

Growth Strategy 2025+



Sussex Learning Trust Growth Strategy 2025+

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The Multi-Academy Trusts Landscape

There are circa 1,346 School Trusts with almost 10,146 academy schools. Around 10% of School Trusts have more than ten schools. The majority of children (62%) are now educated in School Trusts (38% of primaries and 77% of secondary schools are academies). Research shows that early MATs and Academies did add considerable value. Some MATs are doing very well, some are not. Likewise, with maintained schools.

The change in Government administration in 2024 led to a change away from the positive direction of 'most schools' becoming academies. At the beginning of 2025, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill began its journey through parliament. Essentially, this Bill signals the intention of the Government to re-align various flexibilities and freedoms that academies have over maintained schools. It is not a move to row back on the existing academy programme, but it is a curtailment of the assertive expansion of it. At the same time, the Government cites MATs as excellent options to take in the most failing schools to be transformed.

SLT will always seek to add schools and academies where we believe to do so would be of **benefit to our children**, and the children of the locality, and be complementary to our Mission and Vision (see below). We apply the same principles to the consideration of merging or amalgamating with an existing Trust. Such arrangements will be more complex than individual schools joining us.

Our Mission, Vision and Values

Our Mission

- To promote and support the best interests of children in the communities we serve
- To advance education for the public benefit
- To exercise civic duties and responsibilities for the wider good of the local community

Our Vision

Irrespective of background, all children and young people deserve the very best educational provision, and should therefore attend ambitious and dynamic establishments.

*Sussex Learning Trust academies work collaboratively to provide ‘world-class’ **formational** and **transformational opportunities**, helping our young people realise their **potential** and equipping them in their journey towards personal **fulfilment** and responsible **citizenship**.*

Our Values (and related Nolan Principles)

- **Respect** (objectivity, selflessness)
- **Integrity** (objectivity, accountability, honesty)
- **Resilience & Perseverance** (leadership)
- **Kindness** (selflessness, openness)
- **Confidence** (Leadership)
- **Optimism** (leadership)

As of January 2025, SLT comprises of:

- **Chichester Free School** (all-through, 1,020 pupils)
- **Billingshurst Primary Academy** (600 pupils)
- **Warden Park Secondary Academy** (1,530 students)
- **Warden Park Primary Academy** (420 pupils)
- **Woodgate Primary Academy** (105 pupils)
- **Northlands Wood Primary Academy** (420 pupils)



Originally, the vision of the Trust was to grow to incorporate approximately six or seven academies, working together for the benefit of local children. DfE research suggested that the ‘sweet spot’ for small MATs to achieve the desired benefits is around 10 academies.

SLT is now attracted to a model of regions consisting of a small number of academies located in different parts of the County (see [‘Geography and Growth’](#)). With their relative scarcity, secondary schools are better resourced to manage more dispersed geographical collaborations, and so our secondaries will always work as a team across that phase as well as within their geographical region.

We strongly believe that schools should consider academy status because they think that to join a family of like-minded schools would add value to their work, rather than because of political directives. We believe the landscape of the education system has been reset, and therefore this iteration of our Growth Strategy must reflect this.

Prior to the political changes mentioned above, SLT expanded by adding three academies in a short span from June 2023 to June 2024. Such growth has been exciting and we have learnt a great deal in terms of adding capacity to a central team, at pace. This rapid growth offered numerous opportunities to refine our approach to integrating new academies.

The Risks and Opportunities of MAT Growth

The advantages of expanding academy Trusts	The risks of expanding academy Trusts (mitigations in purple)
1. Extends the Trust’s impact in terms of raising standards of education for more young people. 2. Creates a broad base for developing leaders. 3. Increases the scope for sharing learning, subject specialisms, school improvement expertise and CPD. 4. Provides more opportunities for staff deployment and promotion within the MAT. 5. Increases economies of scale in the running of central services and provides greater purchasing power. 6. Opens up new opportunities to build new primary/secondary curriculum and transition model. 7. Provides a bigger platform for supporting innovation.	1. Too many new schools are taken on at one time and there is insufficient leadership capacity to manage the challenge - We are experienced in growing rapidly and have learnt of the opportunities and risks associated with such growth accordingly. 2. The MAT reacts to having more academies by becoming more bureaucratic and a more rules-based organisation - Regional organisation allows for a ‘small MAT’ feel within a wider capacity rich organisation. 3. The core infrastructure (central services) becomes overstretched - We are well placed to meet the requirements of additional academies and to incrementally add to our staff as required.

8. Provides a stronger brand to attract parents and applications for admission.	4. Existing schools in the MAT start to slip back as energies are focused on new joiners - CET have an attuned sense of the requirement to add capacity where required. 5. The growth in the number of academies makes the MAT impersonal, e.g. key senior and middle leader staff don't really know each other - Regional growth will help avoid this.
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DfE Advice on the Growth of MATs

1. Be aware of key transition points. Particularly the phase from 5-10 when there is a need to develop skills and infrastructure. The move from 10-20 raises specialist and capacity issues.
2. Grow carefully, understanding your capacity and the challenges and risks you take on – this might mean steady growth followed by a spurt.
3. Have a mixed portfolio of schools – specifically a balance of sponsored and converter projects.
4. When planning growth, it must be in terms of geography with the understanding of the risks of adding isolated schools.
5. A MAT must be both hierarchical, but also a network. Without hierarchy, there is no accountability. With too much 'top-down', there is no joint learning. Encourage joint learning over Teaching and Learning.
6. Focus on improvements, not change. Use knowledge for improvements (experts), have hard conversations, and don't hide from problems: face issues head-on, through trust not blame.

DfE Guidance Outlining the Central Role of MATs Within a Changing School System

Five key elements which are design principles for successful MATs:



Governance

Key elements for successful governance include strategic leadership, accountability, recruiting individuals with the right skills, strong organisational structures, compliance, and regular evaluation. The importance of local community engagement and the geography of the MAT are also emphasised.

Additionally, it stresses the need for a MAT Board that is strong and capable of holding the executive leader accountable for delivering the Trust's strategic plan. While the appropriate level of delegation is crucial, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each MAT must determine its own delegation structure and ensure clear communication with all stakeholders involved.

Supporting School Improvement

MATs are expected to have the capacity to run schools that are both strong and continuously improving. Successful school improvement tends to thrive when built on a foundation of collaboration and partnership between MATs. This involves tapping into expertise wherever it exists and sharing services effectively.

People and Leadership

Having the right leaders and the right team is essential. The guidance suggests that being part of a MAT helps to build a strong and sustainable workforce. It is crucial to foster a culture of mutual support, where everyone has the opportunity to engage in the MAT's strategic plan, with continuous professional development available at all levels, including the CEO.

Financial Sustainability

As a MAT, the 'benefits of scale' are clear, with significant savings achievable through strategies like a unified procurement function. However, careful attention must be given to both short- and long-term financial planning, benchmarking, maintaining robust financial systems, and managing local spending levels.

Risk Management

Effective risk management is crucial at both the school and organisational levels. This includes proper allocation of risk, due diligence, and a solid understanding of legal requirements related to the estate. The Trust's School Improvement Strategy will continue to provide a strong framework for assessing the strengths and areas for improvement in our existing schools. Our capacity for future growth will be guided by progress made towards the priorities outlined in these plans. The Trust's future growth and development must align with its aims, vision, and ethos, ensuring it becomes both better and bigger. This requires clarity in our vision and mission, alongside effective quality assurance and self-review procedures to assess how well we are delivering.



Our Principles & Vision for Growth

1. We will remain **entirely child-focussed** - making decisions which benefit the children's safety, and emotional and academic well-being¹. By serving more children's interests we will be a 'force for good' in Sussex.
2. To have (develop) the capacity to be world-class in all we do, including school improvement for our existing academies and new joiners.
3. To be a Trust with high-performing academies, led by outstanding leaders who share a drive, determination, commitment, and ethos. Each leader is responsible for their own

¹ This includes being mindful of local children in schools and academies outside of our Trust.

academy, but all members of the Trust must also feel a collective responsibility for every child within SLT.

4. New academies joining SLT will complement our ethos of collaboration, adding value to our already strong provision for local children.
5. To grow sustainably by developing our staff team, focusing on excellent recruitment and retention, ensuring they feel valued, and providing outstanding CPD opportunities that allow their careers to flourish in alignment with their own aspirations and those of the Trust.
6. To explore the opportunities that regions of schools can offer, with particular emphasis on the geographical considerations for primary schools. For secondary schools, their resources and wider geographical reach mean they can, and will, travel greater distances more easily. It is also beneficial for secondary schools to serve multiple catchment areas. In recent years, schools have also become very adept at using online meeting platforms.
7. We will actively seek a diverse range of schools, phases, and specialisms in the spirit of professional learning, to enhance each individual's growth and contribute to providing a better education for all of our children.

Our Approaches to Growth

The Trust must have a dynamic, flexible and differentiated strategy for its growth ([see below](#)). The implications of further growth in new provisions, Free Schools, sponsored, and converter schools, and the varying demands and challenges that they represent must be carefully considered.

Having robust criteria for admitting converter schools into the Trust is a priority to ensure that they either immediately add capacity, or will do so in time.

Robust due diligence procedures are essential to ensure we know the exact level of challenge and risk associated with each academy that joins us (see [Due Diligence](#)). The CEO and central team will continue to develop these procedures to reduce the risk to the Trust.

We have a systematic process in place for the evaluation of the risk new joiners pose in terms of education, finance and estate management (see [Appendix](#)). This rigorous approach enables informed decision-making about which schools should join the Trust. Growth must be linked to the quality and effectiveness of both our educational and service provision. We cannot compromise the performance of other schools in the Trust by taking on challenges that are not suitable.

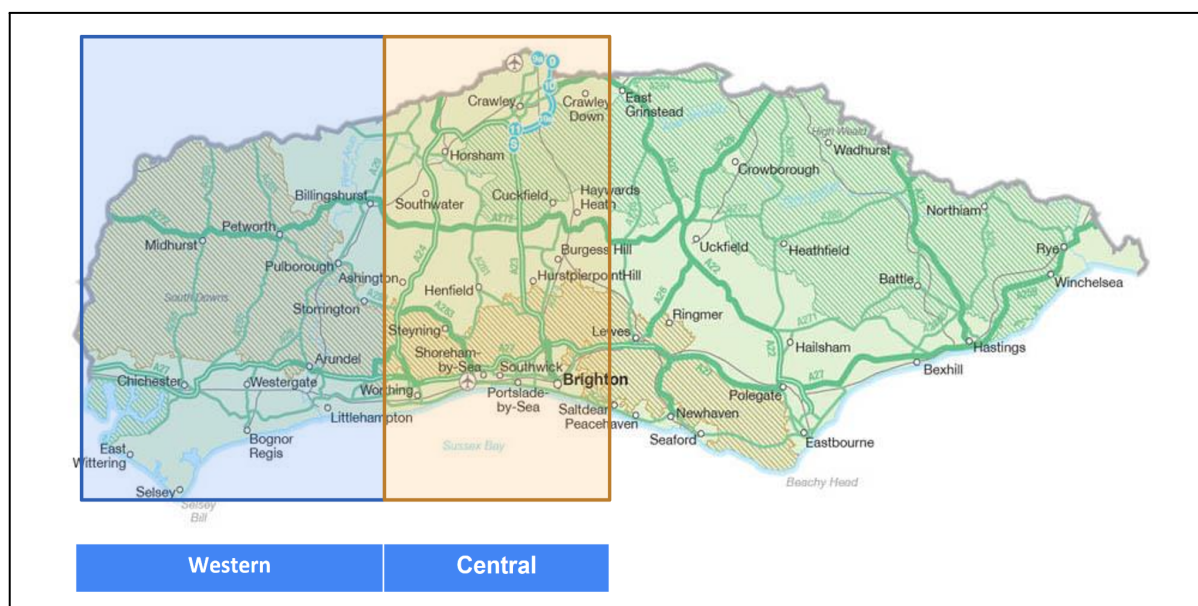
How Will We Achieve Growth?

1. We will bid for new schools as demand requires, whether due to basic need or poor standards. Local Authorities still have a responsibility to ensure there are enough school places. The 2025 Bill allows LAs to open new schools, whereas previously only academy trusts could do so. It is possible that LAs may commission trusts to open schools on their behalf. We maintain good relations with the LA, and with East Sussex, should they merge under another Bill.
2. We will remain open to presenting to Governors and School Leaders to explain the benefits of joining SLT. Included in this will be invitations to come and see our academies in action - our best marketing tool.
3. We will actively seek informal collaborative projects with local schools to demonstrate the value of working together.
4. We will organise more events and training sessions to invite local colleagues to, demonstrating our commitment to the 'common good' of the local education landscape. These initiatives aim to broaden perspectives on the power of collaboration and highlight SLT as an organisation.
5. We will enhance our local reputation through utilising professional media and social media profiles. Our academies are great places doing great things - we must be more proactive and strategic in sharing this.
6. We will continue to offer an Associate Member scheme.

Geography and Growth

Sussex Learning Trust should be open to all opportunities for growth across the entire County. As alluded to above, there is a political move to reunify (at least partially) East & West Sussex. We enjoy great relationships across the entire County.

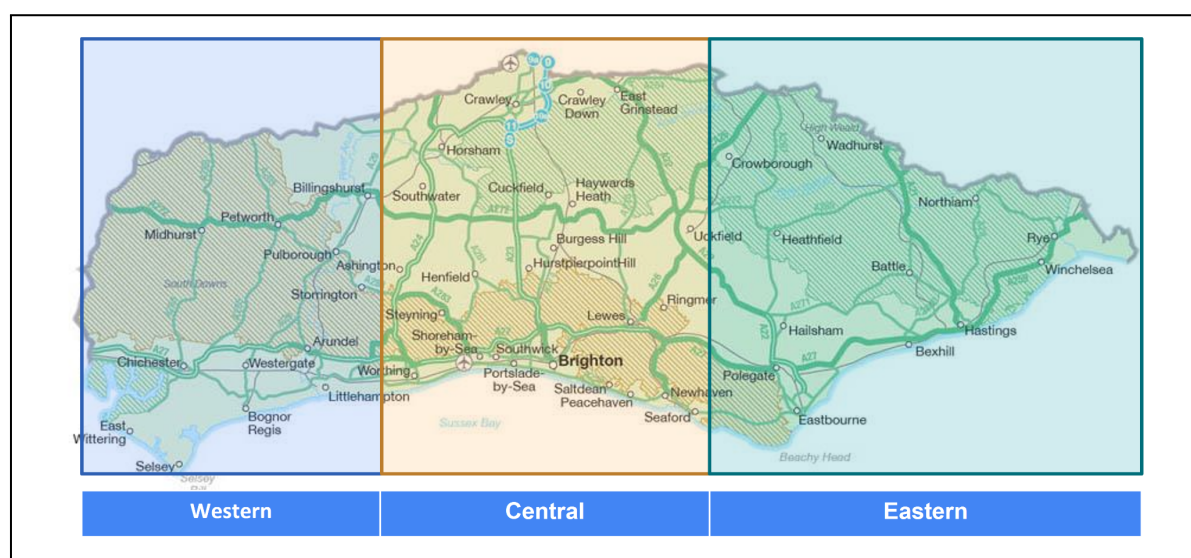
January '25 (current)



Across Trust staff (current)	
Education Officers	CEO (Dir. Secondary) DCEO (Dir. Primary) Ast. Dir. Primary (0.2 fte) Senior Advisor (0.2 fte)
Finance Leaders	CFO Management Accountant Finance Manager Finance Administrator
People Officers	CPO
Estates Officers	CEDO H&S & Compliance Officer CEDO Administrator
Digital Services	Director of DS Director of Networks
Comms & Marketing	Advisor

Regional dedicated staff	Western	Central
Academies	CFS (1,020) Billingshurst PA (600)	Warden Park Secondary (1,530) Warden Park Primary (420) Northlands Wood (420) Woodgate Primary Academy(105)
Finance	Management accountant	2 x Management Accountants
People Officers	1 People Partner 1 People Advisor	Supervision CPO 1 People Advisor 1 People Administrator
Digital Services	Technician on site (CFS) Contract with JSPC	Senior Technician Technician

Potential



Across Trust staff (potential)	
Education Officers	CEO DCEO (Dir. Primary) Dir. Secondary Ast. Dir. Primary (0.2 fte) Senior Advisor (0.2 fte)

Finance Leaders	CFO Finance Manager Finance Administrator		
People Officers	CFO		
Estates Officers	CEDO O & C (H&S & Compliance Officer) O & C Administrator		
Digital Services	Director of DS Director of Networks		
Comms & Marketing	Advisor		
Regional dedicated staff	Western	Central	Eastern
Academies	CFS (1,020) Billingshurst PA (600)	Warden Park Secondary (1,530) Warden Park Primary (420) Northlands Wood (420) Woodgate (105)	
Finance	1 FLO	2 fte FLO	
People Officers	1 People Partner 1 People Advisor	Supervision CPO 1 People Advisor 1 People Administrator	
Digital Services	Technician on site (CFS) Contract with JSPC	Senior Technician Technician	

How Can We Ensure We Develop The Capacity To Grow?

“One of the key signs of effective trust boards is those who consider their central team structure to be continuously evolving rather than static. In these trusts, the central team structure is understood as being based on the trust’s current context and challenges, with an awareness that changes to that context necessitate further changes to the central team.” ([NGA paper Central Leadership in MATS](#))

At SLT, we define capacity as “the professional understanding of the relationship between a challenge involving expansion and the capabilities needing to be allocated to that piece of work”. Because of the success of our talent management initiative often this will mean utilising the expertise of existing colleagues to take increased responsibility.

If we don't have the right skill set within the Trust, we will make a deliberate decision to recruit accordingly. This is part of our 'mindset of building capacity' - understanding where we already have capacity and where we need to expand it. We are developing a pool of experienced Educational Consultants, inducted into SLT's ways of working, whom we can call upon and commission to support our school improvement initiatives whenever their specific skills and additional capacity are needed.

Developing Our Emerging And Existing Leaders

SLT has a strong tradition of developing its staff, particularly those who wish to take on increased leadership responsibilities within our MAT. We believe that by continuing to build on and enhance this work, we can strengthen our leadership capacity. This will ensure that new joiners can have full confidence in our Trust, as it is built on a solid foundation of experienced and emerging leaders - essential for the success of any school or organisation.

Therefore, we will concentrate on three strands to boost the development of our leadership:

1. We will actively seek opportunities for emerging, talented colleagues to acquire new skills and gain experience by working in other schools, taking on different roles, handling challenging circumstances, or leading specific school improvement projects. These placements, which may be part-time or full-time and involve temporary deployments, will primarily be within the Trust, but we will also consider opportunities external to our Trust.
2. We will continue to subsidise National Professional Qualifications for Senior Leaders ([NPQSL](#)). Headteachers will identify potential colleagues for this route, who will then be interviewed by the Senior Executive Team for consideration for the qualification. We will establish an 'Aspiring to Leadership' programme as part of our existing SLT Two-light CPD, which will be available for those not quite ready to qualify for the NPQSL. It will be intended to support an application in future years for the NPQSL (or equivalent).
3. We will subsidise colleagues embarking on National Professional Qualification for Headship and Executive Leadership, in preparation for assuming such positions within our Trust as we grow.

Central Trust Team (existing and proposed)

Green type = anticipated appointments

CEO (JM) incorp. Director of Secondary Education (Accounting Officer, strategy, vision, governance, Leadership Development)					
Deputy CEO (SD) incorp. Director of Primary Education (Standards, Safeguarding, student outcomes, accountability & alignment)		CFO (JHd) (Financial strategy, payroll, procurement)	CPO (JK) (CPD strategy & compliance, appraisal)	CEDO (JHy) (Estates, Capital projects, data protection, digital strategy,)	
Regional Directors 1,2,3,4	0.8 Ast. Dir. of Secondary	0.2 fte (0.8) Ast. Dir of	Management Accountant (CB)	People Partners	Assistant O&CD (LV) (H&S, Compliance)

		Primary (MS)		(VL)	(JL)	E	
Senior Education Consultant (YM)			Finance Manager (LT)	Advisors			O&C Co-ordinator
Dir. of Safeguarding, SEND & Inclusion			Finance Liason Officers (FLOs)	(HS)	(SG)	E	Digital Services Manager (DT)
							Communications & Marketing Advisor (KH)
Education Development Team							

A Regions Model of Growth

Western	Central	Eastern
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The following assumes a Region has at least four academies. Until such time, the structures shown above will apply.

1. Each Region would have an element of delegated responsibility and variable levels of central office responsibility (depending on size, geography etc).
2. Each Region would have:
 - A Trustee (at least 1) who sat on the full board and represented the LGBs of the academies in that region.
 - A Regional Executive Leader (REL). This will likely be one of the HT's within the Region, who would be appointed after due process.
 - A Regional Administrator (may fulfill Clerking duties).
 - One FLO per two or three academies (depending on numbers).
 - One PP and one PA.
 - An Estates Lead.

Key questions From Trustees

The following factors are explicitly considered by Trustees when new joiners apply to join the Trust:

- a) How confident are Trustees that the school will embrace (or be led to embrace) the same high expectations, contribute to our joint vision, and support our non-negotiable expectations?
- b) To what extent will the proposal extend the MAT's impact in terms of raising standards of education for more young people?

- c) Will the proposal create a broader base for developing leaders across the Trust?
- d) To what extent will the proposal increase the scope for sharing learning, subject specialisms, school improvement expertise, and CPD?
- e) What are the increased opportunities it provides for staff deployment and promotion within the Trust?
- f) Will the proposal increase economies of scale in the running of our central services, and provide greater purchasing power?
- g) To what extent will the proposal open up new opportunities to build new primary/secondary curriculum and transition models?
- h) Does the proposal enable central costs to be shared across a larger number of schools?
- i) Does the proposal provide a bigger platform for supporting innovation?
- j) Are parents and other stakeholders supportive of the proposal? If not, should we take further action to address their concerns? Do we need to proceed regardless, as the best interests of the children will be served by doing so?
- k) Do our due diligence procedures confirm that the proposal will add capacity, and not risk the sustainability of our current academies?
- l) Is this proposal for growth linked to the quality and effectiveness of both our educational and service provision? If not, it should be a deal breaker!
- m) To what extent would this proposal, if adopted, impact other local schools?

Expectations

Sussex Learning Trust values the individuality and identity of each of its schools, but membership also requires adherence to a set of non-negotiables to ensure consistency and alignment with our articles of association, which include:

- The Scheme of Delegation will continue to apply, although schools retain much of their character, ethos, and autonomy.
- All SLT schools would be expected to follow statutory policies as shown within the Trust's Policy web pages, and ensure their local policies are complementary to the Trust's aims and objectives.
- Each school will continue to be governed by a Local Governing Body as a committee of the Trust Board, but will retain significant responsibility, autonomy, and authority as long as the academy continues to deliver high standards and value for money (see [Scheme of Delegation](#)).
- People Operations & Finance will be led by the Central Team, with operatives in each region or school. However, this model will evolve

according to need. The Headteacher and LGB (with limited restrictions) run their budget, and so will determine the internal staffing structures at their academy.

- Schools will be subject to the Trust's School Improvement Strategy delivered via the APC initiatives. This will place obligations on all schools to deliver strong outcomes and maintain an openness to continually strive to be even better.
- Educational support for schools would go via the CEO and DCEO to provide, or commission, as required.

Appendix

[Our Approach to Academy Improvement](#)

[Due Diligence Checklist](#)



Jonathan Morris
CEO

Experienced Secondary Head, and National Leader of Education. Expertise in all aspects of leadership.



Steve Davis
Deputy CEO

Experienced Primary Head. Expertise in school transformation. Highly inclusive in approach with exacting standards.

Education Development Team



Jenny Howard
Chief Financial Officer

Chartered Accountant, qualified through an important multinational Accountancy firm. Expertise in all aspects of school finance.



Julie Keylock

Chartered Fellow CIPD. Expertise in employee relations and HR strategies for organisational development.



Jon Hickey
Chief Estates Development Officer

A highly experienced School Business Operations and Capital Projects leader, with an MBA in Education Management.



Yasmin Maskatiya
Senior Consultant

Yasmin has a wealth of school and educational leadership. From successful Headships she became a Regional Director for a MAT. She has been an HMI and, most recently, a Senior LA Officer.



Louise New
Executive Principal

All Through School Leadership. All Through Curriculum development. Secondary assessment and data. Ofsted Preparation.



Mark Sears
Asst. Dir of Primary

Experienced Primary Head. Expertise in mentoring and coaching Headteachers and enrichment curriculum.



Sarah Neller
Headteacher

Primary Leader & HT. Expertise in primary Maths. Experience in supporting schools in challenging circumstances (inc. small sch).



Liz Brodie
Headteacher

Experienced Primary Head. Expertise in Maths, English and systemic leadership. Previous experience in faith schools.



Maz Ley
Headteacher

Experienced Primary Headteacher of two large primary schools. NPQEL qualified.





Nikki Simmons
Senior School Leader

Experienced Secondary School Leader. Expertise in Teaching and Learning, oracy, staff CPD and enrichment curriculum.



Kristy Fitzgerald
Senior School Leader

Expertise in curriculum 3 'I's. 'Day to day' and strategic school leadership are specific strengths.



Mark Sorrell
Senior School Leader

Expertise in Safeguarding and pastoral leadership. Experienced in change management.



Ben Phillips
Senior School Leader

Secondary leadership. Timetabling and curriculum planning. Secondary PE specialism.



James Garner
Senior School Leader

Primary leadership. Primary/Secondary transition.



Neil Matthews
Safeguarding Consultant

Retired Senior Safeguarding and Child Protection Police Officer.



Wendy Griggs
SEND/Inclusion

Experienced Secondary SENDCo and Inclusion lead. Expertise in the above and running Specialist Support Centres.



Cathryn Halton
SEND/Inclusion

Inclusion, SEND and Disadvantaged pupils. Mental Health and Wellbeing. Improving attendance.



Angela Baxter
SEND/Inclusion

Experienced Primary SENDCo and Inclusion lead. Expertise in Therapeutic behaviour management.



Karen Hornby
EYFS Leadership

Experienced Primary leader. Expertise in EYFS & Forest School.



Rob Angell
Curriculum Leadership

All Through PSHE delivery. Futures and careers provision. Personal Development and citizenship curriculum. Trips (EVC), enrichment and co-curricular programme.

