GRASMERE ACADEMY ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025-26

During the 2025/26 academic year, the Governing body of Grasmere Academy navigated significant operational, financial, and strategic milestones to secure the school's long-term sustainability, enhance governance and maintain educational standards as follows:

Governance, Leadership, and Statutory Compliance

- Governance appointments and restructuring: re-elected Lynn Goossens as Chair of Governors and elected David Baldwin as Vice Chair. Reappointed Adele Rigby (Co-opted), Matthew Maplesden (Co-opted) and appointed Susan Wade as a new Community Governor. Accepted the resignation of Matthew Maplesden in August 2026.
- Compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook: in line with DfE regulations regarding staff trustee limits, Hannah Girvan resigned as Staff Governor and was re-appointed as an Associate Member to retain her voting rights on committees.
- Delegated Admissions arrangements: delegated the formal determination of the admission arrangements for the 2027/28 academic year to the Admissions Committee.
- Statutory policies and governance protocols: reconfirmed the Standing Orders, the Scheme of Delegation of Financial Powers and the Governing Body Code of Conduct. Ratified essential policies throughout the year, including Whistleblowing, Teacher Cover, Safeguarding and Child Protection, Financial Management, Procurement and Tendering, Reserves and Investment, Whole School Pay, and Complaints.

Estates and Facilities Management

- Structural building repairs: approved key capital expenditure to progress major structural repair works funded via the DfE's Urgent Capital Support (UCS) fund, including overseeing contractor appointments, quantity surveyor oversight, and structural integration.
- Temporary early closure: approved an extraordinary 4-day early closure of the school site to pupils at the end of the summer term to allow a professional removal firm and staff to safely pack, relocate, and set up classrooms ahead of the new academic year.
- Site infrastructure and Health & Safety: approved critical capital works, including a comprehensive Wi-Fi infrastructure upgrade with IT Assist, fire safety remediation (including a unified fire alarm panel upgrade and VESDA systems), Legionella management contract renewals, and urgent site maintenance works including tree remediation, asbestos containment, and roller shutter repairs.

Strategic Direction, Vision, and Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) Transfer

- Development of the school's vision: the Headteacher produced a strategic business plan to build on the school's SEND expertise and small class strength.
- DfE and Local Authority engagement: held strategic meetings with representatives from the DfE and local authorities (North Tyneside and Newcastle) to present the long-term vision and explore collaborative special needs provision.

- Resumption of MAT transfer discussions: following pauses surrounding Smart MAT's proposed merger, governors resumed direct transfer discussions with Smart MAT's leadership team, agreeing to undergo financial and operational due diligence ahead of a planned transfer timeline.

Financial Oversight and Resource Management

- Annual accounts and audit approval: approved the 2024/25 Annual Accounts and Audit Findings Report, noting an underlying surplus (excluding depreciation) of £109k and net reserves of £252k. Managed non-disclosure findings regarding related party transactions by introducing monitoring checks into the internal scrutiny programme.
- Three-Year budget plan: approved a revised 3-year budget plan to manage reduced core income resulting from falling pupil numbers across the Borough. The strategy balanced the budget through structural staffing realignments such as reassigning the SENDCo back to classroom teaching and adjusting TA allocations while maintaining cumulative surplus reserves.
- External financial support: authorised additional external audit and training support from Azets for the new Company Secretary/School Business Manager to quality assure management accounts and assist with the DfE Budget Forecast Return.
- Capital bids: successfully secured £56k in local authority capital funding for the SEND Unit upgrade alongside funding for a dedicated sensory room.