

The Academies' Trust Strategic Plan 2020–2023

Together we build bright futures
for young people with SEND.



ASH TREES
ACADEMY



**BARBARA
PRIESTMAN**
ACADEMY



HOPE WOOD
ACADEMY



PORTLAND
ACADEMY



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1.0 Mission and Values

Mission

Together we build bright futures for young people with SEND.

Vision

We will create learning environments where young people thrive, developing physically, academically, socially and emotionally. We will ignite curiosity, ambition, aspiration and aptitudes in our young people so they can play the fullest part possible within their communities.

Values

We have **high expectations** of ourselves and our pupils and celebrate our achievements.

We **embrace difference**, celebrate diversity and promote equality.

We **continually learn** in order that we can respond to the needs of our young people and we **continually improve** through sharing and creating best practice models

We **build impactful collaborations** in our staff team across the Trust, with parents and with wider partnerships

We **respect** each person's distinctive contribution and develop their talents and work productively together.



2.0 Context

The Ascent Academies' Trust was established in August 2012 to provide a home for special schools within the North East that wanted to convert to academy status.

The Trust currently has four academies who have joined under sponsored and voluntary converter arrangements. The Trust works with three different Local Authorities in dynamic and strategic partnership to transform provision and outcomes for the children in their care. Alongside the improvement work in its current member academies, the Trust is working actively with the LA's and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) to grow its family of academies in line with our growth strategy. This will enable a greater level of system-led improvements, further opportunities for collaboration between leaders and staff at all levels of the organisation and better economies of scale, vital in the current challenging economic climate.

The Ascent Academies' Trust provides an opportunity for special schools to convert to academy status within a well-established organisation that enables;

Good or better schools to thrive in their own context and in line with their own vision and values;

Struggling special schools to thrive with specialist and bespoke support matched to our children's needs;

Dynamic collaboration, working in conjunction with a range of partners, to deliver tailored programmes of school improvement that will meet the needs of each academy;

Strong, experienced leadership and challenging governance;

High quality services available to academies that will support improvements to teaching and learning, allowing schools to focus on their core business rather than being distracted by academy business;

Flexibility to meet schools where ever they are on their journey and to adapt to their specific circumstances;

Opportunity to operate in close partnership and strong relationship with Local Authorities and the RSC for the good of our academies.

3.0 Overview by Lynn Watson, Chair of the Ascent Board



We continue to strengthen the leadership capacity of the Trust by appointing new Trustees with the skills, knowledge and experience that match the gaps identified within our skills audit. We have 5 members all of whom have a deep understanding of our Trust and how we work.

We are pleased with the progress we have made in our journey of continuous improvement over the time of the last strategic plan. The good Ofsted inspections of all academies have provided important positive external feedback about our work. The inspections have identified the strengths within the leadership of Trustees and senior leaders, and in our leadership of student well-being.

This 3 year plan begins in a time when the global pandemic has radically changed the face of education, some temporarily and others maybe longer term. The vast majority of our young people have had months of not being at school and experiencing remote learning. They have been isolated from their wider families, peers and teachers. Many young people and staff have been anxious and some have suffered bereavement or illness. Therefore this plan will focus strongly on pupil and staff well-being. In 2016 the Trust undertook their first staff Health and Well-being survey. Since then we have seen year on year improvements in all aspects of the well-being survey. The information is well-used by leaders in each academy and the executive team to identify how we can best support our staff. This continues to be a priority of the Trust, as we aim to reduce staff absence and further build on the well-being of our staff teams over the next three years of the plan.

Key staffing reductions in our Trust over the past few years has enabled us to manage a healthy mid term budget forecast despite funding challenges, whilst still maintaining high quality education for our young people. However, this is going to be a constant challenge as the government navigates its way out of the pandemic and rebuilds the economy.

During the last few years we have developed key partnerships locally and nationally and now have a voice that impacts on government, DfE and other strategic groups. Our local partnership of special schools (NE Challenge Partner Hub) is an active collaboration of schools across the region who work together towards common aims. The part-time secondment of our Director of Academy Improvement to Nasen has raised the profile of Ascent and provided us with invaluable knowledge and CPD.

During the last year we have strengthened our communications with all stakeholders and we will work with our leadership teams to build on their feedback.

This new plan establishes our vision for the future, setting out clear aspirations linked to measurable aims. This will allow Trustees to hold the leadership of the Trust to account and measure progress towards our strategic ambitions.

4.0 Education Continuity Planning

We know the educational, emotional, social and economic impact of COVID-19 will be significant. We are committed to ensuring that as many pupils as possible return to formal schooling in the autumn of 2020 in the safest possible way.

Despite our best efforts, groups of children will return to school having missed substantial parts of their planned educational experience. Our young people will have missed social interaction with peers and adults, missed routine and the familiar pulse of the school day, week and terms.

There is no universal experience of, or response to the lockdown, but we know that some families are under considerably more pressure confined in their homes. We know there has been an increase in domestic violence, an increase in challenging behaviours from our young people and increased social isolation and anxiety. We believe there will be implications of the lockdown for mental ill health. Some children and young people, and staff will be bereaved. There are families we were already worried about before COVID-19. For some of these, the lockdown will have intensified stress on family life. There are also families where we had some concerns – and some others where we had no concerns – who are now under considerable pressure. For some families, the economic consequences are likely to be felt for some time to come. The strong likelihood is that we will see a rise in child poverty and the associated effects that has on learning.

This analysis leads us to propose some principles that we believe should underpin decisions about education continuity planning:

1. **Equity:** the just provision and distribution of resources to pupils in a way that reflects their needs and requirements, positively impacting those who have increased vulnerabilities, have experienced the most detriment to their learning and the lowest engagement with remote education.
2. **Resilience:** the need to find solutions that adapt well in the face of multiple stresses on individuals, families, schools and the sector and can take account of local lockdowns.

3. **Flexibility:** leaders must be trusted to exercise discretion and good judgement to suit their context and in the best interests of their pupils, parents and communities based on acceptable minimum levels of provision.
4. **Kindness:** A gentle approach with staff returning to work, understanding that their lives may have changed significantly through lockdown and they are returning to an unfamiliar school, changed significantly to deliver education during the pandemic.

We are planning for multiple scenarios for September (rotas, full return when it is safe to do so, and possible local lockdown). We need to consider how we build curriculum resilience so that schools can move easily between remote teaching activity and classroom teaching. To safeguard pupils' learning against the likely scenario of further disruption during the period of the pandemic, a refined approach to blended learning approaches will be necessary. Pupils will need to be able to move quickly between complementary programmes of remote and school-based learning, with schools seeking to optimise the benefits of each. This needs to be kept simple as introducing more complexity may mitigate against the most effective interventions, the things that schools do well - strong, purposeful quality first wave teaching; a well-planned curriculum; powerful welfare and pastoral support. In particular we need to consider mental health and bereavement support for staff and students.

5.0 Sustainable Improvement Within Ascent

We have an ambitious vision that needs to be under-pinned by shared values and high levels of trust. In Ascent we aim to build bright futures for our young people with SEND, and to this end we must work collaboratively and ethically. We are in a multi-academy Trust because we believe in, and value collaboration, knowing that we are stronger together.

Our improvement model can be described thus;

	VISION , VALUES, AND CULTURE	PEOPLE, LEARNING AND CAPACITY	ASSESSMENT, CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY	QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY
Stage 1 Stabilise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planned urgent priorities to ensure safe environment Reactive decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of roles against expertise High visibility of leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring basics are in place Imposed curriculum and assessment processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring key policies and practice are in place High levels of support for staff
Stage 2 Repair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stated vision and shared values Establishing positive culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective recruitment and retention of staff CPD Clarity of roles and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff contribution to curriculum and assessment developments Expert teachers drafted in to bolster and share good practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Looking for new habits to embed Begin to challenge based on facts and outcomes
Stage 3 Improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish trust and respect amongst leaders Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embedding strategies and approaches Spotting talent and growing leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared curriculum with developmental staged expectations Outcomes improving Strong performance management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal and external peer review High support and high challenge General data collection to identify outcomes of groups
Stage 4 Sustain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading across schools Confidence in performance Beginnings of innovative practice Increased focus on longer term improvement plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deployment of leaders across the Trust to meet need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared principles for high quality teaching and learning begin to impact Active contribution to Trust improvements Empowering those who can to innovate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fit for purpose data collection and analysis based on individual progress High support and high challenge
Stage 5 Innovate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alignment around shared practices that support improvement Leaders work for the benefit of all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge sharing, research and innovation Capacity to lead on aspects on Trust wide improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence based research Innovation Risk taking Increased freedoms for practitioners-empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High challenge and high support Bespoke QA based on needs of organisation

6.0 Objectives

Strategic Ambitions

Outcomes 2023

By 2023 all of our current academies will:

Be confidently good or better and have developed aspects of exceptional provision and practice

Have adopted an ethical leadership model that supports all decision making in our Trust

Be increasingly sustainable within our buildings, behaviours, procurement and curriculum offer

Offer a dynamic, shared curriculum and assessment system that supports academic progress, emotional well-being and the development of independence and results in the best destinations for individuals

Be high performing and improving academies that continuously respond to the changing needs of their populations;

Have clearly benefited from partnership with one another to offer shared curriculum, leadership, staffing, facilities and resources;

Have identified and secured positions for future leaders to gain experience

Continued to improve the well-being and attendance of its staff and students;

Continued effective financial management;

Respond to local need in SEND, growing the Trust in a considered and measured way

Strategic Aims

Outcomes for students

All academies enabled to reach good or better outcomes for students.

- A.** To improve subject knowledge for teachers and teaching assistants so that all pupils achieve well in line with the academies' expectations and the quality of education is good or better.
- B.** To secure high quality teaching and learning by ensuring all teachers and teaching assistants have a sound understanding of SEND in each academy.
- C.** To ensure that Trust & statutory assessment and recording mechanisms are able to clearly demonstrate the small incremental steps of learning made by our learners with complex needs.
- D.** To develop a communication strategy across the Trust that enables functional literacy and a love of reading for all students.
- E.** To increase the number of student leavers who enter employment, internships and voluntary work.

Academy Improvements

To establish a self-sustaining, system-led, collaborative approach to improvement that enables rapid improvement where required.

- A.** To secure an accurate and robust self-evaluation process within the Trust that is supported by a programme of external quality assurance review across all academies.
- B.** To develop high quality Trust wide/CP network training, research and educational development programmes.
- C.** To build stronger links with our Challenge Partner schools locally and Nationally.
- D.** To secure and maintain a strong profile of teaching and learning across the Trust.

People

To improve staff and student well-being, improving staff recruitment, retention and attendance along with pupil attendance and engagement.

- A. To increase staff autonomy through permission to innovate and lead on aspects of role
- B. To secure retention of good staff and recruitment of high quality staff through a range of well-being support, professional development and collaboration
- C. To improve staff and student well-being post pandemic through mental health openness, education and support
- D. To prepare young people for a lifetime of sustainable living through our teaching, fabric, and day to day practice

Leadership

To ensure high quality leadership and governance at Trust Board, Committees and the Local Accountability Body (LAB).

- A. To implement the ethical leadership framework across the Trust, starting with trustees, ensuring that all decision making is made on the ethical framework.
- B. To ensure that all leaders, aspirant leaders, teachers and TAs have access to the Liberating Leadership/pioneering professionals training, Insights training and ethical leadership framework in order that we develop a shared understanding of leadership behaviours.
- C. Strong, regular communication to all stakeholders about the Trust's progress towards its aims from Trustees, the Executive Team and Heads to staff, parents and students.
- D. To ensure that leadership of staff and student safeguarding and well-being enables all staff and students to thrive in a safe, restorative and welcoming environment.

Business

To strengthen the Trust and ensure future sustainability, efficiency and growth (including incorporating new academies).

- A. To develop the structure of the organisation.
- B. To deliver high quality services and support to academies.
- C. To deliver a strong financial plan.
- D. To maintain measured and systematic growth.

Resources

To ensure that all Trust resources are well-used, maintained and managed to ensure improvement, capacity and growth for the future.

- A. To ensure all buildings are fit for purpose, sustainable, safe and well-maintained.
- B. To ensure that IT infrastructures are fit for purpose, secure and accessible.
- C. Finance management systems and controls are strong and robust.
- D. HR systems and processes are safe, transparent, supportive and efficient.

Sustainability

To ensure that our Trust is a model for sustainability through:

- A. Minimisation of waste and engage in sustainable procurement using goods and services of high environmental and ethical standards and from locally sourced materials where possible.
- B. Manage and, where possible, design buildings in ways that visibly demonstrate sustainable development to everyone who uses the school.
- C. To use sustainable travel where vehicles are only used when absolutely necessary and then less polluting vehicles are used.
- D. To ensure our school meals service sources ethical and sustainable food and drink.
- E. To become as energy efficient as possible, using renewable energy, water conservation, and use our school grounds to encourage wild life and nature.

7.0 Monitoring and Accountability

– Achieving Our Aims.

The strategic plan will be monitored at all levels of governance and leadership. The following sections below demonstrate how our strategic aims are translated in to success criteria, the evidence that Trustees and leaders will request in order to judge and rate our KPIs and the risk associated with not achieving a specific aim.

Outcomes for Students 2023

The provision of the highest quality teaching is well established and maintained through peer support, continuous professional development and a well-embedded coaching approach. Pupils experience a wide range of motivating and challenging, well-pitched learning opportunities across all subjects. Teachers confidently identify barriers to learning and plan ways to overcome these so students achieve well. There is a belief that all pupils can succeed whatever their individual circumstances. Assessment processes are well-honed to recognise the small incremental steps made by our young people with the most complex needs. A Trust wide communication strategy is in place that enables all students to be well-prepared for life beyond school.

Current Position and next steps

Teaching and Learning has improved significantly and published expectations (Career ased Expectations) have supported this improvement. We now need to ensure that teachers have confidence in their subject knowledge and deep SEND knowledge. This is a key area for improvement across all subjects so pupils learning is well-planned and sequenced with key conceptual understanding fully embedded before students move on. In addition teachers and TAs need to have a good understanding of all aspects of SEND, how to overcome barriers to learning and ensure that all advice for our young people is used to support readiness to learn. We will use expertise within our leadership, teaching and TA team and in our wider network to provide coaching & mentoring, professional development and support.

The Trust-wide core curriculum (maths, English, Science, IT and PHSEC) is becoming well-embedded in all academies, enabling teachers to share planning and resources.

Each academy has introduced Trust wide data systems to provide Trustees with comparative data. However, there are aspects of development within this strategic plan to ensure that the assessment process reflects our more complex pupil population, their stage of development and their rates of progress. The key factor for Trustees is to understand whether the academy has robust measures and aspirational targets for pupils. This will be established through the LAB and with interrogation of the data from senior leaders and Trustees. However, the focus in our academies will be on ipsative assessment, measuring an individual's progress over time against our aspirations for each individual in their EHCP.

The introduction of the Engagement profile in statutory assessment guidance will impact on how we assess the very small steps of progress we see in our young people with Profound and multiple learning difficulties. We are also responding to changes to the Early Learning Goals and assessment framework for children in EYFS and both aspects will take some time to embed.

A Trust wide communication strategy will be set out to identify the needs of young people at different stages of development. This will ensure that staff select the most appropriate means of communication and resources to enable young people to flourish. This is supported through communication training (ELKLAN level 3) which began in spring 2020 and will roll out to more staff over this 3 year plan. We also want to ensure that our young people are as literate as possible, from the early stages of recognising objects of reference to reading fluently, we need to embed a love of reading. This is fundamental to our students being prepared for adulthood.

All academies enabled to reach good or better outcomes for students.

OUTCOMES

All academies enabled to reach good or better outcomes for students.

- A. To improve subject knowledge for teachers and teaching assistants so that all pupils achieve well in line with the academies' expectations and the quality of education is good or better.
- B. To secure high quality teaching and learning by ensuring all teachers and teaching assistants have a sound understanding of SEND in each academy.
- C. To ensure that Trust & statutory assessment and recording mechanisms are able to clearly demonstrate the small incremental steps of learning made by our learners with complex needs.
- D. To develop a communication strategy across the Trust that enables functional literacy and a love of reading for all students.
- E. To increase the number of student leavers who enter employment, internships and voluntary work.

Success Criteria

- SC 1 All teaching is good or better in each academy across all key stages and subjects. (LAB).
- SC 2 Non-subject specialist teachers are well-supported to deliver good lessons overtime.
- SC 3 Teaching assistants support learning well across all subjects.
- SC 4 Teachers use assessment well, understanding students' starting points and building on learning in well-planned steps .
- SC 5 The quality of education in all academies are judged to be good or outstanding in OFSTED and other external inspections. (EXT).
- SC 6 Teachers and Teaching assistants understand students' barriers to learning. They make appropriate adjustments to environment, resources and planned learning using all MDT advice.
- SC 7 Assessment and recording systems are developed so teachers and TAs can identify clear steps of individualised progress for pupils with complex learning needs. (LAB).
- SC 8 Pupils are well-equipped to communicate at a level appropriate to need and they become literate developing a love of reading. (QA).
- SC 9 There are year on year increases of students accessing supported employment

Evidence

SC 1	E1 Outcomes from QA reviews on quality of education-observations, work scrutiny etc (spring term, annually). And from Leadership QA (Summer term, annually).
	E2 Outcomes for Lesson observations and 360 reviews carried out by academy leaders and peers.
	E3 Outcomes from annual Challenge Partner Reviews.
SC 2	E1 Feedback from staff during QA reviews on implementation and impact of CPD in classroom.
	E2 Lesson observations and learning walks with HOA during 1:1.
	E3 Teacher registers in each academy.
SC 3	E1 Teaching assistant observations demonstrate good practice.
	E2 Any individual academy evidence of teaching assistant standards being met.
SC 4	E1 Progress for individual students against their EHCP outcomes.
	E2 Data for all groups does not show significant gaps. Work scrutiny or pupil shadowing evidences that needs are met well.
SC 5	E1 Ofsted Reports and Challenge Partner Reviews.
SC 6	E1 Observations and external reviews including Autism accreditation, pupil shadowing and drop ins to Annual Review meetings.
	E2 SCERTS data, LP data.
SC 7	E1 Assessment data demonstrates small steps of progress for students working at B1 and B2.
	E2 Teachers are using assessment well to plan next steps.
SC 8	E1 Observations and learning walks evidence consistent use of communication strategy.
	E2 Quality of Education QA review spring term-pupil voice, strategy and observation.
SC9	E1 Destination data for post 16 leavers and year 11 leaders.
	E2 Academies meet the Gatsby benchmarks.

Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring
KPI 1	Results are at least in line with and often above academy agreed targets and expected attainment and progress given starting points.	LAB
KPI 2	Attainment and progress of disadvantaged children is in line with their peers.	LAB
KPI 3	85% + of teachers meet career based expectations.	LAB
KPI 4	Ofsted reports grade each academy good or better.	SC & Board
KPI 5	External reviews are good or better.	LAB

Identified Risk		Strategies to Mitigate
R1	Improvements in T&L are not secured and RI academies remain RI resulting in a reputational damage to the Trust.	<p>M1 Deployment of Trust resources to secure rapid improvement.</p> <p>M2 CPD for teachers who need to improve.</p> <p>M3 Trustees to monitor anonymised PM targets of teachers who are experiencing difficulty.</p>
R2	A specific area does not improve rapidly enough and affects the whole academy Ofsted judgement e.g. EYFS/ Post-16.	<p>M1 Deployment of Trust or external resources.</p> <p>M2 Short term action plan monitored by EHT.</p> <p>M3 External support.</p>
R3	Significant groups of students make insufficient progress or there remains significant gaps between groups and the rest of the pupils.	<p>M1 Close monitoring of PPG, year 7 Catch Up and Sports Premium Grant.</p> <p>M2 Rewriting assessment and progress expectations for B1 and B2 learners.</p> <p>M3 External reviews.</p>

Academy Improvement – 2023 Outcome

All staff and Trustees clearly understand the core values of the Trust and the way it operates. Leaders across the trust act in line with these values, encouraging people to work towards the aims of the organisation. Leaders ensure that the core values are at the heart of the organisation's strategy and govern the way it operates. Leaders of the academies provide challenge and support for each other in order that improvement is central to our work.

Current Position and next steps

The Trust recently appointed a new Chair who is a passionate, knowledgeable and experienced leader in our sector. We are currently recruiting two new Trustees who will bring expertise, leadership and financial acumen to the Board. The CEO is charged with providing support and challenge to the Heads of Academy (HOA) and holding them to account. Heads of Academy have recently established Trust wide strategic leadership roles. The group of Deputy Head Teachers (DHT) for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TL&A) have worked across the Trust under the leadership of the Director of Academy Improvement. There has been significant input from members of this team in terms of the tremendous shared curriculum and assessment model.

Each Academy has developed a self-evaluation document and from this, an Academy Improvement Plan that gives details of the actions being undertaken to ensure that good progress is made. This will be monitored in CEO visits, Trustee visits and the termly LAB meetings. In addition, there is a well-established cycle of monitoring and review by the Executive Team. This group comprises the CEO, COO, and Director of Academy Improvement. This process has been sharpened more recently and rather than holding blanket reviews across all academies we are tailoring reviews based on academies' unique position and circumstances.

The last cycle of Ofsted inspections judged all academies to be at least good. Challenge partner reviews also matched these judgements and also awarded Barbara Priestman an area of excellence.

Now we have seen substantial and sustained improvement in the quality of teaching and learning we have an opportunity to encourage teachers and TAs to learn from one another and make time for teachers to spend time critically analysing one another's practice. It is important that teachers and teaching assistants believe that they can learn from colleagues, whatever stage of their career. Teachers should be provided with freedoms to try out new ideas, implement tried and tested practice and be reflective. We believe that when staff feel that they are making a professional contribution to their school, they enjoy their work more and accomplish more. We want to include parents, carers and other professionals in discussions about learning and progress.



ACADEMY IMPROVEMENT

To establish a self-sustaining, system led, collaborative approach to improvement.

- A. To secure an accurate and robust self-evaluation process within the Trust that is supported by a programme of external quality assurance review across all academies.
- B. To develop high quality Trust wide/CP network training and educational development programmes.
- C. To build stronger links with our Challenge Partner schools locally and Nationally.
- D. To secure and maintain a strong profile of teaching and learning across the Trust.

Success Criteria

- SC 1** Self-evaluation by academies matches that of the external and internal reviews.
- SC 2** Academy Improvement Plans align closely with the Trust Strategic Plan and academy priorities are appropriate to the specific needs of each academy reflecting findings of internal and external monitoring.
- SC 3** Leaders' engagement with training partners, local and national networks and teaching schools provide access to high quality training and support.
- SC 4** CEO to support and challenge the HOA on a monthly basis securing improvement in identified areas. External support and challenge comes from a range of providers.
- SC 5** There is a range of opportunity for joint practice development for teachers and TAs across the Trust and the CP hub in curriculum and TL&A that leads to improvement in teaching and learning.
- SC 6** Performance management processes ensure that staff make a strong contribution to academy improvement.

Evidence

SC 1	E1	Academy SEF judgements for each review judgement matches external review judgements, (e.g. QA's).
	E2	Area for development from the external review are completed in a timely manner.
SC 2	E1	Trustee/CEO visit summaries.
	E2	AIP aligns to the Trust vision and aims.
SC 3	E1	Impact report from DAI on teacher training collated from DHT (TLA).
	E2	NQT and ECF training impact report and feedback.
	E3	Impact/feedback on training/CPD across Trust and CP hub.
SC 4	E1	1:1 reports to Trustees.
	E2	QA reviews and external reviews/accreditation or quality marks demonstrate improvements. Attendance of external peers.(critical friends).
SC 5	E1	Evidence of improvements in classrooms through shared practice, impact of CPD, coaching and shared observations.
	E2	Progress against academy key priorities in TL&A.
SC 6	E1	Well-being survey-roles section.
	E2	Trust collated Teacher register.

Key Performance Indicators

Responsible for Monitoring

KPI 6	Academies make progress in terms of OFSTED grade(s).	Board/SC
KPI 7	Trust support in the academy impacts positively in terms of measurable progress and/or impact.	LAB & SC
KPI 8	Academies achieve key priorities.	LAB & SC
KPI 9	85% + of teachers meet career based expectations.	LAB

Identified Risk

R4 Performance of schools not improving sufficiently or quickly enough impacts on the reputation of the Trust.

Strategies to Mitigate

M1 Prioritise resources to ensure rapid school improvement.

M2 Ensure that monitoring systems and accurate assessments are coming from the ELT and LAB.

M3 Link Trustees to provide another layer of support and challenge.

M4 Deploy effective leadership effectively.

M5 External support.



Academy Improvement – 2023 Outcome

We provide an environment in which everyone is encouraged and supported to develop leadership and management competencies. This enables Ascent to maximise the talent within the trust and plan for succession. We constantly review the progress made by the Trust against the organisation's overall investment. We challenge under-performance and support all to thrive. We value the well-being and safety of all who work and learn in Ascent and therefore measure up well against industry standards such as Investors in People and our own well-being standards. Safeguarding continues to be exemplary. Leaders value teachers' and TA ideas, and we actively seek input from these groups of staff, engage them in decision making, trust their judgement and support and reward risk taking and innovation designed to improve student outcomes and reinforce the sharing of ideas and effective practice across schools and the Trust.

Current Position and next steps

There are greatly improved systems for governance including terms of reference, calendars, role descriptions and specific review items on every meeting agenda. There are developing systems and processes for Trustees to have a secure understanding of the strengths and needs of each academy in the Trust. A document that tracks risk is rigorous, meticulous and leads to improvement across our schools. The Trust has recruited some first-rate and very committed Trustees who fulfill their complex role excellently. The Trustees are keen to adopt the Ethical Leadership Framework. There are currently a number of vacancies on the Board that we hope to fill for this September (2020).

The Executive Leadership Team, although smaller, is made up of experienced and skilled leaders who are impacting positively on academy improvement. More recently the Heads of Academies have taken on a Trust-wide improvement remit, leading on aspects of provision and improvement across the Trust. This supports collaboration and develops a clearer understanding of the challenges faced in each academy. For this period of the strategic plan, the following responsibilities and outcomes are agreed;

Wendy Coates, Ash Trees

Responsible for: Leadership of a Trust wide communication strategy and Emotion Coaching strategy so that both are fully embedded in practice across the Trust impacting positively on levels of behaviour, progress in communication and literacy and pupil learning.

Sharon Common, Portland Academy

Responsible for: Leadership and supervision of the Designated safeguarding leads, ensuring all higher level cases are well-managed and moderated across the Trust. To ensure that Trustees receive termly reports and all training is up to date and relevant issues are raised.

Adele Pearson, Hope Wood Academy

Responsible for: To embed the ethical leadership framework into all aspects of leaders' decision making and behaviour in the Trust. To develop leadership teams in the Trust and aspirant leaders through the Insights and Liberating leadership programmes. To identify potential leaders with Heads and help nurture talent.

Rachel Hargreaves, Barbara Priestman (Director of Academy Improvement)

Responsible for: To improve the quality of education across all schools in the Trust through the leadership of the Deputy Head team (TL&A) and ensuring that NQTs and those on the ECF are well-supported, and new teachers to the Trust have sound, high quality induction and the probationary policy is well-implemented.

We look forward to seeing the outcomes of these Trust leadership actions over the three year plan.

The website is currently under review and we are developing improved use of social media platforms to communicate with our stakeholders (Parents, carers, students and prospective families, employers and feeder schools) The restrictions placed on us by the pandemic will influence how we meet and we will develop the use of video conferencing to meet virtually, maximising time and helping leaders stay on site and reduce travel time. Virtual meetings with parents and carers has the potential to reach those disadvantaged by geography whilst still having face to face contact with staff in schools.

Trustees need to be supported to carry out their role effectively, and to this end we need to provide bespoke governance support. This will support communication and the use of technology will help Trustees to access academy life virtually when visiting all is not practicable.

Many students and staff have not been in a classroom for several months and will need gentle encouragement to come back. Some staff have not stopped working in school face to face with students through the holiday periods and others have worked from home. We need to carefully consider the needs of our students and our workforce, bringing them back safely and responding to need. To this end we need to ensure we safeguard our most vulnerable young people in our plans for re-opening our schools for the September term start.

LEADERSHIP

To establish a self-sustaining, system led, collaborative approach to improvement.

- A. To implement the ethical leadership framework across the Trust, starting with trustees, ensuring that all decision making is made on the ethical framework.
- B. To ensure that all leaders, aspirant leaders, teachers and TAs have access to the Liberating Leadership/pioneering professionals training, Insights training and ethical leadership framework in order that we develop a shared understanding of leadership behaviours.
- C. Strong, regular communication to all stakeholders about the Trust's progress towards its aims from Trustees, the Executive Team and Heads to staff, parents and students.
- D. To ensure that leadership of staff and student safeguarding and well-being enables all staff and students to thrive in a safe, restorative and welcoming environment.

Success Criteria

- SC 1** There is a full complement of Trustees that meet all aspects of the skills audit. There are clear role descriptions linked to the Ethical Leadership Framework for each Trustee. They are well supported by a high quality Governance support service.
- SC 2** The Board and Trust leaders routinely make decisions around the Ethical Leadership Framework.
- SC 3** Leadership, including governance, is judged through our own systems and by Ofsted inspectors to be Good or better in each academy.
- SC 4** Senior leaders, well-developed middle leaders and identified potential leaders are demonstrating strong progress in each academy as evidenced by LAB meeting reports.
- SC 5** Staff take increased responsibility for their own well-being at work and support one another in making changes where necessary.
- SC 6** All safeguarding, health and safety and legal responsibilities continue to be met.
- SC 7** Stakeholders are clear about the Trust vision and actions taken to achieve it.
- SC 8** There is a safe environment secured for staff and students to return and where this is not possible, a blended learning approach is on offer that supports student well-being.

Evidence

SC 1	E1 Recruitment of Trustees is complete and there are no vacant positions. Governor support is in place.
	E2 Trustees' skills are well-matched to roles and responsibilities. No identified gaps in skills audit.
	E3 Minutes from Trustee and Leadership meetings evidence discussion around Ethical framework.
SC 2	E1 The Scheme of Delegation is used well to enable the right people to make the right decisions using Ethical Leadership Framework.
	E2 The Terms of reference ensure that each Board, Committee or Body fulfill their responsibilities.
SC 3	E1 Ofsted reports –outcome for leadership and management.
SC 4	E1 Minutes from LAB meetings and the Dynamic Academy Review (DAR).
	E2 Leaders all access training.
SC 5	E1 Staff across the trust access SOMETHING
	E2 Outcomes of well-being survey roles section.
SC 6	E1 Headline Contextual data.
	E2 Safeguarding reports to Trustees.
SC 7	E1 Information About the Trust vision and strategic plan is shared with parents/carers.
	E2 Vision and values are shared through the website.
SC 8	E1 Published recovery curriculum in place.
	E2 Planned response to a range of scenarios (local lockdown, full/partial return of students).
	E3 Mental health support in place through a whole trust approach to Emotion Coaching.

Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring
KPI 10	There is a full Executive Team and all Academies have a full Leadership Team.	Board
KPI 11	The Trust Board is running at full complement with attendance levels in excess of 85%.	Chair of Board
KPI 12	Leadership, including Governance is rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted in all academies.	Board & Members

Identified Risk	Strategies to Mitigate
R5 Key leaders leave, resign, retire or move from the Trust.	<p>M1 Focus on retention of quality leaders and Trustees.</p> <p>M2 Succession planning and talent management.</p> <p>M3 Academy ambassadors.</p>
R6 National shortage of high quality school leaders impacts on the ability to recruit to academy teams.	<p>M1 Succession planning within existing staff teams.</p> <p>M2 Programme of leadership training within the Trust.</p> <p>M3 PM career based expectations and leadership roles at UPS (EXPERT) teacher.</p>
R7 The quality of internal and external reviews insufficiently robust and does not identify significant areas of weakness or identify these early enough.	<p>M1 Bespoke ELT support in challenging academies.</p> <p>M2 Bespoke timescales on reviews and external inspection.</p>

People – 2023 Outcome

Ascent in an inclusive Trust, the skills and experience of staff are valued and utilised in striving for excellence. No groups are discriminated against. We value each person equally whilst being mindful of the needs of the whole Trust. There are strong fields of applicants for key posts from people who know, and want to work in our Trust. Staff and students attend well and absence rates are near average. Well-being results improve year on year and all academies work towards the IIP standards.

People – Next Steps

During the life of the last plan there has been a clear focus on staff well-being, workload and its impact on staff work-life balance and also on reward and recognition. This work has been a priority as we recognise that there are some high levels of staff sickness absence in a number of our academies. This work has resulted in an established annual well-being survey with key related areas for development. The Workload Charter was published in summer 2017 and this is discussed with staff through regular Performance Management (PM) meetings to ensure that the academy is working within the charter. We have made significant improvements in all aspects of the well-being survey across the Trust. However, the most recent survey in spring 2020, at the start of the pandemic, also asked staff about their own mental health and well-being, and how they felt that issues around mental health were addressed in the Trust. There were many positive responses. As a result of the mental health training that many staff completed in 2019, there appears to be a much better understanding of mental health and these are spoken about more openly. We do know that about a fifth of our staff experience anxiety at work and a smaller number experience stress at work.

In December 2019 we invested in full staff training in Emotion Coaching. This is communication strategy which supports young people to self regulate and manage their stress responses. It is an effective way to nurture mental health and wellbeing in education settings. Emotion Coaching enables adults to communicate more effectively and consistently with children in stressful situations helping children to stay calm, in turn making school life less stressful and exhausting for staff. We now need to use our identified EC Champions to roll out and embed this training so we can further improve the well-being of our staff and children.

Prior to the lockdown we had begun to establish a framework for workforce remodelling in order that we create equity in roles and salaries for our support staff teams. At the same time we hope to provide clarity in Trust career progression for support staff and set out minimum standards for performance management and professional development. This process will be implemented within the timescales of this plan.

Pupil absence levels have been in line or above the special school average, but we have to address the % persistent absentees in our academy so that they are not disadvantaged or become vulnerable to abuse.

As we move from the sustain to innovate aspect of our academy improvement plan we will endeavour to provide staff with increased autonomy and decision making. Research carried out by NFER has found that teacher autonomy is associated with higher job satisfaction and intention to stay in teaching. Teachers' perceived influence over their professional development goal setting is the area most associated with higher job satisfaction and a greater intention to stay in teaching. Therefore we must ensure that good teachers are encouraged to coconstruct their performance goals and aim to increase the controls these teachers have within their classroom, department and academy.

PEOPLE

To improve staff and student well-being, improving staff recruitment, retention and attendance along with pupil attendance and engagement.

- A. To increase staff autonomy through permission to innovate and lead on aspects of role.
- B. To secure retention of good staff and recruitment of high quality staff through a range of well-being support, professional development and collaboration.
- C. To improve staff and student well-being post pandemic through mental health openness, education and support
- D. To prepare young people for a lifetime of sustainable living through our teaching, fabric, and day to day practice

Success Criteria

- SC 1** Staff are empowered to make changes in their classroom, and department or school based on research and practice. Innovation (including the use of technology) reduces workload
- SC 2** The Trust attracts strong fields of applicants for most teaching posts and support roles.
- SC 3** To reduce levels of stress and anxiety in the staff teams. Each academy has a strategy to address mental health issues and actively supports workload reduction. There is a published Trust well-being charter.
- SC 4** Full return to work is well-managed overtime and staff are confident about their safety and well-being
- SC 5** Staff absence rates lowers as a result of higher support and challenge and higher autonomy
- SC 6** The curriculum addresses key aspects of sustainability and this is promoted through the hidden curriculum and the day to day behaviour and decisions of leaders at all levels.

Evidence

SC 1	E1	Control scores on well-being survey increase.
	E2	Staff retention rates and exit interviews.
SC 2	E1	There are no unfilled leadership vacancies in any academy due to non-recruitment rounds.
SC 3	E1	Reduction in numbers of staff identifying as anxious or stressed at work by 20% (well-being survey annually)
SC 4	E1	Staff sickness absence rates return to pre-pandemic rate or better.
	E2	Responses on personal well-being section of survey.
SC 5	E1	PM meetings agree levels of autonomy and empower staff.
	E2	Research model becomes part of the PM process for most.
SC 6	E1	Planned, shared curriculum modules in place.
	E2	Academies achieve the Sustainable schools award.



Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring
KPI 13	Pupil attendance in all academies is above 91%.	LAB & SC
KPI 14	Levels of PA is below 20% in secondary academies and 15% in primary academies.	LAB
KPI 15	All leadership vacancies are filled.	SC
KPI 16	Teacher absence rates are at or less than 4% in each academy.	LAB & SC
KPI 17	Support staff absence rates are at or less than 4%.	LAB & SC
KPI 18	Safeguarding of all staff and students is effective in each academy.	LAB & SC
KPI 19	Well-being scores >3 for each section overall.	Annual Survey

Identified Risk		Strategies to Mitigate
R8	Staff absence rates continue to rise and supply costs place budgets at risk.	M1 Close monitoring of the budget position by EHT. M2 Staff absence insurance policy.
R9	Staff absence significantly affects the stability of the academy to deliver high quality TL&A, behaviour and safety and therefore outcomes.	M1 Flexible deployment of resources across the Trust.

8.0 Financial Plan

	2017–18 £'000	2018–19 £'000	2019–20 £'000
Income	13,856	14,100	15,697
Expenditure	13,925	14,100	15,697
Surplus / (deficit)	(69)	0	0
Reserves B/F	1136	1067	1067
Reserves C/F	1067	1067	1067
Reserves as a % of income	7.7%	7.7%	7.7%
Number of Academies	5	5	7
Pupil Numbers	799	810	900
Average funding per pupil	£17,342	£17,407	£17,441
Academy % contribution to central costs	4%	4%	3.8%



Assumptions and Guidance

1. Financial Planning Model for 2017/18 is based on the budget approved by Trustees in July 2017 and for later years assumes all academies will be operating within a balanced position from 2018- 19 onwards. All additional academies opened by the Trust or joining the Trust will aim to achieve a 3%-5% surplus in year.
2. 2017/18 based on 5 academies, no new additions in the year. £69k in year deficit budget due to overhanging costs from surplus vacant site (New Bridge Lower – in process of surrendering lease and handing back to the LA in year).
3. 2018/19 based on 5 academies, although preparing for the opening of the new Free School and additional converter academy in 2019/20. Balanced budget forecast and surplus site disposed of. Increase in commissioned placed at 2 academies taking pupil/place numbers to 810.
4. 2019/20 based on 7 academies, including the new special free school in Sunderland and the planned addition of another Good or Outstanding special school joining the Trust. Small surplus budget set as a result of the Free School. Pupil numbers increased by 30 from the Free School and an estimate of 60 from the other additional converter academy. Academy contributions to central Trust costs forecast to reduce to 3.8% as a result of the additional academies and contribution they make to central services/costs.
5. Reserve policy to remain at 5% of annual income to ensure the Trust remains in a healthy and stable position and enable flexibility for capacity building and future investment and growth. Guidance indicates that academy trusts should maintain surplus funds of between 3% and 5% of total income.
6. Central support costs include Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Finance, HR, Facilities, IT and Governance Managers/ Lead, support staff, external audit, internal audit, pension audit costs, safeguarding and health & safety for all academies and assumes a 4% contribution of annual income from all academies.
7. Financial plans are challenged annually by Trustees through the Finance, Risk and Resources Committee.



9.0 Growth Strategy

The Ascent Multi- Academy Trust aims to provide exceptional support for pupils with a range of Special educational needs. The Trust aims to have between 8 and 10 special schools working in hubs over 2 geographical areas in the North-East over a 5 year measured expansion plan. This will include the application for the Free School in Sunderland.

These areas will include, current Local Authorities (Sunderland, Durham and Stockton) and in addition we will consider other authorities such as Redcar & Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Gateshead. Given the collaborative model of the Trust, a maximum of 45 minutes travelling time between academies within the hub has been identified. Hubs will enable a North/South collaboration.

Two collaborative hubs; one in the North and one in the South of the region would provide a sustainable collaborative model of school to school support and enable a level of local governance.

The Trust intends to grow through the converter approach of high performing special schools coming in to the Trust reflecting the Government agenda of all schools becoming academies by 2020. We will only consider sponsorship of under-performing schools when the existing academies in the Trust are all good or outstanding. The Trust has no current plans to expand outside of the region.

An expanding MAT of this size will inspire greater collaboration and innovation, built on current good practice. **When a school is proposed to be part of our MAT we consider:**

Moral obligation

Size of school and designation

Financial position of school

Distance between schools

Ofsted category of the school

However, our moral obligation to raise standards and address under-performance remains the overriding consideration and this must be considered in terms of ensuring no existing students are at detriment.

Our intention and ambition is to create a network of outstanding special schools that thrive through collaboration and interaction.

We feel a sense of responsibility and obligation to expand. We will only expand when we have the capacity to do so. It is the responsibility of the Trust to build capacity as it develops.

Our Trust will serve a range of communities including those with relatively high levels of deprivation.

What we won't do..

Put competition before collaboration.

Expand through sponsorship without all existing academies being in a strong position

Nor do anything that would be detrimental to any young person, staff or school in a neighbouring community.

10.0 Glossary

Academies

ATA Ash Trees Academy

BPA Barbara Priestman Academy

HWA Hope Wood Academy

NBA New Bridge Academy

PA Portland Academy

General Terms

AIP Academy Improvement Plan

BAB Business Accountability Board

CEO Chief Executive Officer

CPD Continued Professional Development

DAR Dynamic Academy Review

DHT Deputy Head Teacher

EHT Executive Head Teacher

ELT Executive Leadership Team

EYFS Early Years Foundation Stage

GDPR General Data Protection Regulations

H&S Health and Safety

HOA Head of Academy

LA Local Authority

LAB Local Accountability Board

NQT Newly Qualified Teacher

PA Persistent Absentee

PHSE Personal Health & Social Education

PPG Pupil Premium Grant

QA Quality Assurance

RE Religious Education

RI Requires Improvement

RSC Regional Schools Commissioner

SC Standards Committee

SEND Special Education Needs and Disability

SCERTS Sensory Communication Emotional Regulation Transitional Support

SEF Self Evaluation Form

SLP Student Learning Plan

SMSC Social Moral Spiritual and Cultural

TL & A Teaching Learning and Assessment

UPS Upper Pay Scale