



Oak Trees Multi Academy Trust Virtual Meetings Policy 2020-2021

Issue Status: -

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	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>
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	_____ Chair of Trustees	_____ 	_____

1. Aims

The aims of this virtual meetings policy are to:

- Enable the governing board to continue its work and maintain strategic oversight where face-to-face meetings aren't possible
- Provide a framework in which to run meetings virtually and include those attending virtually
- Provide flexibility so governors or trustees can attend meetings virtually where they would otherwise have had to miss them

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy is based on:

- The Department for Education's (DfE's) [school governance update – March 2020](#)
- The DfE's guidance on [actions for schools during the coronavirus outbreak](#)
- [The School Discipline \(Pupil Exclusions and Reviews\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#)

This policy complies with our funding agreement and articles of association.

3. The board's ability to make alternative arrangements for meetings

Under our articles of association, any trustee can participate in a meeting of the trustees by telephone or video conference if:

- They've given notice of their intention to do so and provided the telephone number on which they can be reached and/or the video conferencing platform they'll be using at least 48 hours before the meeting, and
- The trustees have access to the appropriate equipment

COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, we can agree to hold meetings via telephone or video conferencing without having to meet first.

The chair or clerk can contact governors and trustees directly to agree these alternative arrangements.

The board has determined that the following arrangements will apply.

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 The chair

The chair will chair virtual meetings, and meetings in which some participants are attending virtually, in the same way as face-to-face meetings.

The chair will make sure all governors and trustees:

- Are set up on Zoom
- Have tested their connection and access to the platform
- Are aware of the expectations on attendees set out in section 4.3

4.2 The clerk

The clerk will give each trustee written notice of the meeting and a copy of the agenda at least 7 clear days in advance of the meeting.

Where there are matters demanding urgent consideration, written notice and a copy of the agenda can be given within a shorter period as the chair directs.

The clerk will minute virtual meetings, and meetings in which some participants are attending virtually, in the same way as face-to-face meetings.

The clerk will make sure the minutes reflect that the meeting is virtual, or if a governor or trustee is attending virtually.

The clerk will minute all decisions, and whether anything needs to be ratified at a later date, for example due to loss of connection.

The clerk will read the privacy terms and conditions of Zoom and make sure its security features are enabled.

4.3 All governors

To ensure confidentiality and the smooth running of the meeting, governors and trustees attending virtually will:

- Attend the whole meeting
- Attend with the webcam/video switched on where possible
- Focus on the business of the meeting in the same way as if they were attending in person
- Remain on mute unless they are speaking
- Say their name before they start speaking
- Prevent unauthorised individuals overhearing conversations (for example, by using headphones)
- Be mindful of their surroundings – they will consider the privacy of the room, including, but not limited to, who or what is visible or audible in the background
- Ask questions during the meeting by waiting until the chair invites questions during each agenda item

4.4 IT specialist

A member from the MAT IT provider will review the security of Zoom.

5. Virtual meetings

Fully virtual meetings will only be held if face-to-face meetings are not possible.

5.1 Difficulty joining the meeting

If after all reasonable efforts it does not prove possible for a governor or trustee to participate by telephone or video conference, the meeting may still proceed with its business provided it is otherwise quorate.

The clerk will record in the minutes that the governors or trustees in question attempted to participate but was unable to do so.

5.2 Recording the meeting

The clerk may wish to record the meeting to aid them when writing the minutes.

At the start of the meeting the clerk will make sure all governors or trustees agree to the meeting being recorded via governors or trustees.

Where approval is granted, it is the clerk alone who has permission to record the meeting. No one else has authority to record the meeting unless they have explicit authority from governors or trustees to do so.

The recording will be handled in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and once it is no longer needed the recording will be deleted.

5.3 Quorum

All governors and trustees attending virtually count towards the quorum.

If individual governors and trustees lose connection to the meeting, they will no longer count towards the quorum. The meeting can continue uninterrupted if it is otherwise quorate.

If the meeting becomes inquorate then discussions may continue, but no votes can be held unless the meeting is quorate.

If all governors and trustees lose connection to the meeting then the clerk will postpone the meeting and reschedule. Where this is not possible, the clerk will send the matters for consideration via email, and will expect comments from governors and trustees within 7 days.

5.4 Voting

Governors and trustees may vote on any agenda item for which they've been fully present.

Secret ballots will be allowed where possible. Governors and trustees can share their vote privately with the chair/clerk via email or in a private phone call.

Where a virtual secret ballot cannot be arranged, then each governor or trustee can decide to vote publicly or abstain.

5.5 Conflicts of interest

Where a governor or trustee declares a conflict of interest, they will withdraw from the meeting by leaving the call.

Once the governing board is ready for the governor or trustee to re-join, the clerk will notify them by text.

6. COVID-19: holding exclusion panels virtually

The timeframes set out in [The School Discipline \(Pupil Exclusions and Reviews\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) remain in force.

However, it is possible that these deadlines cannot be met due to the coronavirus pandemic. It is for the governing board to determine if these deadlines can be met by meeting virtually or if the meeting should be delayed.

6.1 Holding the meeting virtually

We will conduct an exclusion panel virtually via Zoom, if all parties have:

- Appropriate devices
- Access to a reliable, affordable internet service – if some parties access the internet through their mobile phone and do not have unlimited data, we will not require them to appear via video conference

6.2 Delaying the meeting

Where virtual meetings are not possible, we will delay the meeting and hold the exclusion panel as soon as is practicable.

7. Virtual attendance at face-to-face meetings

Governors and trustees may attend meetings virtually if they are unable to attend in person.

Any trustee wishing to attend a meeting virtually should act in accordance with the arrangements set out in section 3 of this policy.

The governor or trustee will explain why they're unable to attend physically, and their virtual attendance at the meeting will be subject to the governing board's approval at the start of the meeting.

Where the board does not grant approval, the clerk/chair will notify the governor/trustee immediately and the clerk will minute this decision.

The meeting will be chaired by a governor/trustee present in person.

7.1 Difficulty joining the meeting

If after all reasonable efforts it does not prove possible for a governor/trustee to participate by telephone or video conference, the meeting may still proceed with its business provided it is otherwise quorate.

The clerk will record in the minutes that the governor/trustee in question attempted to participate but was unable to do so.

7.2 Quorum

Any governor/trustee attending virtually counts towards the quorum.

If the governor/trustee loses connection to the meeting, they will no longer count towards the quorum. The meeting can continue undisrupted if it's otherwise quorate.

If the meeting becomes inquorate then discussions may continue, but no votes can be held unless the meeting is quorate.

7.3 Voting

Any governor/trustee attending virtually may vote on any agenda item for which they've been fully present.

Secret ballots will be allowed where possible. The governor/trustee can share their vote privately with the chair/clerk via email or in a private phone call.

Where a virtual secret ballot cannot be arranged, then the governor/trustee can decide to vote publicly or abstain.

7.4 Conflicts of interest

Where a governor/trustee attending virtually declares a conflict of interest, they will withdraw from the meeting by leaving the call.

Once the governing board is ready for the governor/trustee to re-join, the clerk will notify them by text.

8. Monitoring arrangements

This policy will be reviewed annually. At every review, it will be approved by the Trust Board.

9. Links with other policies

This policy will be used in conjunction with the following policies:

- Data protection policy and privacy notices
- Exclusion policy
- Admissions policy
- Conflicts of interest policy
- Governor code of conduct
- ICT and internet acceptable use policy