

**MERCHANT TAYLORS'
OXFORDSHIRE
ACADEMY TRUST**

**GOVERNANCE
PROSPECTUS**

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St. George's Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, OX10 8HH

t: 01491 837115

e: governance@mtoat.co.uk

www.wallingfordschool.com

www.mtoat.co.uk



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Introducing The Merchant Taylors' Oxfordshire Academy Trust

Our Trust

Welcome to the **Merchant Taylors' Oxfordshire Academy Trust (MTOAT)**.

MTOAT is a small multi-academy trust (MAT) based in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, which has grown out of the success of Wallingford School over the past decade since academisation. The size of MTOAT is its strength: each school in the trust has its own identity, ethos and values while being part of a larger structure, where collaboration and support are driven by strong relationships and highly effective leadership and management.

MTOAT currently operates three schools – Wallingford School, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Church of England Primary School and Aylesbury University Technical College (AUTC) – with a total of 1,771 students across the trust.

We are privileged to carry the Merchant Taylors' name and value our relationship with the company. Their interest, benevolence and engagement with education resonate with our ethos as a trust. The connection with the company originates with the foundation of a school in Wallingford by a member of the company, Walter Bigg, in 1659. The company supports the schools in the trust in a broad range of ways, including through grant donations and access to a variety of events and experiences for the students. This support is very much appreciated; however, the company does not make decisions, has no vested interests, and only influences within the context of its role on the Trust Board, where it has an allocated trustee.

By way of context, academies are publicly funded schools that receive money directly from the government rather than via the local council and are operated by an academy trust. There are various academy trust models that can be established, including the multi-academy trust. A MAT is a single legal entity with overarching responsibility for the governance of all academies within the trust.

As a multi-academy trust, the function of MTOAT is to prioritise collaboration, innovation and professional development through structured approaches to ensure the best possible provision for the young people in our schools. We work across and within our schools, recognising that the best school-to-school support is deep, embedded and impactful.

The key defining principles for the MTOAT schools are:

- Ethical
- Comprehensive
- Community-focused
- Committed to excellence and continuous improvement
- Underpinned by operational excellence



Our Schools

Wallingford School is a well-established, very successful secondary school, which has a tangible commitment to providing an excellent education for the young people of the town and the surrounding villages. Results are excellent year-on-year and the school is oversubscribed. A new 19-classroom teaching block opened in 2022, and it is expected that the school will quickly grow to approximately 1,500 students. Current student numbers are 1,444 with 1,174 in Years 7 to 11 and 270 in sixth form. Wallingford School was once more judged by Ofsted to be Good in a section 8 inspection in November 2022.

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Primary School joined MTOAT in 2017 following a period of turbulence characterised by unstable leadership and a lack of strategic direction. At the time, student numbers were below 90, teaching and learning were poor and the future of the school was in question. After a five-year journey of school improvement, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Primary School was judged to be Good by Ofsted in a section 8 inspection in March 2022. Student numbers on roll are currently 181.

Aylesbury UTC joined MTOAT in November 2021. It is fair to say that if it had not joined the trust then the UTC would have closed at that time. It was a school which had lost direction and this was recognised by Ofsted in a section 5 inspection in March 2022 in which the school was judged to be Requires Improvement in all areas in line with the trust's self-evaluation. Significant school improvement work is ongoing at AUTC, and student numbers on roll are currently 146.

At the heart of our three schools is a shared commitment to academic achievement, personal development and opportunity. We thereby ensure that our young people leave us *Able & Qualified* – equipped with the skills and experiences they will need to thrive. This vision is embraced by all members of our school communities and lies at the heart of our ethos.

The focus of the trust is to provide overall leadership, guidance and a consistent set of defining principles across the academies within the trust. The trust aims to promote strategic collaboration between its schools in improving and maintaining high educational standards. While MTOAT is ultimately accountable for the performance of each school in the group, each school has their own local governing body (LGB) which operates subject to the scheme of delegation from MTOAT, which delegates many of the strategic decisions for each school, as well as the primary oversight of those schools.



MTOAT Staff and Central Team

All staff are employed by one organisation – MTOAT. The CEO, the finance director and the operations director manage our trust central teams which cover the following areas:

- Finance
- Recruitment
- HR
- Safeguarding
- Governance and Clerking
- IT Support Services
- Facilities
- Catering
- Cleaning

All of these operate teams across the trust, each with their own individual lead, and provide effective delivery of services, considerable economies of scale and value for money. The trust recognises that schools joining the trust will add value and capacity to its offer through the knowledge, skills and expertise of the people they bring with them. Equally, those schools will be able to benefit from having access to larger teams and greater resources alongside improved opportunities for professional development and collaboration.



MTOAT Governance

Three Levels of Governance

The governance structure of MTOAT operates at three levels, as set out in the articles of association of the trust: members, directors (aka trustees) and governors.

The members of the MAT are the equivalent of the shareholders in a commercial company (save that they do not receive dividends). MTOAT currently has three individual and two corporate members. The corporate members are the Merchant Taylors' Company and the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE). The members' powers are set out in the articles and include appointing and removing directors, appointing and removing members and appointing auditors.

Oxford Diocesan Board of Education became a member when Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Primary School joined the trust while the Merchant Taylors' Company reflects the connection between the company and the town of Wallingford.

Overall responsibility for the governance and performance of the MAT and all the academies within the MAT sits with the **Trust Board**. However, as we will see, each school has considerable autonomy within its own context through active local governing bodies and committees, which make decisions and report regularly to the Trust Board.

The Trust Board is experienced and has a broad and balanced skills set. It includes the chief executive of the trust (who is also the headteacher of Wallingford School) and several individuals with many years of experience as school governors. The trust finance director and trust operations director also attend board meetings in an ex-officio capacity.

The local governing bodies are the third tier of governance within the MAT with responsibility for individual schools. Governors are appointed to the LGBs in a variety of ways, as set out in the scheme of delegation.

Committee Structure

MTOAT Governance Structure with Committees

Members	
MTOAT Trust Board	Audit & Risk Committee
	MTOAT Resources Committee
	Chairs' Forum
AUTC	
Brightwell Primary School GB	Performance Committee
	Resources Committee
Wallingford School GB	Performance, Teaching & Learning Committee (PeTaL)
	Resources Committee
	Wellbeing Committee

In addition to the local governing bodies, the board has currently established three specific committees at trust level: the MTOAT Audit and Risk committee, the MTOAT Resources Committee and the Chairs' Forum.

An audit committee is a requirement for all academy trusts, its role being to ensure that the trust and all academies adhere to the financial rules established by the trust. The finance role of the trust resources committee is to monitor the overall financial performance of the trust, including reviewing the annual budget proposed by each LGB and the overall budget of the trust.

Local governing bodies may also have subcommittees, as outlined in the table above. Chairs of local governing body resources committees sit on the overarching MTOAT Resources Committee*, and the chairs and vice chairs of the local governing bodies attend the Chairs' Forum.

*AUTC currently does not have any committees, a nominated AUTC governor would participate in the MTOAT Resources Committee.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who are school governors and trustees, and what do they do?

School governors and trustees are in place to ensure schools and trusts are well run. They are volunteers who help decide on the direction, focus and ethos of the school and the MAT. Governors represent school staff, parents, the local community and the sponsoring body for the academy trust, which in our case is the Merchant Taylors' Company (MTC) for Wallingford School and Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE) for Brightwell. Both of these sponsor organisations have representation on the MTOAT Trust Board and in the members. This means that school and trust decisions are made by people with a wide range of experience and views.

School governors and trustees come from every walk of life. Each individual governor is a member of a governing body established by the trust as per the articles of association and established in law as a corporate body. Trustees sit on the MTOAT Trust Board, and are directors of MTOAT. Individual governors and trustees must not act independently of the rest of the governing body or trust board. All decisions are the joint responsibility of the governing body or the MTOAT Trust Board.

The role of the governing bodies and the trust board is strategic with the following key functions:

- Set the aims and objectives for the school or trust.
- Set the policies for achieving those aims and objectives.
- Set the targets for achieving those aims and objectives.
- Monitor and evaluate the progress the school(s) is/are making towards the achievement of its aims and objectives.
- Be a source of challenge and support to the headteacher / principal and CEO (a critical friend).

The overall purpose of governance is to provide confident, strategic leadership and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance.

The headteacher or principal and the CEO are responsible for all operational matters, for the internal organisation, management and control of the school, and for the implementation of the strategic framework established by the governing bodies and the trust board.

It is important to note that the role of governance is essentially one of strategic direction and monitoring. The responsibility for operational matters lies with the CEO, headteacher or principal, and senior staff, and whilst the governors and trustees monitor these matters and can ask questions on this, it is not for them to intervene directly in operational issues.

All MATs and governing bodies, no matter what type of school or how many schools they govern, have three core functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff.
- Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure public money is well spent.

What kind of people do we look for as governors and trustees?

Our governors and trustees come from all walks of life and are drawn from the local community, thereby providing vital links to the families, businesses and local organisations served by each school and our community.

Each governing body and the trust board is a diverse group of people who, together, bring a wider perspective to the task of leading their school and the trust overall.

Each governor and trustee brings their own experience and skills, and those with a background across key areas – IT, HR, marketing, communications, legal and finance – are always welcome.

Each governing body needs to work well internally and with the trust board, and it is therefore essential that local governors and trustees are strong team players.

What does the role involve and how much time does it require to be a governor or trustee?

Leading a MAT in partnership with the CEO, or a school in partnership with the headteacher/principal and school leaders, is a significant task that requires a considerable commitment of time and energy. As a trust, we value the contributions of our trustees and local governors to our MAT and schools, and we are committed to using their time effectively.

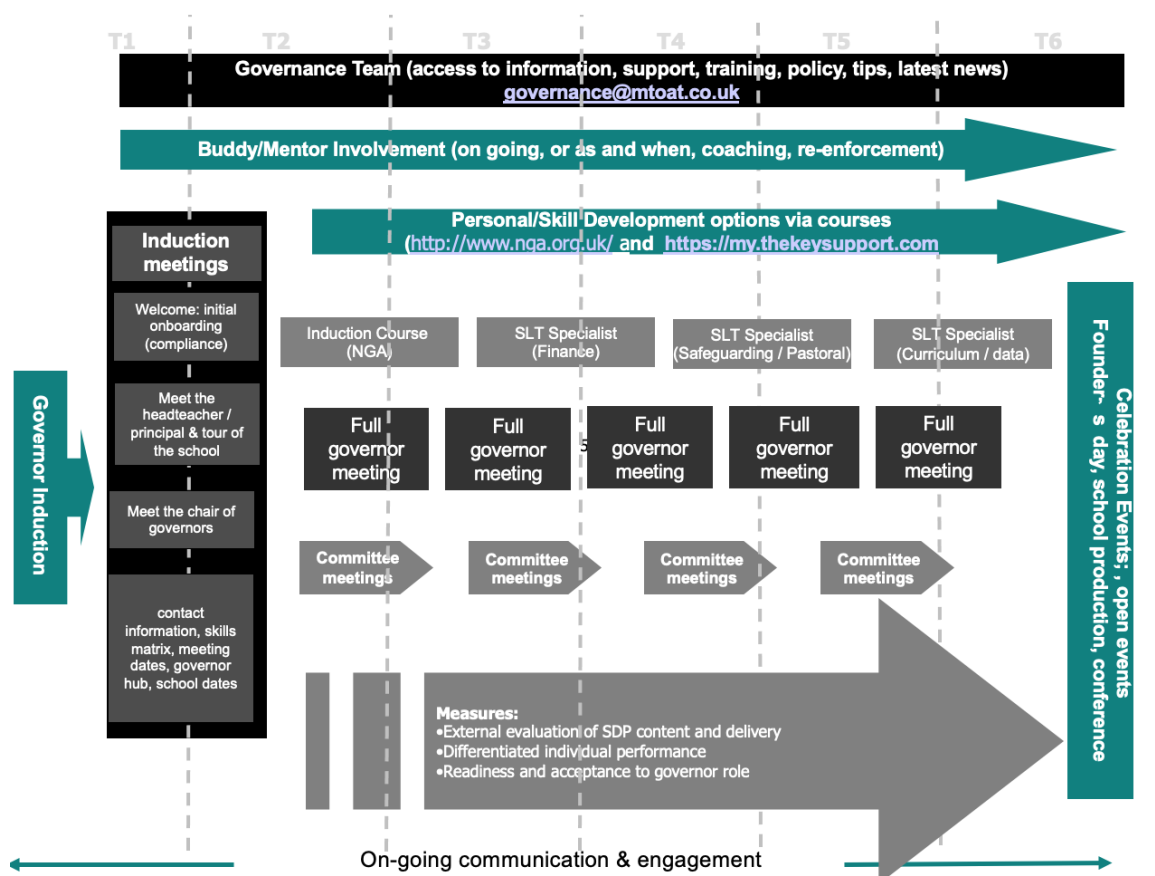
A trustee's or governor's term of office is usually four years, but as a volunteer you can resign at any time. Your main task is to attend meetings of the trust board or school governing body. Meetings of the trust board or full governing body normally take place once or twice each long term, and each committee normally meets once a long term or sometimes more frequently. Trustees and governors also visit the schools as part of their role in monitoring and evaluation to observe practice, to meet with staff and to familiarise themselves with the school. Trustees and governors are usually welcome, by invitation, to attend school performances, events and selected staff training.

What makes an effective governor or trustee?

- You care about improving children's educational attainment.
- You want to work as part of a team and can value and respect the contribution made by different people.
- You are willing to listen, learn and to ask questions.
- You are open to ideas and have a feel for what is important to people.
- You are enthusiastic.
- You can commit time and energy.
- You can commit to attending relevant training.

What support and training does the trust provide for governors and trustees?

Governors are provided with induction training to help introduce them to the relevant school within the trust and the trust as a whole; a snapshot of this process is below. We will also introduce you to one of our current governors, trustees and/or members, who can help answer any questions you may have as you get involved in the various aspects of MTOAT's governance.





Governance Prospectus

We encourage everyone new to MTOAT governance to do some initial training online through the various resources available – the National Governance Association's (NGA) e-learning portal, Governor Hub's 'The Key', Governors for Schools – in addition to bespoke training, such as safeguarding, that is run throughout our schools.

Being a school governor, trustee or member is a truly rewarding voluntary role. You will join a dedicated group of individuals who freely give their time and expertise for the benefit of the schools and the local community as a whole, ultimately to positively impact the life chances of students across those schools. The role also offers significant opportunities for personal development, allowing you to build skills and gain experience in diverse areas, while working as part of a leadership team.

Governors, trustees and members, come from a variety of backgrounds, reflecting the many interest groups in our society and schools, but they have one important thing in common: they are dedicated to ensuring that students across our schools have the best education possible. This must be the primary focus of all trust board and governing body business. Many of your fellow governors and trustees will have a huge amount of knowledge, experience and competence for you to draw upon. Effective governance is a team effort, with decisions made corporately and collectively. You will not be alone and must not act alone. Additionally, personal agendas should never take precedence over the needs of the trust and wider school community.

Please get in touch if you would like more information about becoming a governor or trustee with the Merchant Taylors' Oxfordshire Academy Trust. We would be delighted to hear from you:

Email: governance@mtoat.co.uk

Website: www.mtoat.co.uk