

# Strong Foundation Discussions

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## Contents

1. Definitions.....	3
2. Application of Policy.....	3
3. Relationship with DEMAT Values.....	3
4. Associated Policies.....	4
5. Version Control.....	4
6. Purpose and Scope.....	5
8. Procedure.....	6-8

## 1. Definitions

- 1.1 **DEMAT** means the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust.
- 1.2 **Academy** means a constituent academy of DEMAT.
- 1.3 **Central Team** means Staff who are not employed within an Academy.
- 1.4 **Line Managers** refers to those with line management responsibilities including but not limited to Hub Directors, Head of Department and Headteachers.
- 1.5 **Senior Leader** means a Headteacher or a manager within the Central Leadership Team.
- 1.6 **Staff** means any person employed by DEMAT, temporarily or permanently.
- 1.7 **Employee** means any person employed by DEMAT, temporarily or permanently.
- 1.8 **Support staff** means non-teaching staff within an Academy.

## 2. Application of this Policy

The policy is applicable to all employees (permanent and temporary) .

The above definitions are included for reference purposes for both school and central team staff to enable clarity and transparency when applying this policy.

This policy does not apply to 'off payroll' or supply workers, new employees who are still in their probationary period or in the case of ECTs, in their induction period.

This does not form part of any Contract of Employment or other contract to provide services and we may amend them at any time following consultation with recognised Trade Unions.

## 3. Relationship with DEMAT Values

The application of this policy must be applied at all times in a way that reflects the values of DEMAT:

**Love** – We engender love and tolerance between and for our staff, pupils and others to foster an inspiring atmosphere of mutual support.

**Community** – We are committed to ensuring our schools are a living part of the community and contribute positively to its needs.

**Respect** – We do everything to provide a caring, safe and secure place for our staff and pupils to be happy and respected in our schools so they may achieve their potential.

**Trust** – We acknowledge accountability and responsibility for our actions and ensure that we encourage each other to make brave decisions and then learn from any mistakes.

**Ambition** – We are determined that our schools offer a place for the joy of learning, enabling those of all abilities to thrive and go on to lead rewarding lives

This is further defined in the four key strands of DEMAT, all of which are underpinned by our Christian distinctiveness,

Children are at the heart of all we do  
Keep close to the work  
Maintaining a legacy, creating new traditions  
Aspirational, yet sustainable

## 4. Associated Policies and Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following DEMAT Policies/Procedures:

- Performance Improvement Policy
- Pay Policy

## 5. Version Control

<i>No.</i>	<i>Status of document/changes</i>	<i>Prepared by</i>	<i>Reviewed by</i>	<i>Approved by</i>	<i>Date of approval</i>
1.	New Policy replacing our Performance Management Policy	HRO	CL	AB	23 Oct 25

This document will be reviewed annually.

For all questions in relation to this policy, please contact the HR Team on [hrteam@demat.org.uk](mailto:hrteam@demat.org.uk)

## 6. Purpose

- 6.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide a consistent approach to conducting Strong Foundation discussions across the Trust. These discussions are designed to support all our people to play a vital role in building the foundations to create successful futures.
- 6.2 The Trust is committed to sustaining a culture where all staff are supported, valued and empowered to reach their full potential. Strong foundation discussions form an integral part of this culture, providing regular opportunity for staff and Headteachers/Line Managers to engage in purposeful dialogue focused on wellbeing, performance and professional development.
- 6.2 Strong Foundation discussions are essential to support our people to 'keep getting better' through a continuous cycle of positive interaction that strengthens relationships. Embedding this into our working practices creates space for meaningful discussions to take place consistently ensuring that all our staff are 'known' for their contributions.
- 6.3 Strong Foundation discussions will be held on a regular basis with all staff. Academies will arrange timings to align with critical school operations.
- 6.4 Strong Foundation discussions form part of an overall approach to ensure that staff receive regular feedback and are engaged with the values and aspirations of the school and wider Trust. This includes all colleagues attending team meetings and briefings that provide updates consider whole team focus, agree professional learning and share best practice.
- 6.5 Strong Foundation discussions may also be supplemented by additional catch ups or conversations alongside ongoing recognition for individual and/or team successes.
- 6.6 Group meetings may, in some circumstances, substitute a one to one, on the basis that all employees will experience at least two opportunities per academic year to have a 'one to one' Strong Foundation discussion.
- 6.7 With professional learning being critical for all roles, staff are encouraged to take ownership of their own development and utilise regular catch ups to discuss and drive their own valuable professional learning.
- 6.8 We have a culture of regular and frequent lesson visits to help develop staff further. This includes talking to children, listening to classroom activities and reading books to help understand the quality of education to enable ongoing feedback.
- 6.8 Strong Foundation discussions will complement Instructional coaching techniques providing a further feedback loop for staff and Headteachers.
- 6.9 To further support staff, Strong Foundation Discussions may include an agreed specific focus. Where this is the case, it will be determined by the context and direction of the academies and/or the Trust, the relevant academy development plan and personal development needs to achieve exceptional pupil outcomes on an ongoing basis.

- 6.10 In line with our Pay Policy, pay is not linked to achieving focus areas or objectives set during Strong Foundations discussions. All our people automatically increment unless they are top of their pay scale or subject to a Performance Improvement Plan.

## 7. Scope

- 7.1 This policy applies to all members of staff. It outlines the expectations for the frequency, structure, recording and follow-up of Strong Foundation discussions.

## 8. Procedure

### 8.1 Frequency, Timings and Content for Strong Foundations Discussions

- 8.1.1 Strong Foundations discussions take place on an ongoing basis and will be arranged with all members of staff within the academy/department as agreed with the Headteacher or Line Manager. There is no set cycle for these discussions.
- 8.1.2 Normally, the discussion will be conducted between the staff member and their immediate Line Manager. In some circumstances, this responsibility may be delegated to another appropriate Manager/Lead.
- 8.1.3 Wherever possible, Strong Foundation discussions should be scheduled within the staff member's directed and not during PPA time. Headteachers/ Line Managers should make every effort to protect this time and avoid interruptions.
- 8.1.4 The Strong Foundation discussions are an opportunity to check in on the staff wellbeing and may include, but is not limited to, the following:
- Providing feedback so that people know what they are doing well and if they need to improve in a specific area which area and how best this can be achieved.
  - Engaging in reflective dialogue about progress, challenges and priorities.
  - Revisiting how the individual's role contributes to the academy's vision and strategic direction.
  - Identifying and addressing any barriers for progress.
  - Exploring career aspirations and professional development needs.
  - Recognising and celebrating successes and achievements.
  - Agreeing on future focus areas or objectives, including realistic timeframes for success.

### 8.2 Setting Focus Areas

- 8.2.1 Strong Foundations discussions may include setting areas of focus or objectives to achieve desired outcomes or reviewing the progress of any that are 'live'.
- 8.2.2 Focus areas may be short or medium term (for example, one term, two terms, or an academic year) and there should be no more than three active focus areas at any one time.

8.2.3 Agreed focus areas may link to the Academy Development Plan, departmental priorities or Trust-wide strategic objectives. Alternatively, it may be unique to an individual, reflecting a professional goal. Focus areas may include skill development, behavioural approaches or pedagogical practice.

8.2.4 When setting focus areas, objectives should follow the SMART framework:

Focus Area	Question to ask when constructing objectives
Specific	What specifically should be accomplished? Why the focus? What are the requirements? What are the constraints?
Measurable	How will it be measured? What will success look like?
Achievable	How will it be accomplished? What are the logical steps to take?
Relevant	It is worthwhile, relevant and timely? Are the necessary resources/support available? If not, how will they be obtained?
Time-Bound	How long will it take to achieve? How will time be allocated to achieve this? Are there likely to be any other pressures / deadlines that may conflict?

8.2.5 Where professional development is required the focus should be on the skills, knowledge, and behaviours that will enhance the individual's effectiveness, contribute to the wider success of the academy and support building the foundations for successful futures.

8.2.6 If focus areas are not achieved, the Line Manager and staff member should explore the reasons for this to inform future planning and ensure the necessary support is in place.

8.2.7 Where focus areas or objectives are consistently not met, this may be addressed under the Performance Improvement Policy, which may involve the implementation of an informal support plan.

### 8.3 Recording Strong Foundations Discussions

8.3.1 Line Managers should maintain a 'living record' of Strong Foundations discussions, summarising key points, agreed focus areas, and any associated actions with timeframes. Records may be kept as written notes, within a spreadsheet, or in another suitable format agreed by the academy