

Governance Handbook for SSC Members

Welcome

Foreword from the Chair of the Board Trustees: Welcome to Avanti



I am delighted to extend a very warm welcome to the Avanti community.

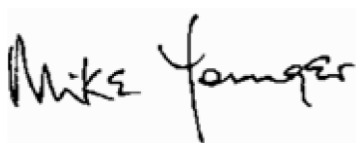
Being an Avanti Trustee or SSC Member is a privilege. We are part of a team of volunteers committed to the values and principles of Avanti who give their time and energy to the Trust and/or to our schools, for the benefit of the education of our young people. We work in partnership across the schools to improve the life chances of our young people.

This Handbook has been produced to support SSC Members to be effective in their respective roles by providing clarity about Trust governance structures, machinery and expectations. It outlines key roles and responsibilities at the different levels of governance and how those different levels work together for the benefit of the whole Trust. I do encourage you to get to know this document, and also the associated documents referred to in it. These documents will support you in beginning constructively to challenge and monitor your school and its

staff and pupils as they strive towards continuous school improvement, progress and achievement.

If you are not yet part of the Avanti family, but are considering joining us, be assured that Trustees appreciate that effective governance needs a range of voices. We promote diversity across the Trust and welcome Expressions of Interest in becoming a Trustee or SSC Member from people of all backgrounds and experience. The necessary skills and qualities are important of course (eg. education, legal, human resource management and experience of governance, etc.) but commitment to the role, support for schools/education and a desire to improve, through excellence in education, the life chances of all our students is key. If you are interested in supporting the Trust or one of our schools, please complete and return the Expression of Interest form.

I would like to thank you, whether as an established SSC Member, or as someone new to the Trust, for your interest. I am confident that you will find the contribution that you make and the commitment you will bring to the role satisfying and rewarding.



Chair of the Avanti Trust Board.

Purpose of this Handbook

This handbook explains the role and expectations of SSC Members.

Introduction to the Trust

The Avanti School Trust (the “MAT”) is a charitable company limited by guarantee.

The Trust has entered into a Master Funding Agreement with the Department for Education (DfE) and a Supplemental Funding Agreement in respect of each school. Legally, the MAT is responsible to the DfE for delivery of commitments under those Funding Agreements.

The DfE requires all MATs to comply with a range of regulations and guidance, much (but not all) of which is set out in the Academy Trust Handbook, updated annually.

Additionally, the MAT is subject to the requirements of the Trust Articles of Association, (the “Articles”) which determine how the Trust is structured and constituted and are the essential rules for how the Trust conducts itself.

Taken together, the Funding Agreements, Academy Trust Handbook, Trust Articles of Association and good practice guidance issued from time to time by eg. the National Governance Association (NGA), establish the basis for the good governance of the Trust and to which the Trust Board is wholly committed.

The Trust Board – Trustees

Company Articles specify that Members may appoint a maximum of 15 Trustees, one of whom may be the Chief Executive (CEO) who can be appointee as an “ex-officio” Trustee. As an “ex-officio” Trustee the CEO remains a Trustee throughout their tenure as CEO. Subject to that, Trustees are appointed for a term of four years and may be re-appointed.

The Board is accountable to the DfE for the performance of all schools within the Trust. Trustees are charity trustees (within the terms of section 97(1) of the Charities Act 1993). They are responsible for setting the strategic direction and vision of the Trust and for the overall control, management and administration of the MAT. Trustees and SSC Members are subject to the Trust Code of Conduct which includes the Nolan Principles of Standards in Public Life, breach of which can lead to suspension or dismissal. All Trustees and SSC Members are required annually to confirm their adherence to the Code.

The Board normally meets a minimum of five times each Academic Year and operates within the Trust Scheme of Delegation (“the Scheme” – see Delegations below).

Trust Board Committees

Trust Articles enable the Board to appoint committees. The Board has appointed four functional committees, the purpose of which is to support the Trust Board by undertaking the necessary level of detailed work that enables the Board to meet its responsibilities. In addition to the functional committees are the School Stakeholder Committees (SSCs), which act as a local layer of governance to support the Board in its work. The four functional committees are:

- **Audit and Risk Committee** meets termly or more frequently as required, reporting to the Board on risk and any concerns arising from internal audit. Through the Trust Strategic Risk Register and the process of Internal Audit, the Committee reviews the effectiveness of Trust systems and procedures and assesses potential risks

to the Trust arising from internal and external developments. The Committee sets the Annual Programme of Internal Audit and reviews the reports arising from this, ensuring that where required, appropriate actions are taken by the Executive. The Committee also receives and considers the annual report from the External Auditor including consideration of the Annual Report and Accounts in readiness for formal sign-off by the Board.

- **Finance and Estates Committee** meets termly or more frequently if required. This Committee undertakes the detailed work necessary to review and monitor management of Trust finances. It is important to remember that legally, Trustees - through the Board - are accountable and responsible for the effective management of all Trust finances, including Trust Reserves which are pooled. The Committee reviews reports and makes recommendations to the Board on financial matters, policies and standards, including the annual Budget of the Trust and each school and management of Trust finances and reserves. The Committee alerts the Board to any financial and/or resource concerns and advises them of forecast financial trends.
- **Learning and Standards Committee** meets 4 times a year, taking a strategic view and monitoring school performance and outcomes, school improvement and curriculum developments. The Committee is responsible for the overall quality of education, education policy, Safeguarding, SEND, Pupil Premium and Admissions policy, as well as aspects of educational provision and improvement.
- **People and Governance Committee** as the name implies, this Committee is responsible for policies and issues relating to staffing, oversight of Trust staffing structures and related matters, Trust Governance (including SSCs) arrangements and effectiveness. The Committee meets 4 times a year.
- **School Stakeholder Committees (SSCs)** see below.

The decisions of each functional committee, taken under their delegations, are reported to the Trust Board (via the minutes of their meetings) by the respective committee chairs. Where required by the Scheme of Delegation, committees make recommendations to Trustees for determination by the full Trust Board. SSCs feed back to the Board through the submission of issues raised at meetings and submitted to the Governance Team via SSC Feedback Forms.

Delegations

The Articles permit Trustees to delegate functions. The Trust Scheme of Delegation, (“the Scheme”) which must be formally approved by the Trust Board and reviewed annually, provides the framework for the strategic, operational and governance management and oversight of the Trust.

Under the Scheme, Trustees retain ultimate accountability for the conduct and performance of the Trust. Some decisions are reserved to the Board. All delegations may be extended or withdrawn at the discretion of the Board. Responsibility for all operational matters is delegated to the CEO who must:

- Seek guidance from the Board on strategic matters, resource use and the development and regular review of the Trust Strategic Plan;
- Report to the Board and Board Committees on developments and progress in relation to the Strategic Plan, many aspects of performance, actions taken under the Scheme of Delegation and issues of high risk/impact. This includes Safeguarding matters, the effectiveness of which underpins everything the Trust does; and
- Explore issues with Trustees, including proposals for and development or review of key policies, management and Trust governance and structure.

The Central MAT

The Central Senior Leadership Team (SLT) oversee the teams of educationalists and business professionals whose role is to support Trust schools, as well as ensuring compliance with regulatory and legislative requirements for the Trust as a whole. In addition to school improvement and educational support, the central MAT team provide a broad range of professional support services across the Trust:

- Estates
- Finance
- Governance, Compliance and Trustee/ SSC Members Support
- Health and Safety
- Human Resources
- IT Services
- Procurement

School Stakeholder Committees (SSCs)

SSCs are the Board's local committees and their members are called SSC Members. You may sometimes hear SSC Members referred to as 'governors'. This is because some MATs call their local committees 'local governing bodies' and their members are called 'governors'. It is important to know that within a MAT it is the Trust Board which decides what actions or responsibilities to delegate to its local committees, and so the role of a 'governor' will be different in different MATs. At Avanti, the Trust Board retains overall accountability for governance and oversight of the Trust and delegates some actions to the SSCs.

SSC Constitution and Membership – with the exception of ex-officio members (such as the Principal, Head of School or Executive Principal), all SSC Members are elected/appointed for a term of four years. There are four categories of SSC Member:

Parent/Carer Members must be elected* (or appointed if an election is not possible due to the number of candidates). If a Parent/Carer member ceases to be a parent of a pupil at the school they may remain in office until their current term of office expires.

Community Members these individuals are identified, nominated, approved and appointed by the SSC. Community Members may be individuals from the local community with connections to or who work with or support the school in some way.

Staff Members are normally elected* by the staff of the school but may be appointed. Each SSC must include two Staff Members (one teaching staff, one support staff). Staff Members are not representatives or delegates on behalf of their colleagues – once elected they have the same responsibilities as other SSC Members. Staff Members play a useful role in explaining staff perspectives on issues discussed by the SSC and, subject always to confidentiality issues, reporting back to their colleagues on the items discussed at SSC meetings. If a staff member or the Principal ceases to work at the school, they cease to be a member of the SSC.

*SSC elections are managed by the school. Formal procedures for this are available from the Governance Team.

Trust Appointed Members appointed by the Trust Board.

Additionally, one or more Aligned Trustees are assigned to each school by the Board. Their role is to engage with and support their nominated school. Aligned Trustees have access to SSC agendas through GovernorHub. All Trustees are entitled to attend any SSC meeting, but are not generally appointed as members.

SSCs : How they work to support the Trust

SSCs meet formally three times each year (once each term). The Terms of Reference of the SSCs are included in the Trust's Scheme of Delegation.

At inspection, Ofsted is likely to look for evidence of an active SSC. It is important to evidence this at formal SSC meetings: SSC Clerks will ensure that relevant questions and constructive challenge from SSC Members are captured in the minutes.

A structure to guide agendas for scheduled termly SSC meetings is issued centrally for local adaptation.

SSCs have local oversight of their school and it is important that the Board is advised of relevant local issues and concerns arising at, or which may affect, the school. Trustees are reliant on SSCs drawing any issues or concerns to their attention. These are recorded in the SSC minutes and the SSC Clerk will also routinely report any issues to the Governance Team after each SSC meeting.

Informal Meetings

Some SSCs choose to hold an occasional informal meeting. The purpose of this is to provide the opportunity for SSC Members to really get to know their school and to meet informally to review and discuss in depth aspects of school performance, policy and improvement. The focus of these meetings is agreed between the Chair and SSC member colleagues in consultation with the Principal, who may agree to facilitate the meetings or may nominate a colleague to do so (eg. a subject leader or the school SENCo). These meetings are not attended by the SSC Clerk or minuted, and no formal decisions (eg. appointment of SSC members) can be made at an informal meeting.

Principals and their colleagues have demanding workloads. It is important that, if the SSC chooses to have informal meetings, they are programmed in agreement with the Principal. Informal meetings may be held in school time so that SSC Members can gain first-hand experience of the workings and practices of the school and the challenges that teachers face day to day.

Examples of the type of discussion that SSCs may wish to consider for informal meetings include:

- Keeping children safe (KCSiE);
- The learning environment and resources;
- Working with parents and carers – parental engagement;
- Exploring Ofsted inspection criteria: for example, what e.g. Quality of Education, Teaching and Learning, Leadership and Management, Personal Development and (where applicable) Early Years, means in practice;
- Safeguarding;
- The curriculum;
- SEND provision.

These and other key issues might be appropriate for a “deep dive” discussion at an informal meeting. While the Trust Board remains accountable for these areas, Trustees believe SSC Members should have a good appreciation of the issues and the opportunity to say how they perceive that these issues affect their school and how they view the standard of provision.

Informal meetings could include a briefing or a discussion with a question and answer session - perhaps to be timed immediately prior to Parents' Evenings or School Events as a means of providing opportunities to relate to and obtain the views of parents and carers and of raising the profile of the SSC within the school. If informal meetings are held, there should be a summary report (oral or written) to the next formal SSC meeting to capture the activity in the formal minutes.

SSC Link Members

Each SSC must appoint the following Link Members:

- *Safeguarding
- *SEND
- *Careers (secondary schools only)
- Standards
- Stakeholders

*These are statutory roles, the purpose being to provide assurance to the SSC, and to the Board, that the policies and practices of the Trust are being followed. It is recommended that these roles are not taken by Staff SSC Members.

Link Member roles can be split between more than one SSC Member. SSC Link Members should develop at least an appreciation of the issues within their area, for which training is provided.

There are role descriptors for each Link Member role (see appendices). This is provided to support the Link Member in their role and to ensure there is clarity between their role and staff members' operational responsibilities, on which lead roles must not encroach. SSCs are free to appoint additional Link Members for other issues that reflect the local priorities or issues that may arise locally from time to time. Health and Safety and website compliance are examples of other areas in which an SSC may consider appointing a Link Member.

School Visits

It is important for SSC Members to visit the school to observe it 'in action' and speak with staff members who do not attend SSC meetings. The purpose of these visit is to triangulate information reported through SSC meetings. All SSC Member visits must be agreed in advance with the Principal or designated nominated subject lead. It is helpful if a programme of visits is put together by the Principal, focused around school improvement targets, for agreement by the SSC. These visits can be designed either for pairs of SSC Members who can meet with staff to explore a specific area (eg. pupil progress) or a group visit to familiarise Members with particular issues. To assist SSC Link Members, a formal reporting template together with guidance for Visits is available.

Expectations of an Avanti SSC Member

- A key requirement of SSC Members is a genuine and deep interest in the learning, development and enhancement of the life chances of our young people. In submitting Expressions of Interest to serve on an SSC, prospective SSC Members are asked to demonstrate their commitment to supporting their school and the Trust and to upholding the Values, Vision and Ethos of the Trust with the best interests of our children at heart. So that SSC Members can challenge their Principal knowledgeably and in the right way, and that SSCs can seek the necessary assurances around performance, it is important that over time, they develop:
- An understanding and awareness of Year Groups and Disadvantaged Groups – and as related issues, the purpose and impact of Pupil Premium and other funding streams and, (Primary Schools only) Sports Premium funding
- The ability to act as a ‘critical friend’ to the Principal – showing positive support for staff but also challenging appropriately by asking for explanation or further detail of the performance information provided in the termly report of the Principal. SSC Members should always consider how the school is progressing and performing in relation to performance targets and the School Self Evaluation (SEF) and School Improvement Plan (SIP);
- An understanding of the Ofsted inspection process. Whilst it is likely than an Ofsted Inspection Team will wish to discuss Trust/school governance and performance with a Trustee, it is also probable that they will wish to meet and discuss these issues with SSC Chairs and Members. Discussion can often focus on the understanding and knowledge of a Trustee or SSC Member of the current progress and attainment of the school, school improvement actions and Trust policies. You should therefore be prepared to take part in Ofsted inspections, for which you will need to have up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the school, its progress and challenges and the effectiveness of Trust governance. In addition to the educational aspects of an inspection, Ofsted judgements take a view on the quality and effectiveness of governance - part of the Ofsted Leadership and Management criteria which can include an assessment of the support and active involvement of Trustees and SSC Members. If Ofsted judge this to be weak, the school is at risk of being judged as Special Measures irrespective of the excellence of pupil outcomes.
- An awareness of Trust and school policies that set out a school’s approach to various areas of School life.

SSC Members are expected to commit to:

- Compliance with the Trust Code of Conduct. Reviewed annually, this includes annual declaration of interests. Trustees and SSC Members are required to abide by the Code which they are asked to sign each year. Advice on the Code (and on Declarations of Interest) is available from the Head of Governance and/or the SSC Clerk. Breaches of the Code are taken very seriously and may lead to suspension or removal from the SSC or the Trust Board.
- Attending, as far as practically possible, the formal termly meeting* (and where arranged, any informal meetings). Apologies for absence from formal meetings and the reasons for this must be submitted to the Clerk or the Chair prior to the meeting and recorded in the minutes. Failure to attend a meeting or send apologies for six months will result in automatic removal from the SSC;
- Prepare for formal meetings by reading the agenda and supporting papers in advance;
- Participating in the Programme of Training provided by the Trust, some aspects of which are mandatory. All Trustees and SSC Members are encouraged to take part in training, which is provided free of charge. As part of their support for Trustees/SSC Members, the Trust subscribes to the National Governance Association (NGA), an independent charity supported by Government representing and supporting governors (SSC Members), Trustees and Governance Professionals in MATs, academies and maintained schools in England. The goal of NGA is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the effectiveness and promoting high standards of

governance throughout the sector. Through the Trust subscription, all Trustees/SSC Members have a personal account with NGA. This provides access to the NGA Learning LINK, a series of online training modules. SSC Members should contact the Governance Team if they do not receive information from NGA or if they have difficulty accessing their personal NGA and/or Learning Link login/accounts

- Visit the school at least once per term during school hours and to complete and submit a brief Visit Report (see Visits Section above). All Visits must be agreed in advance with the Principal;
- Support regular governance effective reviews including SSC skills audits; and
- If possible, participate as a member of a Panel (eg. formal complaint, disciplinary, admissions appeal, exclusion etc.).

SSC Chairs and Vice-Chairs

SSC Chairs and Vice-Chairs are appointed annually. The SSC Chair plays a vital role in ensuring the effectiveness and active engagement of the SSC. There is an opportunity to meet with other SSC Chairs at the SSC Chairs' Forum.

Eligibility criteria for becoming a Trustee or SSC member

All prospective Trustees and SSC Members are required to confirm that they meet the eligibility criteria, which can be found on the Expressions of Interest Form. Anyone interested in becoming an SSC Member must check they meet the eligibility criteria and then complete an initial Expression of Interest which includes a short paragraph for the applicant to explain why they wish to become an SSC Member and what experience they can bring. The form must be returned to the Governance Team. If the category of membership requires there to be an election, the EoI (with contact details deleted) will be included with the ballot paper so those voting know a bit about the applicant. The Eols from prospective Community Governors are presented to the SSC for consideration/approval.

Regulatory Compliance (DBS, S.128 and Right to Work)

All Trustee and SSC Member appointments are subject to satisfactory DBS, S.128 and Right to Work check. Prospective Trustees/SSC Members must therefore complete and meet the requirements of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). The Trust is also required to undertake a S.128 check (Register of Individuals designated as unfit to work with children) and the Right to Work check. All appointments are made subject to satisfactory clearance of these checks.

Safeguarding

Effective safeguarding is at the heart of everything we do. The DBS procedure is designed to support this and additionally all Trustees, SSC Members and staff are required to read key parts of the DfE Guidance "Keeping Children Safe in Education" (KCSiE), which is updated annually.

Interests to Declare?

All Trust Members, Trustees and SSC Members must declare any financial or personal interests, whether these are direct or indirect, financial or non-financial. If a Trustee or SSC Member has a professional, personal or financial relationship with the school (or the Trust) or with staff of the school (or the Trust), it is possible that they may have, or be perceived to have, a potential conflict of interest in an issue being considered or reported to the SSC, and may be required to withdraw from discussions. All interests must be declared annually for recording in the School Register of Interests, which is published on the Trust website.

GIAS

The names of Trust Members, Trustees and SSC Members must also be published on the publicly available DfE “Get Information About Schools” website. .

GovernorHub - the Trust’s Governance archive and document management system

GovernorHub is the means by which Trustees and SSC Members can access key Trust governance records, including current and previous SSC agenda, supporting papers and minutes. The system is GDPR compliant.

The agenda and reports for all formal SSC and Panel meetings are provided electronically via GovernorHub. Paper copies of documents are not normally provided unless these are specifically requested from the school due to special personal circumstances. The system is easy to navigate and can be accessed at any time via p.c., laptop, tablet or smartphone.

Registration on GovernorHub

On joining the Trust, you will be provided with an email invitation to register on the system. The process is simple and requires you to enter a password of your own choice. Registration is essential because this is the only means by which governance related papers are made available across the Trust. GovernorHub is managed by the Governance Team who will automatically enrol any new Trustee or SSC Member.

Support and advice

Any SSC Member who would like advice, guidance or support about their role should contact the Governance Team.