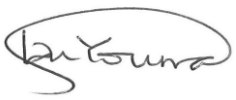
The Sycamore Church of England Trust

Grow together, Learn forever

Governance Handbook 2026

Including Committee Terms of Reference

Applicable to:	All Trust Schools
Adopted By:	Trust Board
Date Reviewed:	**September** 2026
Authorised Signatory:	
Mr Ian Young – Trust Leader and CEO	
Mr Mark Granby – Chair of Board of Trustees	
Review Period:	Annually
Next Review:	September 2027

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Record of Changes and/ or Reviews

Date	Details	Reason for Review/Change
October 2025	Update of references to the Academies Handbook and ESFA Update of committee members Inclusion of Equality Link Trustee and Responsibilities Review of policies to ensure these are accurate.	Updated guidance and closure of ESFA Change of trustees (resignation and newly appointed) In line with new policy and roles. Confirmed.
September 2026	Update of committee members	Change of Trustees - resignation

The Sycamore Church of England Trust

- is a Church of England Trust with Christian values and principles at its heart.
- which expects high academic achievement for all.
- emphasising character development through and beyond the taught curriculum.
- centred in Bury, Greater Manchester and serving children of all ages.
- has a mission to serve the wider community.
- open to all schools which share our values and aspirations.

The Trust has a commitment to the professional development of all staff and a commitment to the development of new teachers and leaders both for the Trust and the wider system.

Vision and Purpose

The Sycamore CE Trust is a Church of England multi-academy Trust (MAT) that exists to provide outstanding education in both primary and secondary schools in Bury and beyond. The charitable object of the Trust is to advance for the public benefit education in the United Kingdom. Alongside Church of England Voluntary Aided (VA) and Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools, the Trust will also include schools with no denominational ethos. While our Church of England schools place an emphasis on teaching children and young people about Christian values, beliefs, and traditions, all our schools subscribe to our underpinning educational, ethical and personal development principles. We value diversity and will preserve the distinctive local character of each school. We welcome pupils and families from all backgrounds and from all faiths and none.

Our educational philosophy derives from our founding values:

- We believe in the value and potential of every child and young person.
- We are committed to high standards of achievement and embrace a positive mind set approach that insists all pupils can make exceptional progress.
- We will deliver high quality teaching with a focus on achieving mastery of subjects from phonics through to the skills needed to actively participate in a range of sporting opportunities or to play a musical instrument well.
- We value our staff because exceptional learning requires exceptional teachers. We provide excellent professional and career development as well as competitive employment packages.
- We will provide rich additional opportunities for all to build character and develop children and young people's moral, social, and cultural awareness.

We are steadfast in our belief in the value of Church of England education, and the consequent commitment to high achievement and personal growth for all young people.

The Sycamore CE Trust aims to offer schools wide opportunities for mutual support and partnership, through the practical sharing of leadership, educational and pedagogical expertise, resources, and joint professional development.

The Trust supports its local academy committees in their important role of working with the head teacher of each school to ensure high levels of aspiration for the children are maintained. Local academy committees have a central role to play in preserving the identity of each school and building and maintaining strong links with parents and the community it serves.

The Trust provides high quality professional development for local governors and open and frequent communication with the Trust board, which carries ultimate responsibility for the performance of the Trust. We aim to relieve local governors of routine or administrative responsibilities so that they can focus on the important part of their work: improving the experience for children and young people in their school.

The Sycamore CE Trust currently operates across Bury. It has a close working relationship with the Diocese of Manchester who actively support the work of the Trust. Likewise, it collaborates with Bury local authority in providing excellent educational opportunities for local children and young people.

The way in which the Trust is funded is transparent and all schools understand the way in which they benefit directly from the contribution they make to central services. Department for Education (DfE) allocation is based on pupil numbers and delegated to each individual school. The school contributes towards the Trust central services from that allocation. The enhanced buying power of a large Trust can secure significantly better rates for many contracts and services than individual schools can procure.

A. Articles of Association

This document is the 'constitution' of the Trust. It is a legal agreement between the members, lodged at Companies House, which can only be varied by special resolution of the members (a 75% majority). The Articles are available on the Sycamore CE Trust website.

B. Members

The Sycamore CE Trust is a charitable company (a company limited by guarantee and an exempt charity) which exists for the provision of education. It has an establishment of five to six members:

Rev Stephanie Mawhinney (Corporate Member, PCC, Christ Church, Walshaw)
Canon Donna Williams (Corporate Member – Bury Area Dean)
Mrs. Deborah Smith (Corporate Member – Manchester Diocese)
Mr. Anthony Lee (Non-Church Appointee)
Mr. Mark Granby (Chair of Board of Trustees)

The Academy Trust Handbook (2026) summarises the role of members as follows:

"Every Trust has members who have a similar role to shareholders of a company limited by shares. The members are subscribers to the memorandum of association (where they are the founding members). They may amend the articles of association subject to any restrictions created by the funding agreement or charity law. They may, by special resolution, appoint new members or remove existing members other than, where there is one, the foundation body and any members it has appointed. They have the power to appoint and remove trustees. They may, by special resolution, issue directions to the trustees to take a specific action. They appoint the Trust's auditors and receive the audited annual report and accounts. They have the power to change the company's name and, ultimately, wind it up. Members must not be employees of the Trust."

C. The Board of Trustees – overview

Trustees constitute together the board of trustees. In some documents trustees are referred to as 'directors' – the terms are interchangeable, but within this Trust we use the term 'trustees' or the 'board' to refer to the board of trustees. The names of all trustees, with terms of office, must be lodged both with Companies House and the DfE. The term of office for a trustee is 4 years.

All trustees currently, apart from the Trust Lead, are non-executive, in other words they do not form part of the senior management of the Trust and are not employed by it. However, legally there is no difference in the level of responsibilities of non-executive trustees and trustees who have executive (or senior management) roles and are employed by the Trust.

The board of trustees elects its own chair annually, and the chair automatically serves as a member, and chairs meetings of members, during the term of office as chair.

The board is held legally accountable for all aspects of the Trust's work, and in particular for ensuring that the terms of the Funding Agreements (FA) are fully met. They are also responsible for ensuring that the Trust complies with

- the Companies Act 2006 – the Trust's obligations as a company limited by guarantee must be met.
- charity law – the Trust's charitable objects must be observed and the obligations of the trustees as charity trustees must be met.

Specifically, the board is accountable to the following bodies for the Trust's educational and financial performance:

- The Department for Education (DfE) – including oversight previously provided by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), now integrated into the DfE.
- The Regional Director and their team, acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education.
- Ofsted, for inspection and educational standards.

D. The Board of Trustees – composition and functioning

The board comprises currently:

Mrs. Janet Adams (Foundation)
Mr. Joe Hinde (Foundation)
Mr. David Taylor (Foundation)
Mr. Alan Beedie (Foundation)
Mr. Mark Granby (Foundation)
Mrs. Kat Sowden (Co-Opted)
Mr. Ian Young (Trust Lead)

New trustees are recruited from time to time. This is done in a transparent way, usually where a role description and an indication of the areas of specialist skill, experience, or expertise the board wishes to strengthen in the light of an audit of skills and experience. Where it is felt by the members that there is a good match, a new trustee may be appointed by them in line with the Trust's Articles of Association.

The board of trustees discharges its responsibilities through meetings 4-6 times per year which include all trustees, including the Trust Lead, and the CFO in attendance at certain meetings. It receives reports and updates from:

- The Trust Lead summarising the achievements and challenges of the Trust against the Trust's development plan, and any strategic decisions the Trust faces
- The board's Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – with all Trust level financial reporting from the CFO, the monitoring of internal audit and scrutiny and the monitoring of risk.
- The board's Standards Committee – summarising end of key stage anticipated performance at each termly data drop, performance against Ofsted criteria in each category, safeguarding and the impact of the trust school improvement strategy.
- All local academy committees, comprising a year group by year group analysis of standards and updates on progress to development plan targets.
- The Director of Operations summarising programme management, risk register & compliance (including school website content, H&S & mandatory policies)
- The Senior Finance Officer – detailing the financial performance of the trust.

E. The Accounting Officer

The Trust Lead is also the Accounting Officer for the Trust, and as such has a range of legal responsibilities in particular for:

- financial transparency and probity in the use and management of public money.
- achieving value for money.
- ensuring feasibility of plans and decisions.
- annual financial reporting.

together with a range of other duties defined by the DfE, including that relating to the Prevent duty and safeguarding more widely.

The Accounting Officer has, in law, a direct personal responsibility to Parliament for the discharge of these responsibilities. The Accounting Officer's annual statement on regularity, propriety and compliance must be included in the Trust's annual report. This is a formal declaration by the Trust's accounting officer that his personal responsibilities to Parliament for the resources under his control during the year have been met.

The Accounting Officer is held to account by other trustees at all Trust board and committee meetings, where they are questioned about projected and actual outturns (financial as well as educational) and projections, and trustees assure themselves of the robustness of mitigation strategies against the Trust risk register. This happens at Board meetings and specifically at every Finance, Audit and Risk committee meeting.

F. The Company Secretary

As a company limited by guarantee, the Trust has a company secretary. This role is fulfilled by the Chief Operating Officer (COO). The responsibilities of a company secretary are in summary:

- Ensuring trustee and member appointments are made according to the Articles.
- Terms of office of trustees are adhered to.
- Meetings are constitutionally convened and recorded.
- Filing requirements at Companies House and the ESFA are met.
- Statutory registers (of members and trustees) are maintained.
- Committees have legal and constitutional terms of reference.
- The trustees have appropriate assistance to discharge their obligations.

Some of these functions are delegated to the Clerk to the trustees, but the Company Secretary has the responsibility for ensuring they happen, so liaises with the Clerk to allow these to be discharged.

G. Trustees' responsibilities and duties

The Companies Act 2006 applies to the board of trustees and imposes a general duty on them to:

1. act within their powers
2. promote the success of the company.
3. exercise independent judgement
4. exercise reasonable care, skill, and diligence
5. avoid conflicts of interest
6. not to accept benefits from third parties
7. declare interest in proposed transactions or arrangements.

H. The Board's main responsibilities are:

1. To set and communicate a strategic vision for the Trust and to plan strategically for its future, including for its sustainable growth, future shape, leadership, outcomes, and financial health.
2. To assess and manage principal risks to the Trust – financial, educational, reputational, and legal risk in particular – and to set an acceptable risk level in key areas and for key significant projects. This is done through the maintenance of a Trust risk register which is considered at every meeting of the Finance, Audit and Risk committee, with a longer examination of risk twice annually at board level.
3. To appoint and hold to account the Trust Lead for the implementation of the Trust's overall performance, and for the discharge of the role of Accounting Officer, and to determine arrangements for the performance management of the Trust Lead, including securing external professional advice. The Trust Lead is held to account principally through outcomes set out in the Trust development plan and progress towards them, and through the risk register and the satisfactory mitigation of principal risks.
4. To ensure that the terms of the Funding Agreement are being fully met. This is done through an annual review of the obligations of the Funding Agreements as part of preparation for the annual report.
5. To ensure that all strategic decisions are taken in the light of the Trust's charitable objects. The charitable objects are set out in the annual report and in the articles, and all Trustees are familiarised with these when they join the board and regularly thereafter.
6. To ensure the requirements of the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) in force at the time are being fully met, that the board takes overall responsibility for Trust funds and approves a delegation of financial powers that maintains robust internal controls. The CFO leads on the ATH and ensures all trustees are familiar with its requirements.
7. To ensure that the Trust undertakes prudent financial planning and remains solvent at all times in order that it can continue to discharge its responsibilities. This is done through annual budget planning and prudent financial projections, along with stress testing against lower than anticipated income or higher than anticipated expenditure.
8. To appoint, train and induct local governors, monitor the work of local academy committees (LACs) for each member school and to delegate roles and responsibilities to those LACs according to their capacity. This is done through advertising openly for local governors and ensuing that there is a robust selection process in place for those who

express interest, and that all newly appointed local governors access good quality bespoke professional development.

9. To set a budget for the Trust, (to include the 'Trust contribution' and the allocations of funding for each school in the Trust with a range of indicative benchmarks for the school to use when setting the individual school's budget), to monitor the budget of the Trust as a whole on a monthly basis and to take action, when necessary, in the light of that monitoring. This is done on the recommendation of the CFO who prepares draft budgets for approval.
10. To ensure, in line with the requirements of the ATH, that an appeals procedure is in place for headteachers to challenge the budget share allocated to the school on grounds of unfairness or unreasonableness.
11. To set end of key stage pupil achievement targets for each school, overall and by significant pupil groups such as the disadvantaged, to monitor end of key stage achievement at least three times per year and to take action, when necessary, in the light of that monitoring. Targets are set on the recommendation of the Trust Lead and are designed to move performance overall forward incrementally each year towards outstanding or maintain an outstanding level of performance. To focus on the needs of vulnerable pupils the Board will appoint a link trustee for inclusion. This is currently Mrs. Janet Adams.
12. To set targets for pupil attendance for each school in the Trust, to monitor attendance at each school three times per year and to take appropriate action in the light of that monitoring. These targets are to move towards or maintain a high level of attendance.
13. To receive minutes of each LAC meeting (to include all papers and reports appended to them) and address issues arising from them 'by exemption'; to consider the executive summary of key issues produced by each LAC (see below under LACs); to challenge the Trust Lead where these reveal underperformances.
14. To ensure that each LAC is discharging the obligations placed by trustees on their behalf with respect to the distinctive character of worship and religious education in the school. This is determined by the school's religious, or non-religious, designation prior to conversion, is set out in the Funding Agreement and is therefore a duty of trustees. In the Sycamore CE Trust this duty is delegated at an operational level to LACs.
15. To make sure appropriate arrangements are made for the external verification or moderation of information provided by the Trust Lead, COO, CFO, LACs, head teachers or other staff on any main area of responsibility, for example though commissioning of an external advisor or consultant from time to time, or the scrutiny of audit reports or external benchmarking data.
16. To ensure that the safeguarding obligations of the Trust (including 'Prevent' and 'British values') are met via regular reviews in each school, reports of training on Prevent and British Values, and reports of the implementation of these through the curriculum in each school. Mr. Mark Granby is the nominated Safeguarding trustee, and each LAC will have a nominated link safeguarding partner.
17. To ensure that all conflicts of interest are declared and documented. Because conflicts of interest are the subject of regular briefing and training, trustees may identify conflicts of interest for other trustees, and as such are obliged to draw these to the attention of the chair. Once declared, identified, and documented, conflicts of interest are managed by ensuring that no trustee is party to a decision from which they may derive personal advantage or advantaged for any party connected with them. In most cases this will mean being absent from both discussion and decision making on that issue.

Trustees may delegate 'powers' to other committees or individuals, but in so doing cannot delegate 'responsibilities'. In other words, for all external purposes the accountabilities remain with the Board of Trustees even when another committee has received delegated powers.

Trustees' responsibilities are discharged through a series of meetings, 4-6 times per year, at which reports, and information are received and examined, proposals discussed, challenged, and shaped and further work commissioned. This work is assisted by a written report on the progress of the Trust against its short- and medium-term objectives produced at least three times per year by the Trust Lead for the board. From time to time the board may ask a senior employee with a particular remit (for example a headteacher) to join a meeting to support such discussions. As outlined above, the Board also has two link trustee positions – one to focus on safeguarding and the other inclusion.

I. Trust and school policies

All statutory policies in the Trust are ultimately the responsibility of the Trust Board. To enable it to discharge this responsibility appropriately and in collaboration with the constituent schools, the Trust Board will:

1. either set a full Trust wide policy,
2. or set a 'policy principles' document (a framework within which LACs develop a full and appropriately customised policy),
3. or delegate to LACs the power to develop their own policy.

Statutory policies and the levels of delegation for them are as follows overleaf:

Statutory policy	Reviewed	Level set (see above)
1.0 Admission arrangements		
1.1 School admission arrangements	Annually	1
2.0 Administration and data		
2.1 Charging and remissions	Annually	1
2.2 Data protection (GDPR and freedom of information)	Annually	1
2.3 Protection of biometric information of children	Annually	1
2.4 Register of pupils' admission and attendance	Ongoing	1
2.5 School information published on website	Ongoing	2
2.6 Complaints	Annually	1
3.0 Staffing and Human Resources		
3.1 Staff capability	Annually	1
3.2 Early Career Teachers	Annually	2
3.3 Staff discipline, conduct and grievance	Annually	1
3.4 Single Central Record and vetting	Ongoing	1
3.5 Dealing with allegations of abuse against staff	Annually	1
3.6 Teachers pay and appraisal	Annually	1
4.0 Pupil Wellbeing and Safeguarding		
4.1 Accessibility plan	Every 3 Years	3
4.2 Child protection policy and procedures	Annually	2
4.3 Children with health needs who cannot attend school	Annually	2
4.4 Designated teacher for looked after children (LAC) and previously LAC	Annually	1
4.5 EYFS	Annually	2
4.6 Special Educational Needs and Disability	Annually	2
4.7 Pupils with medical conditions	Annually	2
5.0 Relationship and Sex Education		
5.1 Relationships and Sex Education	Annually	2
6.0 Behaviour		
6.1 Behaviour in schools including written statement and school exclusion	Annually	2
7.0 Facilities		
7.1 Health and safety	Annually	2
7.2 First aid	Annually	2
7.3 Premises management	Annually	2
8.0 Governance		
8.1 Equality information and objectives statement for publication	Every 4 Years	1
8.2 Register of business interests of headteachers, members, trustees, partners	Ongoing	1

J. Committees of the Trust Board

There are two main committees of the Trust Board:

- **Finance, Audit and Risk Committee** – The Committee has strategic oversight of all matters related to Audit and Risk, Finance and Human and Capital Assets of the Sycamore CE Trust. The Committee will seek to:

  - monitor internal scrutiny,
  - provide independent assurance over the suitability and compliance with, its financial systems and operational controls, seeking to ensure that the Trust is operating within the Funding Agreement and in line with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH),
  - assist the decision making of the Sycamore CE Trust board by enabling more detailed consideration to be given to the best means of fulfilling the board's responsibility to ensure sound management of their finances and capital assets, including proper planning, monitoring and probity,
  - to consider the Trust's estate strategy,
  - to consider and approve recommendations in respect of staff pay and
  - to consider matters relating the Trust's staff structure.

- **The Standards Committee** – this acts as a scrutiny committee to assist the board in discharging its standards-related accountabilities. The committee consists of at least three trustees. The headteachers of our Trust schools may attend meetings of this committee in an advisory capacity but are not members of it. The role of this committee is to:

  - ensure annual school improvement plans contain appropriately challenging targets on achievement and attendance for each school,
  - test the reliability and validity of monitoring information on end of Key Stage pupil performance and attendance supplied to it,
  - ensure that the quality of education in each of the schools is consistently high and that the intent of the curriculum is effectively implemented,
  - ensure that appropriate standards are met in each of the Trust's schools in relation to safeguarding, inclusion and behaviour and
  - ensure that the LACs in each school are operating effectively.

Where necessary, to prevent underperformance it challenges the Trust Lead to propose and implement interventions and improvements or challenges LACs to discharge their responsibilities on standards more effectively. It reports to the full Trust board with a summary of its findings and actions.

Membership of each sub-committee for 2026-27 is as follows:

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee

Mrs Kat Sowden (Chair), Mr. Mark Granby, Mr. Joe Hinde, Mr. Ian Young

Standards Committee

Mrs. Janet Adams (Chair), Mr. David Taylor, Mr Alan Beedie, Mr. Ian Young

The Trust Board delegates decision making to the two committees, the LACs, the Trust Lead and the Headteachers through the Scheme of Delegation which is reviewed on an annual basis. The Scheme of Delegation is published on the Trust's website.

K. Local Academy Committees

Each school in the Trust will have a LAC which is accountable to the board of Trustees. This will comprise in each case:

- The headteacher (ex officio)
- One further elected staff local governor (term: 4 years)
- Two elected parent local governors (term: 4 years)
- Up to five local governors appointed by the Trust Board (who may include church nominated faith partners, community partners or trustees or employees from other trusts or schools in the area selected on the basis of their skills or professional experience), each for a term of 4 years.

The chair of each LAC is appointed annually by the Trust board.

The term *local governor* is used rather than *governor* to ensure there is no confusion in relation to legal accountability at this tier of governance within the Trust. Local governors are vital in ensuring there is effective stakeholder engagement and that the voice of the local community is heard.

The primary role of the LACs is to provide support and challenge to the headteachers of the schools in ensuring every child makes good or better progress and that parents and carers are fully involved in their child's education. To maximise the ability of the local governors to focus on this key area, the LAC is not required to manage financial resources, staffing or many of the other areas traditionally associated with a maintained school governing body as these issues are dealt with at a Trust level. However, in line with Keeping Children Safe in Education, the LAC does play a role in safeguarding pupils. It will also monitor health and safety in the school.

There are no committees of LACs. The frequency and scheduling of meetings are determined at local level, provided that a minimum of three take place annually for established schools, and up to 5 per year for newly opened schools.

Termly LAC meetings are supported by the clerk to the Trust board, in collaboration with whom agendas are planned in line with areas of responsibility set out below.

L. Areas of responsibility for LACs

LACs have a critical role to play in supporting the work of the school and the Trust. Their role falls into two main areas:

a. Supporting the Trust by agreeing the strategic direction of the school and monitoring:

- vision and values.
- clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets.
- access of children, including those with special educational needs, to a broad, balanced, and engaging curriculum.
- ensuring all groups and individuals are making good or better progress.
- the quality of education.

- the implementation of the Trust's policies.
- the development of links with the local community; and
- the establishment of mechanisms to promote good parent/carer/family relations.

b. Hold the senior leaders to account by monitoring the school's performance, including:

- agreeing the outcomes from the school's self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school's action and improvement plan.
- considering all relevant data and feedback provided on request by school leaders and external sources on all aspects of academy performance.
- asking challenging questions of school leaders.
- ensuring senior leaders have implemented the required policies and procedures and the academy is operating effectively according to those policies.
- appointing link governors on a specific issue (specifically safeguarding and SEND), making relevant enquiries of the relevant staff, and reporting to the LAC on the progress on the relevant school priority; and
- listening to and reporting to the school's stakeholders: pupils, parents, staff, and the wider community.

When required, LAC members may serve on committees of the Trust to:

- appoint staff in the school.
- hear discipline, exclusion, admissions, and appeals cases.

M. Communication between LACs and the Trust Board

At least three times per year, the headteacher will produce a written report for the LAC covering the main areas of the LAC's responsibilities. This report will always be part of the communication between LACs and the Trust Board. The report will cover as a minimum:

- quality of education;
- standards being achieved by each year group in key curriculum areas;
- behaviour and attitudes of the children (including exclusions);
- personal development of the children (including attendance) and
- staffing issues and specifically staff wellbeing and development.

The full minutes of each LAC will be available to trustees on the Standards Committee on a termly basis, but issues in them will be addressed by exception only.

To ensure there is effective communication between the Trust Board and the LACs, there will be termly meetings involving the Chair of the Trust Board, the Chairs of the Trust Board Committees, the Trust Lead, the LAC Chairs and the headteachers.

Where there are examples of the development of excellent local practice or if there are areas of concern, the Chair of the LAC may be invited to the Trust Board to report upon them.

N. Local Academy Committees and Policies

In addition to the two main areas of LAC responsibility, which will be addressed as appropriate to the annual cycle at every Local Academy Committee meeting, LACs will be asked to play a part on policies in the three ways which follow:

i. By ensuring that the headteacher is observing all Level 1 Trust-wide policies
ii. By ensuring that Level 2 policies are completed and sent to the Chief Operating Officer
iii. By ensuring that Level 3 policies are developed or reviewed and sent to the Chief Operating Officer
iv. Local governors will meet this responsibility by asking for electronic copies of each of the policies at each level as outlined in the schedule of policies in section E above.

O. Line management of Headteachers

Headteachers of individual schools will be line managed professionally by the Trust Lead, who will undertake their annual performance review, as well as interim monitoring, and make recommendations to the Finance committee in respect of salary progression in the light of it. The Trust Lead, or a person acting on his/her behalf, will ensure professional support and challenge on issues associated with standards and pupil performance.

Head teachers should see LACs as important 'scrutiny and challenge' boards. The LACs role is not to direct leaders on what specific course of action to follow on any particular issue, but to question, challenge and as far as possible assure themselves that appropriate action is being taken to identify and address areas for improvement, and to flag a concern to the Trust Board if it is unsure. It is then for the Trust Lead, acting on behalf of the Trust Board, to work with the headteacher to ensure the issue is appropriately resolved. If necessary and in extremis the Trust Lead, as line manager, may use powers of direction to ensure a serious issue is acted upon.

P. Financial accountability and the role of the Chief Financial Officer and Senior School Administrators

Annual budget share is allocated to each school by the Trust Board, on the recommendation of the Trust Finance Committee, along with the notification of the annual Trust charge and any specific benchmarks to be observed (such as use or accumulation of any carry forward, or a percentage of income to be used for staff or teacher costs).

It is then the responsibility of the headteacher in each school, working with the school's senior administrator, to agree a detailed budget for the year in question, using the Trust's budget planning format. That budget is then submitted to the Trust CFO for approval (in this the CFO is acting with delegated powers from the Trust Board). Once approved, the monthly reporting on income and spend is the responsibility of the school headteacher, with the support of the school's senior administrator, and is communicated to the Trust CFO at regular Trust CFO-headteacher and senior school administrator meetings. If any variances are proposed to the budget, these must be agreed between the headteacher and the Trust CFO.

The Trust CFO is accountable then to the Trust Board via the Trust Finance Committee for the overall financial outturns at the end of the year.

Where an individual school believes that its allocated budget share is unreasonable or unfair, and the disagreement cannot be resolved at local level within the Trust, the ATH provides a line of appeal from the headteacher of that school to the ESFA directly, which may, if it cannot be resolved by the ESFA, be referred to the Secretary of State for adjudication, which is then binding on the Trust.

Q. Clerks to the Trust Board and LACs

The Trust will appoint a Clerk on an annual basis. Where practicable, the Clerk to the Trust Board will also act as Clerk to the LACs. This is to ensure unity of message and purpose across the Trust.

Most meetings will be shaped by a template agenda which will act as a prompt for key areas of LAC, committee, or Board responsibility.

R. Standards accountability

Accountability for educational standards achieved at each national reporting point (end of key stage) sits with the Trust Lead. The Trust Lead exercises this through the regular line management of each school headteacher across the school year, via the Trust Standards Committee, and through the monitoring of pupil performance at each (at least termly) assessment point. Standards monitoring is part of each Trust Lead report to the Board.

S. Cycle of Meetings

A cycle of meetings is established to maximise the effectiveness of communication between each constituent tier of governance.

T. Annual review of governance

In order to ensure that governance is operating effectively in the Trust, annually each trustee will complete a skills audit of their performance and contribution and will also complete a review of how well the Board as a whole is functioning, including its chairing. In addition, at least once every three years the Board will commission an external review of its governance (as recommended within the ATH), including a review of its own performance. Both of these will be reported to members at the annual general meeting (AGM). In addition, the chair and vice chair will use the outcomes to inform training, development and to shape improvement in the Board's working.

The Board will be responsible not only for evaluating its own performance but also for evaluating the performance of each Local Academy Committee. Each local governor will be asked to complete a skills audit annually which will be seen by the chair of the LAC. The chair of each LAC will meet annually with the chair of the Trust Board to review LAC performance – this discussion will be informed by the skills audit and will result in areas for improvement in effective governance for that LAC.

U. Succession planning

The Trust understands that it is essential that there is a diverse mix of experienced and newer trustees and local governors covering a wide range of areas of expertise, and that normally trustees and local governors should not serve more than two consecutive terms of office (unless for reasons such as covering rare skills shortage areas or other exceptional reasons).

Annual audits of trustee and local governance expertise contribute to the strategy for the recruitment, retention, development, and succession planning of trustees and local governors.

The Trust maintains a register of terms of office, skills and background, and other relevant information about each trustee and local governors. This is used in consultation with the chair and the members, to identify likely or actual vacancies or gaps.

The trustees remain mindful of the importance of diversity and equality in trustee and partner appointments

- Appointments are conditional on a satisfactory DBS check.
- All new trustees and local governors are systematically inducted using an established programme, which includes familiarity with this Governance handbook, updated annually, and are mentored by a named more experienced colleague in their first year;
- Training for all trustees and local governors is made available by the Trust, and in addition, trustees and local governors are offered bespoke training against self-assessed needs to enable them to carry out their role effectively.

V. Performance Management of Trust Leader

- The trustees are responsible for the review of the performance and effectiveness of the Trust Leader and to discharge this responsibility will nominate and appoint 2 trustees, together with an external advisor to undertake an annual performance management review and to set targets for the following year.
- Where the Trust Leader believes any of the trustees appointed under this regulation is unsuitable for professional reasons, he may submit a written request to the board of trustees for that trustee to be replaced, stating those reasons.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SUB-COMMITTEES OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE 2026-2027

The Committee has strategic oversight of all matters related to Audit and Risk, Finance & Capital Assets of the Sycamore CE Trust.

The Committee will seek to: monitor internal scrutiny, the delivering of objectives and provide independent assurance over the suitability and compliance with, its financial systems and operational controls, seeking to ensure that the Trust is operating within the Funding Agreement and in line with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH).

To assist in the decision-making process of the Trust Board. Enabling more detailed consideration to be given to the best means of fulfilling the Board's responsibility to ensure sound management of their finances and capital assets, including proper planning, monitoring, and probity.

Composition:

The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee is a sub-committee of the Board, as is permitted under the Articles of Association. As the current Trust income is below £50M the Board has exercised the option, allowed within the ATH, of combining both Finance & Audit and Risk within one committee; with the safeguards as shown in 1.1 & 1.3 below being put in place.

1. The Committee shall comprise a minimum of 4 trustees.

    1.1. The Trust's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) will attend all committee meetings and will be considered as 'in attendance'.
    1.2. The trustees will be appointed by the Board from amongst their members; one of whom will be appointed Chair; who will also become a member of the Pay Sub-Committee.
    1.3. The Quorum will be 2 trustees.

2. The Trust's Accounting Officer (Trust Lead) has the right to attend all meetings of the Committee to enable them to discharge their responsibilities in that role.
3. The Committee shall have the power to seek external legal and other professional advice in order to consider and make recommendations on any specific matter where additional guidance is required.
4. The Committee shall meet at least termly, and its proceedings shall be recorded and reported to the Board at the earliest convenient time; and in any case at the next meeting of the Board.
5. Where operationally necessary, the Committee may conduct business by email, provided that any decisions taken are minuted at the next meeting of the Committee.

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6. The Committee shall not act beyond the powers delegated to it by the Board and shall, in the case of any serious matter of concern relating to its remit, report to and seek advice from the Board.
7. The Committee and the Chair are empowered to take any urgent action which might be necessary to safeguard the Board's financial and capital assets, but must report at the earliest convenient time, and in any case at the next meeting of the Board or Committee.

Subject to the requirements of the ATH, the Committee is authorised as follows:

1. The Committee has delegated responsibility on behalf of the Board for ensuring that there is a framework for accountability; for examining and reviewing all systems and methods of control both financial and otherwise including risk analysis and risk management; and for seeking to ensure the Trust is complying with all aspects of the law, relevant regulations and good practice.
2. The Committee holds the responsibility for considering and approving the school resource management self-assessment tool completion on an annual basis.
3. The Committee is authorised to investigate on behalf of the Board anything that threatens or adversely affects the accomplishment of the Trust's aims and objectives, its assets, the reliability of all records and information, and its compliance with all relevant laws, regulations, policies, and its Articles of Association.
4. To consider the indicative funding, notified annually by the DfE, and to assess its implications for the Board & each LAC in considering and recommending the Trust annual budget acceptance/non-acceptance to the Board before the start of each financial year.
5. To seek to ensure that due diligence on finance & capital assets is carried out by the Board in relation to any school seeking to join the Sycamore CE Trust.
6. To receive and make recommendations on possible income generation & efficiency savings across the Trust.
7. To monitor and review income, expenditure & variances on a monthly basis and ensure compliance with the overall financial plan for the Board and each school and within the financial regulations of the DfE, drawing any matters of concern to the attention of the Board at least once a term.
8. To seek to ensure that information submitted to Department for Education (DfE), that affects funding, including pupil number returns and funding claims completed by the Trust and by constituent schools, is accurate and in compliance with funding criteria.

Audit and Risk Responsibilities

1. The committee will hold responsibility for audit and risk management functions on behalf of the Board.
2. The members will review the Trust's Risk Register and, on behalf of the Board, determine the Trust's appetite for risk and monitor the control measures in place to mitigate risk via the Board Assurance Framework.
3. The committee will determine the top five risks in the register and ensure that these are presented to the Board for information and consideration of the control measures.

Internal Scrutiny

- To recommend to the Board a framework of effective internal audit coverage. This will include the appointment of a Responsible Officer. This may be a trustee where a trustee possesses appropriate financial and audit and risk skills.

- To ensure that regular “internal scrutiny” is carried out to ensure compliance with both the ATH and the Charity Commission guidance CC8 “Internal financial control” across the Trust.
- To monitor internal reviews and to advise the Board accordingly.
- To consider the appropriateness of executive action following internal scrutiny and to advise the Trust Lead and CFO on any additional or alternative steps they should consider.
- To ensure there is coordination and good working relationships between internal scrutiny, external audit and any other review bodies that have been set up.
- To encourage a culture within the Trust whereby each individual feels that he or she has a part to play in guarding the probity of the Trust’s assets and is able to take any concerns or worries to an appropriate member staff or in exceptional circumstances directly to the Chair of the Finance Committee.

External Audit

- To determine the frequency of tendering for external auditing services.
- To consider tenders for the external auditing services and recommend to the Board for approval by the Members which firm should carry out the annual external audit of the Trust’s statutory report and accounts.
- To have delegated powers to sign any letter of representation required by the auditors.
- To scrutinise and advise the Board on the contents of the draft audit report and of any management letter that the auditors provide, and to formulate any written representations that may be needed by the auditors in connection with the Trust's statutory accounts or any other financial statements.
- To discuss with the external auditors any problems or reservations arising from the draft external audit report and draft management letter, reporting relevant issues back to the Board, and advising the Board accordingly and form part of the governance statement.
- To regularly review the performance of the auditors and advise the Board on any changes that ought to be made to their terms of engagement.

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE 2026-2027

The prime responsibility of this Committee is to exercise the Trust Board's responsibility to secure high standards of safety, achievement, teaching, and behaviour in each school in the Trust.

The Committee shall have a minimum of 3 trustees, as well as the Trust Lead. Members of school leadership teams may be invited to attend meetings as required.

The Committee shall meet at least 3 times a year and in any urgent circumstances. Its proceedings shall be recorded and reported to the Trust Board at the earliest convenient time and in any case at the next full meeting of the Trust.

The quorum for a meeting, and any vote on any matter thereat, shall be 2 trustees.

The role of this Committee is to

- ensure annual school improvement plans contain appropriately challenging targets on achievement and attendance for each school,
- test the reliability and validity of monitoring information on end of Key Stage pupil performance and attendance supplied to it,
- ensure that the quality of education in each of the schools is consistently high and that the intent of the curriculum is effectively implemented,
- ensure that appropriate standards are met in each of the Trust's schools in relation to safeguarding, inclusion (specifically for children with SEND) and behaviour and
- ensure that the LACs in each school are operating effectively.

The Committee will discharge its responsibility by considering a range of sources of evidence, principally:

- Minutes from each Local Academy Committee meeting, including headteacher's report and reports of local governor and trustee visits.
- Inspection Data Summary Report for each school
- Published performance table data.
- Summative internal tracking of pupil performance
- Projections of pupil achievement from each LAC
- Pupil Premium expenditure and impact reports
- Information provided by the Trust Lead on standards in each school.
- Ofsted reports and monitoring visit feedback
- Where relevant, SIAMS inspection reports.

The Committee may in some cases call the chair of a LAC to give evidence about the way in which the LAC is setting high aspirations and monitoring and challenging pupil achievement in its school.

It will report its findings to the Trust Board, ensuring that the following questions are addressed:

- Are standards at each school meeting minimum expectations?
- Are standards improving rapidly, or being maintained at a standard of excellence in all areas?
- Is the leadership of each school fully conscious of any areas of weakness and acting robustly to address them?
- Are there any specific groups of pupils underachieving in terms of attainment or progress in relation to their peers, e.g., pupil premium pupils?
- Is each school sufficiently aspirational for its pupils' achievements?
- Are the school's projections of pupil achievement secure? How are they being moderated?
- Is the school's self-evaluation well founded in evidence?
- What are the likely inspection outcomes for each school, and, where there are concerns about inspection outcomes, how are they being addressed?
- Does each school have an appropriate team of teachers to meet the challenge of high standards?
- Is the school developing its teachers in such a way that high standards can be achieved and supporting their wellbeing?
- Is the school monitoring the quality of teaching and assessment tracking in the school in such a way as to secure the high standards required?
- Are the LACs providing appropriate challenge and support to/for the senior leaders and are they ensuring there is effective stakeholder engagement?

Safeguarding Link Trustee Responsibilities

When considering the safeguarding responsibilities of the Trust Board and the LACs, the following are the responsibilities that the appointed link trustee should ensure is being carried out by the appointed LAC safeguarding partners.

- Ensuring that a senior member of staff is appointed as the designated safeguarding lead in each school in the Trust and that this role is incorporated into their job description.
- Ensuring that each LAC in the Trust has appointed a safeguarding local governor who has received appropriate training for their role.
- Ensuring that there are reporting mechanisms in place in the absence of the DSL.
- Ensuring the DSL receives formal safeguarding training every two years - the local authority should be able to either provide training or details of training providers.
- Ensuring all school staff receive formal safeguarding and child protection training on induction.
- Ensuring all school staff, including DSL and designated teacher, receives regular, updated safeguarding and child protection updates on annual basis.
- Ensuring all trustees and local governors receive regular, up-to-date safeguarding training - they could be invited to staff training sessions, for example.
- Overseeing the single central record and ensuring it is up-to-date and compliant with the requirements of the most recent version of Keeping Children Safe in Education
- Ensuring that at least one member of an interview panel has undertaken safer recruitment training.
- Annually reviewing the Trust's safeguarding policy including child protection and staff behaviour policies; those relating to procedures for allegations against staff members; and those relating to child-on-child abuse and make recommendations for approval by the Trust Board.
- Ensuring pupils understand the safeguarding measures in place and are provided with a means for their voices to be heard and acknowledged.
- Ensuring that inter-agency procedures are being followed where necessary i.e., where staff report concerns to the DSL or in the case of staff allegation.
- Reviewing the annual safeguarding audit and providing a summary report to the Trust Board.
- Monitoring progress and actions against the safeguarding audit.

Inclusion Link Trustee Responsibilities

The Inclusion Link Trustee ensures, on behalf of the Trust Board, that the LACs for each school in the Trust have processes in place to support the more vulnerable pupils and to champion inclusion. This could include pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities; Looked After Children; pupils for whom English is an additional language; pupils in receipt of the Pupil Premium Grant or any other pupil considered by the school to be vulnerable.

The Inclusion Link Trustee will work with counterparts in the LACs to ensure schools:

- use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEND gets the support they need.
- ensure that children and young people with SEND engage in the activities of the school alongside pupils who do not have SEND.
- designate a teacher to be responsible for co-ordinating SEND provision – the SEND co-ordinator.
- inform parents when they are making special educational provision for a child.
- prepare an SEN information report and their arrangements for the admission of disabled children, the steps being taken to prevent disabled children from being treated less favourably than others, the facilities provided to enable access to the school for disabled children and their accessibility plan showing how they plan to improve access progressively over time.
- have a senior member of staff is appointed as the designated teacher for looked after children (to be responsible for the educational achievement for children in care).
- provide the designated teacher for looked after children with appropriate and regular training at least once every two years.
- have effective assessment data to enable them to track the progress of vulnerable pupils.
- work to minimise exclusions.

Staff Health and Wellbeing Link Trustee Responsibilities

The Staff Health and Wellbeing Link Trustee ensures, on behalf of the Trust Board, that robust processes are in place to champion this area of work. The key areas of responsibility are:

- work with the Trust Leader and headteachers on the strategy for the Trust.
- support the launch of the strategy.
- assist in the monitoring and reviewing of action plans.
- ensure that budget setting takes account of financial support for this area.
- consider attendance data of staff across the trust and initiate a conversation where necessary.
- share a summary of innovations in this area from the Schools in the Trust at the Board Meetings once a year.
- receive updates on CPD themes through LAP reports demonstrating staff investment by the Trust.
- access to the outcomes of staff/pupil questionnaires to measure the impact of the strategy deployed.
- compile a short report on the area to be shared at the final meetings of the academic year.
- share quick wins and long-lasting innovations so the successes can be replicated across the Trust.

Equality Link Trustee Responsibilities

The equality link trustee ensures on behalf of the Trust Board that robust processes are in place to champion this area of work. The key areas of responsibility are:

- Meet with the designated members of staff for equality every year, and other relevant staff members, to discuss any issues and how these are being addressed
- Ensure they're familiar with all relevant legislation and the contents of this document
- Attend appropriate equality and diversity training
- Report back to the full trust board regarding any issues