected trustees. All trustees' term of office is four years; your term of office is not affected by your child possibly leaving the school during that four year period.

Our funding agreement is made between the school and Secretary of State – it sets out the funding arrangements, the obligations on both parties and the termination provisions - it is only the SoS that can terminate that agreement if (s)he deems it appropriate. As an additional safeguard against such

serious measures needing to be taken, every academy has a Members board that sits above the Trust Board – in essence, the Members hold the trust board to account for the effective governance of the trust, but have minimal involvement in running the trust. They are the ‘guardians’ of the trust.

There are many different models of the difference between school leadership and school governance – here is just one:

Governance	Management
Monitors outcomes <i>(academic performance, student attendance)</i>	Educates the students <i>(teaching and learning, the curriculum)</i>
Monitors management’s effectiveness <i>(complying with legislation, school policies)</i>	Keeps everyone safe – students, staff, visitors <i>(safeguarding, health & safety)</i>
Ensures engagement with stakeholders <i>(students, staff, parents, composition of the trust board)</i>	Communicates with parents and students <i>(letters home, social media, parent/student surveys)</i>
Challenges management when necessary <i>(poor performance, lack of urgency)</i> and supports management when things go wrong <i>(accidents, complaints, budget pressures)</i>	Manages the staff <i>(recruitment, performance, welfare)</i>
Ensures financial probity and appropriate use of public funds	Spends the budget <i>(places orders, pays the bills, pays the staff)</i>

Key points about being a Parent Trustee

As you can see from the table above, we operate at a strategic level – we do not involve ourselves in the day to day nitty gritty of school life. Some other key points to note:

- Every Trustee must be aware of the need for confidentiality and must adhere to the Seven Principles of Public Life (often referred to as the Nolan principles) [The Seven Principles of Public Life - GOV.UK](#)
- You will be required to sign a governance Code of Conduct that is based on those principles. Trustees must also complete a skills audit and an annual declaration of any business interests and family connections that may overlap with your trustee activity. All trustees must undergo an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS), and once you have been elected we shall initiate that process with you.
- Governance is a collective responsibility – our individual thoughts and contributions are important to determining school vision, direction and strategy and we have challenging and robust discussion. But, the overall responsibility and decisions about what is best for the school is a collective one and we all support those decisions in public.
- So, as a Parent Trustee you have an inherent, potential conflict of loyalty. On the one hand you want what seems best for your own children – but with your Trustee hat on you must be able to see the bigger picture and that may be different. Any questions or concerns about your own children’s education must be taken up with the school in the normal way – the trust board is not, and must not be a vehicle for those conversations.

- Parent Trustees are meant to be *representative* of the whole parent community, but it is acknowledged and understood that you cannot possibly canvas and speak on behalf of over 700 families who in any case will not share a common view! In essence, being an elected parent trustee means that you are contributing to the governance of the school from a parent's perspective – other trustees around the table will be predominantly looking at the governance from a staff perspective or maybe a local business/community perspective. Many trustees wear more than one hat – but we never wear an individual, 'what's best for me' hat! We must all be strategic in our decision making.
 - Here is a hypothetical (extreme!) example: the trust board is asked to consider a proposal that the school will subsidise all students' school uniform. Many parents might welcome such a proposal and, as an individual, you might personally benefit considerably; financial assistance with uniform might be extremely helpful to you and therefore attractive. But, as a Trustee you need to be asking:
 - 'Why is this proposal being made?'
 - 'Are there students who genuinely need this, and is a blanket approach the right one?'
 - 'Should the school be subsidising uniform at all?'
 - Is this a good use of the budget?'
 - What might the knock on consequences be?
 - 'Does that mean staffing levels might be compromised, including possibly redundancy?'
 - 'Is there less money left to spend on disadvantaged and vulnerable students' learning in the classroom who need the most support?'
 - ...and, lots more!

Time Commitment

Meetings

- 6 Full Board meetings each academic year, one every half term
 - Wednesday evenings, 5.00-7.00pm
 - Face to face meetings in school
- 3 Committee meetings each academic year, one per term plus an additional FAR meeting (see below) when the external auditor presents the annual accounts
 - Wednesday evenings – either 4.00, 4.30 or 5.45 start dependent on which committee
 - Virtual, Teams meetings
 - There are three committees; you will be a named member on one and will hence contribute to the quoracy of that meeting and have a vote should that be required.
 - All trustees can attend any committee meeting if they wish to
 - The three committees are:
 - Finance, Audit and Risk – FAR
 - Quality of Education (including academic outcomes, curriculum, teaching & learning) - QoE
 - Quality of Culture (including attendance, behaviour, safeguarding) - QoC

We try hard to keep the workload and time commitment of trustees to a realistic level. However, there is a real commitment and in particular it is expected that all papers will be read before meetings – most meetings have a senior leader's report circulated in advance – for Full Board, from the Headteacher; for FAR, from the Business Manager; QoE from Deputy Head (Quality of Education) and QoC from Deputy Head (Quality of Culture).

Governance Weeks – two weeks per year (typically October/November and March)

- Two weeks in which much of our in depth monitoring, meeting staff and students is conducted. A specific theme(s) is determined for each week's activity
- Trustees attend maybe one or two sessions in the week, where work and other commitments allow
- The Thursday of each Governance week, trustees meet with the senior leadership team at 3.30-5.30pm allowing for an annual joint strategy meeting

Panel meetings and working groups – as required

- Some aspects of school life require a panel of trustees to be formed. This is rare, and no newly appointed trustee will be expected to sit on a panel without an experienced trustee beside them
 - Examples include:
 - staff disciplinary or grievance hearing;
 - Permanent Exclusion of a student must legally be heard by a panel of the trust board
 - There is a panel of three trustees that forms the Headteacher's Performance Management Review panel. Any trustee (except staff trustees) can sit on this panel – we currently have a panel in place for 2024-25 and 2025-26.
- Working groups are similarly rare - committees deal with most business. An example was the closure of the Sixth Form.

Training

- All trustees in all schools must undertake annual safeguarding training - this may be face to face at a whole trust board meeting, or, more commonly, online training at a time of your convenience in September – October half term. You will be given guidance and induction training beforehand.
- Online training is available and can be done in line with your own interests or sometimes as requested by the board to ensure skill sets are up to date.
 - We subscribe to two organisations that offer comprehensive online training – the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) and the National Governance Association (NGA)
- You will not be expected to pay for any training.

I hope that this short introduction to governance has been useful, and that it has piqued your enthusiasm and interest and not turned you away! If I have taught any of you to 'suck eggs', then I apologise.

If you have any questions or queries at all, do just ask – either by email or by contacting me on the number below. There are no silly questions, and at board meetings when we will undoubtedly slip into educational jargon and acronyms you will be encouraged to ask what on earth we are talking about - we try not to lapse, but don't always succeed!

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