

nexus

Multi Academy Trust

Learning together to be the best we can be



Annual Report

Academic Year 2021-2022



In Memoriam

John Coleman

6 November 1955 – 25 February 2022

Member and Director of Nexus MAT (21 March 2016 – 25 February 2022)

We learned together, and he always pushed us to be the best we can be.



LEARNING TOGETHER, TO BE THE BEST WE CAN BE

Our Mission Statement

- **Our learners and their families are at the centre of what we do;**
- **Our employees and partners are passionate about being the best that they can be;**
- **Our Trust is relentlessly focused on improvement.**

Accounting Officer Executive Summary

On reflection, 2021-22 has been a far more challenging - and therefore, rewarding - school year than the previous one, which is something I wasn't quite expecting, having had 2 national lockdowns through 2020 and early 2021.

Whilst we all wanted our pupils back in full time, the challenge of "living with COVID" has meant that our whole Trust community has had to work through some unprecedented challenges in terms of staff and pupil sickness absence, as COVID has continued to wash over our population in waves, making life difficult at times for our schools to maintain a full time offer.

Yet, the majority of our schools managed just that, and I couldn't be prouder of the efforts of every senior leader and member of our workforce in putting the needs of children above all other things.

Writing this report in the summer of 2022 makes it difficult to clearly remember the extent of the stresses leaders felt throughout the autumn term. It is absolutely to the credit of our Headteachers that we finished the school year in celebratory mood, reflecting on the amazing achievements our pupils and staff have secured. Indeed, the pupils on the cover of this report - the Craggs Girls Football Team - even inspired our own women's national side to win the Euros, as our team won the Rotherham Schools U11 Girls Finals in April.

This is just one example of so many positives this year, and it continues to be my privilege to lead our Trust and produce this annual report.

Throughout the school year, we've had to live with the pain of losing a number of our pupils, and in February 2022 we also unexpectedly lost John Coleman, a Nexus MAT Director. John was part of the team that founded the Trust, and he dedicated his life to our state education system. John was a key architect of the Trust vision, mission statement and values, and I will be forever grateful for his voluntary contribution to our work.

As always, this annual report has been produced to be read in conjunction with the Trust annual accounts, which are published every January. I hope you share my sense of pride by the time you reach its end.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Warren Carratt".

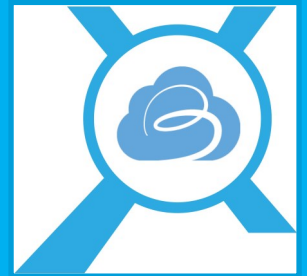
Warren Carratt
Chief Executive Officer (Accounting officer)

OUR ACADEMIES...



Abbey School continues to be a beacon of outstanding provision, with our learners across 3 sites all benefiting from an inspirational curriculum and an extensive sports offer. Throughout 2021-22, the school continued to face demands for growth as more and more families requested a place at the school. Abbey was awarded silver in the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Charter in the autumn of 2021, which is reflective of the ambition we hold for our pupils.

Bader Academy successfully completed its second year of opening, growing pupil numbers to 82 and reaching a full complement of teaching staff. The school embedded a model of restorative practice in its behavior management approach, which has seen a marked decrease in the need for suspensions. The school ended the year saying “thank you and goodbye” to Executive Headteacher Karl O’Reilly, who has returned to the role of substantive Headteacher at Coppice School.



Becton Hospital School has continued to see demand for places grow, and in March the school underwent a section 5 Ofsted inspection, where the school was found to be Good in all areas other than Personal Development, which was found to be Outstanding. The Trust also had approval in this year to de-amalgamate the Kenwood provision into its own special school, with the split planned for spring of 2023.

Coppice School was one of the 4 Doncaster special schools which co-founded The Bridge in September 2021, our new 14-19 learning campus. Pupils there have transitioned successfully and responded really positively to the new, young person-centric learning environment. At the same time, Coppice has embedded its new reading and writing programme and is in the process of enhancing the biophilic design of the school site.



Craggs Community School saw a return to statutory testing this year, with pupils working hard to catch up for the loss of learning in 2020-21. Community engagement activities, such as the Mini Police Programme, returned to the school offer and the girls football team blazed a trail for the Lionesses to follow by winning the Rotherham School Girls U11 Final in April. The school also ended the year with a new Deputy Headteacher, following the appointment of Miss Lowe in the summer term.

OUR ACADEMIES...



Heatherwood School was one of the 4 Doncaster special schools which co-founded The Bridge in September 2021, our new 14-19 learning campus. Pupils there have transitioned successfully and responded really positively to the new, young person-centric learning environment. At the same time, a number of pupils returned to a full time education in school after severe interruption in 2020-21 and anxieties about their complex health needs.

Hilltop School ended the year by saying “thank you and goodbye” to Headteacher David Burdett, who retired after 6 years at the helm. Former Deputy Rob Mulvey worked with David over the summer term as part of planned transition, with Rob becoming Headteacher in September. Throughout 2021-22, Hilltop continued to meet the needs of the 134 pupils on roll, despite the huge staffing absences experienced due to COVID-19.



Kelford School brought back Kel-Fest in the summer of 2022 to help mark the retirement of creative Arts teacher Steve Barton and even took part in Glastonbury through #yourglasto2022. The school leadership team underwent some changes over the school year, whilst the new curriculum developments continued for a second year. The school also installed a new hub and renovated its kitchen.

North Ridge Community School was one of the 4 Doncaster special schools which co-founded The Bridge in September 2021, our new 14-19 learning campus. Pupils there have transitioned successfully and responded really positively to the new, young person-centric learning environment. The school underwent some leadership changes, with a new Head of School and new Deputy Headteacher starting after Easter. The school also started the year with a significant increase in pupils, all of whom settled in quickly.



Pennine View School began to see the impact of its new English curriculum, as the schools returned to community activities and events, such as the Pride Festival. In addition to a new Deputy Head starting in September, Pennine View was one of the 4 Doncaster special schools which co-founded The Bridge in September 2021, our new 14-19 learning campus. Pupils there have transitioned successfully and responded really positively to the new, young person-centric learning environment.

1. INCREASING QUALITY OF PROVISION IN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Trust Collaborative School Improvement Framework (CSIF) continued to drive our improvement activity throughout 2021-22. The Pupil Parliament was launched in November across all Nexus MAT schools, and its success was recognised when the Trust was a winner in the annual UK Parliament Awards, with the Speaker of the House of Commons presenting our delegation with our award. This excellent work was built on further with the establishment of the Trust Cabinet in the summer term, with each school parliament electing one of their MPs to be their Cabinet Member.



The Trust published an overarching assessment policy, which will form the basis of more consistent moderation activity across our schools. A programme of external review was rolled out across the autumn and spring terms, with Peer Reviewer training being delivered in the summer term for senior leaders. This will provide the underpinning knowledge to roll out a peer review programme through future academic years.

The Trust and our schools undertook a self-assessment against the new Wellbeing Charter, which then shaped local wellbeing plans in each school. In the spring term, the Trust also rolled out its second Employee Opinion Survey, one outcome of which has been the commissioning of a Trust-wide Employee Assistance Programme, scheduled to start in September 2022.

The Trust also launched its aspirant leaders programme, Generation: NeXt, with participants from all of our academies.

Human Resources was brought in-house from September 2021, with the Trust HR team being expanded throughout the year to help meet the needs of our schools and support more efficient ways of working, already implementing a coordinated approach to recruitment and enabling better use and support of apprentices.

Through this year, the Trust support offer was enhanced with the creation of - and appointment to - an Early Reading & Phonics Consultant post, which offers support and challenge to our English leads. The Trust also enhanced its capacity to coordinate family engagement activity, with the creation of a new Family Support lead post, whilst our ICT engineer team was expanded to meet growing demand from our schools.

Due to an increase in COVID-19 infection rates, the Trust shared INSET day in February 2022 was conducted in a dispersed way, with school staff undertaken shared learning on their own school sites, provided by the Trust.

2. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS TO BETTER MEET NEED

The Trust has continued to place a high value on engaging with a wide range of partners.

Parental complaints continue to be incredibly low, with only one requiring resolution at Stage 3. Parental satisfaction continues to poll as high in school surveys, and our Trust continues to engage actively with local Parent Carer Forums.

Throughout 2021-22, we have worked hard with our local authority partners to ensure we can help them meet their SEND sufficiency needs. In 2021-22, our academies had 1,678 on roll, an increase of 114 compared to the previous academic year. This is expected to increase further in 2022-23, as the Trust incorporates another 4 new schools and continues to accommodate more places in our existing academies.

The Trust partnership with Sheffield City Council is on-course to see Discovery Academy open successfully in September 2022 after 5 years of development work. At the same time, Nexus is working with Barnsley Council to help create new provision to meet their placements needs.

As well as successfully delivering on the Rotherham Council extended schools contract for a fifth successive year, the Trust was also commissioned to provide mental health support for Sheffield Schools. Over the summer, our extended schools offer has also grown to meet the needs of other local authorities.



Mansfield school praised by Ofsted for improvements since last inspection

Harlow Academy in Mansfield has been praised for driving significant improvements following its latest Ofsted inspection.

By Shelley Marriott
Thursday, 28th July 2022, 4:12 pm

In January 2022 the Trust was approached to support the Harlow Academy, a school that had been placed in special measures by Ofsted and was closed until it could be safely re-opened. Luci Windle agreed, without hesitation, to become interim Executive Headteacher, and led a rapid improvement intervention which saw the school open in full after just one half term. As a consequence of her excellent work, Luci has since been confirmed as the permanent leader of the school as it moves to become a Nexus academy (to be renamed “Fountaindale”) in the autumn. At the same time, its sister school - Beech Academy - is also joining Nexus MAT in the autumn, and the Trust has established a progressive, mutually respectful working relationship with Nottinghamshire County Council as a consequence.

The Trust was commissioned by the Department for Education to support a special school in the North East, and also a mainstream secondary school in South Yorkshire, via their Focused Support Grant scheme. In addition, the Doncaster Opportunity Area commissioned us to develop a support offer for all of Doncaster’s schools in the summer term, and initiative which had really positive results and has opened up a number of new partnerships with other schools and Trusts across the city.

The Trust has continued to engage with our sector body, the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), with the Chief Executive Officer asked to write a piece for their journal to reflect on their annual conference. The Trust has also utilised the partnership with CST to engage with senior DfE policy advisors on key areas of challenge for the state specialist sector.

Nexus MAT also continues to be a key strategic partner of the new Teaching School Hub, Exchange Teaching Hub, which operates across Barnsley & Doncaster.

3. MAINTAINING A FINANCIALLY VIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND ETHICALLY DRIVEN MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

The Trust has set clear examples of its commitment to being an ethical employer, with a responsibility to do more for our society as a key civic structure .

In the spring of 2022 we amended our lowest paid salary bands to ensure we met the threshold of being a Real Living Wage employer, as we seek to raise our minimum standard of pay whilst maintaining a commitment to nationally agreed pay deals.

In the autumn of 2021, we signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant, marking our commitment to do more to help young adults, who have been formerly looked after children, get the help and support they need to make the first step into a career. We went further than meeting the requirements of the Covenant, however, and have worked with our local authority partners to establish a “reach in” approach, where we link up with leaving care teams in children’s services to support care leavers in identifying and applying for roles with us. We will then utilise nationally recognised accreditation schemes, such as apprenticeships, to ensure these young adults build their skills and knowledge-base with transferable currency, where they choose to not stay with us in the long term.

**Consolidated Income in
2021/22
£32,133,811**

We have been working to begin our journey towards sustainability and decarbonisation. This year we have started collecting our carbon data across the estate, supported employees through schemes such as cycle to work, and have brought all our schools together to plan for achieving the Eco-Schools award in the next 12 months. We have also secured the services of RLB around our assets strategy with a specific remit around sustainability across the estate.

The financial implications of COVID-19 - with many schools having to spend an unprecedented amount of budget on supply staff to mitigate absence levels and maintain a safe working environment - appeared to be the greatest financial challenges we faced this year. However, the spectacular increase in utility costs has inflicted a huge, unpredictable burden on school budgets. This has been compounded with the introduction of the Health & Social Care levy, increasing national insurance by 1.25%. These costs have been particularly acute in special schools, who have high energy bills due to the age of our buildings and the facilities we have to run (such as therapy pools), combined with disproportionately high staffing levels when compared to our mainstream peers, leaving us with a higher pay liability with the increase in NI.

In his autumn statement the Chancellor announced that the Government was providing all public sector employers with additional funding to meet these pressures, and in December 2021 the Department for Education published guidance stating that all mainstream schools would get additional funding - the schools supplementary grant (SSG) - from April 2022. However, for some inexplicable reason all special and alternative provision schools saw this funding instead allocated to High Needs budgets, with local authorities having discretion about what, if anything, they wanted to pass on. Whilst many councils have chosen to pass nothing on to special and alternative provision schools, Nexus MAT took legal advice and informed our primary commissioning councils that we would seek a judicial review of any decision to not pass funding on. Thankfully, as a consequence all our local authority partners agreed to provide a funding increase to ensure all of our schools received SSG. This has enabled all of our schools to have balanced budgets over the last two-year COVID period, though a few ended 2021-22 with in-year deficits.

LOOKING TO THE NEXT ANNUAL REPORT...

The Trust is set to experience at least 40% institutional growth next year, with the opening of Discovery Academy, the incorporation of Beech Academy and Fountaindale School, and the creation of Kenwood Academy following its de-amalgamation from Becton School. Further growth is also anticipated, given the Schools Bill is expected to soon become an Act, with the Government making clear their aspiration for all state schools to be in a strong family of schools (i.e. a Trust) by 2030. We are already working with a number of partner schools in the area, and remain open to wider growth, as long as those schools wishing to work with us share our values.

As a consequence of the anticipated growth of the Trust, the central Trust has been strengthened ahead of the autumn, with two new Executive Regional Directors and two Executive Leads for Mainstream Primary joining our team. The Trust finance team has also been enhanced, with a new Deputy Chief Finance Officer starting in September to add strength to our existing team of Assistant Chief Finance Officers. All of this resource will help our existing schools develop whilst also enable us to engage in wider strategic partnerships and fulfil our strategic objectives, as per our Strategic Plan.

2022-23 brings huge financial challenges for the state education sector, with higher-than-expected increases to teacher pay and an even bigger pay offer to support staff unions. Whilst Nexus MAT has worked hard to create the financial resilience to weather these storms in the medium term, these new costs create a systemic pressure which will ultimately lead to financial unviability in the long term, without the provision of more funding from Government. The Trust is working closely with the Confederation of School Trusts to make a clear and factual case to the Department for Education, so that the whole sector can return to a more certain financial footing.

Managing through unclear funding waters is often par for the course in our public sector, though, and we take huge assurance from our track record of sound financial management, as we prepare for the future.



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