

**Minutes of a Meeting of the STEP Board of Trustees Board Development Session  
 Monday, 27 September 2021 at 2.00pm at Turnham Academy**

Name	Position	Attendance
<b>Trustees</b>		
Ben Bartlett (BB)	Non-Executive Trustee	Absent (apologies accepted)
Kate Chhatwal OBE (KC)	Non-Executive Trustee	Absent (apologies accepted)
Mark Ducker OBE (MD)	Executive Trustee - CEO	Present
Angela Farrell (AF)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Ross Gardner (RG)	Non-Executive Trustee (Vice Chair)	Present
Peter Lilford (PL)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rory Nath (RN)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present (from item 3)
Navdeep Sanghara (NS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Shelley Stuart (SS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rama Venchard (RV)	Non-Executive Trustee (Chair of Trustees)	Present
<b>Executive Team</b>		
Jennese Alozie (JA)	Director of Effectiveness and Performance	Present
Paul Glover (PG)	Deputy CEO (CEO Designate)	Present
John Halliwell (JH)	Executive Director of Primary	Present
James Hooper (JHo)	Director of Operational Services	Present
Ben March (BM)	Chief Finance and Operations Officer	Present
Tim Mills (TM)	Executive Director of Primary	Present
<b>Other</b>		
Mark Charman	STEP First/ Pupil Engagement Lead	Present
Sam Daly	Headteacher, Gonville Academy	Present (for items 5 and 6)
Philippa Jackson	Senior Governance Clerk	Present
Libby Majumdar	Assistant Headteacher, Westbridge Academy	Present (for items 1-5)
Ursula Norbert	Prospective Trustee (Observer)	Present

<b>1</b>	<p><b><u>Welcome and Apologies</u></b></p> <p>RV, Chair of the Board of Trustees, welcomed Trustees and the Executive team members to the meeting. Apologies had been received from KC and BB (work commitments).</p> <p>The Chair extended a particular welcome to UN, prospective trustee, who had joined the meeting as an observer.</p> <p>He also welcomed LM (Assistant Headteacher, Westbridge Academy) and MC (STEP First/ Pupil Engagement Lead) who would present items 4 and 5. SD (Headteacher, Gonville Academy) would join the meeting later to present item 6.</p>
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**2** STEP Successes and Areas for Development

Introduction

The CEO reflected on how the Executive Team had operated over the last year and some of the achievements to be celebrated. The Executive Team had received feedback from some of the leaders across the Trust and had considered this as part of their future areas for development. He recognised that STEP was a maturing Trust that achieved great results. It was important for the Board to continue to look for ways to evolve and succeed and to focus their particular attention on discussions in growth. He welcomed feedback from Trustees at the end of the session.

MD provided some background on the Trust’s development. The organisation had been incorporated 10 years ago and this would be his final year as CEO before retiring. The Trust would have grown by 20 schools within 10 years and this reaffirmed the success of the organisation and staff. He explained that the strategic plan tackled four main areas of challenge in the education sector. This plan remained key to the future success of the Trust. The four key areas included:

1. Unity - To establish a sense of unity as one organisation and to remain united as one team;
2. Consistency – Believe in the strength and integrity of leadership to decide what was right, but to also understand the importance of standardising some aspects to ensure the Trust’s success;
3. Support – Continue to offer a strong level of support, educational and operational. It was also important to ensure a generosity of spirit so that all understood the obligation to support the most vulnerable members of the Trust;
4. Development – The STEP Compass ensured clarity of direction across the organisation and helped leaders work together.

MD highlighted as a success the CEO succession plan that had been put in place some years ago. It was gratifying to see PG develop over time and prove himself to be worthy of the CEO role through the robust recruitment process put in place by Trustees. MD added that an important challenge for this year was to ensure a smooth handover to the new CEO. Over the next year, PG would be supported and mentored to help with the transition process and to ensure his role as the future CEO.

The DCEO explained that a massive challenge for the Executive Team had been the response to the pandemic. He felt the strategic response to reopening the STEP academies (safety, community, choice) had been key to supporting the children and the families. The response to the pandemic had really tested the organisation’s operating model and the STEP Compass. The structure and unity had worked well and created confidence within the communities. PG reflected on this and felt that there was still more work to do on building culture and unity across the Trust. He felt that the discussions around leadership behaviours that would take place as part of the performance reviews would be key to driving this.

## STEP Successes 2020/21

The Executive Team briefly outlined the successes in 2020/21 and areas for development in 2021/22. The following points were raised in line with the STEP Compass:

### *STEP First (TM)*

- NGA Outstanding Governance Reward recognised the effective work of the Board of Trustees and Academy Committees;
- The Academy Committees were responsible for communication and safeguarding elements within their local communities which were crucial to our response to Covid;
- We had learnt from our response during the first lockdown and the on-line learning offer was significantly more effective during the second lockdown;
- Since the pandemic, we felt that the communication with families and their understanding of STEP had been more aligned;
- The quality of provision (remote learning) during the pandemic had been high and this was evident in the assessments when the children returned to school;
- The pandemic had offered huge opportunities for the academies to support each other (EYFS, SEND, career pathways and performance management) and this collaboration would continue into the future;
- STEP First had strengthened during the pandemic and we were a more unified organisation.

### *STEP Way (JH)*

- The development of the STEP Way Statements in each academy had progressed;
- The different contexts within each community had been recognised within the STEP Way Statements but the formal part of the design principles were in line with the resources set by the Board of Trustees;
- The Anti-Racism Roadmap had been launched and progress had been made on embedding the new culture, curriculum design and policies, establishing champions to lead on the (RACE) Charter Mark and the Roadmap;
- The financial strength of the Trust continued with a positive ESFA report, doubled reserves and the move towards equitable funding.

### *STEP Up (JA)*

- STEP Up support had been strengthened during the pandemic with the onboarding of four new academies and the continued work under MOUs;
- This had tested the core of how we operated and ensured the moral purpose of the Trust;
- The HR function had been brought in-house;
- The pooling of resources during the pandemic had been key in supporting families with learning;
- Over 900 Chromebooks had been secured and set up for pupils to support them with their on-line learning;
- Relationships with secondary schools had been strengthened to smooth the transition.

*STEP Ahead (JHo)*

- A planned transition for the new CEO was underway to ensure the future success of the Trust;
- A number of leadership changes had been managed internally through a formal succession planning process;
- STEP Ahead Teaching School Hub had received a DfE designation and the setup, recruitment and delivery plan had progressed this year.

STEP Challenges 2021/22

*STEP First (BM)*

- The demands of the new Ofsted framework to ensure the quality of judgements continued to grow;
- Consider what we do and how to ensure effectiveness of the new Executive Leadership model;
- Improve the external understanding of STEP and communication around this.

*STEP Way (JHo)*

- Maintain the trajectory and Trust wide focus of the Anti-Racism Roadmap;
- Continue to develop the networking and curriculum offer and collaboration in specific areas;
- Manage pupil numbers, particularly in academies with falling rolls;
- Deliver the final phase of equitable funding.

*STEP Up (JA)*

- Ensure a smooth handover of the CEO role;
- Find different ways to support the communities to recover from the impact of Covid;
- Deliver strong SATs and KS2 outcomes in all academies;
- Prepare for a potential MAT inspection and the roll out plan.

*STEP Ahead (JH)*

- Remain adaptable to the changing educational landscape (Ofsted framework, impact of pandemic, curriculum development and challenging communities);
- Continued growth of the Trust – how and when to move into the secondary sector;
- Improve educational offer in relation to SEND and Inclusion and consider the infrastructure to move into the next phase;
- Consider the support and development of STEP leaders and those new to SLT and continue to nurture and develop staff through the continuous challenges.

The Chair thanked the Executive Team for their presentation. Trustees raised the following questions and comments:

- Trustees were keen to reflect on the previous 18 months and to tie this into the changing landscape. It was important to embed the successes and challenges into the Trust's resources and culture and to see specific ideas from the Executive Team on how this could be done;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congratulations on the successes and achievements, particularly the work to drive change and onboard the new academies during the pandemic. There had been so much work done in such a challenging environment which provided confidence in the leaders and succession planning;</li> <li>• Overall, there was a high level of participation from the Executive Team and Trustees which impacted what we could collectively achieve.</li> </ul> <p><i>RN joined the meeting.</i></p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b><u>Governance in the Pandemic</u></b></p> <p>The Chair asked Trustees to reflect on governance and challenge during the pandemic. He asked them to consider whether they had felt sufficiently informed of how the pandemic was managed within the Academies and how Trustees could have further supported the Executive Team or Academies. The following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trustees felt that the interim Board meetings and communications had been very helpful and had taken into consideration the strategic response for reopening the STEP academies (safety, community, choice);</li> <li>• The verbal and written reports on strategy, safeguarding and the communities had been particularly useful and reassuring for Trustees;</li> <li>• Trustees were interested to hear from the perspective of the Executive Team on how they could have further supported the Executive Team or academies during this time;</li> <li>• The Executive Team collectively agreed that they had felt very well supported by Trustees;</li> <li>• The frequent updates and communications at the beginning of the pandemic had provided reassurance;</li> <li>• The staged return of the children following the first lockdown had worked well and had been very effective;</li> <li>• The key challenge was supporting the Headteachers across the Trust so they had not felt isolated, either emotionally or professionally;</li> <li>• It had been a challenging time for the Executive Team but they felt that the leadership support and communications to and from Trustees had been very effective;</li> <li>• The pandemic had tested the structure, processes and relationships of the organisation;</li> <li>• The Executive Team had been inundated with support during this time and generally felt challenged and well supported by the Trustees;</li> <li>• This reflected the healthy relationship between the Board and the Executive Team which had helped develop future discussions and they hoped that this could be developed further in the future.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b></p>	<p><b><u>Pupil Voice Survey</u></b></p> <p>MC provided some background on the Pupil Voice Survey. He explained that it had been part of the largest global learning survey (overall 26,000 responses). It had been rolled out across all STEP academies in the Summer term of 2021 and Trust wide participation had been high (100%). There had been 1,361 pupil respondents from Years 5 and 6.</p>

He set out the main findings of the survey which confirmed that:

- 1) Our pupils rated STEP Academies as significantly better in comparison to other UK schools;
- 2) A strength across the Trust was STEP pupils' attitudes towards 'aiming high' (i.e. paying attention; being outcomes focused; and applying effort);
- 3) Against the UK benchmark, STEP pupils spoke significantly more positively than other UK schools about: 'diversity', 'teacher enthusiasm'; and 'classroom behaviour';
- 4) An area for further development was pupils' sense of seeing 'errors as opportunities' (growth mindset).

MC explained how the full survey data and pupil comments could be accessed by Trustees which may help them inform strategic thinking.

He also shared some of the critical questions that had been raised from the survey results. It was important to consider the ways that Pupil Voice could help strengthen the provision from STEP academies. Philosophy for Children (fostering unity) and children led engagement was a critical part of their learning. Encouraging open mindedness to improve the children's attainment was an advantage, particularly for the disadvantaged children.

Trustees thanked MC for facilitating the survey and for his presentation.

The following questions were raised:

Q: How could Pupil Voice be improved across the Trust?

A: Encourage pupils across the Trust to get together at a summit to collaborate. The views of pupils could be heard more strategically by the Board of Trustees to foster a sense of pupil presence at Board meetings.

Q: Was there any correlation between Pupil Voice and educational outcomes and engagement?

A: There had been a number of benefits seen from studies to show that pupil rights increased pupil confidence. The benefits could be seen in conversations with the children but were difficult to measure in outcomes.

Q: The philosophy in education was different within the STEP academies. Was there anything in the results to show how the different approach in class had impacted the survey results?

A: This would be hard to glean from the questions. The qualitative survey data was useful and showed some themes across academies.

MD thanked MC for his presentation. The survey results had been useful for Trustees to hear and would help the Board to define what was needed from pupil representation. He explained that there was an argument for a pupil representative role across the Trust to support and raise the profile of STEP First, particularly in the new academies. Although it was up to leaders to decide what was right in each academy, there was an argument for a more coordinated and centrally funded role across the Trust.

*SD joined the meeting.*

**5** **STEP Anti-Racism Road Map: Curriculum**

LM gave a presentation on behalf of the STEP Anti-Racist Curriculum Team. The presentation included an update on the approach taken to developing the Anti-Racist Curriculum, CPD offer, curriculum design, subject specific audits, networking and timelines.

LM thanked Trustees for inviting her to present at the Development Session. She was very grateful for the opportunity to champion the work around the Anti-Racist Curriculum. It had meant a lot to her personally and she was very keen to drive the work forward.

The following questions were raised:

Q: The Curriculum Team had made an amazing start. How does the curriculum development work fit into the broader educational view across the country?

A: This was a very important point. We had talked about the (RACE) Charter Mark and how to foster this externally. Engagement had not been particularly effective in schools across the country. It was important for STEP to look at the curriculum and how it reflected the communities that we worked in. If anti-racism was to be integrated into everything we do, it needs to be woven through the curriculum but the starting point for each STEP academy was very different.

Q: How do you know that staff were on board with this work and understood the urgency?

A: We had not rushed into this. It was a top organisational priority for STEP and communicated through the STEP Compass Priorities. We were confident that this was a passion of leaders and staff. There would be different stages of development and challenges along the way but all academies were supportive and had engaged with the work so far.

Q: Was there any national data/ benchmarks in developing anti-racism initiatives?

A: Not really but it had been talked about for some time. The (RACE) Charter Mark was still relatively new. The murder of George Floyd had certainly created more energy.

Q: In relation to the CPD, the STEP Ahead Teaching School Hub could be a huge benefit for this?

A: Yes, absolutely. The Teaching School Hub could produce the resources and build momentum through its networking opportunities.

Q: How had the parents and the wider community been engaged in this work?

A: The pupils and parents were part of the Roadmap. Some examples of how pupils and parents had been engaged at Beddington Park Academy were provided, including newsletters, community councils and shared communications.

Q: It would be interesting to see some example of changes to the curriculum?

A: We could provide some examples and build in how leaders had made the decisions across the Trust.

	<p><b>Actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Progress update on the Anti-Racist Curriculum to be presented to Trustees in the Summer term. (Anti-Racist Curriculum Team)</b></li> <li>• <b>Update on the Road-Map to becoming an Anti-Racist organisation to be presented at the Board meeting in October. (Executive Director of Primary)</b></li> </ul> <p>LM left the meeting.</p>
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**STEP Way – We agree to do things like this**

6	<p><b><u>STEP Way Statements</u></b></p> <p>SD gave a presentation sharing how a STEP Way Statement had been developed at Gonville Academy. She provided some history and background information on Gonville Academy.</p> <p>She talked through the journey and development of the STEP Way Statement and how staff views had been taken into consideration. It had been important to consider staff views as some of staff had worked at the academy for a long time and they knew what worked for the children and the families. There had been six focus points which sat on top of the STEP Compass. The key focus points included collaboration, feeling safe and nurtured, communication, learning new skills and applying knowledge, achieving goals and diversity and family. From the STEP Way Statement, the Gonville mural had been created and shared with the community in the playground.</p> <p>The following questions were raised:</p> <p>Q: Had you found the STEP Compass and Priorities useful in the development of the Statement?</p> <p>A: I had previously worked in academies that were at very different stages of development to Gonville Academy. When I joined Gonville it was in a very strong position. The Compass had been in place for some time and was well understood by the staff and pupils which made the development stage much easier.</p> <p>MD added that this had been an important engagement activity for the Trust. The STEP Way Statement led back to the STEP Compass Priorities and Vision Statement but leaders had the opportunity to develop their own Statement and communicate how this related to the academy. The Academy Committees had been a big part of the development process with the leadership team. Each academy had done things differently. Leaders had been empowered to do what was right for the academy and community, providing reference to the STEP Compass and the origin of the organisation.</p> <p>Q: Were there any areas of debate/ priorities that had not been included in the Statement?</p> <p>A: Lots of ideas were presented by staff over a number of sessions. We then looked at where these ideas sat under the different focus points. It was an important process for a new leader in the academy to show the importance of the views of the existing staff.</p>
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Q: How could we make sure the Vision of the organisation is considered in the development?  
A: This was a good point. Gonville Academy is a well-established academy within the Trust. Different academies were at different stages in their journey and used different approaches to leadership and direction. From the Trust’s perspective, the process has made the staff and community see how the academy is linked to the Vision of the Trust. It ensured that each academy visualised the Vision set by the Board of Trustees.

Q: It was reassuring to see how the Statement had been developed in collaboration with the staff to keep them focused.  
A: We had received a lot of support and input from staff. They brought new thoughts and ideas.

Q: How do you induct new staff in the Statement?  
A: Inset days and morning staff briefings. Reference was always made to the visual to keep the Statement alive. If Trustees visit an academy they should ask to see the Statement as it was fundamental to the vision of the academy.

The CEO recognised the recent improvements in Gonville Academy and thanked JH and SD for their work in developing the academy.

*SD left the meeting.*

**STEP Ahead – We invest in our future**

**7 STEP Growth Plans: Secondary**

Trustees noted a briefing paper on the advantages and challenges of having a secondary provision in STEP.

BM introduced the paper and summarised the main drivers for growth into the secondary sector including financial, pupil experience and staff development and retention.

TM took Trustees through the recommendations set out in the paper. He thanked BB for his input into the development of the paper. He had shared some valuable experience which had been useful when considering the different options and recommendations. He had provided some useful insight into the complexities of running and staffing a secondary school, timetabling and teaching and recruitment, particularly up to A-Level.

UN introduced herself and provided some background information on her recent experience of setting up a secondary free school and explained some of the challenges in doing this.

The Executive Team and Trustees discussed the proposal on a secondary school facility and raised the following points:

- A further option to consider, which had not been included in the paper, was to find a smaller MAT with a failing primary school and a successful secondary school, but that would depend on the opportunities that arose;
- The London area was saturated in terms of a secondary MAT but other geographical areas could be considered particularly as we knew that the STEP Compass could be applied in many different settings;
- A failing secondary school requiring MAT support would come with many challenges;

- A 'good' or 'outstanding' secondary MAT would be considered where the Headteacher and Trustees could provide expertise;
- There were many reasons why secondary SATs were reluctant to join a MAT because of the perceived loss of power and reserves;
- All geographical areas would be considered if STEP had the capability improve the life chances of children and could demonstrate that the current primary schools would also benefit from the opportunity;
- It was important to recognise the bias in the sector and to balance this with the financial challenges;
- It would be difficult to find a good SAT secondary in the London area as there were no drivers for change;
- It may be worth considering a different geographical area to gain credibility in the secondary sector and to actively target other areas outside of London.

Trustees raised the following questions:

Q: What due diligence had been carried out in London and East Sussex? What opportunities were you aware of?

A: In Hailsham, East Sussex, there was an increasing need for a secondary facility in the future. This could possibly be the best future option for the Trust to consider due to the large amount of land held and the possibility of growing gradually internally.

Q: Were you aware of other options in other parts of the country?

A: We had discussed this through formal channels with the RSC. An option outside of London with a solid secondary and primaries. An opportunity in East Sussex would come through connections. There were two options, through a formal route or through connections.

Q: Was there an opportunity to gain more experience in secondary along the way?

A: Yes, we had considered this in the model but tested the market through specific provisions. Generally, we had seen challenges with operations and services with the previous secondary connections. We were, of course, open to all considerations in gaining more experience in secondary.

Q: With the change in leadership, it would be interesting to hear PG's perspective on this as the new incoming CEO?

A: In terms of developing children through to adulthood, I am absolutely convinced that a secondary facility is the right thing to do.

Q: Was there a case to be made to proactively communicate what STEP stood for and to make a statement of intent to provide reassurance within the sector? The statement of intent could confirm that, although we were recognised as primary specialists, we were open to opportunities.

A: Our message and intention had been made clear to the RSC and we had agreed to **consider** schools outside of our geographical area.

Trustees noted the recent Government mandate for all SATs to join MATs and that the RSC would present the benefits of joining a MAT. The NGA had run some sessions with SATs and the majority of the feedback showed that the benefits of joining a MAT were misunderstood.

	<p>There was also some fear about losing autonomy. This was a failure of the MAT sector for not being clear on the benefits they offered.</p> <p>UN advised that in terms of staff experience, some of the Trust’s current primary staff may have QTS experience so the Executive Team may want to consider what options they had to move current members of staff into secondary.</p> <p>Trustees referred to the paper and agreed that option 5 (merge with a ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ secondary school that was close to full pupil capacity) was an ideal strategy but other options could not be disregarded. It was important to consider all options and opportunities as they arose and for the Executive Team to carry out the necessary due diligence.</p> <p>It was felt that a secondary opportunity within the catchment area of a current STEP primary school could bring huge benefit to the STEP children and this should be carefully considered if the opportunity arose. Also, contextual and recruitment experience would play an important part.</p> <p>Trustees requested that the Executive Team explore the different avenues for growth to enable the Board to make a further assessment on strategy.</p> <p><b>Action: Review avenues for growth and present to Trustees in the Spring term. (Executive Team)</b></p>
8	<p><b>Harmful Sexualised Behaviour and the Role of Governance</b></p> <p>JA provided a brief update on harmful sexualised behaviour and the role of governance.</p> <p>Trustees participated in a group activity to identify the strategic obligations of each layer of governance in terms of safeguarding and what was in place to protect the children.</p>
9	<p><b>Understanding Monthly Management Accounts</b></p> <p>BM gave a presentation on the streams of funding and frequency issues facing MATs and what Trustees should be looking for and querying in the Cash Flow Reports and Management Accounts.</p>
10	<p><b><u>Board Evaluation</u></b></p> <p>JA provided an update on the plans for the external Governance Review and Chair 360 Review.</p>
11	<p><b><u>Closing Comments</u></b></p> <p>Trustees considered this to have been a very positive session. They had found the presentations from leaders particularly worthwhile and felt that there had been a good level of debate on the Trust’s current initiatives. They found it very interesting to hear about Gonville Academy’s approach to developing the STEP Way Statement and the development work on the Anti-Racist Curriculum. Overall, the format of the Board Development Session and the breakouts had worked well.</p>

	Trustees recognised that STEP was a maturing Trust that achieved great results and continued to look for ways to evolve and succeed. The discussions on the secondary opportunities had been particularly useful and they looked forward to a further debate on this.
<b>12</b>	<b><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></b>  The next Board of Trustees meeting would be held on 11 October 2021 at 5.15pm (Virtual).

<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Progress update on the Anti-Racism Curriculum to be presented to Trustees in the Summer term.	Anti-Racism Curriculum Team
Update on the Road-Map to becoming an anti-racist organisation to be presented at the Board meeting in October.	Executive Director of Primary
Review avenues for growth and present to Trustees in the Spring term.	Executive Team

<b>Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting</b>	
<b>Chair's signature</b>	
<b>Chair's name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	