

# nexus

Multi Academy Trust

*Learning together to be the best we can be*

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## Annual Report

Academic Year 2022-2023

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

## Accounting Officer Executive Summary

31 August 2023 saw the close of our Trust's eighth academic year of operating, and with it the end of a 12-month period that generated a huge amount of hard work and achievement for our schools and the communities we serve.

For the first time since September 2019, we started a school year without some form of restrictions in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, though the aftereffects of two lockdowns continued to be felt throughout the last year as our schools have worked hard to drive down absence and ensure as many children attend school every day that they are able to.

On 1 September 2022, the shape of our Trust changed yet again as we welcomed Beech Academy and Fountaindale School into Nexus MAT, both based in Mansfield. At the same time, we also opened Discovery Academy, our brand new (free) special school in Sheffield, as well as opening our West Riding campus in Barnsley. Not content with four new settings, on 1 January 2023 we went on to open Kenwood Academy in Sheffield, following its de-amalgamation from Becton School.

The Trust made a step change in its approach to quality assurance and improvement this year, with the introduction of a new support & challenge process in partnership with school leaders. At the same time, our academies all elected to adopt a new model of local governance with the introduction of Academy Councils. Connecting across the work of the central Trust team and local governance, our new model of quality assurance has self-evaluated positively and will be strengthened further as we start 2023-24.

As with the majority of state schools, the last year has seen unprecedented budget challenges coupled with chronic uncertainty over the Government's funding intentions. At the same time, strike action has taken place across the public sector, which has unavoidably interrupted provision in a number of our schools. Despite these challenges, our school communities continue to be bound by a strong sense of shared endeavor and common purpose, and the collective financial resilience of our MAT has allowed our schools to live with short term uncertainty whilst planning for medium term viability. Protecting jobs and ensuring our children have consistency in the adults they learn from remains a key aim of ours.

As our MAT has evolved, I am proud to see we have remained true to our values and that - despite the pressures we've faced this year - our schools and our MAT continue to thrive.



Warren Carratt  
Chief Executive Officer (Accounting officer)



**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.**

## OUR ACADEMIES...



**Abbey School** continued to grow in the face of high demand from families, with further expansion of the Abbey @ Horizon provision this year. The school has continued to be recognised locally and nationally for its excellent work in creating the very best learning opportunities for children & young people, and in July the school hosted our inaugural Trust-wide Primary Olympics.

**Bader Academy** started the year with a new Headteacher and has successfully been through its first Ofsted inspection in the spring, which has established a clear baseline for shaping the school's development plan over the next 3 year period. The school continues to be under high demand for placements and reached full capacity this year.



**Becton School** managed a significant change this year when it was de-amalgamated from Kenwood Academy in January 2023. Demand for places in the school's medical outreach offer has continued to increase when compared to previous years, and across 22-23 school leaders engaged nationally and international with other similar settings and agencies to learn and share their best practice.

**Beech Academy** joined Nexus MAT from The Evolve Trust on 1 September 2022 and underwent an Ofsted inspection in January 2023, which found that despite the changes and challenges, the school retained its Good grade. School leaders have re-developed the curriculum this year to better meet the needs of pupils, and the school is accommodating the enrolment of more pupils for September 2023.



**Coppice School** had a new Headteacher appointed at Easter '23 and has been on a journey of rapid improvement this year as it embeds changes to the school curriculum and assessment processes. The school is under demand for further growth and will be accommodating more pupils on roll from Autumn 2023.

**Crags Community School** continues to be a school where children learn and develop in a caring, loving environment. The impact of the pandemic and the missed learning created by two national lockdowns continues to be the biggest challenge the school is addressing, hand in hand with an improvement in pupil attendance.



**Discovery Academy** opened its doors for the first time on 1 September 2022, with the school having a really positive first year where the new workforce has come together to create a clearly defined school culture and ethos. Demand for places remains incredibly high, so much so that the school will exceed its intended capacity by September 2023.

**Fountaindale School** has continued its journey of being a phoenix, rising from the ashes of its predecessor school, the Harlow Academy. Re-brokered from the Evolve Trust as an inadequate school, Fountaindale officially opened as a new Nexus MAT academy on 1 September 2022 and continues to rebuild on a foundation of mutual respect, regard and the highest of ambitions for our children and young people.



## OUR ACADEMIES...



**Heatherwood School** has diversified its roll this year in response to the sufficiency needs of Doncaster Council, which has evolved the school population and introduced a different dynamic to the school community. The school's most significant challenge this year has been securing an improvement in the attendance of pupils, with a big reduction over the year in persistent absence rates as pupils have returned to school full time.

**Hilltop School** started 2022-23 with a new Headteacher, and the school also featured in a BBC documentary in the spring, which sought to highlight the pressures in the special school system. The school continues to be under demand for more places, and to accommodate this it will be taking on a new sixth form site with Kelford School for autumn 2023, the Forest View campus.



**Kelford School** has throughout the last year continued to work at pace to revise its curriculum and assessment processes and implement these changes consistently across school. Kelford continues to be under demand for more places and to accommodate this it will be taking on a new sixth form site with Hilltop School for autumn 2023, the Forest View campus.

**Kenwood Academy** officially opened on 1 January 2023 following its de-amalgamation from Becton School. Whilst still part of Becton, the school had developed and opened the new West Riding campus in Barnsley, to ensure that there is sufficient local provision to meet demand. Trust and school leaders continue to explore a long-term asset solution for the Sheffield sites, in partnership with Sheffield City Council.



**North Ridge Community School** ended the 22-23 school year by saying "thank you and goodbye" to Executive Headteacher Lisa Suter, who stepped down from the role after 5 years at the school. In that time, the school has sustainably improved at a rapid pace, and incoming Headteacher, Sam MacDonald will be leading a school where children are happy and where they thrive in their learning. Thank you, Lisa!

**Pennine View School** started the year with an increased pupil roll, and will be expanding further in September 2023. The school has had another successful year, and has actively contributed to wider Trust work, with the Headteacher supporting another Trust school on an interim basis in an executive capacity. In the summer of 2023 the school was recognised as "most innovative provision" at the South Yorkshire Careers Hub "Leading the Way" awards.



**The Willows School** worked in partnership with Nexus MAT throughout the summer term, as it prepared to acadmise and join the Trust on 1 September 2023. As a Good school, The Willows will add strength and capacity to Nexus MAT as more growth is realised throughout the next 18 months.

# 1. INCREASING QUALITY OF PROVISION IN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Trust Collaborative School Improvement Framework (CSIF) continued to drive our improvement activity throughout 2022-23. The Trust made radical changes to its quality assurance infrastructure in September 2022, a change which also saw the introduction of a new support and challenge process delivered in partnership with our schools. This new model ran parallel to revised local governance arrangements, all of which have ensured the Trust has a more efficient and effective means of supporting our schools and being anticipatory of any issues or concerns that may arise.

The Trust's number of network groups was expanded in 2022-23, with more curriculum leads coming together to share their learning and experiences as part of our commitment to collective efficacy.



The Trust Pupil Cabinet met each term of the year, and its work led to the holding of two Trust-wide Olympics: one for primary and one for secondary-aged pupils. These events evaluated really well, and will be repeated in future years. Inspired by the agency of our pupils, the Trust established a Staff Parliament in 2022-23, drawing on our elected staff governors for its membership. This provides a parallel forum for staff voice and influence.

In the autumn of 2022 the Board of Directors commissioned an external review of the Trust, which recognised our self-awareness and highlighted areas where Directors may wish to secure more direct assurance. This led to the creation of a 360 review programme in the summer term which was undertaken by the Board, and reported on in July.

In February 2023 the Trust held its biennial Conference for our schools' workforce, with around 1000 delegates attending. The Trust also successfully concluded the first round of its aspirant leaders programme this year - Generation: NeXt - with a second roll out planned for autumn 2023.



Following demand from our academies, the Trust has invested more resource in expanding our service offer in key areas such as Human Resource, ICT and Asset & Facilities. The Trust also commenced a capital improvement programme across our schools this year, prioritising projects on a needs-led basis following detailed audit work of our estate. Linking in to our sustainability goals, this programme is planned over a 3 year period, with activity overseen by the new Transformation Board. At the same time, growth projects have also been scoped and planned with a number of these due to be completed ahead of September 2023.

The Trust 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

Throughout 2022-23, we have continued to work hard with our local authority partners to ensure we can help them meet their SEND sufficiency needs, which has seen all of our special schools grow their rolls this year and into next. The Trust has also partnered with another MAT in the North West to support their development of new free special school provision in that area.

The Trust has expanded its partnership as an extended schools provider, with contracts now in place with Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield councils in addition to the contract the Trust has held since 2016 with Rotherham Council. The Trust has also expanded its reach and impact with the growth of the mental health outreach commission for Sheffield City Council.



In November 2022 the Trust was named by the Department for Education (DfE) as the sponsor for Holgate Meadows School in Sheffield, a special school for children aged 6 –16 with social, emotional and mental health needs. The school has received significant support from the Trust throughout 2022-23, which has included the secondment of a credible and experienced Headteacher to lead the school out of special measures. The Trust is continuing to work very closely with Sheffield City Council and the appointed Interim Executive Board to help turn the school around at pace and ensure it has a clear plan for budget viability moving forward, so that it can academise in the next school year.

The Trust has continued to work with other MATs and schools in the region, where we can support them with their improvement needs, and we have again been funded by the DfE to support other schools via their Trust & School Improvement initiative. The Trust has also been commissioned by a local authority partner to support one of their maintained schools. In the summer, the Trust was appointed as the national specialist-lead MAT for the DfE's new Flexible Working Ambassador programme, which will be 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 continued to engage with our sector body, the Confederation of School Trusts (CST), and with senior DfE policy advisors on key areas of challenge for the state specialist sector. The Trust now represents the specialist sector on the DfE'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.

Throughout the year, the Trust was 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. At the same time, the Trust has applied to open new free special and alternative provision schools across the East Midlands and the Yorkshire & The Humber regions, having been directly invited to do so by a number of tendering local authorities. Results should be known in the autumn.

Parental complaints continue to be very low, with only one requiring escalation and resolution at Stage 3 this year and no referrals to the Education & Skills Funding Agency. 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

Strong ethics and civic duty remain at the heart of Trust strategy and decision making, in what has been another year of funding uncertainty amid rising costs.

The Trust continues to be committed to the Care Leaver Covenant, and we also remain a committed and accredited national living wage employer. Across 2022-23, the Trust worked with the Department for Education (DfE) Commercial Team on a pilot with the Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply, to self evaluate our systems and process and work towards industry “gold” standards. As part of this, we have reviewed how we ensure our ethics and values are reflected in the contracts we have with all our commercial partners.

**Consolidated revenue  
expenditure in 2022/23  
was £50.1m**

The Trust has continued on our journey towards sustainability and decarbonisation, and we have worked with a local charity to enhance our technological infrastructure to enable us to better manage our energy usage and, in turn, our carbon footprint. We have also utilised the development of our West Riding Campus to pioneer new approaches to implementing biophilic design across our estate. As we continue to offer a cycle-to-work scheme, we have begun exploring if there is value in offering a lease car scheme for our workforce, with an onus on electric vehicle leasing.

The Trust has invested in enhanced wellbeing resources this year, with our staff having the option to access discounted membership of Westfield and its associated services. This is one aspect of our broader Trust Happiness Plan, which is driving our efforts to ensure all of our schools are an employer of choice.

The Trust Board of Directors has been strengthened this year, with all vacant posts now filled and a number of advisors appointed to help support succession planning for when future changes occur. Ethics and values have continued to be placed in parity of esteem with critical analysis when new Directors and advisors have been appointed, which should ensure the Trust maintains fidelity to the values it was borne from.

The last 12 months have seen the return of widespread industrial action in state education for the first time in a decade, with the National Education Union taking its members on strike throughout the spring and summer, and the other teaching and support staff unions balloting their members on the same basis. By the end of the year, it was a relief to finally have a pay offer for school teachers accepted by the main teacher unions, but there remains uncertainty about the non-teaching staff pay award. The DfE will only fund half of the teacher pay award, leaving schools to find the rest from existing budgets, which creates an unexpected pressure.

The DfE finally recognised the need for additional funding in special schools with the announcement of an extra 3.4% funding from April 2023 along with a minimum funding guarantee of +3%. Whilst these increase have gone some way to alleviating some of the financial pressures created in the last 12 months, the refusal by the DfE to provide further funding increases in 2024 means that there remains big budget viability risks for the state education sector, and Nexus MAT is not immune from that. Good financial management by our schools and our Trust has ensured we have contingency funds available to support our schools through short-term uncertainty and protect jobs; though there still remains a clear and present need for special schools to get the same funding increase guarantees that the National Funding Formula is seeking to provide for mainstream schools.

## LOOKING TO THE NEXT ANNUAL REPORT...

The Trust is anticipating more growth throughout 2023-24, with a likelihood that the footprint of the MAT will both deepen and extend beyond our current geographical boundaries.

Growth always necessitates change, and so far Nexus MAT has evolved to meet the expanded demands of our increased schools without losing the best aspects of who and what we are. In September 2022 the Board of Directors approved an investment proposal in the central Trust team to ensure there was the capacity to manage future change and growth, and the same approach has been taken for September 2023. This time, however, new people have been added to existing roles, meaning that the next 12 months will be more about enhanced capacity, rather than the radically transformed operating models we introduced this year.

The Trust has a strong desire and commitment to secure more growth of mainstream primary, and we remain optimistic that this will be an area of opportunity for us throughout 2023-24.

Invariably, the work of our Trust will be impacted by the outcome of the next General Election. Whilst the big three political parties in England have all backed the academy model whilst in Government, there is now a natural question - 13 years after the Academies Act was introduced - over what the next Government will want for state education in our country over the next decade. The Special Educational Needs & Disabilities and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, published by the Government in February '23, calls for a more inclusive, less expensive system. At the same time, the unrelenting focus on ever-improving progress and attainment in our mainstream schools continues to create a tension between the Government intent for inclusion and the reality for pupils, their families and schools. Let's see what the new Chief Inspector brings...

The next 12 months will undoubtedly present more unforeseeable challenges. However, as recorded in previous annual reports, there are also a healthy supply of opportunities for our Trust to do more, for more, of the public we serve. On that basis, we know that 2023-24 will be anything but boring.



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