

Academy Councils



Each academy has its own **Academy Council** (AC).

The Lime Trust Board has identified in the published Scheme of Delegation the areas of responsibility that they delegate to the ACs. Although not in any way legally responsible and not itself accountable for the statutory functions, the AC has an important role to play in assisting the academy to operate effectively.

The governance of a Multi Academy Trust differs from that of maintained schools and the Lime Trust genuinely believes that by placing the statutory responsibilities firmly at the centre, in the remit of the Lime Trust Board, ACs become more effective in their focus to provide challenge and support in the drive for outstanding outcomes for all pupils.

The range and extent of the delegated responsibilities can be adjusted by the Trust Board. The ACs of academies that have demonstrated they are consistently and securely outstanding are able to take on increasing autonomy. The ACs of academies that still need support may be required to operate with reduced delegated responsibilities. In some circumstances, eg if an academy fails an inspection, the Lime Trust Board will suspend the delegated powers of that AC completely for a pre-determined period of time.

What does an Academy Council do?

The role of the AC is to understand, advise, challenge, support and encourage the academy to be outstanding, within the umbrella of the Lime Trust. The ACs are supported in this role by the CEO and her central team, and by the Trust Board. When an AC is performing at its best, it is fully and proactively engaged with the academy through:

- acting as a “critical friend” to the academy by evaluating and challenging under performance, supporting and understanding progress and being consistent in the drive for educational excellence at all levels of academy life.
- working with the academy to build a unique character, and to realise the Lime Trust's values in the local context, to increase the pace of the academy's development and improvement
- fulfilling an outward facing role by using the collective knowledge and skills to promote the academy and to enhance relationships with all key stakeholders, the local community and local business. It is an essential role of the AC to provide local knowledge - the academy and its community.

Characteristics of an effective Academy Council

Academies have outstanding governance when members of the AC:

- talk about teaching and learning.
- know a great deal about the academy and its community.
- are ambitious for the academy and its community.
- ask questions which make colleagues reflect and these discussions lead to delivering the very best outcomes for every child and adult within the academy community.
- maintain strong and effective relationships within the Lime Trust.

The Role of the Academy Council Member

- **ethos and values:** to be fully committed to the education of children and young people and to focus first and foremost on the needs of the pupils and their education, the values of Lime Trust and the specific ethos of the academy.
- **the nature of governance:** to understand the distinction between governance and management. The AC has a distinctive role which is separate from that of the executive. The Headteacher is the leader of the academy and is held directly accountable by the CEO and Lime Trust Board for the management and performance of the academy. The AC provides support and challenge, guidance and advice. There are some specific matters, e.g. child protection and safeguarding, where the AC will pay particular attention to reviewing the implementation of Lime Trust policies.
- **the responsibilities of governance:** to appreciate that the role of the AC carries with it overarching responsibilities. The attitude and approach of each individual AC member is critical in determining the extent to which the AC adds value to the academy.
- **professional skills and community knowledge:** to bring to the AC their skills and experience and community knowledge, whether professional or personal, in order to enrich the work of the AC and the academy.
- **full engagement:** to take an active role; this is more than just turning up at meetings. An effective AC is characterised by
- Frequent engagement in academy activities by all AC members e.g. attendance at music and drama performances, seeing lessons in action, involvement in parents evenings and parent social events. Visits to the academy must always be made via appointment and in agreement with the Headteacher.
- Helpful, constructive and supportive contributions by all AC members during discussions in meetings. In order to achieve this, it is essential that no one person dominates and that no one seeks to undermine the work of the academy, the AC, the Lime Trust or any of the individuals involved in this shared governance model.
- AC members are expected to have a sound and meaningful knowledge of the academy and its community and to be passionate and driven in ensuring the academy's success.
- **attendance and punctuality:** to give priority to AC meetings with full and punctual attendance. We do recognise and appreciate that AC members are volunteers, but by agreeing to be an AC member, there is an expected commitment to attend all meetings. The smooth running of meetings is only possible when there is an orderly start and finish. This therefore requires high levels of punctuality from all members.
- **confidentiality:** to comply with the strictest of standards in terms of confidentiality. An AC cannot be effective if there is concern about confidentiality. Even if just one person around the table is thought to be untrustworthy in this respect, the agenda of the AC will be curtailed and important matters dealt with elsewhere. Such a position immediately undermines the effectiveness of the AC.
- **conflicts of interest:** to understand the distinction between their own personal relationships and their role as a member of the AC. There may be times when there is a conflict of interest. The AC member must ensure that there is a clear line between these two areas. As a member of the AC, it is essential that personal relationships do not encroach on academy business. The most challenging of these occurs frequently when the AC member is a parent. In this case, the AC member is required to act dispassionately and not to let their individual knowledge of their child and their circumstances colour their contributions or decision making to the AC.

The Role of the Chair of the Academy Council

The role of AC Chair is a key one, and very much valued by Lime Trust. The AC Chair has a legal responsibility to act in the interests of Lime Trust but has a special responsibility to ensure the needs of the academy are well represented and communicated to the Lime Trust Board.

1. **Effectiveness of the AC:** the Chair takes the lead in ensuring the AC is effective. Good ACs also review their own effectiveness at regular intervals.

2. **Role Model:** the Chair sets a good example to their fellow members and ensures that everyone is aware of the expectations upon them. Occasionally it may be necessary for the Chair of the AC to respond when an AC member is not meeting those expectations to such an extent that the effectiveness of the AC might be damaged. Every attempt must be made to resolve these issues on an informal basis. However the AC Chair has recourse to the CEO and ultimately to the Board of Lime Trust for a resolution.
3. **Communication:** the Chair, together with the Headteacher, is responsible for ensuring AC members are well informed about both the academy and the Lime Trust; and for ensuring the views of the AC are well communicated to the Lime Trust Board.
4. **Relationship with the Headteacher:** the AC Chair and the CEO are the most significant people with whom the Headteacher interacts. Both provide the Headteacher with guidance, advice, support and constructive challenge. The Chair's main focus is as critical friend; the CEO has a main focus as line manager and therefore to hold the Headteacher professionally to account. At the heart of each of these relationships is total trust. It should be possible for each to speak to the other in full confidence no matter how difficult the subject matter. It is rare for the relationship between the AC Chair and the Headteacher to break down. If one loses confidence in the other or has concerns about the actions and performance of the other, this must be addressed through the CEO.

Communication

In order for the shared model of governance to be effective it is essential that there is open and honest communication between the Lime Trust Board, the ACs, Headteachers and the central team.

There are direct channels of communication between the Headteacher, the AC Chair and the CEO. Routine communication for day to day academy business should come from the Chair of the AC, managed by the academy and the AC Clerk.

It is important for AC members to have good access to the academy. It is essential however that they respect the authority of the Headteacher and take great care not to encroach on the management of the academy. If the Chair of an AC feels that access issues have arisen, it may be that the balance of responsibilities is not correctly aligned and in these circumstances concerns should be raised with the CEO of Lime Trust so that the matter can be resolved.

External accountability: the Academy Council and the Ofsted Process

The quality of governance is inspected as part of an OFSTED inspection when the inspectors consider the quality of leadership and management within the academy. Lime Trust will ensure OFSTED understand the structure of governance across the Trust: the inspection team will not comment on the structure, but rather the effectiveness of the leadership and management at all levels.

The Ofsted Inspection Framework says that inspectors should ensure that meetings are with those who are directly responsible for exercising governance of the school and for overseeing its performance. During the inspection itself, which is usually scheduled with one half day notice, the inspection team would expect to meet with the Chair of the AC but all AC members should hold themselves in readiness to meet either individually or as a group with members from the Inspection team.

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Summary of Key Delegated Responsibilities

Members	Trustees	Members of Academy Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> determine constitution oversee the Trustees recognise any strategic partnerships delegate governance and management responsibility to the Trustees (appointing and removing Trustees where necessary) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> determine strategic vision and overarching strategic plan provide strategic leadership and governance provide challenge and support to senior leaders develop and decide strategic and operational policies facilitate collaboration co-ordinate and oversee shared services and resources develop and oversee the implementation of action plans set performance benchmarks determine curriculum priorities set overall Trust budget and approve of Academy budgets monitor expenditure in accordance with appropriate authorisations develop and implement a risk management strategy determine the Trust's reserves/contingency policy ensure appropriate insurance or risk cover is put in place undertake recruitment and performance management of head teachers and other senior leaders develop staff training programmes and opportunities for professional development support the development and building of leadership and governance capacity at Academy level approve of site and asset management strategy oversee any significant capital expenditure and building projects approve of all funding applications decision maker for all appeals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitor implementation of strategic vision support senior leadership team oversee expenditure ensuring the Academy works within its budget and implements the Trust risk and financial management policies support the senior leadership team in the development and review of an appropriate staffing structure where appropriate, support the head teacher in the recruitment and performance management of strategic personnel promote collaboration with other Academies in the Trust contribute to the development and review of Academy policies (e.g. admissions, pupil behaviour, safeguarding) provide advice and feedback to the Trustees, ensuring the Academy is meeting the needs of its community support the senior leadership team in relation to curriculum and budgeting priorities support the senior leadership team in monitoring pupil progress and analysing performance data support the implementation of any Academy plan, focussing particularly on school performance targets undertake all and any appropriate community consultation provide a point of contact for parents, carers and other members of the local community maintain effective links with the school community and the wider local community

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