

Annual Report 2023-24



nexus

Multi Academy Trust

Learning together to be the best we can be

Caring
Nurturing
Child-Centred Family-Focused
Encouraging Enriching
Empowering Passionate
Inclusive

Accounting Officer Executive Summary

2023-24 was the trust's ninth academic year of operation, and it has continued to grow and develop throughout the last 12 months in the same way it has every year since it was founded by three Rotherham special schools back in the summer of 2016. The great success of Nexus MAT since its inception has been to enable and facilitate growth and improvement in our schools, year-on-year, to ensure that we are doing all we can to meet not just our own legal duties but also to ensure we act as a responsible element within the wider civic structure.

We started this school year with the opening of Forest View, the new shared 14-19 campus for our pupils at Hilltop & Kelford schools. In partnership with Rotherham Council, we have created a new satellite which not only provides a more age-appropriate, graduated learning environment for our young people, but has also enabled both schools to increase their placement offer to meet the ongoing sufficiency demands of the local authority. All of this has been fully funded by the council, utilising a de-commissioned, former pupil referral unit site that would otherwise be sat empty.

In the autumn of 2023, we moved into Enterprise Works: a beautiful building which doubles as the new trust headquarters and, more importantly, will be mostly utilised by our schools (and some partner schools) to create another new shared 14-19 campus from September 2024. This initiative brings all the same benefits as Forest View, but this time it's mostly Sheffield-based children and families who will feel the benefit. We have bold plans for how we can utilise this new asset to create some truly innovative provision for our pupils and the wider community, which we'll be working hard to develop and deliver throughout the next 12 months.

We have also worked closely with Barnsley Council to further expand our West Riding Campus, which is a beacon of biophilic design made manifest. Likewise, we completed the installation of new classrooms at Abbey, Coppice and Pennine View schools this year, and we've also developed a brand new satellite of Pennine View, which is integrated on the McAuley Catholic High School site and which will open in September 2024.

I was so proud that we became only the second multi academy trust nationally to receive the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply award in the summer, an internationally recognised kite mark of good practice. This speaks to the strong business support function we've developed for our schools, ensuring we constantly secure the best value for every pound of public funding we spend.

The last 12 months have brought our busiest period as a trust in terms of external inspection, with an ESFA-commissioned School Resource Management Advisor review in the winter and five Ofsted inspections of our schools across the spring and summer terms (as well as the Trust supporting our two sponsored academies through Ofsted inspections, too). I couldn't have asked for more from our trust officers, school leaders and whole school communities in how they responded to this scrutiny, and it is assuring to our Directors that those who reviewed us from without saw the same strengths and shared the overall judgements as those who manage the trust and our schools from within.

It remains my privilege to author this annual report, and I hope you enjoy it!



Warren Carratt

Chief Executive Officer (Accounting officer)



OUR ACADEMIES...



Abbey School continues to be under high demand for placements from the surrounding local authorities. This year we completed the installation of a new modular build for our sixth form, which provides the space and resources our pupils deserve. Yet again, leaders pushed the boundaries of achievement once more and secured the UNICEF Gold award.



Bader Academy has continued its journey as a “rapidly improving” school, moving towards being judged a “Good” school by Ofsted when next inspected. The first cohort of pupils successfully graduated from the school this year, four years after they joined us when we opened the academy in September 2020.



Becton School has continued to support some of our society’s most medically vulnerable pupils in tier 4 NHS care. We have also expanded the offer at Chapel House to support more children in need of specialist education. Throughout this year, we have been preparing to open a new integrated resource unit at Silverdale School for 16-19 year olds, which will open in September 2024.



Beech Academy has continued to evolve its offer following its “Good” Ofsted grade in 2023. Throughout the last school year, the Headteacher of Beech assumed Executive Head responsibilities for Derrymount School, a sponsored special school. As such, Beech ended the year with a modified leadership structure, drawing on the existing strength in depth of the senior and middle leadership layers at the school.



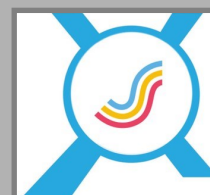
Coppice School started the year with the opening of a new modular build to meet the demands of pupil growth. Coppice was inspected in the summer term, and was judged to remain a securely “Good” school by Ofsted. This outcome reflects the hard work of the Headteacher and leadership team, who have overseen rapid improvements since coming into role in January 2023.



Craggs Community School continues to be a school where children learn and develop in a caring, loving environment. The school was inspected in the spring term, where it was found to be “Requires Improvement” overall, getting “Good” in three out of four inspection areas. The school has seen significant improvement this year in Key Stage 2 SATs, moving the school toward being found “Good” overall at its next inspection.



Discovery Academy continues to face overwhelming demand for placements. Having opened in September 2022 with a maximum planned capacity of 80 places, the school will have 50% more than that in September 2024. Despite these challenges, the school continues to develop and embed at pace, ahead of its first scheduled inspection next year.



Fountaindale School is continuing to rebuild, following the significant failings of its predecessor school the Harlow Academy. Children are now safe, happy and engaged in their learning. We have also worked closely with Nottinghamshire County Council this year to develop plans for the school building to be modified next year to accommodate more places.

OUR ACADEMIES...



Heatherwood School was inspected in the summer of 2024, and was judged to remain “outstanding” by Ofsted with no areas for improvement. This excellent outcome was made all the more impressive, given the school experienced significant leadership changes mid-year, with the Head of School retiring, the Executive Headteacher moving to a new role in the trust and a new Headteacher joining the school at Easter.

Hilltop School started the year by opening its new shared 14-19 campus, Forest View, with Kelford school. This change allowed for EYFS and Key Stage 1 to be reinstated at Hilltop’s main site, following notice being served on the satellite at Maltby Redwood Academy. The school has also been engaging with the Yorkshire Children's Charity to prepare for major remodeling works to be undertaken through 2024-25 as part of the charity’s “big build” programme.



Kelford School started the year by opening its new shared 14-19 campus, Forest View, with Hilltop school. The hard work of the school community, led by the Headteacher, saw rapid improvements embed at Kelford at an impressive pace, and - as a result of this - when the school was inspected in the summer term, Ofsted’s judgment was that the school remains securely “Good”.

Kenwood Academy completed its first full year as a new academy, following the de-amalgamation from Becton School and its opening in January 2023. The school expanded further with the addition of an extension at its West Riding campus, and will also be occupying space for key stage 4 and 5 pupils at Enterprise Works from September 2024.



North Ridge Community School has continued its improvement journey as we eagerly await a graded Ofsted inspection, where we anticipate the academy will move beyond the “Requires Improvement” grade of its predecessor school. The school undertook work this year to improve the outside learning environment and enhance its facilities, much to the delight of our pupil parliament.

Pennine View School finally received a graded inspection from Ofsted in the summer term, having last been inspected in March 2020, and was judged to be a securely “Good” school in all areas. The school managed to attain this judgement whilst also transitioning to new leadership, with one of the Deputy Heads stepping up to the role of Headteacher at Easter, as part of a planned leadership change.



The Willows School completed its academisation journey and officially joined the trust at the start of this school year. The Headteacher has worked closely with the trust’s quality assurance and improvement team as the school has integrated into our systems and processes, and the Deputy Head was seconded to one of our sponsor schools, Derrymount, for the summer term to help create additional capacity for improvement.

1. INCREASING QUALITY OF PROVISION IN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Collaborative School Improvement Framework (CSIF) continued to drive improvement activity throughout 2023-24, and the work of the central trust team alongside school leaders ensured that Directors anticipated the outcome of the Ofsted inspections, and the schools performance dashboard continues to present an honest and accurate reflection of our academies. The trust also received multiple accolades this year, getting “Highly Commended” at the Rotherham North Notts College annual awards, which is a wonderful reflection of the hard work of our school leaders and staff teams in supporting apprentices. Our trust was also confirmed as a winner at the national Education Business Awards, having been shortlisted in the School Procurement category that recognises innovation and best practice in increasing value for the tax payer.

Our Pupil Cabinet met each term of the year, and its work led to the second year of our trust Olympics: one for primary and one for secondary-aged pupils. The events evaluated really well, and will be repeated in future years. We also held our first “Hands in Harmony” performance in July, where pupil choirs from across our schools performed for friends and families at Doncaster’s Eco-Power Stadium.

We held our biennial employee opinion survey in February 2024, giving a really positive reflection on what it’s like to work in our schools and the Trust. Overall, 68% of staff responded, which is a marked increase compared to the 43% response rate in 2022, across what is now a much larger Trust. Of those who responded, 98% of employees feel driven in their work to make their school a success; 94% of employees look forward to coming to work most days; 95% of employees have confidence in their school leadership team, and believe that the school is managed effectively. From a MAT perspective, 93% of staff welcome the chance to work with colleagues from other schools and are proud to be part of our family of schools, and 96% of employees agree that the trust vision of 'Learning together to be the best we can be' reflects what's important to them.

The Trust worked closely with Nottinghamshire and Sheffield councils throughout the year to support Derrymount and Holgate Meadows schools, two inadequate special schools where we have been named as the academy sponsor. Sponsorship of an LA maintained school is a challenge, as no trust has any legitimate authority to implement change until after the school has converted and joined the MAT. However, no inadequate school can or should be left waiting for support either. Given this, we’ve worked closely with each respective local authority to ensure that the schools have strong, credible leadership in place (provided by our staff), and we have supported local governors to oversee rapid improvement. Both schools were inspected last year when Ofsted undertook monitoring visit, and the positive impact of the trust was reflected in Ofsted’s reports.

The Trust has continued to meet the high standards of safeguarding expected of us, as reflected in the annual Statement of Assurance from the Named Safeguarding Director, which is published on the Trust website.

2. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS TO BETTER MEET NEED

Close working and co-production with our local authority partners continues to be at the heart of how we play an active role as a responsible civic structure, and this year we have secured funding from all our partner councils to help improve and enhance our special schools to meet their sufficiency demands.

We continue to deliver successfully on our re-commissioned short breaks contract with Rotherham council, our re-commissioned mental health support contract with Sheffield, and we have also supported more of our schools to deliver provision outside of term time, funded by the holiday activities and food programme.

Our partnership with Waterton Academy Trust to deliver the level 3 teaching assistant apprenticeship programme has had a positive impact on the quality of training and development we can offer our workforce, and the provision was found to be “outstanding” by Ofsted in the summer term.

We have worked with a number of other schools and MATs over the course of the school year, providing either bespoke support or improvement interventions. We have again been funded by the government to support other schools via the Trust & School Improvement initiative.

In the summer of 2023, the trust was appointed as the national specialist lead MAT for the government’s Flexible Working Ambassador programme, which is being delivered over an 18-month period and provides advice, support and guidance to special schools up and down the country who need and want to do more to enable flexible working. The trust has already exceeded its target of schools to engage with through the whole programme, and we have therefore been asked to offer help for other schools, with additional funding provided.

**FLEXIBLE
WORKING
AMBASSADOR
MATS AND
SCHOOLS**

The trust has continued to engage with our sector body, the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), and we were one of a small number of trusts invited to be involved in co-authoring CST’s “Trust Led School Improvement” framework. The trust continues to represent the specialist sector on the government’s Attendance Action Alliance, a national group that is chaired by the Secretary of State. Nexus MAT also continues to be a key strategic partner of one of the local Teaching School Hubs, the Exchange Teaching Hub, which operates across Barnsley & Doncaster, as well as having partnerships with the Education Endowment Foundation, Derby University and South Yorkshire Futures.

Throughout the year, the trust has been invited to talk to 18 different school Headteachers and/or governors to explore the potential for them to join Nexus MAT, and discussions have continued with schools in various stages of the academisation process. From Leicester to the Humber, the strong and positive reputation of Nexus MAT continues to create opportunities for new and exciting partnerships. From these conversations, three schools are in the process of formally joining the trust, in addition to the two sponsored schools, with more decisions expected from governing boards in the autumn.

Parental complaints continue to be very low, with none requiring escalation to Stage 3 this year, and no referrals to the Department for Education or Ofsted. Parental satisfaction continues to poll as high in school surveys, and our Trust continues to engage actively with local Parent Carer Forums.

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

The Trust continues to be committed to the Care Leaver Covenant, and we also remain a committed and accredited national living wage employer. In the summer of 2024, we became only the second multi academy trust nationally to receive the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply award, an internationally recognised kite mark of good practice. This speaks to the strong business support function we've developed for our schools, ensuring we constantly secure the best value for every pound of public funding we spend.



The trust has continued on our journey towards sustainability and decarbonisation, and we have committed to a financial enhancement to our cycle-to-work scheme. The Trust has continued to offer staff discounted access to the Westfield Health programme, and we have also utilised our Staff Parliament to consult on new ways of supporting employee wellbeing. The employee opinion survey will also inform our wellbeing activity in the next school year, and we are actively exploring how we can offer supported internships for our school leavers, to help bridge the employability gap many of our pupils face.

The Trust Board of Directors is entering a period of change, with three of our longest serving Directors stepping down on 31 August 2024. One of these is the Chair of the Board. However, Directors have been preparing for this change for some time, and three advisors to the Board will be “graduating” into these vacancies from 1 September. Likewise, the Vice Chair has been elected as the new Chair of the Board. From September, the Board will have a majority of female members, which better reflects the workforce profile across our trust. The Board has also incorporated the Confederation of School Trust’s Governance Code into trust policy.

Whilst we did not experience the same degree of industrial action in 2023-24 as we did in the previous year, we nonetheless ended the school year with more funding uncertainty than we’d hoped for, as the new government hadn’t - before the end of term - taken a decision on the teacher pay award, and some of the non-teaching staff unions have opened ballots on strike action, having rejected the local government final pay offer.

The government has reduced the minimum funding increase for specials schools to 0% for this year and next, which will yet again leave special and alternative provision schools with financial pressures to alleviate. The national funding formula for mainstream schools provides some additional funding, though this is at risk of being accounted for by higher than inflation pay awards that aren’t fully grant funded.

Yet again, despite all those challenges, good financial management by our schools and our trust has ensured we have contingency funds available to support our schools through short-term uncertainty, protecting jobs and giving our children and families as much stability as possible. However, there still remains a clear and present need for all schools to see real terms funding enhancements that put us beyond the position in 2010, and the state of the public finances makes this a real challenge for government and a real risk to mitigate for all schools.

**Consolidated revenue
expenditure in 2023/24
was £56.7m**

LOOKING TO THE NEXT ANNUAL REPORT...

Our trust is on course to be 17 schools in the autumn term, with three more schools working with us on a formal partnership agreement and a number of others interested in adopting a similar approach. Nexus MAT is now a large trust in the ESFA definition, as our annual equity funding is over £50m. In twelve months' time, Sheffield could likely be the locality where we have the most schools, with a growing presence in Nottinghamshire. We are also in the early phases of exploring partnership in West Yorkshire, in addition to our existing relationships there.

The General Election of 2024 has retuned the Labour party to government for the first time in 14 years. The academy system we have today is a manifestation of the vision of a Conservative education secretary, though he did build that vision on emergent Labour education policy in the late 00s. As such, it is unclear what the future holds for the academy system, though there don't appear to be any indicators in these early days of the new government that there is an appetite for more system change. Schools that are in the process of becoming academies are continuing to join trusts, so we can - with some green shoots of certainty - reasonably expect for our growth ambitions to be realised.

The number of mergers of academy trusts is on the increase, and this remains one area of organisational development that the Board of Directors remains open to. The last 14 years has seen the emergence of some large trusts, but the vast majority remain small or medium sized. As the first generation of chief executive officers retire, there does become a natural point where trust boards can and should be considering the benefits of securing growth through merger, and civil servants appear to be more likely to ask these questions, when leadership change occurs, than they have been before. However, direct government intervention remains scarce, unless it relates to an individual school's inspection outcome.

Whilst inflation appears to be returning to government target levels, the impact of the last two years remains embedded in our society and will be with us for some time yet. Child poverty is at record levels, and the attainment gap has widened for disadvantaged pupils when compared to 2019 data, according to the Education Policy Institute (EPI) Annual Report. The continued impact of the COVID pandemic seems only present through the prism of outcomes, rather than there being any meaningful debate about how we properly respond to it. As Sir Kevan Collins lamented, we appear to have missed the opportunity to do more and be better.

At the same time, the demand for specialist provision continues to increase, and the high stakes accountability system that the new government has inherited - so pivotal in alienating a statistically small yet financially significant number of children and their families from mainstream education - will be tricky to unpick, without it appearing as though they are soft on aspiration. Ofsted's explicit accounting of outcomes data when inspecting schools is another pressure point that drives the system dysfunction, though, when in opposition, the Labour party did commit to the abolition of one word judgements. So there's hope yet!

Compared to this time last year, we have little more certainty, and about the same level of environmental insecurity. What's different, though, is that we have, nationally, a new government with an electoral mandate to govern for the full five years, and we have, in ourselves, a trust that is larger, more successful, more in demand and more secure than it's ever been, with high family and employee satisfaction, and children who love coming to school. That's a pretty good position to be starting 2024-25 from.

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Multi Academy Trust

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