




CREATIVE EDUCATION TRUST  
*Unified Purpose, Empowered People*

# ACADEMY COUNCIL HANDBOOK



A photograph of two young girls, likely in a classroom, looking intently at a book or document. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The girl on the left has her hand near her chin, and the girl on the right is pointing at the book.

*"The governing body should always remember that they are the custodians of the public interest, ensuring that education provided by schools is of the highest possible standard."*

**Lord Nolan, The Seven Principles of Public Life**

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# Welcome to Creative Education Trust

Dear Colleague,

Welcome to the Creative Education Trust community. By joining the Academy Council of one of our schools you are undertaking an important and responsible voluntary role in the governance of our organisation. You are also contributing directly to the success of your chosen school and the life of its local community. We are very grateful that you are willing to give up your time and to share your experience and expertise for the benefit of your school, its pupils, and staff.

This handbook has a dual purpose. The first is intended to give you an overview of the role you have undertaken and its responsibilities, as well as to give you a short history of Creative Education Trust and its mission, vision and values, so that you understand the context in which you will be working.

It is important to emphasise that we do not expect you to be an expert on education, but to give your chosen school the benefit of your wider experience of the world. Creative Education Trust runs regular induction programmes for new Academy Council members to help you prepare for your new role.

Each year you will also have access to live and on-line training and development opportunities to keep you abreast of new developments in areas such as Safeguarding, Health & Safety, Behaviour and other matters for which the Academy Council is the 'eyes and ears' at a local level of the Creative Education Trust Board of Directors.

In addition, we run an annual conference for Academy Council members at which you will have the opportunity to hear from senior members of our central team and external speakers, as well as to meet and share ideas with your peers from across the country.

We think that you will find being a member of a Creative Education Trust Academy Council a stimulating and rewarding experience.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abbie Rumbold".

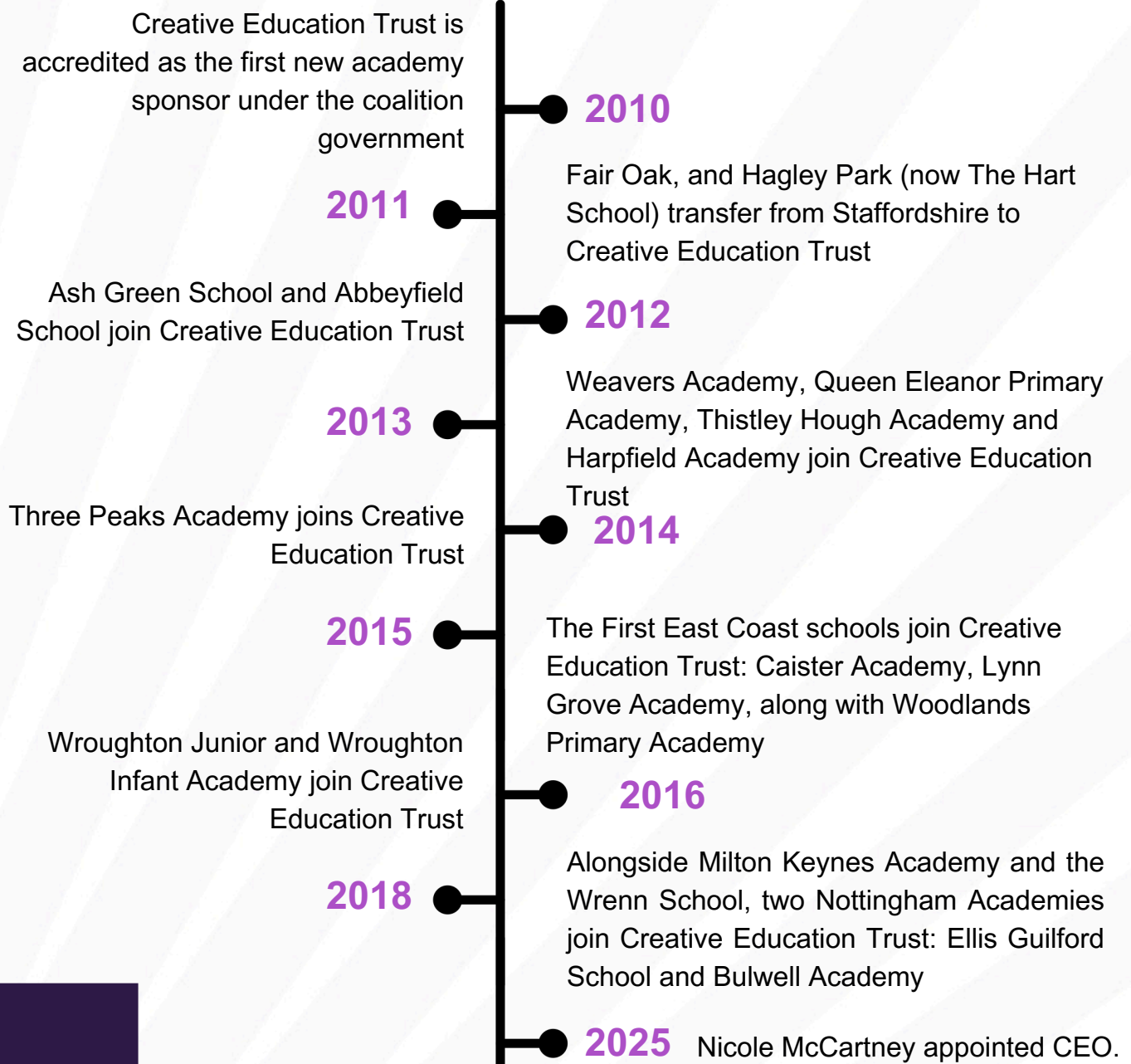
Abbie Rumbold  
**Chair of Trustees**



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole McCartney".

Nicole McCartney  
**Chief Executive Officer**

# The History of Creative Education Trust



*"I knew the value of education as an enabler of social mobility from the experience of my own family.*

*"I wanted to work with children in communities that had had a raw deal and try to improve schools that just weren't offering the start in life that young people deserved."*

Marc Jordan, Founder and CEO

# Our Mission, Vision and Values

## Our Mission

Creative Education Trust transforms lives by delivering an education that unlocks opportunity, inspires ambition, and equips every student for lasting success. Through a rich curriculum and a culture of purposeful leadership, we empower our people to embody equity and excellence so that every student thrives, now and into the future.

## Our Vision

We aspire to build a Trust where equity is lived, ambition is ignited, and opportunity is limitless. Through sector-leading collaboration and a shared commitment to excellence, our schools will be places where every learner thrives, every adult leads with purpose, and success is both expected and achieved – together.

## Our Values

- **Empowering Ambition:** Our people drive our progress. We invest in them, fuel their ambition for themselves and our students, and empower them to lead and innovate with confidence to achieve success.
- **Championing Equity:** Every student deserves success. We deliver this through our schools, which are a leading provider of education in the region.
- **Unlocking Opportunity:** We unlock opportunity by ensuring every student has access to the knowledge, experiences and networks that broaden horizons and open doors. Through collaboration across our Trust, we enrich learning, raise expectations, and ensure no student's potential is limited by circumstance.

Marc Jordan, Founder and CEO

# What does it mean to be an Academy Councillor?

An Academy Councillor at Creative Education Trust (CET) is instrumental in ensuring that the Trust's mission of transforming the lives of young people through innovative and creative education is realised at local academy level

## Core Behaviours and Expectations

### Our Academy Councillors must at all times:

- observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the governance of the academy.
- be accountable to its stakeholders and regulatory bodies for its activities
- engage in a partnership with the academy's Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
- follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (referred to as "the Nolan Principles")
- comply with relevant Governance documentation to ensure best practice
- uphold the vision and values of the Trust
- ensure they understand their duties, rights and responsibilities, and that they are familiar with the function and role of the Trust
- have regard to the Department for Education (DfE) guidance on the governance of academy trusts including the **Academy Trust Handbook** and the **Academy Good Governance Guide**.
- not misuse information gained in the course of their Academy Councillorship for personal gain, nor seek to use the opportunity of service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations
- participate actively in the induction process and any relevant training

## Accountability of Academy Councillors

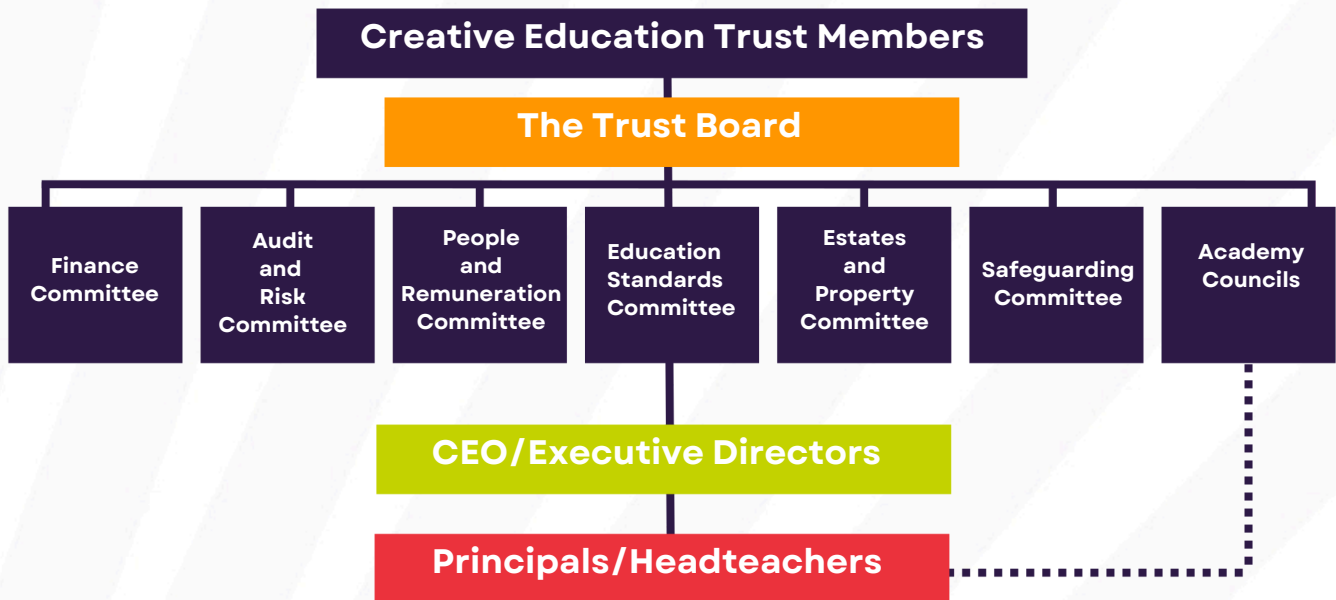
### Our Academy Councillors are chiefly accountable to:

- the Trust Board, of which each Academy Council is a sub-committee dedicated to the local community.
- beneficiaries of the Trust (pupils at the Academies, their parents and the local community) for particular areas of school life as delegated by the Trust Board
- the DfE and the Secretary of State under the terms of the Funding Agreements
- Academy Councillors shall also have regard to the framework for inspecting schools in England issued by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)

# What does it mean to be an Academy Councillor at CET?

## Governance Structure

Academy Councils form one of the sub-committees of the Trust board. Academy Councillors act collectively, holding school leadership accountable, while ensuring the educational organisation aligns with its mission and objectives



## Academy Council membership

Our Academy Councils are representative of the community they serve; they are made up of:

- 1 Headteacher/Principal
- 2 staff representatives
- 2 parent representatives
- 1 Personal Development Lead from another CET school
- 3 community members (including local business/stakeholder voices)

Each member plays a vital role in our local layer of Governance, ensuring that different perspectives of the local community are heard and understood

Academy Councillors have a three-year term. The longest an Academy Councillor may stay on an Academy Council is nine years

The Headteacher/Principal is ex-officio, however the parent and staff representatives are elected onto the council. Community representatives are appointed based on their experience and skills. The Education Director line managing the school will attend one Academy Council meeting a year

# What does it mean to be an Academy Councillor?

## The role of the Academy Councillor

- Supporting Creative Education Trust's plans for the academy, as set out in the Academy Development Plan
- Providing regular monitoring of health and safety matters, behaviour provision, attendance of pupils at the school, the local community links, and stakeholder voice, providing an observer at Academy Improvement Boards
- Following the agenda determined by the Trust, which includes prescribed standing items for information/discussion
- Monitoring compliance with Equality Act 2010 requirements
- Maintaining the Register of Interests for the Academy Council
- Hearings against exclusions and complaints. Panel members may also include Executive Directors, principals/headteachers, or acting principals/headteachers from other Creative Education Trust schools.
- Reviewing the wellbeing of pupils and staff through the principal's/headteacher's report, including data on bullying and exclusions of pupils, and staff disciplinary action and turnover
- Ensuring a regular update is received from the Principal/headteacher and Academy Improvement Board on safeguarding

## The role of the Trust Board

The relationship between the Academy Council and the Trust Board is fundamental to the success of governance at Creative Education Trust

The Trustees are responsible for the governance and supervision of the Trust and its committees. They are accountable to all regulatory bodies and for all statutory duties. The specific functions of the Board are set out in the Trust's Scheme of Delegation. The responsibilities can broadly be summarised as follows:

- establishing the vision, mission and values of the Trust
- the delegation of the running of the Academies and the direction of the education, pastoral care, financial and other policies of the Academies to the Executive
- ensuring sound management and administration of the Trust by the Executive, and ensuring that the Executive is equipped with the relevant skills and guidance
- financial controls and the financial management of the Trust in accordance with the provisions of the Handbook
- setting standards of conduct and values, monitoring performance and the achievement of objectives, and ensuring that plans for improvement are acted upon
- risk management, that is identifying, quantifying and overseeing systems to minimise the major risks affecting the Trust; and ensuring the Trust and the Academies are conducted in compliance with the general law

# What does it mean to be an Academy Councillor at CET?

At Creative Education Trust, we ask our Academy Councillors to proactively engage in three main areas.

## Attending Meetings:

Academy Councils meet four times each academic year

## Preparation:

Reading reports and documents before meetings

## Visits and Training:

Occasional school visits and ongoing training or development sessions

*“It’s a real privilege to Chair Wrenn’s Academy Council. My colleagues and I can bring our skills, experience and knowledge of the local community to the school to make a real difference, working with its outstanding staff and leadership. We feel the school and the Trust really value our contributions, and see first-hand the excellent relationship and support that exists with the Trust’s teams, whether education, governance, estates and facilities or beyond.”*

**Richard Tapp, Academy Council Chair, Wrenn School**

## Attending Meetings:

Academy Councils meet four times each academic year

## Meetings of the Academy Council

Academy Council meetings follow a Trust-wide standardised agenda including.

- Pupil presentations (PD/safeguarding, vulnerable groups)
- Reports on PD, careers, community engagement
- Review of stakeholder feedback (surveys, complaints, visits)
- H&S and safeguarding update
- Governance matters (recruitment, vacancies, training, visits)

Meetings are usually held in the afternoon/evening and last up to two hours; they are attended by the school's leadership team whom will provide oral and written reports on progress against academy development targets, and report back on any matters arising since the last meeting

Our annual cycle allows Academy Councillors to have the best opportunity to triangulate their visits, committee discussions and Academy Council meetings

**Meetings**



**Visits**

**Feedback**



## The Role of the School Leadership Team

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in academies plays a pivotal role in providing strategic direction, leadership, and oversight. They are responsible for setting the academy's vision and strategic goals, ensuring daily operations align with these long-term objectives. Key functions include managing various operational areas such as curriculum, safeguarding, personal development, staffing, and finance. The SLT monitors staff and student performance, setting targets and implementing improvement plans where necessary

They also lead staff development, offering guidance, support, and overseeing recruitment and performance evaluations. Safeguarding and student well-being are paramount, with the SLT ensuring policies are effectively implemented and any welfare concerns are addressed

Additionally, the SLT represents the academy to external stakeholders, such as parents, local authorities, and inspectors, while being accountable for overall performance. Their leadership ensures a safe, inclusive environment, fostering success for both students and staff

## The Role of Academy Councillor

The role of an Academy Councillor in meetings is to be a “Critical Friend”. We pride ourselves on creating an environment where every voice is heard and opinions are expressed freely

Academy Councillors are expected to celebrate with the academy in their successes and also challenge them when things haven't gone to plan. Actively engaging in discussion is a big part of our culture at Creative Education Trust. We need Academy Councillors to ask thought-provoking questions based on their expertise and natural curiosity for the inner workings of the Academy and wider Trust

Academy Councillors are expected to conduct themselves appropriately as laid out in the Code of Practice.

## Preparation:

Reading reports and documents before meetings

## What reports should I expect?

The central governance team will provide an annual planner of business that aligns with the Trust-wide agenda, ensuring Academy Councils receive the right information at the right time. Reports and documentation will be shared in advance of each meeting to support focused discussion.

Examples of reports you can expect to see include:

- Pupil presentations on personal development or safeguarding (with a focus on vulnerable groups)
- Headteacher/Principal's reports on Personal Development, Careers, and Community Engagement
- Analysis of stakeholder voice, including Edurio surveys, complaints, and feedback from visits
- Termly Health & Safety and safeguarding compliance reports
- Governance updates (recruitment, vacancies, training, policy updates)
- Reflections from Academy Councillor visits and attendance at parent or PD-related events

## Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Academy Councillors are entrusted with sensitive information, which may include student records, staff details, and Trust strategies, and must handle this data with the utmost care

They are required to maintain strict confidentiality, ensuring that such information is only accessed, stored, and shared securely by authorised individuals

Confidential documents should be clearly marked, securely stored, and transmitted through encrypted or protected channels. At Creative Education Trust we use GovernorHub for our storage

Academy Councillors must avoid unauthorised disclosures, report any potential breaches immediately, and adhere to legal and ethical standards to protect the Trust's integrity

Violations of confidentiality can lead to severe consequences, including legal action and removal from the Council

## Visits and Training:

Occasional school visits and ongoing training or development sessions

## Visit expectations

Academy Councillors are expected to make at least two in-person school visits per year

- One focused visit per agenda theme each year (e.g. PD, stakeholder voice, community).
- Attendance at one parent event and one PD-related school event annually.
- 

Visits will be organised well in advance and will be coordinated by the Clerk and senior leaders

Academy Councillors are also expected to visit the academy for events such as parents evenings, sportsdays and school performances

## Preparing for a visit

Focus for Visits will be agreed by the SLT and the Academy Council. These will be linked to a specific focus for the Academy that academic year

Beforehand, you are required to review open source information - such as recent press, any school releases and feel welcome to contact the SLT at the school for more information

You are also expected to ensure you have read any relevant documentation that will be pertinent to your visit

## What to expect?

The agenda will need to be decided at least one week before the visit will take place. This will give you all the information you need for a successful visit

On arrival to the Academy you will be asked to show photo ID and then the visit will commence.

All visits must be written up on a Visit form that is then fed back to the Chair and the next Academy Council meeting

# Link Roles

The Academy Council is made up of members from the local community, parent and staff body. Members are not expected to be education experts, we value the different life and professional skills that our members can bring. Each member is allocated a Link Role, which gives them an area of focus for the academic year

## Academy Improvement Board Link

The Academy Improvement Board (AIB) Link attends the AIB three times a year. The AIBs are meetings held by Academy SLT and the Trust Education Team to review key areas of school performance

## Personal Development

The Personal Development Link champions the holistic growth of pupils, working with leaders to monitor progress against the Trust's Personal Development Framework and KPIs, and sharing good practice across schools.

## Community focus link

The Community Link takes an active role in building and maintaining positive relationships in the local community

## Stakeholder Voice

Primarily Student and Parent voice, the Stakeholder Voice Link helps gather stakeholder opinion and communicates both inwardly and outwardly

## Health and Safety Link

The Health and Safety Link conducts monitoring visits and assists the school in ensuring that all school sites and facilities are safe for our staff and pupils

## Careers Link

The Careers Education Link supports the school's work to prepare pupils for future pathways, by reviewing careers provision, employer engagement, and opportunities that develop skills for further education, training, and employment.

# Training and Development

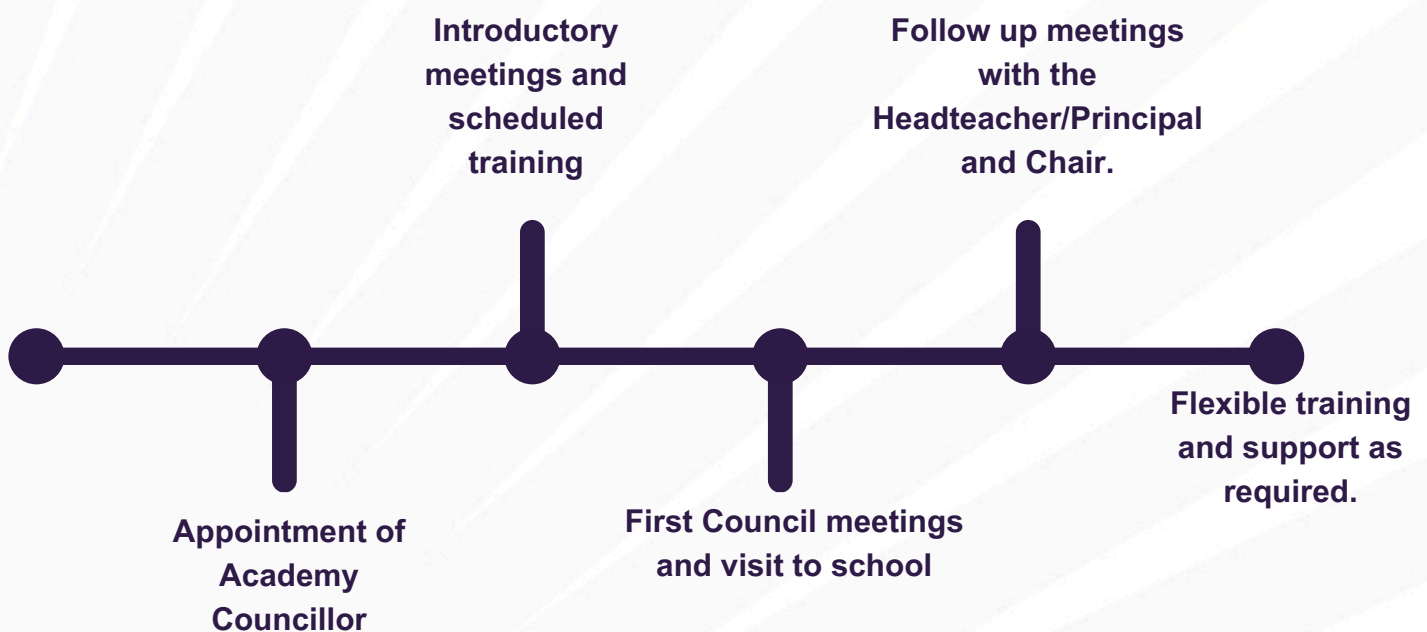
We believe that the development of our people is so important and the Academy Councillor role is no different

## Induction

Each new Academy Councillor will be properly inducted to ensure that they understand the nature and extent of their role and responsibilities. It is the duty of a new Academy Councillor to ensure that they are familiar with the objects of the Trust; its history and ethos, and the nature and extent of its activities; as well as the content of the Trust's Articles.

The Academy Councillor induction process does not end after one meeting. We do not expect a Academy Councillor to be inducted completely until they have been in the post for 12 months. Our induction process is comprehensive and includes the following

- Introductory meetings with Academy Council Chair and Headteacher/Principal
- Induction training with CET's Head of Governance.
- Safeguarding, Health and Safety and other mandatory training
- An Academy Councillor mentor- An experienced Academy Councillor who will be able to meet with you and answer any questions you may have.
- Link Role Training, each Link Role training session runs multiple times throughout the year and can be booked via GovernorHub



# Training and Development

## Annual training programme

On appointment, all Academy Councillors shall be required to complete a Skills Audit. The Academy Council must have a way of evaluating potential gaps in their expertise. This is an annual requirement that will then feed into any training that is required throughout the year for the Academy Council as a whole

There are 4 strands to Academy Council Training:

- **Statutory training refreshed annually:** safeguarding, Prevent, GDPR, H&S, equality.
- **Induction:** CET strategy, AC roles, PD Framework, stakeholder data.
- **Ongoing CPD:** careers, PD, stakeholder voice, community engagement.
- **Specialist training:** PD Leads, community links

Academy Councillors will also be expected to complete annual declarations and annual mandatory compliance training, including GDPR and Health and Safety

All of our Academy Councillors complete safeguarding training annually

*“The Academy Council are an invaluable part of driving school improvement and an integral part of wholistic school leadership and accountability. They represent the broader community and ask the questions that school leaders need to think about and be able to answer. We are very fortunate in the fact that our AC bring a range of experiences and expertise which help us to develop and support the young people in our care.”*

**Gordon Farquhar, Principal, Milton Keynes Academy**

Gordon Farquhar, Principal, Milton Keynes Academy

# Code of Practice

We expect all of our Academy Councillors to live by the **Nolan Principles**. We also have a strict code of practice that our Academy Councillors agree to on an annual basis

## Introduction

This code of practice is designed to set out the conduct required of Academy Council members in order to ensure the highest standards of integrity and stewardship

### General responsibilities

Academy Councillors should listen to the view of other Academy Councillors, staff, volunteers or external advisers respectfully, taking cognisance of differences of opinion. Academy Councillors should not cause offence to others or undermine the standing of their colleagues as a member of the Council

## Roles and responsibilities

- To act at all times in the best interest of the academy and also the Trust, and with a view to furthering The Trust's Objects for the benefit of the children and wider communities that the academy serves
- To understand the role of the Trust Board and the purpose of the Academy Council.
- To actively challenge and support the Senior Leadership Team
- To contribute to maintaining and developing the values, ethos and reputation of the Trust and the academy
- To act fairly and without prejudice in relation to academy staff
- To accept collective responsibility for all decisions made by the Academy Council and to be bound by decisions made by the Trust Board
- To consider how the decisions of the Academy Council may affect other schools and the community

## Professional Community

Professional Community of AC Chairs:

- Termly forum chaired by Head of Governance.
- Written report to Trust Board each term.
- One AC Chair to present annually to the Trust Board (10 mins via Teams).

# Code of Practice

## Commitments

- To commit considerable amounts of time and energy to the Academy Council in order for it to fulfil its functions and duties
- To become actively involved in the Academy Council's work and accept a fair share of responsibilities
- To send apologies in advance of Academy Council meetings to which the individual Academy Councillor is unable to attend, but making full effort to attend all meetings of the Academy Council
- To develop and maintain relationships with the Academies and arrange visits where necessary in advance with the Senior Leadership Team
- To develop and maintain effective working relationships with the Executive, staff and parents, volunteers, the community, the local authorities and other relevant agencies
- To respond to opportunities and become actively involved in Trust-wide activities
- To undertake relevant training and to identify and fulfil any skills gaps as and when determined by the Academy Council
- To accept that relevant individual Academy Councillor details shall be published on the academy's website and also logged on the DfE's national database ("Get information about schools")

## Council Papers

While the Academy Council aims to conduct its business openly, it is inevitable that some matters must be confidential either for a time or always

All matters discussed at Academy Council meetings (save for items which are clearly neither confidential nor of a sensitive nature either legally, commercially, financially or personally) should be treated as strictly confidential and should not be discussed with anyone other than those present at the meeting when the matter in question was discussed, unless authorised by the Academy Council to do so. If in any doubt, Academy Councillors should contact the Chair

## Council Meetings

Open discussion and debate is actively encouraged, in which every spectrum of objective opinion is welcomed

As Academy Councillors must act with probity, the Academy Council should take and consider professional advice from internal and / or from external advisers in all decision- making

Where consensus is not achieved, decisions will be taken during Council meetings by calling for a vote by those present. Academy Councillors who abstain on, or vote against, any motion may request an appropriate note be made in the minutes

# Code of Practice

## Outside of Meetings

Academy Councillors should exercise restraint outside a meeting in relation to particular comments made within the Academy Council meeting by individual members. Academy Councillors must accept that it is inappropriate for any private or public references to be made, except in dialogue with other Academy Councillors

Academy Councillors should accept the need for care and restraint, honouring the spirit as well as the letter of the code of practice, when talking about Academy Council matters in any other forum

## Disagreements

Where an Academy Councillor has a disagreement on any matter, they should raise the matter informally with the Chair or through the normal procedures at a Council meeting

If not resolved, an Academy Councillor may request the matter be taken further by the Chair

If a satisfactory conclusion is not reached, the Council may recommend the appointment of an independent mediator

## Visits

Site visits during the school day are warmly encouraged by appointment only. Academy Councillors are expected to undertake one focused visit each year for their area of responsibility, as well as attend one parent event and one personal development-related school event. All visits must be coordinated in advance with the Headteacher/Principal or relevant school lead. Councillors should conduct themselves professionally at all times and comply with the school's safeguarding and visitor requirements. Schools reserve the right to reschedule or decline visits where necessary. A short written reflection must be completed after each visit and shared with the Clerk for inclusion in Council records.

## Breaches of the Code of Practice

In the event of a breach of this Code of Practice, the matter shall be raised with the Chair and an investigation shall take place

In the event a breach of this Code of Practice is believed to have been made by the Chair, another individual Academy Councillor shall conduct (or commission) the investigation

The Council understands that removal of an individual Academy Councillor will be used only as a last resort, once all efforts have first been utilised to resolve the matter

Where there is no other plausible option other than to remove the Academy Councillor, the Chair or other appropriate Academy Councillor shall refer the matter to the Head of Governance, who will provide support

# Who's Who at CET

## CET Governance Team

### Head of Governance

*Holly Crofts*

#### Compliance Manager

*Tina Matty*

#### Governance & Development Manager

*Priya*

*Sundararaman*

**Data Protection Coordinator**  
*Sarah Kotb*

**Governance Clerk**  
*Vicki Ellis*

**Governance Clerk**  
*Elizabeth Bullock*

The members of the Governance and Compliance team at Creative Education Trust are here to ensure that the Trustees and Executive are compliant with the standards set out in the Academy Trust Handbook and the Academy Good Governance Guide. They ensure that Creative Education Trust follows the Articles of Association and Scheme of Delegation, and work with all layers of Governance to ensure best practice throughout. The Governance and Compliance team can be contacted via: [Holly.Crofts@creativeeducationtrust.org.uk](mailto:Holly.Crofts@creativeeducationtrust.org.uk)

### The Trust Executive Team:

Nicole McCartney, **Chief Executive**  
Dr Jason Howard, **Director of Education**  
Catherine Hughes, **Director of Finance**  
Jon Ward, **Director of Estates**  
Ash Mudaliar, **Director of IT**

Vacancy, **Director of Inclusion**  
Gwayne Webb, **Director of Research and Development**  
Ben Driver, **Director of Performance**  
Victoria Tricarico, **Director of HR**

# Further reading and support

## Academy Trust Governance Guide

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/-governance-in-academy-trusts>



## Academy Trust Handbook

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academy-trust-handbook>



## Articles of Association

[https://www.creativeeducationtrust.org.uk/\\_site/data/files/statutory%20documents/EF72BAADC1F64E0D295BD84F783ED73D.PDF](https://www.creativeeducationtrust.org.uk/_site/data/files/statutory%20documents/EF72BAADC1F64E0D295BD84F783ED73D.PDF)



## Scheme of Delegation

[https://www.creativeeducationtrust.org.uk/\\_site/data/files/statutory%20documents/F0FDE468572AFD4BAB0ADB10FC171EA5.pdf](https://www.creativeeducationtrust.org.uk/_site/data/files/statutory%20documents/F0FDE468572AFD4BAB0ADB10FC171EA5.pdf)



## All Trustee resources and paperwork (via GovernorHub):

<https://app.governorhub.com/quickLinks>



## Committee terms of reference (via GovernorHub):

<https://app.governorhub.com/quickLinks>





**CREATIVE EDUCATION TRUST**

*Unified Purpose, Empowered People*

*Ambition • Excellence • Creativity • Resilience • Inclusion • Respect*