



SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES SERVICES LIMITED

Internal Scrutiny Annual Report

Growth Multi-Academy Trust

Prepared by Nigel Smith for the Year Ended 31st August 2024

Introduction

Internal Control visits were undertaken at Stanton Bridge Primary School ('the Academy') in accordance with the Service Level Agreement between drb Schools & Academies Services Ltd and Stanton Bridge Primary School.

The reviews have been undertaken to provide an independent assurance report to the Academy's Trustee Board and Finance/Audit Committee on the adequacy and effectiveness of the financial controls operating within the Academy in accordance with the requirements contained in the Academy Trust Handbook (formerly Academies Financial Handbook).

Where issues or omissions in the system of internal control were identified, we included recommendations for improvements in our reports.

The reports provide the Board, Governors, Audit Committee and Finance Committee with limited assurance that the following issues have been complied with:

- The financial responsibilities of the Governing Body/Directors are being properly discharged.
- Resources are managed in an efficient, economical, and effective manner.
- Sound systems of Internal Control are being maintained.
- Financial considerations are fully considered in reaching decisions.

We emphasize that it is the Trust Board / Academy's responsibility to ensure recommendations are acted upon in a timely manner and any changes should be monitored to ensure they are effective in improving the Academy's financial resources.

Any recommendations raised in the reports are followed up on the next visit, usually scheduled for the next term. Any items identified which pose a significant risk should be implemented as a matter of priority.

Schedule of Visits: 2023/24

Name of Academy / MAT	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Stanton Bridge Primary School	20/12/23	21/03/24	04/07/24

Financial Management

The Internal Control testing covers the following areas:

Purchases

Five payments made within the period are selected to ensure:

- The payment is correctly authorised.
- The payment is correctly authorised in the accounting system.
- The invoice is correctly authorised.
- The invoice agrees to the order.
- That goods or services have been certified as received.
- The order is correctly authorised.
- That the order has been placed with an appropriate supplier.

Contracts

Details of any contracts with a value over a prescribed limit are obtained and the documentation reviewed to ensure that the correct quotation/tender procedures have been followed.

Capital Expenditure

Progress against any significant capital contracts is reviewed to ensure payments are appropriate and progress of the project is satisfactory.

Funding Reconciliation

Review the receipts from the ESFA and LA checking the amounts agree with the source documentation before tracing onto the Finance system.

Income

Select receipts and ensure money is banked promptly and in full, ensuring monies are recorded correctly in the accounting system. For those academies with cashless arrangements, settlement statements are checked with supporting information.

Payroll

- Five employees from the payroll are selected and the salary details will be checked back to personnel records to confirm that the amount paid is correct
- Five amendments to the payroll are checked to ensure that appropriately authorised source documentation exists
- The final payroll print for one month is reviewed to ensure that it has been appropriately authorised.

Accounting Systems

- Bank reconciliations are reviewed to ensure that they have been correctly prepared and authorised.
- Control account reconciliations are reviewed to ensure that they have been correctly prepared and authorised.
- The procedures used to prepare financial reports issued to Governors and Officers, and ESFA are reviewed through sample checks to be satisfied that they are completed accurately and promptly.
- The Internal Control Officer checks the function of reports and budget monitoring reports.

Reports and Returns

Review the latest reports submitted to the ESFA and Governors and agree to source documentation.

Governance

A reminder of the key governance issues with notes on how the academy or MAT/MAC is showing compliance on these matters.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The following is a summary of the key findings and recommendations arising in the academic year 2023-24.

Autumn-23 Term

Finding	Recommendation	Implications	Management Response
No recommendations.			

Spring-24 Term

Finding	Recommendation	Implications	Management Response
No recommendations.			

Summer-24 Term

Finding	Recommendation	Implications	Management Response
No recommendations.			

Executive Summary

There is a very efficient Finance operation in place at Stanton Bridge.

All information required for the Internal Control visits was readily available and communication was good with the Headteacher on any discussion points.

Segregation of duties is evidenced when an independent check is carried out by the Operations Manager to ensure payments are made to the correct sort code and accounts as instructed by suppliers.

A new BACS run report is now in use notifying of any bank detail changes

A general observation had been made regarding the high level of agency invoices for supply teachers.

All known commitments are entered onto the system and some contracts may be offered after successful placements.

The Support Consultant now has the necessary permissions to reduce the card limits or freeze cards over the holiday periods. One card would remain 'live' to accommodate any urgent expenditure.

The Operations Manager has reviewed the schedule of contracts to reflect the 'live' agreements on a new simplified working document. As a reassurance all historical information was available in an archive.

Stanton Bridge are still using SIMS as the school MIS system through Education Software Solutions.

The agreement expires on 31/03/25 and a three months' notice period is required.

Costings were awaited for the SIMS Next Generation MIS which would offer Finance as well.

For cyber cover the academy has registered with the police and the flow of emails is monitored by the IT Technicians. Cyber-security training has been conducted for staff.

The energy supply has been discussed and the school decided to remain with the Local Authority using the ESPO framework based on government recommendation. Obviously with more members using this framework there is a degree of protection against expected severe price increases. Stanton Bridge are currently with Total Energies for Gas and Power.

The gas contract runs until 31/03/27 while the electricity contract runs until 31/10/24.

It was noted that the electricity supplier would be N Power from 01/11/24 which was negotiated by CCC.

In terms of marketing, it was advised that a leaflet advertising nursery provision had been circulated to 12,000 homes.

The Pupil Premium Strategy Statement for 2023/24 appears on the school website.

The income and expenditure relating to Sports Premium is monitored by the Support Consultant.

A SEND review had taken place, and the visit had also included oversight of how the school managed specific children and their plans. The availability of 1-1 sessions for support outside the classroom was noted and staff were commended for their hard work and commitment.

Academies generally were struggling with expenditure because of increased SEND spending obligations which were underfunded.

An increase in SEND children meant that the usual staffing framework had not been in place and there had been a need to employ an extra support staff member to meet the needs of the SEND children. Applications had been progressed for EHCP's.

This situation was not just related to nursery resources but across the whole school.

EHCP delays in approval were due to the pressure on Local Authority resource in general.

The Head teacher had expressed concern that the increase in pupils with SEND but without an EHCP had a potential Health and Safety impact.

SEND is a priority area for the school and discussions with the Reception and Nursery staff had noted an impact on learning in the classroom.

Key areas had been identified regarding updating the number of SEND / EHCP plans.

Data Plan advise of the deadlines to accept amendments to payroll. All amendments to contracts are signed off by the Headteacher and the amendment forms are scanned onto the VERA secure portal.

It was advised that actual v budget payroll variances were not being reviewed until Dataplan made the necessary adjustments to employees who were classed as term time only. This exercise was close to conclusion.

Two members of the Board had attended website compliance training and noted some links on the website were not immediately obvious. The website was to be refreshed.

Policies

Evidence was seen in the minutes that all the key policies were circulated prior to the Trustee Meeting and were then subsequently approved.

Risk Management

The board of trustees has reviewed the key risks to which the academy trust is exposed together with the operating, financial and compliance controls that have been implemented to mitigate these risks. The board of trustees is of the view that there is a formal on-going process for identifying, evaluating, and managing the academy trust's significant risks. This process is regularly reviewed by the board of trustees.

The Emergency Plan has been reviewed and accepted with a business continuity process in place.

The trustees recognised the risk to future funding with a decrease in pupil numbers and the increase in costs had been considered.

Safeguarding

An agreement with CPOMS for data sharing connected with safeguarding pupils had now been established. This was initially a one-year agreement but is now a rolling arrangement.

The Safeguarding Policy had been approved via circulation and responses.

It was reported that KCSIE operate a Single Central Record facility which would be considered at Stanton Bridge.

Health & Safety

As a responsible employer the Governing Body of Stanton Bridge Primary School honour their legal obligations, in particular the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated regulations and codes of practice.

The Governing Body recognises and accepts its responsibilities and duties as the employer to conduct its operations in a manner which protects the health and safety and welfare of employees, students and visitors so far as is reasonably practicable.

In compliance with the management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, risk assessments are undertaken, and arrangements are made, where significant risks are identified, for any necessary preventative and protective measures to be put in place as far as is reasonably practicable using a sensible risk management approach.

It is understood that all of Stanton Bridge Primary School employees have a duty of responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves and others and to co-operate to ensure statutory duties and obligations are fulfilled.

Estates Management

Library

The new library was now in place and the Chair advised he was very pleased with the facility.

Pupils were noted as being very receptive to learning and the new environment, which was part of the new strategic approach.

Energy Efficiency

Ongoing LED replacement lighting was taking place.

RAAC Survey

It was confirmed that a RAAC survey had taken place at Stanton Bridge also including the Caretaker's house and there were no issues.

Emerging issues for the Academic Year 2024-25

- National Insurance Employer Contributions increase.
- Growth of the MAT and the unknown political landscape for the academies sector.
- Increase in children's additional needs and ensuring Stanton Bridge has the right skills and right support for those pupils. This had led to a growing resource provision across the school.



Signed

Date 18/12/24

Nigel Smith on behalf of drb Schools and Academies Services Ltd