



North Warwickshire and Hinckley College

Post 11 educational improvement through the formation of a Multi-Academy Trust

North Warwickshire & Hinckley College (the College) is a general further education college incorporated in 1992 that straddles the West and East Midlands regions. The College offers a wide curriculum (including higher education and apprenticeships), with provision for 14-16 year olds, 16-19 year olds and adults.

The College is a Department for Education (DfE) accredited sponsor of academies and has established a multi-academy trust, The Midland academies Trust (MAT), to oversee the running of three Academies which are based in the Nuneaton area. A studio school is currently being developed for opening in September 2012, when it will become part of MAT. A second stage application for a further studio school has been submitted to the DfE and if approved, it will become part of MAT in September 2014.

A number of Corporation members and College senior post holders have director and / or governor roles in MAT's governance structure (see overleaf). The Clerk to the Corporation clerks across the Group.

Catalyst / drivers for the emerging academy model

National Challenge Trust School and an Academy

Following a request from the local authority, the College executive team approached the Corporation with proposals to establish a National Challenge Trust school and to sponsor an academy with the aim of raising secondary school student attainment rates.

The Corporation considered the strategic value to the College as well as identifying potential risks and determined to proceed with both projects. Benefits identified were:

- the embedding of College values in secondary school provision, particularly in respect of raising local aspiration;
- improving the attainment profile of students generally and particularly in relation to those entering the College;

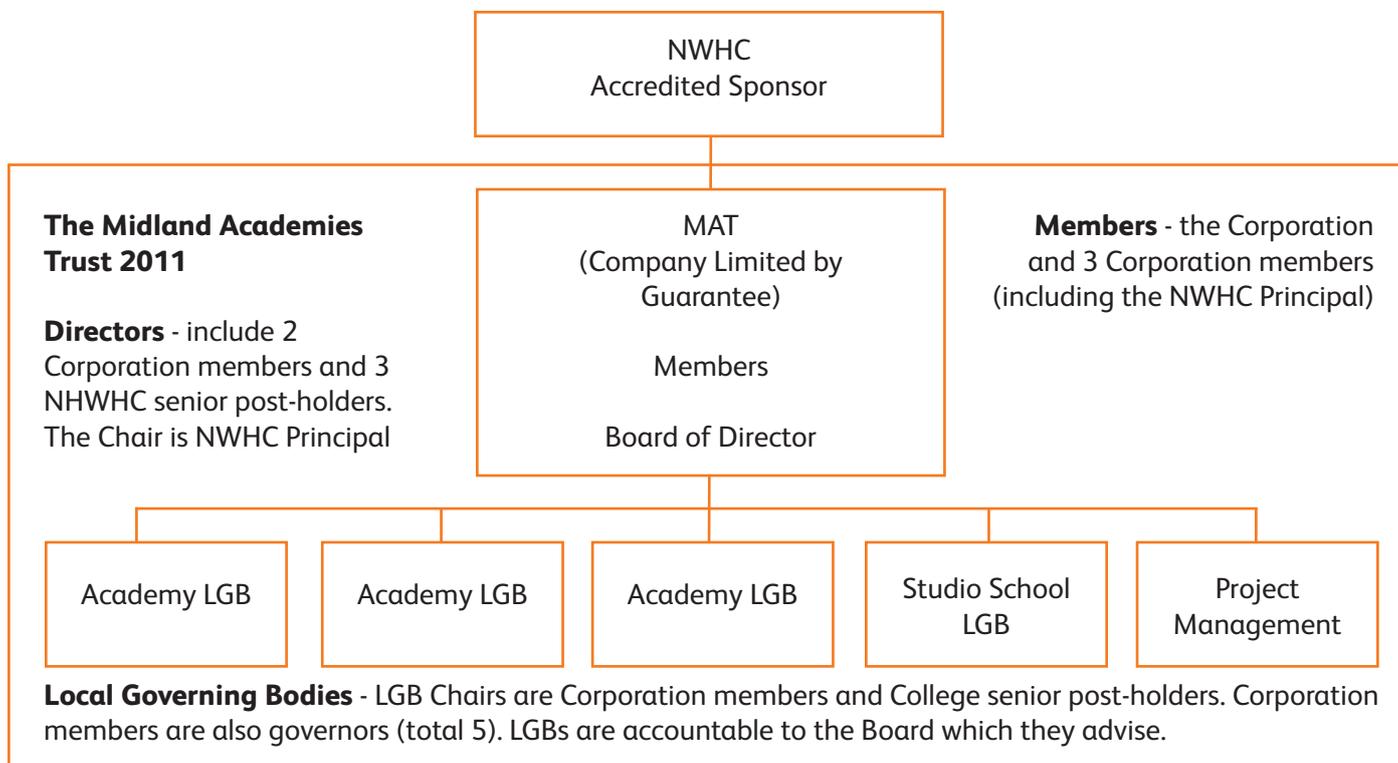


Figure 1 - The Midland Academies Trust Model of Governance 2011

- strengthening College involvement in the delivery of secondary school provision;
- strengthening progression routes to the College;
- potential cost savings through shared services;
- the sharing of good practice.

Potential risks to the College related to reputational considerations, the capacity of College staff to undertake the (considerable) development and implementation work and the hurdles in obtaining reimbursement from the DfE for the work undertaken.

Both projects were undertaken with the Corporation scrutinising activity, particularly in relation to the identified risks. Separate but similar governance models resulted from the establishment of the National Challenge Trust school and the academy.

A multi-academy trust

Resulting from an approach by the DfE to the College to invite The George Eliot school governing body to apply for academy status, the Corporation agreed to sponsor this further academy development, viewing it as a natural progression of the journey the College and School were taking together towards raising the attainment of students.

Having made this decision, the Corporation devoted the majority of its Spring Conference to investigating the most appropriate model for this development, taking into account flexibility and long-term sustainability. Legal advice was sought as to the models which were available and which would fit with the College's corporate strategy.

Two key enablers arose from this discussion:

- The establishment of a multi-academy trust enabling the College to manage its responsibilities to both academies,

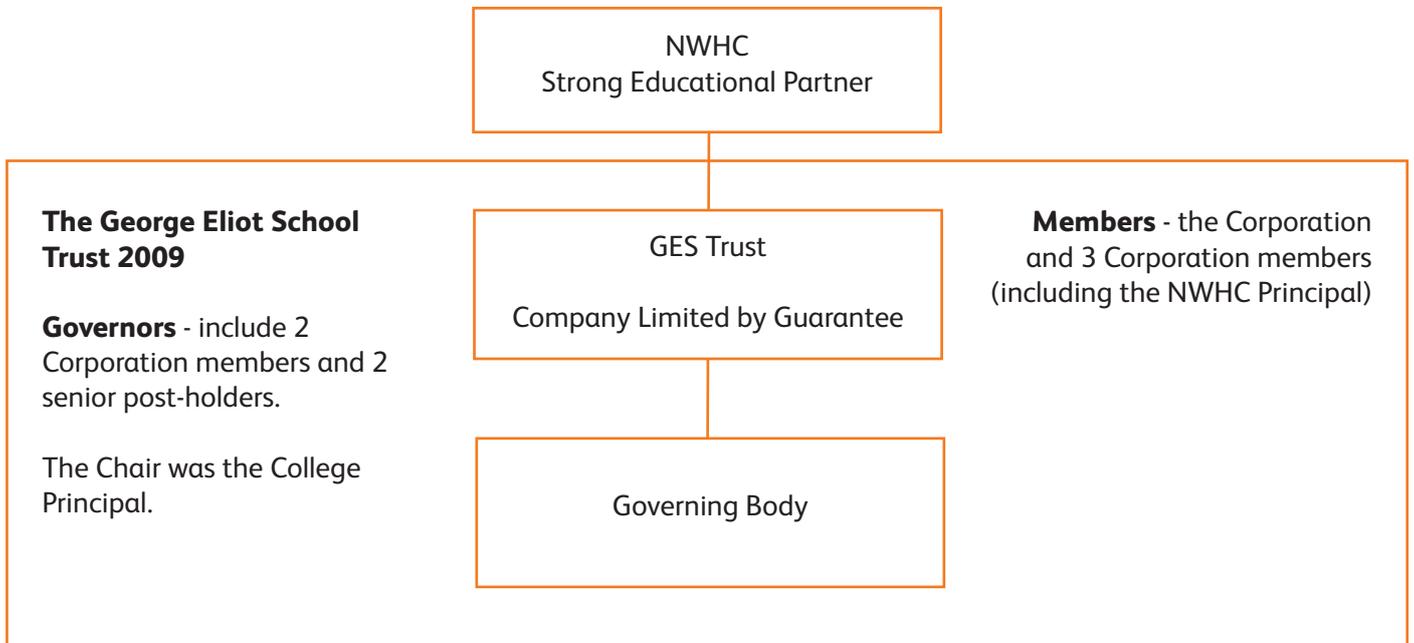


Figure 2 - The George Eliot School Trust Model of Governance 2009-2011

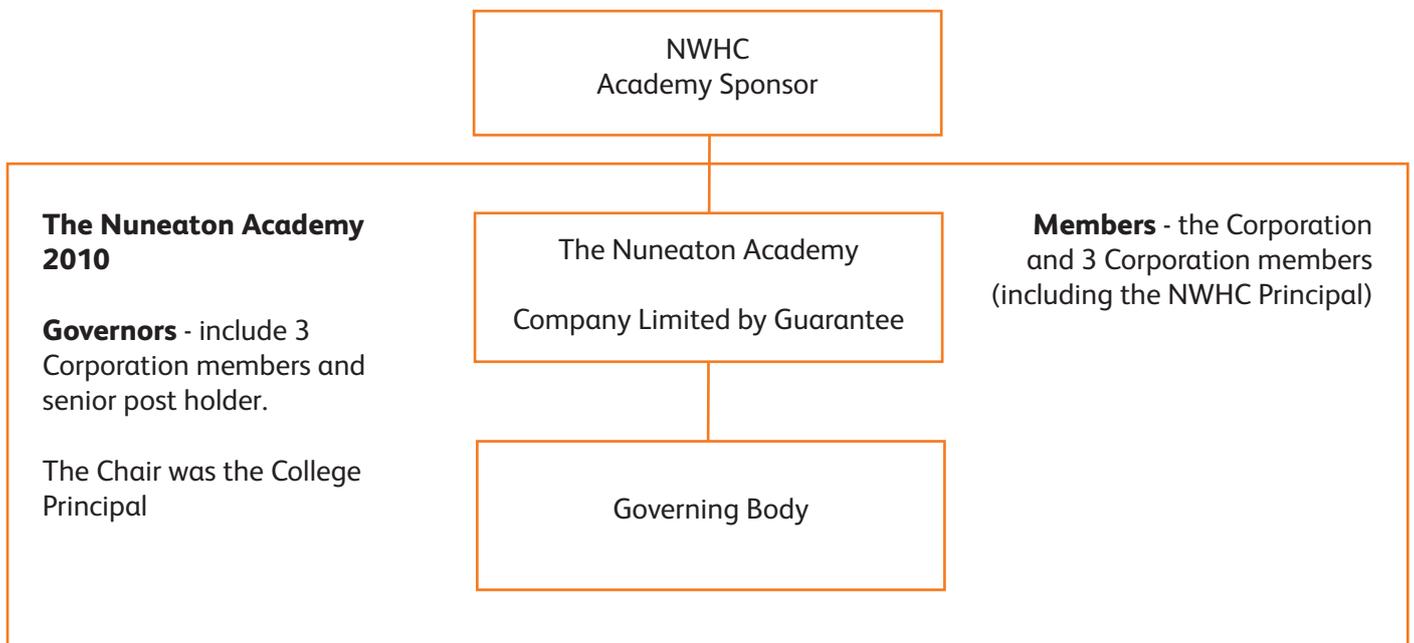


Figure 3 - The Nuneaton Academy Model of Governance 2010-2011

significantly reducing the administrative burden of operating each academy separately and facilitating progression towards achieving benefits such as:

- a governance model distinguishing clearly between strategic direction and oversight and operational accountability;
 - the development of a shared services model, expert advice and support functions;
 - consistent and continuing expert support for Principals and their senior leadership teams;
 - the development of capacity through joint practice development and the identification and exchange of best practice throughout the group, on a governance, managerial and operational level;
 - the many and varied partnerships brokered by the College.
- The development of project management capacity to enable the College to use its own experience in setting up the multi-academy trust and the new academy and for it to be directly reimbursed by the DfE for this resource.

Studio School

The Corporation subsequently approved an application to the DfE, as proposed by the Executive, to open a studio school. The key drivers for this were the recognition of the need to improve the employability of local young people and to engage employers in new and revitalised ways. The specialism of the studio school was designed to respond to

the local and regional skills priorities identified through the College's work with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Strategic Partnerships, as well as its analysis of labour market intelligence.

Convertor Academy

The College was then approached by a local school wishing to convert to an academy, but which had been informed by the DfE that it would require a strong educational partner to do so. Following discussions between the Corporation and the school governing body, it was agreed that the College would be involved in the conversion as educational partner on the condition that the school joined and became subject to, the multi-academy trust; this condition was agreed and work overseen by the College academy project manager commenced.

Development timeline

February 2008

Corporation agreement to explore the opportunities for founding academies in Nuneaton with the College either as lead or partner-sponsor.

October 2008

Proposal to the Corporation from the local authority to support a National Challenge Trust school and sponsor an academy. Proposal approved.

December 2008

Establishment of a Corporation Task and Finish Group overseeing governance issues arising from establishment of a Trust school.

September 2009

Opening of The George Eliot School as a National Challenge Trust school, with the College as educational partner.

November 2009

Establishment of a Task and Finish Group overseeing governance issues.

September 2010

Opening of The Nuneaton Academy sponsored by the College.

December 2010

DfE approach to the College to invite The George Eliot School Governing Body to apply for academy status with the College as sponsor.

February 2011

Agreement by Governing Body to convert the School to an academy. Approval by the Corporation to sponsor the Academy.

March 2011

Corporation Spring Conference with an emphasis on academy model development.

Establishment of a Task and Finish Group overseeing governance issues.

May 2011

Corporation approval of an application to the DfE to establish a studio college.

Establishment of a Task and Finish Group to oversee governance issues.

Employment of a Project Manager to manage conversion and oversee future academy and studio school projects.

July 2011

Request from Hartshill School for support in academy conversion - approval from the Corporation.

Establishment of a task and finish Group to oversee governance issues.

September 2011

Establishment of The Midland Academies Trust.

Opening of The George Eliot School Academy sponsored by the College.

Proposed date - April 2012

Opening of Hartshill School Academy with the College as educational partner.

Proposed date - September 2012

Opening of The Midland Studio College sponsored by the College.

Questions arising from the process and conclusions or decisions reached so far

Shortly after embarking on its involvement in post 11 provision, the Corporation questioned the ability of the College to manage future developments from existing resources and what the criteria should be for approving further involvement in similar developments. As a response to these questions the Corporation, supported by the Executive determined that any further extension or development to its partnership working should be governed by a number of strategic parameters, namely:

- the maintenance of the local College identity;
- that projects must not impact negatively on key College objectives unless those impacts could be managed with available resources; and
- that the lead for any partnership working project should come from the Corporation and College management.

Throughout the development of the academy model, these parameters have been applied to determine whether partnership opportunities should be pursued or not and as

a consequence not all opportunities offered have been taken up.

With the passage of time and the stage of development of its 'wider group', the Corporation, recognised a need to undertake a review as to the fitness of its governance model and the ability of the Corporation to govern effectively and economically across the group.

This review was undertaken in the autumn of 2011, through a number of self evaluatory and review activities out of which the following questions arose:

- How could the Corporation make an impact across the wider group and should continue to be the 'parent' of the wider group or become part of it?
- How should governance be modelled and discharged?
- what was the purpose/aim of governance within the wider group?
- How could its impact be measured and evaluated?
- How could College values permeate the wider group?

At the same time, the Corporation undertook a further risk analysis in relation to its model of governance and identified:

- the difficulties in managing risks to the College's reputation arising out of the increasing size of group;
- the potential for failing to achieve the benefits of academy sponsorship, identified by the Corporation as a precursor to becoming a sponsor;
- capacity issues potentially affecting the ability of members to perform

effectively in a number of roles and functions across the Corporation and multi-academy trust;

- challenges in transferring and embedding College values throughout the multi-academy trust.

Conclusions consequently reached were that:

- The existing governance model, whilst effective in the establishment of the multi-academy trust, did not respond appropriately to opportunities provided by the wider group structure;
- Although there had been many opportunities to consult with stakeholders throughout the implementation processes (in line with DfE requirements) and this consultation had been undertaken successfully, there were concerns as to the Corporation's legitimacy and its accountability to the community in the further development of the academy model.

Next steps

As a result of this analysis the following actions were agreed:

- The development of an academy vision and strategy to ensure that the increasing number of academies could be accommodated and that the desired balance of accountabilities throughout the Trust and by the Corporation could be maintained. The resulting vision and strategy clearly recognised the role of the College as sponsor in terms of the vision and values described and incorporated within the broad strategic objectives, the benefits to the College and mitigating responses to College risks, as identified by the Corporation.

- The commissioning of a full governance review by an external consultant to ensure that a governance model could be implemented supporting the Corporation's compelling vision of:

- legitimate and visionary leadership;
- clarity of governance and operational relationships;
- effective oversight;
- support structures for sustainability, responsive to current and future expansion into the community;
- the greatest possible economy.

The review process would consist of two stages:

- stage 1 to result in a report setting out recommendations for future governance arrangements as regards the Corporation, multi-academy trust and sponsored academies and studio schools;
- stage 2 to consist of the implementation of the direction of travel established in Stage 1.
- The immediate establishment of a risk management framework by which corporation committees and task and finish groups would actively manage and undertake mitigating actions for identified risks.
- Consideration during the summer term 2012 of the opportunities available to amend the Instrument and Articles of Government to deliver more effective and economic governance.

Impact experienced to date

The following impacts from the emerging academy model have been identified:

- i improvement in academy success rates:
 - The George Eliot School has demonstrated an increase of 43 % to 93 % in 5 GCSE A*-C in two years of sponsorship by the College, with a 17 % increase (from 23 % to 40 %) in 5 GCSE A* - C including Maths and English.
 - The Nuneaton Academy has demonstrated an increase of 34 % to 77 % in 5 GCSE A*-C in first year of sponsorship by the College with an 11 % increase (from 30 % to 41 %) in GCSE A - C including Maths and English.
- ii the work undertaken in setting up the studio school has resulted in a new energy and dynamism in the College's engagement with local employers;
- iii College partnership work which included the academy model development has recently been recognised by Ofsted as outstanding;
- iv the Corporation's knowledge and understanding of post 11 educational provision has increased vastly.

Lessons learnt

- The role of the Corporation supported by the Executive, to provide strong leadership and strategic direction, was essential. The importance of the role of governance was recognised with the active recruitment of new members with skills and experience specifically identified to ensure that the Corporation

was able to respond appropriately to new challenges. The Corporation and Executive also demonstrated a strong belief in the College values and the need to embed them into the academy model, particularly in relation to successful learner outcomes.

- To undertake the role required of it in such a fast-changing and dynamic process over a considerable period of time, the Corporation's model of governance had to be responsive, flexible and proactive. The use of time bound task and finish groups with specific terms of reference, composed of members with specialist knowledge and skills to scrutinise and monitor projects and identify and manage the governance issues arising from them, were viewed as essential to align purpose and delivery and facilitate the ultimate smooth running and success of those projects.

- The role of the Clerk was pivotal from the from the beginning of the academy development process in terms of:
 - supporting the Corporation and Executive to understand, identify and proactively respond to and solve governance issues arising out of the development and set up of academies and the multi-academy trust;
 - working with the Corporation, the multi-academy trust board of directors, local governing bodies and academy principals to build, shape and deliver consistent, coherent and effective governance for the multi-academy trust and to maintain linkages between it and the Corporation as sponsor.

For further information please contact:

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