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**THE FIRS LOWER SCHOOL**

**(A Company Limited by Guarantee)**

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**GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

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**Scope of responsibility**

As Governors, we acknowledge we have overall responsibility for ensuring that The Firs Lower School has an effective and appropriate system of control, financial and otherwise. However such a system is designed to manage rather than eliminate the risk of failure to achieve business objectives, and can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss.

As Governing Body, we have reviewed and taken account of the guidance in DfE's Governance Handbook and competency framework for governance.

The Governing Body has delegated the day-to-day responsibility to the Headteacher, as Accounting Officer, for ensuring financial controls conform with the requirements of both propriety and good financial management and in accordance with the requirements and responsibilities assigned to it in the funding agreement between The Firs Lower School and the Secretary of State for Education. They are also responsible for reporting to the Governing Body any material weaknesses or breakdowns in internal control.

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**GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)**

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**Governance**

The information on governance included here supplements that described in the Trustees' report and in the Statement of Trustees' responsibilities. The Governing Body has formally met 6 times during the year.

Attendance during the year at meetings of the board of Governing Body was as follows:

Trustee	Meetings attended	Out of a possible
Mr Thomas Stean	5	6
Mr Adam Campbell, HeadTeacher and Accounting Officer	6	6
Mr John Ashley, Chair of Trustees	6	6
Mrs Louise Haigh	4	6
Mrs Annette Anderson	5	6
Mr Franco Cameli	3	6
Mrs Kerry Mercer, Deputy Headteacher	6	6
Mr Stuart Hobbs, (appointed 18 November 2021)	6	6

**Conflicts of interest**

The Firs Lower School Academy trusts has a number of processes in place to manage conflicts of interest. These include maintaining an up-to-date and complete register of interests, a six monthly declaration is completed and kept on file, and governors are also asked to verbally declare any conflicts of interest at the start of every committee meeting which are recorded in meeting minutes.

**Governance reviews:**

The committee reviews the "must haves" on an annual basis and reviews the risk register at least three times a year.

The Governors undertook a Governing Body Health Check using a check list as a process of self-valuation

The Environment and Finance Committee is a sub-committee of the main Governing Board. Its purpose is to:

- Assist the decision making of the Governing Body, by enabling more detailed consideration to be given to the best means of fulfilling the Governing Body's responsibility to ensure sound management of the Academy's finances and resources, including proper planning, monitoring and probity.
- Make appropriate comments and recommendations on such matters to the Governing Body on a regular basis.

Attendance at the HR and Curriculum meetings in the year was as follows:

Trustee	Meetings attended	Out of a possible
Mrs Kerry Mercer, Deputy Headteacher	2	2
Mrs Annette Anderson	2	2
Mr Adam Campbell, Headteacher and Accounting Officer	5	5
Mr Thomas Stean	3	3
Mrs Louise Haigh	2	3

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**GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)**

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**Governance (continued)**

The Environment and Finance Committee is a sub-committee of the main board of trustees. Its purpose is to: Review the financial position of the school through cash flow, income and expenditure reports. Assess current and possible future risks and discuss how to manage these. Discussions about strategies for improving the schools financial position as well as the planning of any future projects including how these will be funded also take place. Health and safety and property concerns are also discussed as well as E&F policies.

Attendance during the year at meetings was as follows:

Trustee	Meetings attended	Out of a possible
Mr John Ashley, Chair of Trustees	4	4
Mr Franco Cameli	5	6
Mr Stuart Hobbs, (appointed 18 November 2021)	5	6
Mr Adam Campbell, Headteacher and Accounting Officer	6	6
Mr Thomas Stean	1	1
Mrs Louise Haigh	1	1

Katherine Jukes also attended all 6 of the E&F meetings in her role as School Business Manager

**Review of value for money**

As accounting officer, the Headteacher has responsibility for ensuring that the Academy Trust delivers good value in the use of public resources. The accounting officer understands that value for money refers to the educational and wider societal outcomes achieved in return for the taxpayer resources received.

The accounting officer considers how the Academy Trust's use of its resources has provided good value for money during each academic year, and reports to the board of trustees where value for money can be improved, including the use of benchmarking data where appropriate. The accounting officer for the Academy Trust has delivered improved value for money during the year by:

- The Governing Body is accountable for the way in which the school's resources are allocated to meet the objectives set out in the school's development plan. Governors need to secure the best possible outcome for pupils, in the most efficient and effective way, at a reasonable cost. This will support the schools efforts to continuously improve standards achieved and services provided.
- Governors and school leaders have adhered to the purchasing procedures which are laid down in The Firs Lower School Finance Manual. Goods and services have been obtained which provide "value for money" in terms of the school purchasing what it needs in the correct quantity, the appropriate quality and at the time the best price possible.
- The Governors reviewed its preschool, Kids Club, Holiday Club and lettings Charges. The schools charges were bench marked against a number of local providers and it was decided to increase fees in line with inflation and energy cost increases.
- Multiple quotations gained and benchmarked for larger purchases in line with the requirements set out in our finance manual.
- The school has implemented parent pay across all its income collection arear which ensures prompt and complete cash collection.

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### GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

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#### The purpose of the system of internal control

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives. It can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of Academy Trust policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. The system of internal control has been in place in The Firs Lower School Academy Trust for the period 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and financial statements.

#### Capacity to handle risk

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 those 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 that has been in place for the period 1 September 2021 to 31 August 2022 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and financial statements. This process is regularly reviewed by the board of trustees.

#### The risk and control framework

The Academy Trust's system of internal financial control is based on a framework of regular management information and administrative procedures including the segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability. In particular, it includes:

- comprehensive budgeting and monitoring systems with an annual budget and periodic financial reports which are reviewed and agreed by the Governing Body;
- regular reviews by the Finance and General Purposes Committee of reports which indicate financial performance against the forecasts and of major purchase plans, capital works and expenditure programmes;
- setting targets to measure financial and other performance;
- clearly defined purchasing (asset purchase or capital investment) guidelines; and
- identification and management of risks.

The Board of Trustees has decided not to appoint an internal auditor. However, the Governing Body have appointed Mr Gareth Jones a member and previous Chair of Governors, a Trustee, to carry out a programme of internal checks.

This option has been chosen because Gareth Jones is qualified accountant regulated by the FCA who acts as an independent, trusted 'critical friend'. Gareth Jones also has a good knowledge of The Firs Lower School gained through his former role as chair of governors. Gareth Jones was also happy to provide this service on a voluntary basis.

The internal auditor's role includes giving advice on financial matters and performing a range of checks on the Academy Trust's financial systems. In particular, the checks carried out in the current period included:

- Cash and Bank
- Procurement
- Monthly financial Closedown
- Payroll and HR
- Efficiency, funding and budgets
- Fraud, theft and bribery
- Safeguarding and Whistleblowing
- Management information and reports
- Data and IT issues

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**GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)**

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**The risk and control framework (continued)**

- Premises Issues
- Business Continuity Plans/Disaster Recovery

On an annual basis, the internal auditor documents a report to the E & F board of trustees, on the operation of the systems of control and on the discharge of the board of trustees' financial responsibilities. On an annual basis the internal auditor prepares a summary report to the committee outlining the areas reviewed, key findings, recommendations and conclusions to help the committee consider actions and assess year on year progress.

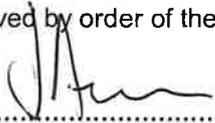
**Review of effectiveness**

As Accounting Officer, the HeadTeacher has responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control. During the year in question the review has been informed by:

- the work of the internal auditor;
- the financial management and governance self-assessment process or the school resource management self-assessment tool;
- the work of the Senior Leadership Team within the Academy who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework;
- the work of the external auditors;
- correspondence from ESFA e.g. FNI/Ntl and 'minded to' letters.

The Accounting Officer has been advised of the implications of the result of their review of the system of internal control by the committee and a plan to address recommendations and ensure continuous improvement of the system is in place.

Approved by order of the members of the Board of Trustees and signed on their behalf by:



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**Mr John Ashley**  
Chair of Trustees

Date: 15/12/22



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**Mr Adam Campbell**  
Accounting Officer