Governance in D&NDLT

Code of Conduct for Academy Councillors 2025/26

Thank you for joining the Academy Council. This code sets out the conduct and commitment expected by the Board of Directors from academy councillors across all schools in the Durham & Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust. The code is based upon guidance published by the National Governance Association (NGA). Councillors are expected to be true to the vison and mission of their own school as well as upholding the objects, vision and mission of the D&NDLT. These expectations are detailed below.

Councillors are asked to read this Code of Conduct and then sign that they have read and agreed to the expectations within at the first meeting of the Academy Council for 2025/26.

The vision of the Trust is as follows:

At the heart of our vision is our commitment to ensure all of our schools are places where children and young people develop and thrive academically, socially, culturally and spiritually. The drive for excellence and effectiveness in our schools is paramount, but not merely because the Government says so. The enabling of every child to flourish in their potential as a child of God is a sign and expression of the Kingdom and is at the heart of the Church's distinctive mission.

The mission statement of the Trust is as follows:

The Trust's Mission is to support and encourage the work of academies in our Trust, promoting Christian distinctiveness through the high quality education of children and young people across the Trust whilst enabling and actively encouraging each school to retain and develop its own unique identity within the local community it serves.

The objects of the Trust are:

To advance for the public benefit education in the United Kingdom by establishing, maintaining, carrying on, managing and developing academies which shall offer a broad and balanced curriculum and which shall include:

- Church of England Schools designated as such which shall be conducted in accordance with the principles, practices and tenets of the Church of England both generally and in particular in relation to arranging for religious education and daily acts of worship, and having regard to any advice issued by the DBE
- other Academies whether with or without a designated religious character; but in relation to each of the Academies to recognise and support their individual ethos, whether or not designated Church of England.

As individuals on the academy council we agree to the following:

Role & Responsibilities

- We understand the purpose of the academy council and the role of the school's leaders.
- We accept that we have no legal authority to act individually, except when the academy council has given us delegated authority to do so, and therefore we will only speak on behalf of the academy council when we have been specifically authorised to do so.
- We accept collective responsibility for all decisions made by the academy council or its delegated agents. This means that we will not speak against majority decisions outside the academy council meeting.

- We have a duty to act fairly and without prejudice, and in so far as we have responsibility for staff, we will fulfil all that is expected of a good employer.
- We will encourage open governance and will act appropriately.
- We will consider carefully how our decisions may affect the community and other schools.
- We will always be mindful of our responsibility to maintain and develop the ethos and reputation of our school and the wider group of schools in D&NDLT. Our actions within the school and the local community will reflect this.
- In making or responding to criticism or complaints we will follow the procedures established by the Trust/academy council.
- We will actively support and challenge the school's leaders.
- We will accept and respect the difference in roles between the academy council and staff, ensuring that we work collectively for the benefit of the organisation.
- We will respect the role of the school's leaders and their responsibility for the day to day management of the organisation and avoid any actions that might undermine such arrangements.
- We agree to adhere to the school's rules and polices and the procedures of the academy council as set out by the relevant governing documents and law.
- When formally speaking or writing in our governing role we will ensure our comments reflect current organisational policy even if they might be different to our personal views.
- When communicating in our private capacity (including on social media) we will be mindful of and strive to uphold the reputation of the organisation.
- We will fulfil our role and responsibilities as set out in our scheme of delegation.
- We will not discriminate against anyone and will work to advance equality of opportunity for all.

Commitment

- We acknowledge that accepting office as an academy councillor involves the commitment of significant amounts of time and energy.
- We will each involve ourselves actively in the work of the academy council, and accept our fair share of responsibilities, including service on committees or working groups.
- We will make full efforts to attend all meetings and where we cannot attend explain in advance why we are unable to.
- We will get to know the school well and respond to opportunities to involve ourselves in school activities.
- We will visit the school, with all visits arranged in advance with the head teacher and undertaken within the framework established by the academy council.
- When visiting the school in a personal capacity (i.e. as a parent or carer), we will maintain our underlying responsibility as an academy councillor.
- We will consider seriously our individual and collective needs for induction, training and development, and will undertake relevant training.

- We accept that in the interests of open governance, our full names, date of appointment, terms of office, roles on the academy council, attendance records, relevant business and pecuniary interests, category of councillor and the body responsible for appointing us will be published on the school's website.
- In the interests of transparency, we accept that information relating to academy councillors will be collected and logged on the DfE's national database of governors (GIAS).
- We will work to create an inclusive environment where each board member's contributions are valued equally.

Relationships

- We will strive to work as a team in which constructive working relationships are actively promoted.
- We will express views openly, courteously and respectfully in all our communications with other academy councillors, the clerk to the academy council and school staff both in and outside of meetings.
- We will support the chair in their role of ensuring appropriate conduct both at meetings and at all times.
- We are prepared to answer queries from other councillors in relation to delegated functions and take into account any concerns expressed, and we will acknowledge the time, effort and skills that have been committed to the delegated function by those involved.
- We will seek to develop effective working relationships with the executive leaders, staff and parents, the trust, the local authority and other relevant agencies and the community.

Confidentiality

- We will observe complete confidentiality when matters are deemed confidential or where they concern specific members of staff or pupils, both inside or outside school.
- We will exercise the greatest prudence at all times when discussions regarding school/trust business arise outside an academy council meeting.
- We will not reveal the details of any academy council vote.
- We will ensure all confidential papers are held and disposed of appropriately.

Conflicts of interest

- We will record any pecuniary or other business interest (including those related to people we are connected with) that we have in connection with the academy council 's business in the Register of Business Interests, and if any such conflicted matter arises in a meeting we will offer to leave the meeting for the appropriate length of time.
- We accept that the Register of Business Interests will be published on the school's website.
- We will also declare any conflict of loyalty at the start of any meeting should the situation arise.
- We will act in the best interests of the school as a whole and not as a representative of any group, even if elected to the academy council.

Ceasing to be an Academy Councillor

- We understand that the requirements relating to confidentiality will continue to apply after an academy councillor leaves office

Breach of this code of conduct

- If we believe this code has been breached, we will raise this issue with the chair and the chair will investigate; the academy council will only use suspension/removal as a last resort after seeking to resolve any difficulties or disputes in more constructive ways.
- Should it be the chair that we believe has breached this code, another academy council member, such as the vice chair, will investigate.

As a person holding public office, I will also abide by the principles of the Nolan Committee:

The seven principles of public life

(Originally published by the Nolan Committee: The Committee on Standards in Public Life was established by the then Prime Minister in October 1994, under the Chairmanship of Lord Nolan, to consider standards of conduct in various areas of public life, and to make recommendations).

Selflessness - Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity - Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity - Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability - Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness - Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty – Holders of public office should be truthful

Leadership – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

I agree to abide by the principles and details of this Code of Conduct and confirm that I will uphold the vision and aims of both my academy and the Durham & Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust. I will affirm to this effect at the first meeting of the Academy Council in 2025/26.