



Strategic Plan

2017 – 2020

for a better future ...

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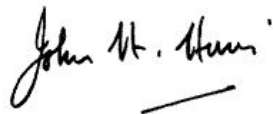
Foreword

Welcome and thank you for taking the time to read about our vision for the West Herts School Trust (WHST). I am pleased to present the new Strategic Plan for the Trust which sets out our priorities and objectives for the next three years.

Our Trust was set up with a clear moral purpose focused on raising aspirations and promoting social mobility for disadvantaged children and their families. The strapline for our schools is ***'for a better future'***, underpinned by a strong belief that every child can and will succeed. We have made great progress over the last three years to open new schools that command the confidence of parents and the wider community, with high quality teaching and learning, and high standards of achievement for our children. Thank you for your contribution and commitment.

As a Board, our responsibility is for the strategic direction of the Trust, working in partnership with the Local Governing Bodies for our schools. Working together, we must ensure that we have the people, finance and plans in place to deliver the vision for the long-term. Collaborative working across the Trust is key to effective delivery, particularly in supporting school improvement, leadership development, and the provision of timely and effective support services for schools. Our new three year plan focuses in particular in taking forward greater joint working between the trust schools in these areas.

Plans on a page are nothing without the shared commitment of everyone involved. I want everyone in the Trust - whatever their role - to feel that they have contributed to our plan and that they know how they will play their part in delivering successful schools with outstanding outcomes for the children and the communities that we serve.



John Harris - Chair – WHST



Introduction

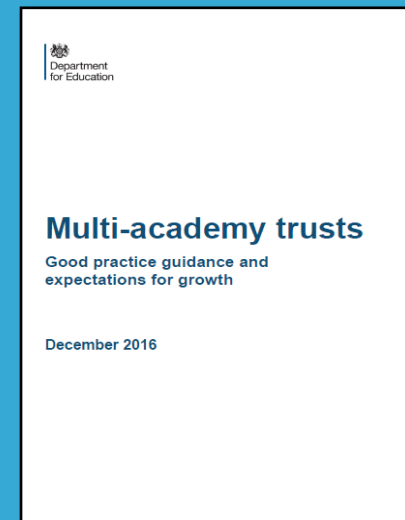
West Herts School Trust (WHST) is a multi-academy trust (MAT) which opened three primary schools in September 2014: Ascot Road, Jupiter and Lanchester Community Free Schools. The time since the schools opened in 2014 has been the period of 'establishment'. The schools are now performing well in most areas, they are well-regarded in their local communities and pupil outcomes are above national and Hertfordshire figures.

The next three years, which are dealt with by this strategic plan, will be the period of both consolidation and development. In terms of consolidation it is critical that the schools are able to sustain their focus on leadership, teaching, learning and the curriculum and to maintain the excellent outcomes for children that have been achieved so far. At the same time the trust needs to improve its effectiveness, develop best practice and to secure a more sustainable future for the children, parents and schools.

The strategic direction and key objectives set out in this plan have been informed by research, the Ofsted inspections of the schools, the outcomes of a trust review, a development day for staff across the trust and a full consultation with staff, governors and trustees. We have gained a parental perspective from the parent representation both at board level and in the membership of the governing bodies. We will also ensure that this plan is published on the trust and school websites to allow parents full access.

The name of the trust was shortened to WHST as a result of the consultation.

Effective MATs should have a strategic plan which turns its vision into reality for the organisation as a whole rather than for individual schools.



Vision — **for a better future ...**

The WHST strapline is ***'for a better future'*** because our mission is to promote a better future for the children in our schools. The intention is for the schools to be: for families and children in the local community; places where children expect to reach high standards; places where every child is on the way to college, university or a good job; developing children's confidence with language and determination to succeed; specialising in science, technology and sport.

The WHST board comprises people with a common purpose who believe in promoting social mobility and high academic achievement as a child's key to success and choices about their future. The board is a mix of local parents, education and other professionals and partner institutions (University of Hertfordshire and HCC). The Trust is the 'guardian' of the vision and responsible, in partnership with the local governing bodies, for holding the schools to account for their academic and financial performance.

WHST aims to improve the lives of local children and families and rank amongst the highest performing schools nationally and locally. The schools are inclusive and welcome all children including those with special needs.

The trust provides a framework for self-improving schools which have a high level of autonomy. The schools are starting to develop a shared approach to teaching, learning and the curriculum. They have a distinctive shared ethos and a

common uniform but with individual badging for each school. There is a strong emphasis on values, social development and resilience. The children learn to behave impeccably.

To build the foundation for learning there are small classes in reception and year one with a strong focus on developing language skills. The buildings are designed to accommodate three classes in each of these two year groups and also to open out the year six learning spaces to accommodate lead lessons from subject specialists from the university and our partner secondary schools.

A modern foreign language, Spanish, is taught from the time that children start school. There is good evidence that learning an additional language early improves children's learning more generally. We have chosen Spanish because globally it is the most commonly spoken business language and it supports well the structure for learning English.

There is a partnership with a private company, Squirrels Day Nurseries, that provides childcare and nursery education on site in each of the schools.

The trust has an ambition to grow to include more schools over the next few years in order to be more sustainable and have a positive impact on the lives of a greater number of children and families.

Key objectives for the next three years

The following objectives have been distilled from the outcomes of the trust review (2016), the trust development day (2017), the Ofsted inspections of the schools, consultation with staff, governors and trustees, and are also informed Multi-academy trusts: Good practice guidance and expectations for growth DfE (2016)

- To establish a common culture and a sense of belonging to one trust where all are focused on 'a better future' for children
- To build on the good outcomes in the schools by establishing a common school improvement strategy which promotes best practice and consistent high standards
- To establish a succession planning strategy for leadership and governance to ensure consistent and robust leadership which drives high quality education
- To establish central services to allow the schools to focus on their core business of teaching, learning, the curriculum and the achievement of high standards
- To introduce a new structure and business cycle for the work of the trust to ensure an educationally and financially secure structure to educate our pupils
- To establish a growth and expansion plan in order to increase the capability and capacity of the trust to improve outcomes for children*
- To strengthen and extend strategic partnerships in order to support school improvement and pupil outcomes

**There is general agreement from staff, governors and trustees, that the trust needs to expand to include 6-10 schools over the next few years with a range of new and established schools - and some views that this might include secondary schools. All agree that the schools should be in a relatively small geographical area.*

There is very little feeling among the staff of being part of a trust team

Governor and teacher

Centralisation of finance, HR etc. not in place yet

Trustee and senior leader

Leadership in schools to focus on teaching and learning

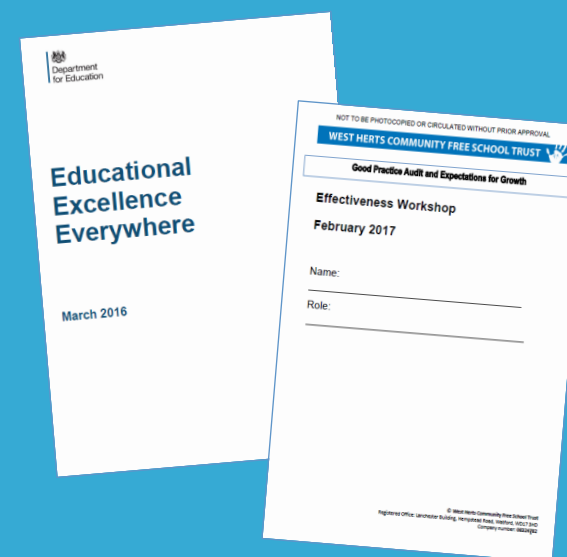
Teacher

Succession planning not yet secure across the trust

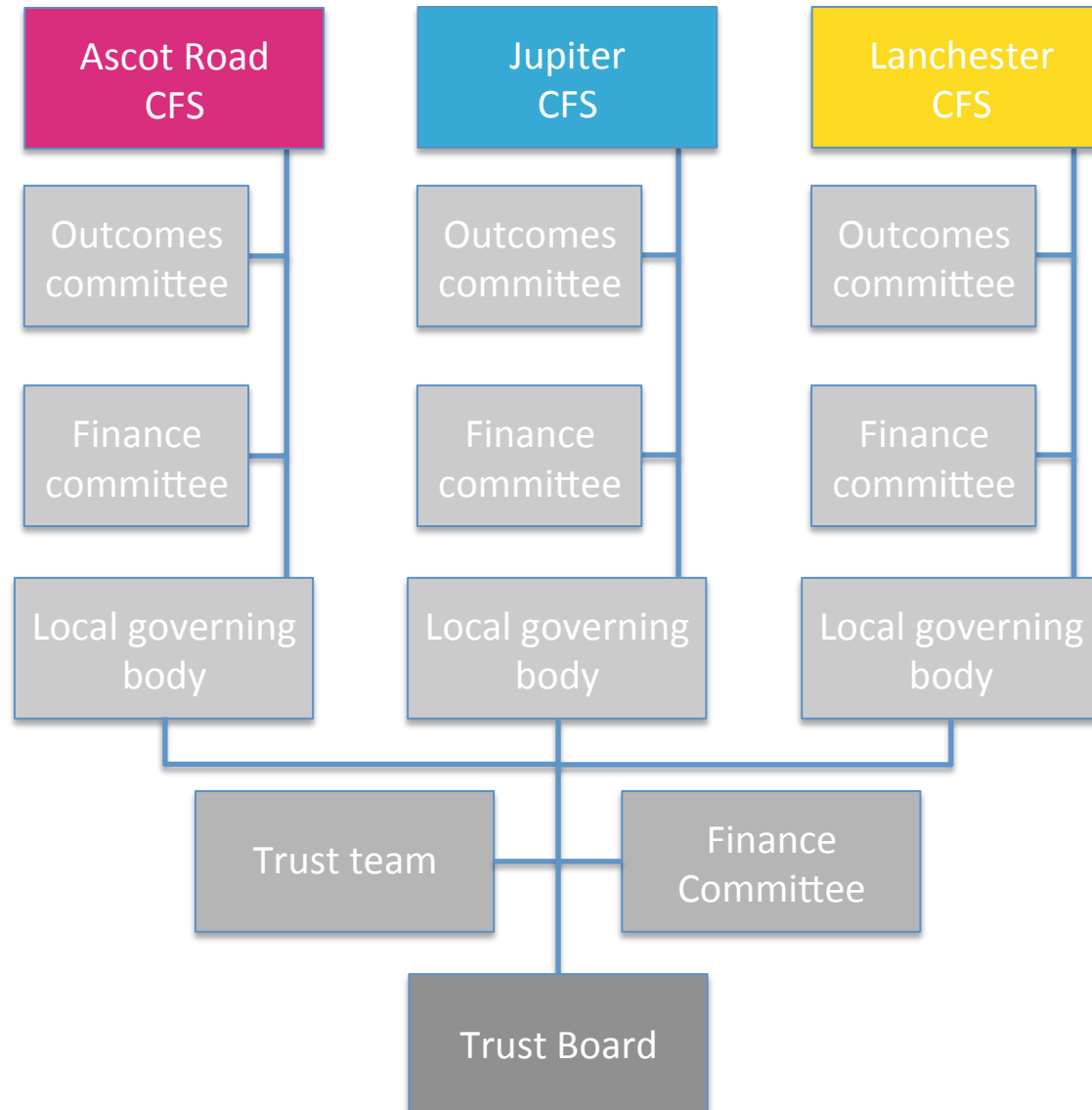
Senior leader and trustee

... relatively small geographical area

Staff, governors and trustees



The Trust Structure



The trust currently comprises three schools which each have a local governing body (LGB). The LGBs provide close links to the local communities and a high degree of local accountability. The LGBs are responsible for holding the schools to account for standards, quality and finance.

The chairs of the LGBs are all trustees and sit on the trust board. There is also link trustees from the board that attends LGB meetings and provide support and liaison.

The trust board has overall strategic responsibility with three core functions:

- *ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;*
- *holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the school and its children, and the performance management of staff;*
- *overseeing the financial performance of the schools and making sure that money is well spent (DfE 2016).*

The trust team currently comprises a CEO (0.2fte), business manager (0.4fte) and admin assistant (0.3fte). This team supports the central and strategic functions of the trust.

A common culture and sense of belonging

Each member of staff and governing body has a strong sense of belonging to their Individual school but does not necessarily feel part of the overall trust. To help to develop a more common culture and sense of belonging we intend to establish a common culture and sense of belonging to one trust where all are focused on 'a better future' for children. In order to do this we will:

- actively promote the trust and its role in overseeing the development of its schools
- ensure a sense of community and belonging is actively promoted within the trust schools and that staff 'have a say' in future developments
- through positive marketing ensure the role and impact of the trust is recognised and understood not only within the schools but also in the wider community
- ensure the vision and strategic plan of the trust is clearly visible and accessible to all stakeholders
- provide more opportunities for staff engagement and collaboration within the trust

The following key performance indicators will let us know how well we are doing:

- all staff, governors and trustees identify themselves as members of the trust
- high levels of positive feedback/commentary in relation to feelings of 'belonging / community'
- high levels of engagement by trustees in annual learning walks programme
- establishment of an annual conference for all school staff and other members of the trust
- a growing staff exchange programme within the trust schools

There was a shared perception among many school staff and some governors that they did not feel part of the trust but saw the trust as 'the Board'

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WEST HERTS COMMUNITY FREE SCHOOL TRUST

Good Practice Audit and Expectations for Growth

Effectiveness Workshop

February 2017

Name: _____

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A common school improvement strategy

Since the schools opened they have quite rightly focused on establishing the curriculum, secure teaching and learning and high standards in their own organisations. To build on the good outcomes and the findings of the Ofsted inspections we intend to establish a common school improvement strategy which promotes best practice and consistent high standards across the schools. In order to do this we will:

- Identify key strengths and areas for development from the Ofsted reports
- develop a trust wide school improvement policy
- develop a peer challenge programme across the trust
- put in place cross-school improvement team and develop cross-school task groups
- engage external partners for periodic monitoring and evaluation
- establish action research programme supported by the University

The following key performance indicators will let us know how well we are doing:

- schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted
- outcomes for children remain above Hertfordshire and National averages
- high levels of positive feedback from parents, staff, governors and pupils
- trust wide School improvement policy in place (*approved by governing bodies and board of trustees*)
- active programme of cross-school improvement monitoring in place evaluated by board of trustees
- annual programme of external monitoring in place

Teachers feel committed to their own schools as this is their home base – working across the trust through secondments would be positive
senior leader and trustee

At the moment the DfE adviser takes the school improvement role – should we look at where we go with this in future?

Senior leader

Schools should discuss and share their school improvement plans – especially the key area of focus on learning
teacher

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Succession planning for leadership and governance

Our schools already have programmes in place for 'growing' leaders. We need to make sure that these arrangements are broadened and strengthened by establishing a succession planning strategy for leadership and governance to ensure consistent and robust leadership which drives and maintains high quality education. In order to do this we will:

- ensure strong leadership in the trust schools
- strengthen programmes for supporting and growing leaders in schools
- introduce shadowing and secondment opportunities across trust schools
- ensure full range of skills across the trust and governing bodies and put in place training for 'chairs in waiting'
- maintain the trust recruiting officer model for governors and trustees
- plan for the sustainable development of the trust team

The following key performance indicators will let us know how well we are doing:

- leadership judged as at least good against Ofsted criteria by key stakeholders and through external scrutiny
- secure leadership succession plans in place for schools, LGBs and trust
- trustees assigned key objectives to monitor and report on annually to Members
- active programme of work shadowing / secondment in place across the trust
- staff leadership development programme in place (including formal qualifications)
- strong leadership strand in the trust recruitment strategy

Central Services

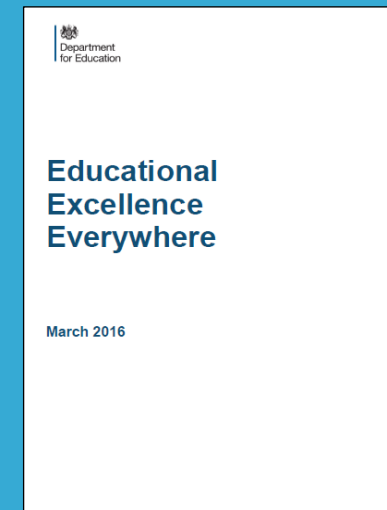
Currently there is a small central trust team which deals with strategic business, trust policies and oversees finances. Each school has its own team to deal with finance, HR, IT and site management. Over the next year, the intention is to establish central services in order for the schools to focus on their core business of teaching, learning, the curriculum and achieving high standards. In order to do this we will:

- establish an internal working group to identify key services that can be centralised e.g. finance, HR, site management etc.
- draw up plan for centralisation for trust approval
- benchmark central provision against similar trusts/schools to ensure most effective and efficient practices are in place across the trust
- put in place central procurement and contracts monitoring to ensure value for money
- establish a strong trust wide recruitment strategy

The following key performance indicators will let us know how well we are doing:

- central trust team in place to ensure value for money in the areas of HR, Finance and site management
- central provision benchmarked to ensure best value for money
- trust wide recruitment strategy in place (including a strong leadership strand)

'The strength of MATs in building teams that have finance, HR, IT and site management expertise means that more teachers and leaders can focus on what they do best; great teaching'



Trust business cycle

The current pattern of trust meetings allows insufficient time for discussion and decision making about strategic issues. We intend to introduce a structure and business cycle for the work of the trust to ensure an educationally and financially secure structure to educate our pupils. In order to do this we will:

- create a structure for trustee meetings which allows effective discussion and decision making for both business and strategic issues
- ensure stronger scrutiny and challenge by trustees and LGBs of school SEFs, improvement plans and KPI reports
- undertake a skills audit of board members to ensure skills are aligned with objectives of trust
- maintain strong links between trust board and local governing bodies

The following key performance indicators will let us know how well we are doing:

- new business cycle in place and working effectively
- programme of scrutiny and challenge in place and impacting on quality of education
- trustees allocated specific areas of responsibility in line with skills: school improvement, vulnerable children and safeguarding, finance and support services, commercial development and marketing
- link trustees role maintained and effective
- trustees championing key objectives and reporting annually to Members

Growth and expansion

The trust has an ambition to grow to include more schools over the next few years in order to be more sustainable and have a positive impact on the lives of a greater number of children and families. In order to do this in a manageable way we will:

- develop a positive marketing strategy for the trust
- develop a strategy for accepting new and/or established schools into the trust giving full regard to location
- pursue opportunities for sponsoring new schools and opening new free schools
- support existing schools to become teaching schools
- establish a trading arm focused on supporting expansion and selling relevant support services

The following key performance indicators will let us know how well we are doing:

- increase the number of schools in the trust to at least six
- ensure school budgets are well managed and in surplus (at least 2.5%) across the trust
- all pupil places to be taken in each school
- through the separate trading arm, higher income to schools through increased efficiencies and the sale of support services
- at least one trust schools gains training school status

Strategic Partnerships

One of the aspects which provided the trust with long-term stability is its strategic partnerships. We intend to strengthen and extend our strategic partnerships in order to support school improvement and pupil outcomes. In order to do this we will:

- strengthen trust relations with Watford Borough Council, the Regional Schools Commissioner and teacher training institutions
- to become accepted as a DfE academy sponsor
- maintain and strengthen partnership with UH an HCC
- develop a strategic partnership with Herts for Learning (HfL) – the schools’ company which manages the HCC school improvement programme
- develop partnerships with local businesses
- develop an effective ‘teacher supply’ network

The following key performance indicators will let us know how well we are doing:

- partnerships in place with UH and HCC
- accepted by DfE as an academy sponsor
- strategic partnership with HfL established
- at least two partnerships established with local businesses
- established ‘teacher supply’ network

Into action

In order for the objectives in this plan to become a reality there will be an annual action plan put in place which will be considered at each trust strategic meeting. For each objective it will identify: priorities, actions, timelines, lead trustee/governor/principal, resource requirements, monitoring processes, reporting of progress.

Key Performance Indicators

- Schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted
- Leadership is judged as at least good by key stakeholders
- Schools oversubscribed
- Outcomes for children remain above Hertfordshire and National averages
- Staff, governors and trustees identify as members of the same organisation
- The school budgets are well managed with a healthy surplus across the trust
- A central trust team is in place resulting in better value for money
- The number of schools in the trust increases to at least 6 over the next three years
- New strategic partnership have been forged bringing greater sustainability to the trust



www.whcfst.org.uk

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