Becoming an Oasis Academy Councillor

Information Booklet
Welcome from Oasis Founder, Steve Chalke

I began Oasis in 1985 with a vision to build inclusive communities, where everyone has hope, feels that they matter and is given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Oasis’ first project, No. 3, which I set up with my wife, Cornelia, is a hostel for young homeless people in Peckham, South London. However, it was always my aim that one day Oasis would not only run housing projects but also other services including youth programmes, schools and hospitals.

Oasis’ mission is to ensure that people and whole communities are offered the breadth of support, depth of education and spectrum of opportunity that they deserve, in order to reach their God-given potential. We know that individuals can only truly thrive when their community flourishes around them, so we work in ‘community hubs’ to provide a range of integrated and high quality services that support people holistically: educationally, physically, socially, spiritually, emotionally, economically and environmentally. Oasis has now developed into a movement of many thousands of people, working in ten countries around the world, who are all committed to this goal.

As part of this, our first three Oasis Academies opened in 2007 in the UK; this was the beginnings of a national network which has now developed into a substantial family of primary, secondary and all-through schools. Though each Oasis Academy aims to serve the needs of its local community in its own unique way, they all share our Ethos and holistic approach to education. Our Academies seek to provide a welcoming environment for students of all faiths and none, as well as for their parents and carers.

Education is never just about what happens during the formal school day. We seek to provide a rich and balanced environment for all our students which develops informed and active learners who can explore questions, seek answers and solve problems. Our hope is that Oasis students will become people who care passionately about their lives, their learning, their neighbours, their communities and their planet.

Academy Councillors play a vital role in the life of each Academy and its wider community, as you will discover as you read on. Thank you for considering this opportunity to play a key role in supporting the children, young people and families that, together, we serve. I look forward to working with you.

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An introduction to Oasis Academy Councils, Head of Governance Services, Norma Downer-Powell

Firstly, thank you for your interest in volunteering with Oasis as an Academy Councillor.

Oasis Community Learning is one of the largest Multi-Academy Trusts in England, with over 47 Academies opened since 2007. To help you work out whether this role is for you, this booklet explains our model of governance and gives you some key facts about what is involved in the role of an Academy Councillor.

Academy Councils create an opportunity for local people who are passionate about excellent education, in the context of community transformation, to come together to support their Academy.

We are looking for Academy Councillors with the right skills and experience to be effective locally. Oasis governance works at both a national and local level, as explained later, but essentially we rely on Academy Councillors to be local champions.

One of the other key areas for Academy Councillors is to robustly assess the impact of the Academy on student performance; working collaboratively to ensure standards are raised for all our students, regardless of their starting point.

Please do contact me if you have any further questions, I would be happy to talk with you!

Norma.Downer-Powell@oasisuk.org
Who is Oasis?

Oasis was established in 1985 and has now grown into a group of charities working to deliver housing, training, youth work, health care, family support and primary, secondary and higher education. We also work in nine other countries across Europe, Asia, Africa and North America.

Oasis in the UK started life delivering a handful of youth projects. Since then it has gained high levels of expertise in mentoring young people and working with them through different stages of transition;

• developed housing projects for homeless young people and, more recently, merged with housing organisation Aquila Way, to form Oasis Aquila Housing in order to focus on the delivery of social and affordable housing;
• established Oasis College for Higher Education which specialises in both undergraduate and post-graduate studies in children's work, youth work and family practice and now offers courses to over 400 students a year;
• started STOP THE TRAFFIK – a global campaign against human trafficking working in almost 100 countries;
• through the development of Oasis Community Learning, entered primary, secondary and all-through education.

Oasis’ Vision and Mission

Oasis’ vision is for community – a place where everyone is included, making a contribution and reaching their potential. Oasis’ Mission is to work in an inclusive, integrated, empowering and comprehensive way so that all people experience wholeness and fullness of life. Our way of doing this is by building community Hubs, of which Academies are a key part.

Oasis Community Learning

Oasis Community Learning (OCL) is one of the subsidiary organisations of Oasis Charitable Trust. It is the subsidiary in which all the Academies sit, and is a Multi-Academy Trust. As of January 2017, OCL is a family of over 47 Academies which are based across four regions and cater for over 24,000 students.

A full list of Academies can be found on the Oasis Community Learning website http://www.oasiscommunitylearning.org/

OCL’s Vision is for ‘Exceptional Education at the Heart of the Community.’

Oasis Hubs are local “Christ-centred” places of activity that provide integrated, high quality and diverse services to benefit the whole person and the whole community. This is achieved by bringing together the Oasis Ethos and values, as well as local, regional, national and international resources and expertise, and working together in and with local partnerships, to meet the needs and build on existing strengths and assets in the local community.
Oasis Governance

The Oasis Governance Model is different to the way a governing body in a non-Academy/traditional school undertakes governance. Essentially, there are two elements to the governance of Oasis Academies – local governance, delivered via the Academy Council (AC), and national governance, delivered via the CEO, the Regional Directors and the Heads of Service.

The principle of the Oasis Governance Model is that local and national governance work together, each providing a different element of governance. Working together, both parties provide a very strong governance model.

The OCL Board of Trustees oversees both national and local governance and is the equivalent of the traditional school’s governing body and, as such, has ultimate responsibility for all Oasis Academies. Please note that Academy Councillors are therefore not trustees.

Oasis believes that the role of the AC is a vital one because it is essential that people in a local community have the opportunity to discuss and reflect on the purpose of education in society and how it can transform communities. It is therefore really important that the AC understands, has time to think about and ask questions about the Academy’s curriculum, teaching and learning.

The focus of local governance, delivered through the Academy, is the context of the Academy; the role of the AC is to understand the Academy in its local context and to ensure that the Academy is being Oasis in it.

The 4 key roles of an Academy Council

1. To serve as "champions" of the Oasis Philosophy of Education and the Oasis Ethos and values in the Academy.
2. To act as “a critical friend” to the Principal and the Academy at local level.
3. To act as “a sounding board” for the Principal and their leadership team, and represent the views of different parts of the Academy community to influence decision making.
4. To continually assess and review the overall impact of the Academy amongst the people it exists to serve, make suggestions for improvement and ensure that the Oasis Ethos remains at the heart of it.

Expectations of Academy Councillors

Oasis understands that the role of an Academy Councillor is voluntary and we appreciate everyone’s contributions to this important function. However, in order for the Academy Council to function efficiently and effectively, there are certain expectations of AC members in order to achieve this. One of the key expectations is regular attendance at AC meetings. Academy Councillors are also expected to undertake tasks that support the work of the Academies.

Meetings of the AC take place roughly once every half term. The meeting is prepared by the Principal and the Chair of the AC and the process is supported by the AC secretary. Academy Councillors receive an agenda and documents in advance of the meeting.

Meetings are usually held in the evenings or at other times as agreed locally by all AC members.
What other things does the Academy Council do?

- It acts as a key link between the Academy, parents and local community
- It supports the work of the Academy in the community
- It supports the Principal and Academy Leadership Team in the development and implementation of the Academy Development Plan and other relevant plans, ensuring that the Oasis Ethos and OCL Philosophy of Education is at the heart of the Academy Community
- It offers challenging but positive and proactive support to the Principal and Academy Leadership Team
- It regularly reviews the Academy’s performance in relation to its Key Performance Indicators
- Share professional expertise and personal contacts to develop the Academy and local hub by linking with curriculum and/or other areas of interest/work (e.g. Equality, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, SEND, Pupil Premium, Hub)
- Sitting on student discipline panels.
Case Study
Sue Wates, an Academy Councillor at Oasis Academy Johanna, shares her experiences of being part of the Academy Council at our primary Academy in Lambeth.

When I was first asked to be an Academy Councillor I declined as I am not a parent and felt that I did not know anything about education. However, I am now so glad that I was encouraged to give it a go and have learnt so much.

I work in the NHS and part of my role involves governance; ensuring that our service is safe, has high standards, has up-to-date policies and procedures, sets clear objectives, undertakes audits and responds to feedback, all of which I feel has been transferable knowledge and experience that I was then able to bring to the role of Academy Councillor.

My link-role on the Academy Council is Inclusion, Equality and Pupil Premium, with responsibility to raise the profile of inclusion within the Academy Council. I meet regularly with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator in the Academy to discuss what is needed to enhance learning for the children with special needs and, from there, make recommendations to the Academy Council, such as funding additional Speech and Language Therapist sessions.

I’ve had the opportunity to attend some great training for the role, which has helped me to understand how to ask the right questions and supportively challenge the Academy to achieve an outstanding education and experience for the children.

I’ve also enjoyed attending different events at the Academy; concerts, carnivals, as well as open afternoons for parents and carers. The leavers’ assembly is a highlight and great reward for the tiny part I have played, as each of the Year 6 pupils confidently and positively report back on their time at Oasis Academy Johanna.

Oasis Academy Johanna is a wonderful school and it’s great to hear about all the exciting things the children experience and how innovative teaching is now, compared with when I was at school.