

**Company registration number 08098007 (England and Wales)**

**THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST  
(A COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE)**

**ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023**

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## CONTENTS

---

	<b>Page</b>
Reference and administrative details	1 - 2
Trustees' report	3 - 18
Governance statement	19 - 24
Statement on regularity, propriety and compliance	25
Statement of trustees' responsibilities	26
Independent auditor's report on the accounts	27 - 29
Independent reporting accountant's report on regularity	30 - 31
Statement of financial activities including income and expenditure account	32 - 33
Balance sheet	34
Statement of cash flows	35
Notes to the accounts including accounting policies	36 - 58

---

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

---

### Members

V Milnes  
Dame D Smith  
M Morris OBE  
M Butler  
N Hurn OBE

### Trustees

P Aitchison  
C Green  
G Jobs  
S Martin-Denham (Appointed 27 February 2023)  
H Smith (Appointed 14 July 2023)  
PL Watson OBE (Chair)  
G Bowman (Appointed 12 June 2023)  
N Hudspeth  
G Kirkbride  
C Morgan (CEO)  
K Stevens  
P Mee (Appointed 15 September 2023)  
AJ Stephenson (Appointed 9 October 2023)

### Senior management team

- Chief Executive Officer	C Morgan
- Chief Operating Officer	M Little
- Executive Head Teacher	A Pearson (June 2023)
- Executive Head Teacher	S Common (June 2023)

### Company secretary

A Marshall

### Company registration number

08098007 (England and Wales)

### Academies operated

Portland Academy  
Barbara Priestman Academy  
Hope Wood Academy  
Ash Trees Academy

### Location

Sunderland  
Sunderland  
County Durham  
Stockton-on-Tees

### Principal

S Murphy  
A Pearson  
A Pearson  
G Musson

### Independent auditor

Azets Audit Services  
Bulman House  
Regent Centre  
Gosforth  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE3 3LS

### Bankers

Lloyds Bank plc  
5th Floor  
102 Grey Street  
Newcastle Upon Tyne  
Tyne And Wear  
NE1 6AG  
United Kingdom

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

---

### Solicitors

Ward Hadaway Solicitors  
Sandgate House  
102 Quayside  
Newcastle Upon Tyne  
Tyne And Wear  
NE1 3DX  
United Kingdom

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

The Trustees present their annual report together with the financial statements and auditor's report of the charitable company for the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023. The annual report serves the purpose of both a Trustees' Report and Directors' Report under company law.

The Trust operates four special academies in the North East of England. Its academies, spanning three local authorities and across seven sites, had a combined pupil roll at the end of the year of 770 students. This is an overall increase of 22 pupils from last year, with academies expanding and growing in numbers to meet demand.

#### **Structure, governance and management**

##### Constitution

The Ascent Academies' Trust (the "Trust") was incorporated on 8 June 2012. It is a company limited by guarantee with no share capital (registration number 08098007) and an exempt charity under the Academies Act 2010. The charitable company's Memorandum and Articles of Association are the primary governing documents of the Trust. The charitable company is known as The Ascent Academies' Trust.

The Trustees of the Trust are also the directors of the charitable company for the purposes of company law. Trustees of the charitable company are nominated by either the Secretary of State for Education or by the members. The Ascent Academies' Trust is a single trust multi-academy sponsor. In that capacity, it acts as one employer across all academies which it sponsors. The academies forming part of the Trust during the financial year were:

Ash Trees Academy - Bowes Road, Billingham, TS23 2BU

Ash Trees Academy – Rievaulx Avenue, Billingham, TS23 2BH

Barbara Priestman Academy - Meadowside, Sunderland, SR2 7QN

Barbara Priestman Academy 6th Form – Thornholme Road, Sunderland, SR2 7NA

Hope Wood Academy – Crawlaw Road, Easington, SR8 3LP

Hope Wood Academy 6th Form – Edenhill Road, Peterlee, SR8 5DD

Portland Academy - Weymouth Road, Sunderland, SR3 2NQ

Details of the Trustees who served during the year are included in the Reference and Administrative Details on page 1.

##### Members' liability

Each member of the charitable company undertakes to contribute to the assets of the charitable company in the event of it being wound up while they are a member, or within one year after they cease to be a member, such amount as may be required, not exceeding £10, for the debts and liabilities contracted before they ceased to be a member.

##### Trustees' indemnities

A Trustee may benefit from any indemnity insurance purchased at the Academy Trust's expense to cover the liability of the Trustees, which by virtue of any rule of law would otherwise attach to them in respect of any negligence, default or breach of trust or breach of duty of which they may be guilty in relation to the Academy Trust, provided that any such insurance shall not extend to any claim arising from any act or omission which the Trustees knew to be a breach of trust, or breach of duty or which was committed by the Trustees in reckless disregard as to whether it was a breach of trust or breach of duty or not, and provided also that any such insurance shall not extend to the costs of any unsuccessful defence to a criminal prosecution brought against the Trustees in their capacity as Trustees of the Academy Trust.

In accordance with normal commercial practice, the Academy Trust has purchased insurance to protect Trustees and officers from claims arising from negligent acts, errors or omissions occurring whilst on Academy Trust business through the ESFA's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) scheme which provides cover up to £10,000,000.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### **FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023**

---

#### Method of recruitment and appointment or election of trustees

Trustees are appointed under the rules contained within the Trust's Memorandum and Articles of Association and membership of the Board of Trustees is in accordance with the structure contained within it. The number of Trustees and the appointments made are in line with the guidance in the Articles of Association.

The Trustees may appoint Staff Trustees through such process as they may determine, provided that the total number of Trustees (including the Chief Executive) who are employees of the Trust, does not exceed one third of the total number of Trustees. There was one staff Trustee who served throughout the period, this was the Chief Executive.

The Trustees make the necessary arrangements for and determine all matters relating to the election of Parent Trustees. Parent Trustees must be a parent or an individual exercising parental responsibility of a pupil at one of the academies at the time they were elected. There are two Parent Trustees positions on the Board, however there were four Parent Trustees in total who served at some point during the period. When one Parent Trustee resigned during the year and the term of office came to an end for the other, an election process was undertaken during the year to recruit to the two vacancies. Two new Parent Trustees were successfully in post during the summer term.

The Trustees may appoint co-opted Trustees. The Trustees may not co-opt an employee of the Trust as a co-opted Trustee if thereby the number of Trustees who are employees would exceed one third of the total number of Trustees.

The Secretary of State may appoint additional Trustees as they think fit if they have given a warning notice and the Trustees have failed to comply, or secure compliance, with the notice to the Secretary of State's satisfaction, within the compliance period. The Secretary of State may also appoint additional Trustees following an inspection by the Chief Inspector of Schools (Ofsted) where the Trust receives a grading which amounts to a drop of two Ofsted grades.

#### Policies and procedures adopted for the induction and training of trustees

All new Trustees are given an induction at the commencement of their post, in addition to on-going opportunities for training and development. The Trust performs a regular skills audit of Trustees and, when any gaps are identified, training courses or other methods (such as working with a mentor) are offered to address these issues. Statutory guidance is also adhered to and linked to relevant training in areas such as, for example, Prevent and Keeping Children Safe in Education.

The Board of Trustees continued to operate efficiently and effectively, with a proportion of meetings conducted online, and others being held face-to-face. This enabled the Trust to maximise attendance and effectiveness using face-to-face meetings for those issues requiring richer discussion. The Board met regularly over the year, in addition to supplementary meetings of the Chairs and individual meetings with Trustees to challenge and support senior leaders.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees remained unchanged throughout the academic year. There were three Trustee appointments during the year and two resignations. Two further appointments were made at the start of the new 2023-24 academic year, providing additional expertise in some of the areas where skills gaps had previously been identified. A further skills audit will be carried out in the new academic year to ascertain where there are any remaining skills gaps that need to be addressed.

During 2022-23, the Board agreed to expand numbers and fill all existing vacant Trustee positions, taking the total number of Trustees to fifteen, the maximum possible within the Articles of Association. To date, there are 13 Trustees in place, with a further two identified and going through the appointment and clearance process.

#### Organisational structure

The Board of Trustees has overall responsibility, and is ultimately accountable, for all the academies within the Trust. It holds to account the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Chief Operating Officer (COO). Powers are delegated from the Board via a scheme of delegation and decision matrix which is reviewed annually by each of the Trust's committees and the Board.

The Trustees were responsible for strategic planning, setting general policy, adopting strategic and development plans, budget monitoring, making major decisions about the direction of the academies and the Trust and senior staffing appointments.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### *FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023*

---

The Board of Trustees and Standards Committee were responsible for the setting and review of the curriculum, monitoring the standards and performance of each of the individual academies. The Standards Committee formally met six times during the year.

The Board of Trustees and the Finance, Audit, Risk & Resources Committee (which was superseded during the year by the Finance, Assets & Resources Committee and the Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee) were responsible for monitoring, supporting, challenging, and reviewing the financial sustainability of the Trust, financial management and control, the efficient and effective use of resources and effectively managing risk. The Finance, Audit, Risk & Resources Committee formally met twice during the year, with the Finance, Assets & Resources Committee meeting four times and the Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee meeting twice.

The new clerk (governance professional), appointed in June 2023, is supporting the development of governance within the Trust, supported by a 0.5 FTE governance support officer.

The Executive Leadership Team throughout the year consisted of the CEO and COO. As part of a restructure during the summer term, the team was extended to include two Executive Heads. The team led and managed the Trust at an executive level, steering the direction of the academies in line with strategic plans and developing opportunities.

The Senior Leadership Teams were responsible for the day-to-day operation of each individual academy in addition to supporting the wider work and objectives of the Trust.

#### Arrangements for setting pay and remuneration of key management personnel

The remuneration of the key management personnel is determined by the Pay and Review Committee from which the CEO is excluded in relation to discussion of their remuneration. The committee is guided by a formal report and supported by an external HR partner ensuring that all available relevant information is considered including legislative obligations, teaching and support pay scales in relation to salaries and settlement levels, internal differentials, recruitment difficulties, the proposed costs and ability to pay.

#### Engagement with employees

The Trust is committed to ensuring employees are as informed and as involved as possible in the operation and development of the MAT. The leadership and management teams within the Trust communicate regularly with staff to ensure all employees have the necessary information on all matters that may concern them. Employees are consulted regularly through a number of different avenues so the Trust can obtain views and opinions on activities, developments, decisions or changes that may affect them.

The Trust has ensured regular communication and engagement with employees so that staff feel informed, involved and supported.

Regular staff surveys throughout the year have been very productive in capturing staff thoughts, views and feelings, and have provided a mechanism for staff to engage and communicate with leadership, including anonymously if preferred. This has supported interaction with staff and provided valuable feedback.

The Trust values the views and involvement of all employees and ensures the appropriate engagement methods are used to maximise staff input.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

The Trust agreed and published its Equality Statement and Objectives in order to discharge its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty. This sets out the Trust's commitment to ban unfair treatment and achieve equal opportunities in the classroom, the workplace, in wider society and to embed equality considerations in day-to-day practice.

The duty to have 'due regard' to equality considerations means that whenever significant decisions are being made or policies developed, thought will be given to the equality implications. Our policy sets out that as an employer, 'the Trust will not discriminate against a potential employee in respect of whether to offer a job or the terms on which a position is offered and must not discriminate against an existing employee in respect of the benefits, facilities and services offered to employees, including training opportunities, promotion or dismissal'.

All academies are required to prepare and publish specific and measurable objectives to demonstrate how the Trust's Equality Objectives are being met. This includes the objective to continue to address workforce-based equality issues by conforming to agreed Human Resource procedures on appointments, promotions and other employment issues, whilst always appointing the best.

As a Trust we ensure that our recruitment process is fully inclusive and accessible. We display our Disability Confident badge to ensure potential applicants know that we are an inclusive employer. We ensure that there are reasonable adjustments in the workplace where a disabled person would otherwise be put at a substantial disadvantage compared with other colleagues. Our Disability Confident accreditation requires the Trust as an employer to commit to offering disabled people one of nine activities. At present, we have committed to three areas: work experience, paid employment and apprenticeships.

We continue to employ several former students in posts within our academies in a variety of roles. In addition, we had increased the number of apprenticeship opportunities, of which some are being undertaken by former students.

#### Engagement with suppliers, customers and others in a business relationship with the academy trust

The Board of Trustees behaves responsibly and ethically to ensure that leadership operate the business in a responsible manner, functioning within the high standards of conduct and good governance expected of a Multi Academy Trust. This is reflected in the values and ethical leadership model embedded within the Trust.

Trustees do not interact directly with suppliers but do set the principles around the type of suppliers the Trust wants to be associated with. This includes locally based and locally focussed companies, organisations with good ethical values and principles and those companies that contribute to a sustainable future.

The Trust seeks to operate on a formal contract basis to ensure complete transparency for all parties around expectations, responsibilities and obligations. This enables the delivery of consistently good service together with the timing and amicable resolution of any issues arising. The Trust seeks to ensure that the achievement of value for money is also aligned closely to the values by which the Trust operates.

Trustees encourage the positive engagement with suppliers and do so to ensure support for the long-term survival and sustainability of service providers and local businesses. The Trust fulfil all contractual obligations to suppliers including the timely payment of invoices and act responsibly and ethically to support local businesses.

All suppliers are paid in a timely fashion which is one of the key financial performance indicators reviewed by Trustees on a monthly basis.

#### Related parties and other connected charities and organisations

There are no related parties which either control or significantly influence the decisions and operations of the Trust.

#### **Objectives and activities**

##### Objects and aims

##### **Mission Statement**

Together we build brighter futures for young people with SEND.



# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### Values

The Trust has a number of values and guiding principles to adhere to and which steer its objectives and activities:

- 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.

The Strategic Plan 2024-26 sets out our aspirations for the period;

By 2026 all of our current academies will:

- Continue to be rated good or better and have developed aspects of exceptional provision and practice.
- Have our Ethical leadership model fully embedded in every academy.
- Be increasingly sustainable within our buildings, behaviours, procurement and curriculum offer.
- Offer a new dynamic, shared curriculum that supports academic progress, emotional well-being and the development of independence and results in the best destinations for individuals.
- Be well-embedded within our local communities.
- Be high performing and improving academies that continuously respond to the changing needs of their populations.
- Have clearly benefitted from partnership with one another to offer shared curriculum, leadership, staffing, facilities and resources.
- Have identified and secured positions for future leaders through strong succession planning.
- Continue to improve the well-being and attendance of its staff and students.
- Have continued effective financial management.
- Respond to local need in SEND, growing the Trust in a considered and measured way.

#### Objectives, strategies and activities

The Ascent Academies' Trust was founded with the aim of developing a vision and strategic plan for SEND in the North East. By collaboratively working together, sharing expertise and resources, the Trust has improved the curriculum and outcomes for pupils across the Trust.

#### **Achievements**

- The curriculum and associated assessment and record keeping has been thoroughly reviewed with collaborative Trust teams. The new assessment systems will ensure that we recognise small step achievements for our most complex young people.
- Quality Assurance reviews demonstrate that the implementation of the new curriculum is impacting positively on ensuring that there is a sound foundation for learning.
- There has been ongoing investment in leadership training through formal NPQs and through the range of Ascent selected leadership courses.
- Our Growing Great People Policy has been devised along with a toolkit for coaching support that we are using to develop all colleagues within our Trust. This approach links in well with Liberating Leadership, Motivational Maps and personal awareness through the Insights programme. The process involves all colleagues engaging in research-based change.
- We continue to support colleague well-being and now provide access for all colleagues to Education Support Services.
- Our academies continue to develop and improve through national awards such as Rights Respecting Schools Award, Families First, Makaton award, Eco Flag award etc

#### Public benefit

The Trustees have complied with their duty in Section 4 of the Charities Act 2011, to have due regard to public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission in exercising their powers or duties. In particular, the Trustees consider how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives they have set. The Trust has provided a fully comprehensive education to all pupils in its care. It fully complies with all statutory guidance and seeks to support its wider educational objectives via a strong community role.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### Strategic report

##### Achievements and performance

The Trust is built on strong collaborative working that enables students and staff to share resources, expertise and best practice. In order to strengthen improvement across the Trust it has a shared understanding of self-evaluation outcomes and a numerical way to describe starting points for key priorities.

The Trust Executive Team (Trustees and CEO and COO) has focused on implementing a number of key strategic areas during the year:

- Supporting staff roles and training within the new career framework
- A leadership restructure in June 2023 has ensured that we are investing in succession planning and bringing people up through our organisation. This also addressed capacity for potential growth in the number of academies in our Trust.
- Supporting staff well-being and efforts to reduce staff absence rates.
- The recruitment of a number of new Assistant Heads to focus on the delivery of the curriculum within the Trust.
- The implementation of the new revised curriculum and assessment routes.
- Development of a love of reading across the academies resulting in better engagement from students and increased skills for colleagues with well-embedded phonics programmes where needed.

##### Academy Specific Information

The following section provides high-level information and context on each academy. Detailed performance information can be found on the Trust's website.

#### Ash Trees Academy

##### Background

- Ash Trees is a primary special needs academy.
- Ash Trees became a sponsored academy and part of The Ascent Academies' Trust in November 2014.
- Number on roll: 173.
- Ash Trees Academy is situated in Billingham. It is the only primary special school in Stockton.
- All pupils attending the academy have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- The academy is split over two sites and pupil numbers have been steadily increasing since joining the Trust in 2014.
- The academy has continued working closely with Stockton Borough Council to develop capacity and increase the number of places on offer. There are early discussions around the potential of adding space to the Rievaulx site.
- As numbers continue to grow at Ash Trees we are working with the Local Authority to provide additional places for students to access a supported mainstream provision. This is planned for 2024/25 academic year.

##### Most recent Ofsted judgement

An Ofsted inspection in December 2022 judged the academy to be soundly 'Good' The Ofsted report recognised the improvements in the teaching of reading and the well-established maths curriculum. The team also recognised the positive culture in Ash Trees and the high levels of support for colleagues, particularly in reducing workload. Safeguarding was effective, and the team were secure that it was of a high, constant priority in the school.

##### Number of staff (full time equivalent)

Teachers – 23.1

Support staff – 44.1

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### Barbara Priestman Academy

##### Background

- Barbara Priestman became an academy in August 2012 as one of the founding academies of The Ascent Academies' Trust.
- Barbara Priestman is a secondary special needs academy for students aged 11-19 with autism and complex needs.
- Barbara Priestman Academy is located in Sunderland.
- Numbers on roll: 178 and includes a 16-19 provision on a separate site attached to a secondary academy.
- Pupils attending the academy all have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- Pupil numbers have steadily increased as local demand for autism specialist provision has grown.
- The academy continues to work closely with Together for Children and a neighbouring secondary academy in the operation of a satellite provision for the sixth form pupils. The sixth form centre is based on the Thornhill Academy site in Sunderland.

There have been a number of leadership changes at Barbara Priestman over the last 2 years. Adele Pearson took up an Executive Head post over the academy in June 2023 and she has made significant progress in developing consistent expectations and high challenge - high support for all colleagues, with many improvements and successes. The sixth form provision has continued to have a strong and positive impact on our students' preparation for adulthood. The academy was recognised as having an 'Area of Excellence' through Challenge Partners 2022 for its work as a Thinking School and this has been recently strengthened through the introduction of Thinking Moves programme. There has been significant investment in the curriculum resources for PE with the conversion of the swimming pool into a sports hall.

##### Most recent Ofsted judgement

An Ofsted inspection in November 2018 confirmed and upheld the academy's 'Good' judgement.

##### Number of staff (full time equivalent)

Teachers – 25.4

Support staff – 38.9

#### Hope Wood Academy

##### Background

- The academy was sponsored by the Trust and joined Ascent in November 2015.
- Hope Wood caters for the full range of special educational needs for pupils aged 2-19 years.
- The academy is situated across two sites – a provision for pupils aged 2 to 16 years on the main site situated in Easington in County Durham and a second site housing the 6th form provision in the Eden Hill area of Peterlee, three miles from the main site.
- Numbers on roll: 224 including a 16-19 provision.
- Pupils attending the academy all have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- Pupil numbers on roll have significantly increased since the academy was sponsored and brought into the Trust and they continue to rise.
- There are ongoing discussions underway with Durham County Council regarding future growth and pupil numbers in the future, including exploring additional accommodation. A recent independent building capacity survey indicated the main site was significantly over capacity in most areas.
- The satellite site (Eden Hill), which opened in September 2020 for the 6th form, has provided a number of opportunities and improvements for the students' preparation for adulthood, but the building is not ideal and there are ongoing conversations around the quality and capacity of the building for future needs.
- A mobile education service is now part of the academy's offer to support the needs of young people who are unable to attend school on a long-term basis due to a range of complexity of needs.

There are some fantastic achievements to celebrate at Hope Wood. Very recently, the academy was recognised again as being 'Leading' in Leadership and Management and School Improvement Strategies during the Challenge Partners peer review process.

The academy's work on ensuring all pupils have a voice and understanding their rights and responsibilities has been acknowledged as an area of excellence through two accreditations, revalidation of Investing in Children membership (which has been consistent now for the last ten years and the academy has now become a Gold member), as well as gaining Rights Respecting School Gold Award over the last twelve months.

---

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

The leadership team has continued to invest significantly in site improvements and adaptations to make best possible use of the limited space available.

Work continues against The Better Health at Work Award Gold Award which demonstrates the commitment to health and wellbeing and positive culture embedded within Hope Wood Academy. The academy took the opportunity to engage in The Durham Resilience Project to develop an awareness of developing resilience across the school community. Leaders made a commitment to training all senior leaders as Mental Health First Aiders during the academic year.

#### **Most recent Ofsted judgement**

An Ofsted inspection in September 2018 judged the academy to be 'Good' overall with outstanding judgements for 'leadership and management' and 'behaviour and safety'.

#### **Number of staff (full time equivalent)**

Teachers – 31.5

Support staff – 71.2

#### **Portland Academy**

##### **Background**

- Portland became an academy in August 2012 as one of the founding academies of The Ascent Academies' Trust.
- Portland is a secondary special needs academy designated for students with severe and profound learning difficulties. A growing number of pupils also have an additional diagnosis of Autism.
- Portland is based in the south of Sunderland and the vast majority of pupils reside in Sunderland.
- Numbers on roll: 195 and includes a 16-19 provision.
- Pupils range in age from 11 to 19, with approximately one third of pupils in the 16-19 age group.
- Pupils attending the academy all have an Education Health and Care Plan.
- Pupil numbers have steadily increased over the past couple of years. Proposals regarding future growth and increase in capacity and pupil numbers in the future are underway. The academy commissioned places increased to 198 from September 2023.

In April 2023 the Academy was awarded the Investors in People Gold Award. The following Awards were achieved in the academic year 2022-23: Bronze Eco Award, Rainbow Flag Award, Mental Health Charter Mark Bronze, and maintained their Gold Active Sunderland School Award and School Games Mark Gold.

A leadership restructure was undertaken during the summer term. The new structure ensured that the Academy is fit for purpose and builds capacity in order to continue the improvement journey towards Outstanding.

There continued to be ongoing works to the building to enable additional learning spaces to be created following the increase in student numbers.

#### **Most recent Ofsted judgement**

The academy was inspected in November 2019 and was given a 'Good' overall judgement with Leadership and Management and Personal Development both rated outstanding.

#### **Number of staff (full time equivalent)**

Teachers – 28.7

Support staff – 47.3

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### Key performance indicators

the benefit of the education of children and the progress that they make.

The Finance, Assets and Resources Committee (formally Finance, Audit, Risk and Resources Committee) developed robust financial plans and a strategy to ensure that the Trust is responsive to funding pressures and increasing costs over the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). This is to ensure finances are managed effectively, monitored closely and spending is focused on our key aim of improving pupil progress. As part of the strategy, all academies are tasked with aiming to set a minimum of a balanced budget and meet required savings targets. If this is not achieved, a plan is put in place to challenge and support addressing any budget deficit. This is fundamental to the financial viability and sustainability of each academy. Overall, the Trust achieved a surplus budget outturn at the end of 2022/23 (excluding agreed use of reserves). All financial KPIs set in the strategic plan were met and there was a positive contribution to reserves at the year end.

The Finance, Assets and Resources Committee also used a suite of KPIs to monitor financial performance throughout the year. These included a range of indicators to measure the Trust's financial position (i.e. budget, outturn, reserve level), financial performance (aged debtors, creditors, cash flow) and metrics to enable benchmarking (staff costs as a % of total costs, % of costs on supply staff, % of costs on premises). These KPIs are reported and reviewed each month by Trustees to demonstrate performance and identify any further areas for improvement.

The key non-financial performance indicators of the Trust relate to the achievements and performance of students within the individual academies. This information is reported to academy Local Advisory Bodies (LABs) on a termly basis, in addition to summary to Trustees in the Standards Committee. Overall, performance against the strategic plan, including updates from each committee, is reported to Trustees at Board level on a regular basis.

#### Going concern

The Trust has generated a good operating surplus in the financial year of £53k (excluding depreciation and pension costs), which is very positive following significant investment in-year in capital projects on planned building developments and improvements and updating the Trust's fleet of vehicles. This is in addition to managing the financial pressures around energy costs, inflation and staff pay awards during the year. There has been an operating surplus each year for the last five financial years and a growing healthy reserve balance to provide stability going forward and support potential future growth.

The Trust holds a strong balance sheet with net assets of £37,683k (excluding pension liability). Land and buildings, which are the Trust's largest assets benefiting from continued investment each year, are maintained to a good standard and condition. Exposure to unexpected repair costs has been significantly reduced and mitigated against, following capital investment over recent years, and therefore reduced the risks to reserve balances being called upon in the future. The Trust will continue to invest where appropriate and in line with strategic priorities and impact on pupils. All investment decisions will be assessed with due regards to affordability and long-term sustainability and any use of reserve balances will be approved by Trustees.

The Trust's MTFP is positive, demonstrating the sustainability of each academy, whilst also holding comfortable reserve balances. Reserves are in excess of the Trust's reserve policy, representing 8.3% of annual pupil-led income, and provide adequate capacity and flexibility to deal with any future uncertainties or risks.

Given the current balance sheet position, the strength of financial controls and future financial forecasting, the Trustees have a reasonable expectation that the Trust has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason, it continues to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements. Further details regarding the adoption of the going concern can be found in the Statement of Accounting Policies.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### *FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023*

---

#### Promoting the success of the academy trust

The Trustees consider they have acted ethically and in good faith to promote the success of the Trust, taking into account the needs of pupils, colleagues, Trustees, members and other stakeholders, including the Trust's wider community. In doing so they have taken into account the matters set out in s172(1)(a-f) of the Companies Act 2006 in the decisions taken during the year ended 31 August 2023.

The Board is mindful that the long-term success of the Trust is critically dependent on the way it works with a large number of stakeholders. The Trust is committed to engaging with all stakeholders to support the Trust's decision making. A robust governance framework is in place to ensure that stakeholder views are taken into account in Board discussions and decisions.

Material decisions taken by the Board in the year include approval of financial plans and strategies, growth and expansion, significant decisions regarding operations, and the development of our new strategic plan.

The latest strategic plan sets out the objectives and success criteria for the Trust. This includes KPIs to measure success and to monitor and ensure continuous improvement, growth and development and sustainability over the long term.

The Trust continues to embed an ethical leadership framework throughout the organisation to foster strong relationships with all stakeholders.

The MAT depends on the trust and confidence of its stakeholders to operate successfully and sustainably in the long term. The Trust puts pupils' best interests first, invests in its employees, supports local suppliers and the communities in which it operates and strives for continuous improvement to improve the life of young people with SEND.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### Financial review

The majority of the Trust's income for the year of account is obtained from either the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency) or Local Authorities as commissioners of pupil places, the use of which is restricted to particular purposes. This income is largely high needs funding, but also includes ESFA and DfE capital and revenue grants for specific purposes and projects.

During the year, all academies within the Trust received additional Devolved Formula Grant capital allocations from the DfE.

The Trust received additional funding during the year to support the pressures caused by the pandemic through the means of recovery premium. All the academies in the Trust received an allocation of recovery premium. All COVID-related funding received in-year was used to fund additional costs to support students through a recovery curriculum and is reported in line with pupil premium grant conditions. The Trust also received additional supplementary grant income from Local Authorities, provide by the ESFA to support the rising costs of staff pay and inflation.

All grants and funding received from the ESFA and Local Authorities during the year and the associated expenditure are shown as restricted funds in the statement of financial activities.

Expenditure within the year includes a large investment in capital spend, including buildings, transport and resources. This represents 3% of overall incoming resources for the year. Capital expenditure included costs associated with the CIF project for new windows and doors at Hope Wood Academy. This work was completed during the year through each holiday period. The project brings several benefits, both from a pupil well-being perspective and financial and sustainability savings through reducing heating costs. The Trust has made significant investment in facilities using both revenue and capital budgets. The capital investments are an essential part in continuing to ensure pupil safety, providing the best learning environment possible to support pupil outcomes and to proactively and effectively manage the assets of the Trust. The building estate developments and improvements reduce the risk of a potential future call on reserves for repairs and maintenance and enhance the facilities available for staff and students.

Pupil numbers on roll continue to rise and further support the sustainability of each academy and growth of the MAT.

During the year ended 31 August 2023 total expenditure of £18,287,308 (excluding gain on defined benefit pension scheme) was in excess of grant funding from the ESFA, commissioned place income from Local Authorities and other incoming resources. However, the excess of income over expenditure for the year (excluding inherited assets and liabilities, restricted fixed asset funds and before pension transfer) was £53,436.

At 31 August 2023 the net book value of fixed assets was £36,477,203. The assets were used exclusively for providing education and associated support to the pupils in the academies within the Trust.

The Trust has strong cash-flow and a healthy bank balance as at the 31 August 2023 of £3.137m. (2021-22 £2.627m). Debtor and creditor management is very effective with no significant trade debtor or creditor balances and no bad or doubtful debts at the year end. The Trust continues to make improvements in financial processes and procedures to maintain and improve cash balances.

Under accounting standard FRS 102, it is necessary to charge projected deficits on the Local Government Pension Scheme, which is provided for support staff, to the restricted fund. This resulted in the pension fund showing a deficit of £322,000 which has been carried forward to 2023/24. It should be noted that this does not present a liquidity problem for the Trust. Contribution rates are regularly reviewed to reduce the pension deficit for future years.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### Reserves policy

The Finance, Assets and Resources Committee reviews reserve levels on a half-termly basis in line with the budget monitoring information and forecasts that are presented to Trustees. This regular review is in line with the reserves policy, uses the monthly financial reporting information including outturn forecasts and KPI data, and considers future commitments, risks and strategic priorities. At 31 August 2023 the value of reserves that were freely available to the Trust was £1,386,028 (2021-22 £1,332,592).

The Trust holds reserves to provide financial stability and to enable investment in line with the Trust's strategic plan and priorities. Given the ongoing financial pressures facing schools and academies, including uncertainties around inflation, grant funding, increase in staffing and utility costs and staff absence, the current reserves level is being maintained to provide the Trust with additional capacity and flexibility for the foreseeable future.

The Trust has a reserves policy which is reviewed annually by Trustees alongside budget outturn projections, medium term financial plans and cash flow forecasts. The policy specifies minimum reserve balances equivalent to 5% of annual pupil-led income. The Trust's current balances are in excess of the reserve policy and represent 8.3% of annual pupil-led income. Balances are reviewed every month in line with management accounts, projections and any investment plans.

Reserves are made up of restricted and unrestricted funds, although the total reserves balance is available for the general use and purpose of the Trust. There are no current commitments on the reserves balances held or any specific plans for significant use in the near future.

Reserve levels are one of the Trust's financial KPIs and are monitored closely. Any use of reserves requires approval from Trustees.

#### Investment policy

The Trust has a Treasury Management Policy which is reviewed annually by Trustees. The Trust currently operates interest bearing bank accounts.

The only investment the Trust currently has is a £1 share capital in Ascent Extra Limited. This investment represents 100% of shares. Ascent Extra Limited was set up on 29 August 2014 and traded until 31 August 2018. The company has not traded throughout the 2022/23 period.

Other than the investment in the trading company above, the Trust does not have any funds invested at present.

#### Principal risks and uncertainties

The Trustees implemented a new risk management strategy and associated processes last year and have embedded this framework during the period. This approach has significantly improved the Trust's ability to identify and mitigate risk as efficiently and effectively as possible. The Trust use risk management software to enable more effective monitoring and reporting of risks throughout the organisation. Trustees have reviewed risk appetite during the year and this has been agreed and approved for the nine risk themes/areas identified. The new framework and associated risk registers, including policy and procedures have been in place throughout the period.

The key risks facing the Trust are:

Staffing absence/capacity - staffing capacity continues to be an ongoing risk, providing challenges and uncertainty. Post COVID, staffing absence levels are still high, including further instances of COVID and COVID-related absence, in addition to other sickness/illness. We continue to support staff regarding illness and wellbeing and manage absence on a day-to-day basis. A big challenge during the last year has been long term absence and leadership capacity. To manage this effectively with as little impact as possible, leaders have had to support other academies in addition to their own role. Despite our best efforts, throughout the period, some classes and key stages have had to be closed at times due to insufficient staffing to operate a safe provision. This risk is a key focus of Trustees and senior leaders as this risk has continued into the new academic year.



# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

Staff recruitment – continues to be challenging and provides uncertainty for the future and a risk to academies having the necessary staffing levels. Regionally and nationally, recruitment to the Education Sector is becoming very challenging, from a general shortage in available personnel to trying to attract people to the sector. Academies continue to have a number of vacant posts and the availability of supply staff has dramatically reduced. The Trust is actively taking steps to promote the opportunities and benefits Ascent has to offer and we are developing a new people strategy, including recruitment, to address this challenge.

Finances and budgets – the significant rise in costs due to inflation is putting a massive strain on budgets. Whilst energy prices appear to be stabilising, unpredictable staffing pay awards, contract cost increases, general inflation and cost of living increases are crippling schools finances. We are working closely with commissioners to secure additional funding and having to micro-manage finances to understand the constantly changing financial pressures. The Trust continues to maintain healthy reserve balances to provide capacity and flexibility to manage such pressures over time. Whilst finances are reviewed half termly by Trustees, given the current level of risk, financial modelling and forecasting is shared with Trustees on a monthly basis at present.

Accommodation and physical space in most of our academy buildings is very challenging and an increased pressure. As pupil number continue to increase, there is a future risk that we may not be able to accommodate all pupils. As numbers increase, due to the demand for special school places continuing to rise, we need to be constantly planning for the next stage of growth and secure additional space. We already operate three out of four academies over two separate sites and are planning further growth and satellite provisions. Additional sites bring additional costs and risk and further stretch existing resources. We undertake full due diligence on all new developments and manage associated risks through existing processes.

Cyber-attacks continue to impact the education sector. The potential disruption to our network, preventing both onsite and remote access, would be crippling to the Trust if any attacks were successful. Cyber security is a priority and we take a very proactive approach to keeping our IT network safe, and our data security is a key priority.

All key areas of focus are being strictly monitored, reviewed and managed continuously by the Trust to understand the financial implications and enable action to be taken to address them, if and when necessary. The strategic risks, future opportunities, uncertainties and challenges are reviewed by Trustees annually and monitored termly throughout the year through the committees.

In addition, the Trust is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), which results in the recognition of a significant liability on the Trust's balance sheet. The Trust recognises that the defined benefit scheme deficit (Local Government Pension Scheme), which is set out in note 22 to the financial statements, represents a significant potential liability. However, the Trust considers that, as each individual academy is able to meet its known annual contribution commitments for the foreseeable future, the risk from this liability is minimised. Also, Parliament has agreed, at the request of the Secretary of State for Education, to a guarantee that, in the event of academy closure, outstanding local government pension scheme liabilities would be met by the Department for Education. The guarantee came into force on 18 July 2013.

At the year end, the Trust had no significant liabilities arising from trade creditors or debtors where there would be a significant effect on liquidity.

#### **Fundraising**

The Trust and its academies ensure fundraising conforms to standards set out by the Charity Commission and there have been no complaints received this year in respect of any fundraising activity or how the proceeds of such are used.

The Trust and its academies do not employ or use any third party or private company to raise funds and do not place undue pressure to donate on individuals, groups or other donors.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### Streamlined energy and carbon reporting

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>kWh</b>	<b>kWh</b>
<i>Energy consumption</i>		
Aggregate of energy consumption in the year		
- Gas combustion	1,859,369	2,052,636
- Fuel consumed for transport	26,341	29,874
- Electricity purchased	530,243	554,059
	<u>2,415,953</u>	<u>2,636,569</u>

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>metric tonnes</b>	<b>metric tonnes</b>
<i>Emissions of CO2 equivalent</i>		
Scope 1 - direct emissions		
- Gas combustion	340.13	374.69
- Fuel consumed for owned transport	6.30	7.20
	<u>346.43</u>	<u>381.89</u>
Scope 2 - indirect emissions		
- Electricity purchased	119.30	116.95
Scope 3 - other indirect emissions		
- Fuel consumed for transport not owned by the academy trust	5.89	6.75
	<u>471.62</u>	<u>505.59</u>
Total gross emissions		
	<u>471.62</u>	<u>505.59</u>
<i>Intensity ratio</i>		
Tonnes CO2e per pupil	<u>0.61</u>	<u>0.68</u>

#### *Quantification and reporting methodology*

We have followed the 2019 HM Government Environmental Reporting Guidelines. We have also used the GHG Reporting Protocol – Corporate Standard and have used the 2023 UK Government's Conversion Factors for Company Reporting published by BEIS.

#### *Intensity measurement*

The chosen intensity measurement ratio is total gross emissions in metric tonnes CO2 equivalent per pupil, the recommended ratio for the sector.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### *Measures taken to improve energy efficiency*

- Continued the use of online meetings through the use of Microsoft Teams to reduce the need for travel between sites.
- An increased number of staff that can work at home now do so for a proportion of their time
- The majority of staff training is accessed online, reducing travel to training venues, locally and nationally
- A large proportion of Trustee and governance meetings continue to be online, reducing the need to travel and savings on building costs from building being open late on an evening
- A new cloud based IT strategy resulting in 22 onsite servers being decommissioned, saving on power and air cooling
- A rationalisation of printers and reducing the volume of printers, saving generated from less machines, less power and reduction in paper use
- Increased use of SharePoint to save, store and share documents, reducing both paper and printing
- Replacement of 5 old, inefficient large diesel minibuses, replaced with newer, smaller, more efficient minibuses
- New internal doors continue to be installed within Ash Trees and Hope Wood Academies, increasing thermal efficiency
- Building Management Systems continue to be used effectively to improve the control of the heating
- Water usage is monitored externally to identify quickly any issues (excessive consumption and any wastage/leaks)
- Hope Wood Academy CIF project completed to replace all windows and doors, significantly improve energy efficiency at the academy and utility usage
- Further CIF bids are being submitted for the next round of funding which will have energy efficiency benefits if successful including heating improvements at Ash Trees and Hope Wood
- Over recent years all academies have had replacement lighting and all buildings now have LED lights throughout. Three buildings have had new roofs, including additional insulation and all academies have had new boilers and heating systems. The Trust continues to invest in energy efficiency works and projects
- As part of the independence curriculum and training with students, more of our young people are making their way independently to school, using public transport, cycling or walking, thus reducing the need for taxis and escorted home to school transport

#### **Plans for future periods**

The Trust exists 'to build brighter futures for young people with SEND'. In expanding the SEND provision on offer to local young people, the Trust is working with a number of partners to develop new ventures and opportunities including potentially new satellite sites in mainstream schools in Stockton for Ash Trees Academy that have been delayed during the pandemic. The Trust continues to work with Durham and Sunderland LA to explore the options around additional accommodation for the growing demand for SEND placements.

The Trust looks forward to further developments and potential opportunities that may come with growth. We plan to continue to work closely with the DfE and the Regional Commissioner to support and sponsor other schools and academies in the future in line with the Trust's vision. The Government's aspirations of 'every school part of a strong Trust' gives us food for thought in how we might position ourselves in terms of readiness for more schools or academies potentially looking to join the Trust.

We continue to communicate positively with potential partners and potential new academies who may wish to join the Trust or engage with us in re-thinking a wider network of special academies.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### Next steps - Strategic Developments for 2023-24

- To build on the relationships with parents and families and develop a strategy to engage parents as true partners in their child's education, to engage parents as co-producers of provision and to develop parents' roles in holding us to account.
- To review the Trust's curriculum to ensure that it is clearly articulated, with clear key learning points and entry and exit points.
- To develop a mental health and well-being strategy across the Trust to support students and colleagues.
- To replace traditional performance management with our Growing Great People policy.

We are developing wider networks both regionally and nationally which is helping to get the Trust more widely known, contributing to income generation and enabling us to have a voice in championing the needs of SEND. This is being supported by plans to develop the public face of Ascent and what we do. We lead a regional network of special schools through our Challenge Partner North East Special School Hub. This also gives us access to a network of 142 schools nationally. We are active leaders in The Federation of Leaders in Special Education (FLSE), which has a place on the SEND forum. We are also active members of Schools North East, the National Network of Special Schools (NNOSS) and the Confederation of School Trusts (CST).

#### Auditor

In so far as the trustees are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditor is unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditor is aware of that information.

A resolution proposing that Azets Audit Services be reappointed as auditor of the charitable company will be put to the members.

The trustees' report, incorporating a strategic report, was approved by order of the board of trustees, as the company directors, on 14/12/2023..... and signed on its behalf by:



Patricia Lynn Watson 14 Dec 2023 13:56:21 GMT (UTC +0)

PL Watson OBE

Chair



Carolyn Morgan 14 Dec 2023 12:56:06 GMT (UTC +0)

C Morgan

CEO

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023**

---

### **Scope of responsibility**

As trustees, we acknowledge we have overall responsibility for ensuring that The Ascent Academies' Trust has an effective and appropriate system of control, financial and otherwise. However, such a system is designed to manage rather than eliminate the risk of failure to achieve business objectives, and can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss.

The Board of Trustees has delegated the day-to-day responsibility to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mrs C Morgan, as Accounting Officer, for ensuring financial controls conform with the requirements of both propriety and good financial management and in accordance with the requirements and responsibilities assigned to it in the funding agreement between the Trust and the Secretary of State for Education. The CEO is also responsible for reporting to the Board of Trustees any material weaknesses or breakdowns in internal control.

### **Governance**

The information on governance included here supplements that described in the Trustees' Report and in the Statement of Trustees' responsibilities. The whole Board of Trustees has formally met five times during the year ended 31 August 2023. There were two meetings of the Finance, Audit, Risk and Resources Committee, four meetings of the Finance, Assets & Resources Committee, two meetings of the Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee and six meetings of the Standards Committee. The Pay and Review Committee continued to meet on an annual basis. Trustees' attendance at meetings during the year was as follows:

The year-end membership of the Board of Trustees consisted of eleven Trustees. The Articles of Association for the company limit the maximum number to fifteen and the Board has agreed to recruit up to this maximum figure. As of September 2023, there were therefore four vacancies, However, two appointments were made between the year end and the Annual General Meeting (AGM), with two more prospective Trustees going through the vetting and clearance process, which, if successful, would mean that the full quota of 15 Trustees would be in place.

### **Conflicts of interest**

The Trust maintains an up-to-date and complete register of the business and pecuniary interests of all Members, Trustees, Senior Leaders and the Central Services team. The information regarding Members and Trustees is published on the Ascent website. This information is used to ensure there are no conflicts of interest regarding any contractual arrangements or relationships with related parties. The information has been collated in a register and is reviewed as part of the Trust assurance processes and robust governance arrangements.

In addition, all Board and Committee meetings include a declaration from Trustees to ensure there is no conflict of interest with any agenda items. Any conflicts of interest are managed appropriately and transparently, including seeking any necessary approvals regarding potential related party transactions and reporting such transactions to the relevant body and in the Annual Financial Statements.

Business interest forms are updated annually, however any changes during the year are declared and notified to the Trust's Governance Professional. Business interests, including any personal or pecuniary interests, are checked and audited annually, including references and checks to other data sources, including Companies House.

The Trust tries to avoid any related party transactions. However, if and when they may occur, any conflict of interest is managed openly and transparently.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

### Meetings

Trustee Name	Board of Trustees	Finance, Audit, Risk & Resources Committee (FARR)	Finance, Assets & Resources Committee (FAR)	Audit, Risk & Assurance Committee (ARA)	Standards Committee (SC)	Pay and Review Committee
P L Watson (Chair of Trustees)	1/5				2/6	0/1
G Jobes (Vice Chair of Trustees, Vice Chair of FARR Committee, Chair of SC)	4/5	2/2	1/3	2/2	6/6	
K Stevens (Chair of FARR Committee, Chair of FAR Committee, Vice Chair of ARA Committee)	4/5	2/2	4/4	2/2		1/1
C Morgan* (CEO)	5/5	2/2 *	3/4	2/2 *	6/6	1/1 *
P Aitchison	5/5	1/2	2/3	2/2	1/1	
G Bowman (appointed 12.06.23)	0/0	0/0	0/1			
C Green	2/5			0/1	6/6	1/1
N Hudspeth	3/5	2/2	3/4	1/2		1/1
G Kirkbride	1/5	1/2	1/3	0/2	0/1	
K Lawton (resigned 2 <sup>nd</sup> November 2022)	0/1	0/1	0/0			
S Martin-Denham (appointed 27.02.23)	0/2				3/3	
V Milnes (resigned 18.05.23)	1/4	0/2	0/3		1/5	
H Smith (appointed 14.07.23)	0/0				0/0	

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

NOTE: Carolyn Morgan (CEO) attended the FARR, ARA, and Pay & Review Committees but was not counted towards the quorum due to the conflict with her CEO role.

Trustees continued to conduct the majority of meetings (70%) virtually during the year, with the remaining 30% face to face. Virtual meetings helped to maximise attendance, particularly during a time of recruiting new Trustees and moving to a new committee structure. Face to face meetings were reserved for those meetings / topics where richer discussion was required.

Link Trustees worked closely with academies and senior leaders to provide support and challenge within their key areas of responsibility. Newly appointed Trustees are being supported to develop the Link Trustee aspect of their roles. "

#### **Governance reviews**

The performance of the Board and its effectiveness is assessed based on attendance levels, challenge given and impact. This can be demonstrated from registers, notes, and minutes from meetings and in particular the outcome and comments from the Ofsted inspections which have previously judged Leadership and Management including Governance as Outstanding. The information provided to Trustees is regularly reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose, accurate and effective. Data provided is challenged and externally reviewed as part of robust quality assurance and validation processes that are in place. The Board is constantly reviewing the effectiveness of meetings and, as a result, changes have been implemented in the format of the minutes to clearly identify areas of Trustee support and challenge and to highlight decisions made and impact for each meeting. Action logs are in place to ensure all agreed actions are complete and recorded. Agenda planning has been a key area of development and improvement over the period, with the format of the agenda document now consistent across meetings. Feedback from Committee Chairs continues to be a standing agenda item at each Board of Trustee meeting to ensure Trustees are fully aware of the content of Committee meetings, in-line with the delegated functions. The chairs of the Board and the Committees meet termly to discuss key strategic areas and plan with the CEO and COO.

A review of governance by Internal Audit concluded the Board could take substantial reassurance that governance processes were operating effectively. An external review of governance has been commissioned and is underway with the final outcome and report to be published by the end of 2023.

#### **Review of value for money**

As accounting officer, the Chief Executive had responsibility for ensuring that the Trust delivered good value in the use of public resources during the period. The accounting officer understands that value for money refers to the educational and wider societal outcomes, in addition to estates safety and management, achieved in return for the taxpayers' resources received.

The accounting officer considers how the Trust's use of its resources has provided good value for money during each academic year and reports to the Board of Trustees where value for money can be improved, including the use of benchmarking data where available.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

The accounting officer for the Trust has delivered value for money during the year by:

- Challenging academies to ensure resources align with objectives and improvement plans;
- Ensuring academies are sustainable and operate within the resources and funding available;
- Reviewing benchmarking data to inform budget setting and spending decisions;
- Continuously reviewing contracts, services and subscriptions across all academies to ensure best value;
- Ensuring all core business and support functions are undertaken and provided by a central Trust team, avoiding duplication in academies and ensuring a consistent and efficient service to academies;
- Ensuring Trust procurement of IT services and equipment maximise purchasing power and economies of scale;
- Using external consultants to support large scale capital developments and multiple projects running alongside each other, maximising resources and using the appropriate expertise as and when required;
- Sharing assets across the Trust to ensure more efficient use of resources, saving money and giving maximum return to the Trust;
- Using external experts to assist in securing external funding;
- Sharing staffing resources and appointing specific posts to work across the Trust rather than in individual academies, increasing capacity and expertise;
- Maximising funding opportunities and income generation during the year;
- Challenging commissioners to ensure the appropriate level of funding is provided to meet pupil need;
- Working with partners and wider networks to share best practice and support each other

The Trust has a clear and continual focus on securing best value for money and maximising the use of the academies' resources. The Trust's COO is an active SRMA for the ESFA and shares and implements best practice to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in all areas. Robust monitoring and reporting processes to Trustees are in place to monitor value for money and impact.

The Trust have a comprehensive Asset Management Plan (AMP) to inform the works and investment required to ensure the Trust's estate remains safe, well maintained and compliant with all regulations. The Trust bid for Condition Improvement Funding (CIF) to finance the large capital schemes, including the use of DfE and SALIX loans to provide a substantial contribution. In addition, the Trust hold reserves balance to ensure there is sufficient capacity and flexible to provide both the appropriate planned investment in the estate and also to respond to any emergencies or immediate priorities to mitigate risk. This plan has been very effective in both managing the estate and the efficient use of resources to inform and prioritise capital expenditure and future grant applications required for funding.

#### **The purpose of the system of internal control**

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives. It can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of academy trust policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. The system of internal control has been in place in The Ascent Academies' Trust for the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and accounts.

#### **Capacity to handle risk**

The board of trustees has reviewed the key risks to which the academy trust is exposed together with the operating, financial and compliance controls that have been implemented to mitigate those risks. The board of trustees is of the view that there is a formal ongoing process for identifying, evaluating and managing the academy trust's significant risks that has been in place for the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and accounts. This process is regularly reviewed by the board of trustees.



# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### **The risk and control framework**

The Trust's system of internal financial control is based on a framework of regular management information and administrative procedures including the segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability. In particular, it includes:

- comprehensive budgeting and monitoring systems with an annual budget and monthly financial reports which are reviewed and agreed by the Board of Trustees;
- regular reviews by the Finance, Assets and Resources Committee of reports which indicate financial performance against the forecasts and of major purchase plans, capital works and expenditure programmes;
- setting targets to measure financial and other performance;
- clearly defined purchasing guidelines;
- delegation of authority and segregation of duties; and
- identification and management of risks.

The Board of Trustees has considered the need for a specific internal audit function and appointed RSM Risk Assurance Services LLP for the year ending 31 August 2023 to provide a programme of internal audit assignments. An internal audit work plan was agreed by Trustees for the year, based on the Trust's assurance framework and priorities for coverage informed by the Trust's risk register. The plan included a process to report back to the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee following the completion of each assignment.

The schedule of work and assignments undertaken for the period covered areas and risks in relation to:

- HR Recruitment and Selection
- Key Financial Controls
- Cyber Security
- Governance
- Follow up on previous Internal Audit Actions

From the internal audits completed during the year, there are no significant or material control issues to report. There are a number of recommendations included in an action plan, which the Trust is adopting and implementing, which will be reviewed for completeness during the 2023/24 academic year.

Following a Risk Management internal audit last year, a new Risk Management strategy was developed to ensure a robust and effective risk management system was in operation. The strategy included a revised risk management framework, policy and the adoption of a robust risk portal. This was implemented during 2021/22 and continues to be embedded across the Trust to enable risks to be strictly and effectively monitored, reviewed and managed continuously by the Trust. Risk registers are in place now for all academies, central service functions and at a strategic level for the Trust. Risk Management has now been embedded into all governance meetings as standard and informs decisions and actions in line with the framework.

Trustees continue to discuss, review and agree the Trust's risk appetite during the year, providing a clear measure against which key Trust decisions can be assessed. This risk appetite has been effectively used as a key factor in managing risk and determining actions as part of the risk management framework and reporting process.

The Trust continues to strengthen risk management across the MAT through implementing and embedding the new risk strategy, individual academy and service risk registers and the wider use of the new 4Risk portal.

As part of the Trust review of governance structures during the year, the decision was made to create a new committee during 2023/24 to focus solely on Audit, Risk and Assurance, to ensure risk and the control framework for the Trust is as robust and effective as possible.

Risk management continued to be a core focus for Trustees and is at the centre of planning and decision making.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### Review of effectiveness

As accounting officer, the Chief Executive has had responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control. During the year in question, the review has been informed by:

- the work of the Finance, Audit, Risk and Resources Committee;
- the work of the Finance, Assets and Resources Committee;
- the work of the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee;
- the checks performed by the internal auditor;
- the work of the external auditor; and
- the work of the Executive Leaders within the Trust who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework.

The accounting officer has been advised of the outcome of the review of the system of internal control by the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee and the plan to ensure continuous operation and improvement of the system in place.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 14/12/2023 and signed on its behalf by:



Patricia Lynn Watson 14 Dec 2023 13:56:21 GMT (UTC +0)

PL Watson OBE  
Chair



Carolyn Morgan 14 Dec 2023 12:56:06 GMT (UTC +0)

C Morgan  
CEO

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## STATEMENT OF REGULARITY, PROPRIETY AND COMPLIANCE

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

As accounting officer of The Ascent Academies' Trust, I have considered my responsibility to notify the academy trust board of trustees and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) of material irregularity, impropriety and non-compliance with terms and conditions of all funding, including for estates safety and management, under the funding agreement in place between the academy trust and the Secretary of State for Education. As part of my consideration I have had due regard to the requirements of the Academy Trust Handbook 2022, including responsibilities for estates safety and management.

I confirm that I and the academy trust's board of trustees are able to identify any material irregular or improper use of funds by the academy trust, or material non-compliance with the terms and conditions of funding under the academy trust's funding agreement and the Academy Trust Handbook 2022.

I confirm that no instances of material irregularity, impropriety or funding non-compliance have been discovered to date. If any instances are identified after the date of this statement, these will be notified to the board of trustees and ESFA.

*C Morgan*

Carolyn Morgan 14 Dec 2023 12:56:06 GMT (UTC +0)

C Morgan

**Accounting Officer**

14 December 2023  
.....

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

The trustees (who are also the directors of The Ascent Academies' Trust for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the trustees' report and the accounts in accordance with the Academies Accounts Direction 2022 to 2023 published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) and applicable law and regulations.

Company law requires the trustees to prepare accounts for each financial year. Under company law, the trustees must not approve the accounts unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for that period.

In preparing these accounts, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP 2019 and the Academies Accounts Direction 2022 to 2023;
- make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the accounts; and
- prepare the accounts on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charitable company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and enable them to ensure that the accounts comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The trustees are responsible for ensuring that in its conduct and operation the charitable company applies financial and other controls, which conform with the requirements both of propriety and of good financial management. They are also responsible for ensuring that grants received from ESFA/DfE have been applied for the purposes intended.

The trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the corporate and financial information included on the charitable company's website. Legislation in the United Kingdom governing the preparation and dissemination of accounts may differ from legislation in other jurisdictions.

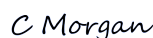
Approved by order of the members of the board of trustees on 14/12/2023..... and signed on its behalf by:



Patricia Lynn Watson 14 Dec 2023 13:56:21 GMT (UTC +0)

PL Watson OBE

**Chair**



Carolyn Morgan 14 Dec 2023 12:56:06 GMT (UTC +0)

C Morgan

**CEO**

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023**

---

### Opinion

We have audited the accounts of The Ascent Academies' Trust for the year ended 31 August 2023 which comprise the statement of financial activities, the balance sheet, the statement of cash flows and notes to the accounts, including significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland' (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice), the Charities SORP 2019 and the Academies Accounts Direction 2022 to 2023 issued by the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

In our opinion the accounts:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 August 2023 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice;
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP 2019 and the Academies Accounts Direction 2022 to 2023.

### Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the 'Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts' section of our report. We are independent of the academy trust in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the accounts in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

### Emphasis of matter

We draw your attention to the key judgements made in relation to the accounting treatment and assumptions regarding the Local Government Pension Scheme ('LGPS'). The key judgements are disclosed in note 2 and the pension note includes the relevant pension scheme disclosures. It should be noted that for sector-wide comparability users of these financial statements should take into consideration differing sector judgements relating to asset ceiling calculations, where appropriate. Our Auditor's Report is unmodified in this respect.

### Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the academy trust's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

### Other information

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report other than the accounts and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information contained within the annual report. Our opinion on the accounts does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon. Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the accounts or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the accounts themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

---

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST (CONTINUED)

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023**

---

### **Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006**

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the trustees' report including the incorporated strategic report for the financial year for which the accounts are prepared is consistent with the accounts; and
- the trustees' report including the incorporated strategic report has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

### **Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the academy trust and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' report, including the incorporated strategic report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the accounts are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit.

### **Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the statement of trustees' responsibilities, the trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of accounts that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error. In preparing the accounts, the trustees are responsible for assessing the academy trust's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

### **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the accounts**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the accounts as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these accounts.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud is detailed below:

- enquiries of management and those charged with governance around any actual or potential litigation and claims;
- enquiries of management about any known or suspected instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations and fraud;
- challenging assumptions and judgements made by management in their significant accounting estimates;
- auditing the risk of management override of controls, including through testing journal entries and other adjustments for appropriateness, evaluating the business rationale of significant transactions outside the normal course of business and reviewing accounting estimates for bias;
- reading correspondence with regulators including the OFSTED;
- reviewing minutes of those charged with governance;
- reviewing internal assurance reports; and
- reviewing financial statement disclosures and testing to support documentation.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST (CONTINUED)

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023**

---

We identified the following areas as those most likely to have a material impact on the financial statements: Health and Safety; employment law (including the Working Time Directive); and compliance with the Charities Act 2011 and UK Companies Act.

Owing to the inherent limitations of an audit, there is an unavoidable risk that some material misstatements in the financial statements may not be detected, even though the audit is properly planned and performed in accordance with the ISAs (UK). For instance, the further removed non-compliance is from the events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, the less likely the auditor is to become aware of it or to recognise the non-compliance.

A further description of our responsibilities is available on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: <https://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities>. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

### Use of our report

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

**Brian Laidlaw BA CA (Senior Statutory Auditor)**  
**for and on behalf of Azets Audit Services**

*Azets Audit Services*  
Brian Laidlaw 14 Dec 2023 14:27:49 GMT (UTC +0)  
.....

**Chartered Accountants**  
**Statutory Auditor**

Bulman House  
Regent Centre  
Gosforth  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE3 3LS

14 December 2023

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## INDEPENDENT REPORTING ACCOUNTANT'S ASSURANCE REPORT ON REGULARITY TO THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST AND THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY

***FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023***

---

In accordance with the terms of our engagement letter dated 30 June 2022 and further to the requirements of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) as included in the Academies Accounts Direction 2022 to 2023, we have carried out an engagement to obtain limited assurance about whether the expenditure disbursed and income received by The Ascent Academies' Trust during the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023 have been applied to the purposes identified by Parliament and the financial transactions conform to the authorities which govern them.

This report is made solely to The Ascent Academies' Trust and ESFA in accordance with the terms of our engagement letter. Our work has been undertaken so that we might state to the The Ascent Academies' Trust and ESFA those matters we are required to state in a report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than The Ascent Academies' Trust and ESFA, for our work, for this report, or for the conclusion we have formed.

### **Respective responsibilities of The Ascent Academies' Trust's accounting officer and the reporting accountant**

The accounting officer is responsible, under the requirements of The Ascent Academies' Trust's funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education dated 1 August 2012 and the Academy Trust Handbook, extant from 1 September 2022, for ensuring that expenditure disbursed and income received is applied for the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions conform to the authorities which govern them.

Our responsibilities for this engagement are established in the United Kingdom by our profession's ethical guidance, and are to obtain limited assurance and report in accordance with our engagement letter and the requirements of the Academies Accounts Direction 2022 to 2023. We report to you whether anything has come to our attention in carrying out our work which suggests that in all material respects, expenditure disbursed and income received during the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023 have not been applied to purposes intended by Parliament or that the financial transactions do not conform to the authorities which govern them.

### **Approach**

We conducted our engagement in accordance with the Framework and Guide for External Auditors and Reporting Accountant of Academy Trusts issued by ESFA. We performed a limited assurance engagement as defined in our engagement letter.

The objective of a limited assurance engagement is to perform such procedures as to obtain information and explanations in order to provide us with sufficient appropriate evidence to express a negative conclusion on regularity.

A limited assurance engagement is more limited in scope than a reasonable assurance engagement and consequently does not enable us to obtain assurance that we would become aware of all significant matters that might be identified in a reasonable assurance engagement. Accordingly, we do not express a positive opinion.

Our engagement includes examination, on a test basis, of evidence relevant to the regularity and propriety of the academy trust's income and expenditure.



# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## INDEPENDENT REPORTING ACCOUNTANT'S ASSURANCE REPORT ON REGULARITY TO THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST AND THE EDUCATION AND SKILLS FUNDING AGENCY (CONTINUED)

**FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023**

---

The work undertaken to draw to our conclusion includes:

- Review of Governing Body and committee minutes;
- Review of available internal assurance reports;
- Completion of self assessment questionnaire by the Accounting Officer;
- Discussions with the Accounting Officer and finance team;
- Review documentation provided to Governors and Accounting Officer setting our responsibilities;
- Obtained a formal letter of representation detailing the responsibilities of Governors;
- Review of payroll, purchases and expense claims on a sample basis;
- Confirmation that the lines of delegation and limits set have been adhered to;
- Evaluation of internal control procedures and reporting lines;
- Review of cash payments for unusual transactions;
- Review of purchasing card transactions;
- Review of register of interests;
- Review of related party transactions;
- Review of borrowing arrangements;
- Review of land and building transactions;
- Review of potential and actual bad debts;
- Review of gifts and hospitality on a sample basis to ensure in line with policy; and
- Consideration of governance issues.

### Conclusion

In the course of our work, nothing has come to our attention which suggests that in all material respects the expenditure disbursed and income received during the period 1 September 2022 to 31 August 2023 has not been applied to purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions do not conform to the authorities which govern them.

*Azets Audit Services*

Brian Laidlaw 14 Dec 2023 14:27:49 GMT (UTC +0)

### Reporting Accountant

Azets Audit Services

Bulman House

Regent Centre

Gosforth

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE3 3LS

Dated: 14 December 2023

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds: General    Fixed asset £            £		Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
<b>Income and endowments from:</b>						
Donations and capital grants	3	110,308	-	158,104	268,412	315,128
Charitable activities:						
- Funding for educational operations	4	77,377	16,866,181	-	16,943,558	15,564,644
Other trading activities	5	64,919	-	-	64,919	42,749
Investments	6	306	-	-	306	253
<b>Total</b>		<u>252,910</u>	<u>16,866,181</u>	<u>158,104</u>	<u>17,277,195</u>	<u>15,922,774</u>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>						
Raising funds	7	230,392	-	-	230,392	206,805
Charitable activities:						
- Educational operations	9	19,994	16,785,882	1,251,040	18,056,916	17,907,362
<b>Total</b>	7	<u>250,386</u>	<u>16,785,882</u>	<u>1,251,040</u>	<u>18,287,308</u>	<u>18,114,167</u>
<b>Net income/(expenditure)</b>		2,524	80,299	(1,092,936)	(1,010,113)	(2,191,393)
Transfers between funds	20	-	(452,387)	452,387	-	-
<b>Other recognised gains/(losses)</b>						
Actuarial gains on defined benefit pension schemes	22	-	1,538,000	-	1,538,000	16,165,000
<b>Net movement in funds</b>		2,524	1,165,912	(640,549)	527,887	13,973,607
<b>Reconciliation of funds</b>						
Total funds brought forward		718,000	(822,408)	36,937,863	36,833,455	22,859,848
Total funds carried forward		<u>720,524</u>	<u>343,504</u>	<u>36,297,314</u>	<u>37,361,342</u>	<u>36,833,455</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED) INCLUDING INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

Comparative year information Year ended 31 August 2022	Notes	Unrestricted	Restricted funds:		Total
		funds	General	Fixed asset	2022
		£	£	£	£
<b>Income and endowments from:</b>					
Donations and capital grants	3	82,969	-	232,159	315,128
Charitable activities:					
- Funding for educational operations	4	101,010	15,463,634	-	15,564,644
Other trading activities	5	42,749	-	-	42,749
Investments	6	253	-	-	253
<b>Total</b>		<u>226,981</u>	<u>15,463,634</u>	<u>232,159</u>	<u>15,922,774</u>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>					
Raising funds	7	206,805	-	-	206,805
Charitable activities:					
- Educational operations	9	20,880	16,911,317	975,165	17,907,362
<b>Total</b>	7	<u>227,685</u>	<u>16,911,317</u>	<u>975,165</u>	<u>18,114,167</u>
<b>Net expenditure</b>		(704)	(1,447,683)	(743,006)	(2,191,393)
Transfers between funds	20	-	(457,949)	457,949	-
<b>Other recognised gains/(losses)</b>					
Actuarial gains on defined benefit pension schemes	22	-	16,165,000	-	16,165,000
<b>Net movement in funds</b>		(704)	14,259,368	(285,057)	13,973,607
<b>Reconciliation of funds</b>					
Total funds brought forward		718,704	(15,081,776)	37,222,920	22,859,848
Total funds carried forward		<u>718,000</u>	<u>(822,408)</u>	<u>36,937,863</u>	<u>36,833,455</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31 AUGUST 2023

	Notes	2023		2022	
		£	£	£	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>					
Tangible assets	13	36,477,203		36,957,075	
Investments	14		1		1
			<u>36,477,204</u>		<u>36,957,076</u>
<b>Current assets</b>					
Stock	15	7,644		9,756	
Debtors	16	272,536		594,886	
Cash at bank and in hand		3,137,046		2,627,384	
			<u>3,417,226</u>		<u>3,232,026</u>
<b>Current liabilities</b>					
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	17	(2,014,731)		(1,687,603)	
			<u>1,402,495</u>		<u>1,544,423</u>
<b>Net current assets</b>					
			<u>37,879,699</u>		<u>38,501,499</u>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>					
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year	18		(196,357)		(231,044)
			<u>37,683,342</u>		<u>38,270,455</u>
<b>Net assets excluding pension liability</b>					
Defined benefit pension scheme liability	22		(322,000)		(1,437,000)
			<u>37,361,342</u>		<u>36,833,455</u>
<b>Total net assets</b>					
			<u><u>37,361,342</u></u>		<u><u>36,833,455</u></u>
<b>Funds of the academy trust:</b>					
<b>Restricted funds</b>	20				
- Fixed asset funds			36,297,314		36,937,863
- Restricted income funds			665,504		614,592
- Pension reserve			(322,000)		(1,437,000)
			<u>36,640,818</u>		<u>36,115,455</u>
<b>Total restricted funds</b>					
			<u>36,640,818</u>		<u>36,115,455</u>
<b>Unrestricted income funds</b>	20		720,524		718,000
			<u>720,524</u>		<u>718,000</u>
<b>Total funds</b>			<u><u>37,361,342</u></u>		<u><u>36,833,455</u></u>

The accounts on pages 32 to 58 were approved by the trustees and authorised for issue on 14/12/2023..... and are signed on their behalf by:

  
 Patricia Lynn Watson 14 Dec 2023 13:56:21 GMT (UTC +0)  
 PL Watson OBE  
 Chair

  
 Carolyn Morgan 14 Dec 2023 12:56:06 GMT (UTC +0)  
 C Morgan  
 CEO

Company registration number 08098007 (England and Wales)

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

	Notes	2023		2022	
		£	£	£	£
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>					
Net cash provided by operating activities	23		1,160,856		1,299,249
<b>Cash flows from investing activities</b>					
Dividends, interest and rents from investments		306		253	
Capital grants from DfE Group		158,104		232,159	
Purchase of tangible fixed assets		(771,168)		(523,035)	
<b>Net cash used in investing activities</b>			(612,758)		(290,623)
<b>Cash flows from financing activities</b>					
New long term loan		-		40,911	
Repayment of long term loan		(38,436)		(28,325)	
<b>Net cash (used in)/provided by financing activities</b>			(38,436)		12,586
<b>Net increase in cash and cash equivalents in the reporting period</b>			509,662		1,021,212
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of the year			2,627,384		1,606,172
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at end of the year</b>			<u>3,137,046</u>		<u>2,627,384</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### 1 Accounting policies

A summary of the principal accounting policies adopted (which have been applied consistently, except where noted), judgements and key sources of estimation uncertainty, is set out below.

##### 1.1 Basis of preparation

The accounts of the academy trust, which is a public benefit entity under FRS 102, have been prepared under the historical cost convention in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard Applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (Charities SORP (FRS 102)), the Academies Accounts Direction 2022 to 2023 issued by ESFA, the Charities Act 2011 and the Companies Act 2006.

These financial statements are prepared in sterling which is the functional currency of the entity,

##### 1.2 Going concern

The trustees assess whether the use of going concern is appropriate, ie whether there are any material uncertainties related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the ability of the charitable company to continue as a going concern. The trustees make this assessment in respect of a period of at least one year from the date of authorisation for issue of the accounts and have concluded that the academy trust has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future and there are no material uncertainties about the academy trust's ability to continue as a going concern. Thus they continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting in preparing the accounts.

##### 1.3 Income

All incoming resources are recognised when the academy trust has entitlement to the funds, the receipt is probable and the amount can be measured reliably.

###### Grants

Grants are included in the statement of financial activities on a receivable basis. The balance of income received for specific purposes but not expended during the period is shown in the relevant funds on the balance sheet. Where income is received in advance of meeting any performance-related conditions there is not unconditional entitlement to the income and its recognition is deferred and included in creditors as deferred income until the performance-related conditions are met. Where entitlement occurs before income is received, the income is accrued.

General Annual Grant is recognised in full in the statement of financial activities in the period for which it is receivable, and any abatement in respect of the period is deducted from income and recognised as a liability.

Capital grants are recognised in full when there is an unconditional entitlement to the grant. Unspent amounts of capital grants are reflected in the balance sheet in the restricted fixed asset fund. Capital grants are recognised when there is entitlement and are not deferred over the life of the asset on which they are expended.

###### Sponsorship income

Sponsorship income provided to the academy trust which amounts to a donation is recognised in the statement of financial activities in the period in which it is receivable (where there are no performance-related conditions), where the receipt is probable and it can be measured reliably.

###### Donations

Donations are recognised on a receivable basis (where there are no performance-related conditions) where the receipt is probable and the amount can be reliably measured.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 1 Accounting policies

(Continued)

##### Other income

Other income, including the hire of facilities, is recognised in the period it is receivable and to the extent the academy trust has provided the goods or services.

##### Donated goods, facilities and services

Goods donated for resale are included at fair value, being the expected proceeds from sale less the expected costs of sale. If it is practical to assess the fair value at receipt, it is recognised in stock and 'Income from other trading activities'. Upon sale, the value of the stock is charged against 'Income from other trading activities' and the proceeds are recognised as 'Income from other trading activities'. Where it is impractical to fair value the items due to the volume of low value items they are not recognised in the accounts until they are sold. This income is recognised within 'Income from other trading activities'.

##### Donated fixed assets

Donated fixed assets are measured at fair value unless it is impractical to measure this reliably, in which case the cost of the item to the donor is used. The gain is recognised as income from donations and a corresponding amount is included in the appropriate fixed asset category and depreciated over the useful economic life in accordance with the academy trust's accounting policies.

#### 1.4 Expenditure

Expenditure is recognised once there is a legal or constructive obligation to transfer economic benefit to a third party, it is probable that a transfer of economic benefits will be required in settlement, and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably.

Expenditure is classified by activity. The costs of each activity are made up of the total of direct costs and shared costs, including support costs involved in undertaking each activity. Direct costs attributable to a single activity are allocated directly to that activity. Shared costs which contribute to more than one activity and support costs which are not attributable to a single activity are apportioned between those activities on a basis consistent with the use of resources. Central staff costs are allocated on the basis of time spent, and depreciation charges are allocated on the portion of the asset's use.

All resources expended are inclusive of irrecoverable VAT.

##### Expenditure on raising funds

This includes all expenditure incurred by the academy trust to raise funds for its charitable purposes and includes costs of all fundraising activities events and non-charitable trading.

##### Charitable activities

These are costs incurred on the academy trust's educational operations, including support costs and costs relating to the governance of the academy trust apportioned to charitable activities.

#### 1.5 Tangible fixed assets and depreciation

Assets costing £1,000 or more are capitalised as tangible fixed assets and are carried at cost, net of depreciation and any provision for impairment.

Where tangible fixed assets have been acquired with the aid of specific grants, either from the government or from the private sector, they are included in the balance sheet at cost and depreciated over their expected useful economic life. Where there are specific conditions attached to the funding that require the continued use of the asset, the related grants are credited to a restricted fixed asset fund in the statement of financial activities and carried forward in the balance sheet. Depreciation on the relevant assets is charged directly to the restricted fixed asset fund in the statement of financial activities. Where tangible fixed assets have been acquired with unrestricted funds, depreciation on such assets is charged to the unrestricted fund.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 1 Accounting policies

(Continued)

Depreciation is provided on all tangible fixed assets, at rates calculated to write off the cost of each asset on a straight-line basis over its expected useful life, as follows:

Leasehold land and buildings	10 - 50 years straight line
Plant and machinery	3 years straight line
Computer equipment	3 years straight line
Fixtures, fittings & equipment	10 years straight line
Motor vehicles	5 years straight line

A review for impairment of a fixed asset is carried out if events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying value of any fixed asset may not be recoverable. Shortfalls between the carrying value of fixed assets and their recoverable amounts are recognised as impairments. Impairment losses are recognised in the statement of financial activities.

#### 1.6 Liabilities

Liabilities are recognised when there is an obligation at the balance sheet date as a result of a past event, it is probable that a transfer of economic benefit will be required in settlement, and the amount of the settlement can be estimated reliably. Liabilities are recognised at the amount that the academy trust anticipates it will pay to settle the debt or the amount it has received as advanced payments for the goods of services it must provide.

#### 1.7 Leased assets

Rentals under operating leases are charged on a straight-line basis over the lease term.

#### 1.8 Investments

The Academy's shareholding in the wholly owned subsidiary, Ascent Extra Limited, is included in the balance sheet at the cost of the share capital owned less any impairment. There is no readily available market value and the cost of valuation exceeds the benefit derived.

#### 1.9 Financial instruments

The academy trust only holds basic financial instruments as defined in FRS 102. The financial assets and financial liabilities of the academy trust and their measurement basis are as follows.

##### Financial assets

Trade and other debtors are basic financial instruments and are debt instruments measured at amortised cost. Prepayments are not financial instruments.

Cash at bank is classified as a basic financial instrument and is measured at face value.

##### Financial liabilities

Trade creditors, accruals and other creditors are financial instruments, and are measured at amortised cost. Taxation and social security are not included in the financial instruments disclosure definition.

Deferred income is not deemed to be a financial liability, as the cash settlement has already taken place and there is an obligation to deliver services rather than cash or another financial instrument.

#### 1.10 Stock

Stock is valued at the lower of cost and net realisable value. Net realisable value is based on estimated selling price less further costs to completion and disposal. Provision is made for obsolete and slow moving stock.



# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 1 Accounting policies

(Continued)

##### 1.11 Taxation

The academy trust is considered to pass the tests set out in Paragraph 1 Schedule 6 of the Finance Act 2010 and therefore it meets the definition of a charitable company for UK corporation tax purposes. Accordingly, the academy trust is potentially exempt from taxation in respect of income or capital gains received within categories covered by chapter 3 part 11 of the Corporation Tax Act 2010 or Section 256 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992, to the extent that such income or gains are applied exclusively to charitable purposes.

##### 1.12 Pensions benefits

Retirement benefits to employees of the academy trust are provided by the Teachers' Pension Scheme ('TPS') and the Local Government Pension Scheme ('LGPS'). These are defined benefit schemes and the assets are held separately from those of the academy trust.

The TPS is an unfunded scheme and contributions are calculated to spread the cost of pensions over employees' working lives with the academy trust in such a way that the pension cost is a substantially level percentage of current and future pensionable payroll. The contributions are determined by the Government Actuary based on quadrennial valuations using a prospective unit credit method. The TPS is an unfunded multi-employer scheme with no underlying assets to assign between employers. Consequently, the TPS is treated as a defined contribution scheme for accounting purposes and the contributions are recognised in the period to which they relate.

The LGPS is a funded multi-employer scheme and the assets are held separately from those of the academy trust in separate trustee administered funds. Pension scheme assets are measured at fair value and liabilities are measured on an actuarial basis using the projected unit credit method and discounted at a rate equivalent to the current rate of return on a high-quality corporate bond of equivalent term and currency to the liabilities. The actuarial valuations are obtained at least triennially and are updated at each balance sheet date. The amounts charged to net income or expenditure are the current service costs and the costs of scheme introductions, benefit changes, settlements and curtailments. They are included as part of staff costs as incurred. Net interest on the net defined benefit liability/asset is also recognised in the statement of financial activities and comprises the interest cost on the defined benefit obligation and interest income on the scheme assets, calculated by multiplying the fair value of the scheme assets at the beginning of the period by the rate used to discount the benefit obligations. The difference between the interest income on the scheme assets and the actual return on the scheme assets is recognised in other recognised gains and losses. Actuarial gains and losses are recognised immediately in other recognised gains and losses.

##### 1.13 Fund accounting

Unrestricted income funds represent those resources which may be used towards meeting any of the charitable objects of the academy trust at the discretion of the trustees.

Restricted fixed asset funds are resources which are to be applied to specific capital purposes imposed by funders where the asset acquired or created is held for a specific purpose.

Restricted general funds comprise all other restricted funds received with restrictions imposed by the funder/donor and include grants from the [Department for Education Group].

##### 1.14 Agency accounting

The academy trust acts as an agent in distributing 16-19 bursary funds from ESFA. Payments received from ESFA and subsequent disbursements to students are excluded from the statement of financial activities as the trust does not have control over the charitable application of the funds. The trust can use up to 5% of the allocation towards its administration costs and this is recognised in the statement of financial activities.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

### 2 Critical accounting estimates and areas of judgement

Accounting estimates and judgements are continually evaluated and are based on historical experience and other factors, including expectations of future events that are believed to be reasonable under the circumstances.

#### Critical accounting estimates and assumptions

The academy trust makes estimates and assumptions concerning the future. The resulting accounting estimates and assumptions will, by definition, seldom equal the related actual results. The estimates and assumptions that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next financial year are discussed below.

The present value of the Local Government Pension Scheme defined benefit liability depends on a number of factors that are determined on an actuarial basis using a variety of assumptions. The assumptions used in determining the net cost or income for pensions include the discount rate. Any changes in these assumptions, which are disclosed in note 22, will impact on the carrying amount of the pension liability. Furthermore, a roll forward approach which projects results from the latest full actuarial valuation performed at 31 March 2022 has been used by the actuary in valuing the pensions liability at 31 August 2023. Any differences between the figures derived from the roll forward approach and a full actuarial valuation would impact on the carrying amount of the pension liability. The UK corporate bond yields at 31 August 2023 are at their highest levels for many years resulting in higher accounting discount rates at the year end. This places a significantly lower value on the pension obligations compared to last year and will be one of the main reasons a net asset has been reported. We have ensured that our assumptions are appropriate for the academy trust and the valuation has been based on the following estimates:

- There is a minimum funding requirement in relation to LGPS
- There is the ability to recover a surplus through the ability to reduce future contributions (not refund)
- In calculating the surplus, the present value of current and past service costs is offset against the future contributions over the future period
- The present values in the above calculations are calculated using an annuity representing participation into perpetuity.

There is no known intention to exit the LGPS and therefore the economic benefit of a refund would be highly unlikely and on that basis recognition of an asset is considered inappropriate. We have however considered the economic benefit available to the Academy trust as a future contribution reduction and whether it is appropriate to recognise the net asset in full. Under FRS 102, a net asset restriction may apply as the prevailing view is that a minimum funding requirement for future service exists in the LGPS. We requested our actuaries consider the impact of the minimum funding requirement on the asset ceiling and as a result we have restricted the asset based upon an asset restriction calculation. We consider this to be appropriate and a more accurate reflection of the pension positions as at the 31 August 2023.

#### Critical areas of judgement

Accounting estimates and assumptions are made concerning the future and, by their nature, will rarely equal the related actual outcome. The key assumptions and other sources of estimation uncertainty that have a significant risk of causing a material adjustment to the carrying amounts of assets and liabilities within the next financial year are as follows:

#### **Assessing indicator of impairment**

In assessing whether there have been any indicators of impairment of assets the trustees have considered both external and internal sources of information such as market conditions, counterparty credit ratings and experience of recoverability. There have been no indicators of impairment identified during the current financial year.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 3 Donations and capital grants

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
Capital grants	-	158,104	158,104	232,159
Other donations	110,308	-	110,308	82,969
	<u>110,308</u>	<u>158,104</u>	<u>268,412</u>	<u>315,128</u>

#### 4 Funding for the academy trust's educational operations

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
<b>DfE/ESFA grants</b>				
General annual grant (GAG)	-	7,520,529	7,520,529	7,160,000
Other DfE/ESFA grants:				
- UIFSM	-	19,920	19,920	-
- Pupil premium	-	396,196	396,196	419,607
- PE and sports grant	-	34,190	34,190	-
- Others	-	85,916	85,916	503,887
	<u>-</u>	<u>8,056,751</u>	<u>8,056,751</u>	<u>8,083,494</u>
<b>Other government grants</b>				
Local authority grants	-	8,410,409	8,410,409	7,243,217
Special educational projects	-	126,414	126,414	39,659
	<u>-</u>	<u>8,536,823</u>	<u>8,536,823</u>	<u>7,282,876</u>
<b>COVID-19 additional funding</b>				
<b>DfE/ESFA</b>				
Catch-up premium	-	272,607	272,607	-
<b>Non-DfE/ESFA</b>				
Other COVID-19 funding	-	-	-	97,264
	<u>-</u>	<u>272,607</u>	<u>272,607</u>	<u>97,264</u>
<b>Other incoming resources</b>	<u>77,377</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>77,377</u>	<u>101,010</u>
<b>Total funding</b>	<u>77,377</u>	<u>16,866,181</u>	<u>16,943,558</u>	<u>15,564,644</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 5 Other trading activities

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
Other income	64,919	-	64,919	42,749

#### 6 Investment income

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
Short term deposits	306	-	306	253

#### 7 Expenditure

	Staff costs £	Non-pay expenditure		Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
		Premises £	Other £		
Expenditure on raising funds					
- Direct costs	230,392	-	-	230,392	206,805
Academy's educational operations					
- Direct costs	10,972,225	1,073,216	443,112	12,488,553	12,143,445
- Allocated support costs	3,687,299	1,023,096	857,968	5,568,363	5,763,917
	<u>14,889,916</u>	<u>2,096,312</u>	<u>1,301,080</u>	<u>18,287,308</u>	<u>18,114,167</u>

#### Net income/(expenditure) for the year includes:

	2023 £	2022 £
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	1,251,040	975,165
Fees payable to auditor for:		
- Audit	9,500	7,259
- Other services	2,475	2,100
Net interest on defined benefit pension liability	<u>33,000</u>	<u>260,000</u>

#### 8 Central services

The academy trust has provided the following central services to its academies during the year:

- human resources;
- education and support services;
- financial services;
- governance services;
- assets and estates services;
- health and safety services;
- IT and digital media services;
- leadership; and
- all other central Trust costs and overheads.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 8 Central services

(Continued)

The academy trust charges for these services on the following basis:  
Each academy pays 6.50% (2022 - 6.50%) of pupil led income to fund central services.

The amounts charged during the year were as follows:

	2023 £	2022 £
Portland Academy	247,282	220,895
Barbara Priestman Academy	209,231	195,123
Hope Wood Academy	334,281	276,527
Ash Trees Academy	202,489	193,116
	<u>993,283</u>	<u>885,661</u>

#### 9 Charitable activities

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
<b>Direct costs</b>				
Educational operations	19,994	12,468,559	12,488,553	12,143,445
<b>Support costs</b>				
Educational operations	-	5,568,363	5,568,363	5,763,917
	<u>19,994</u>	<u>18,036,922</u>	<u>18,056,916</u>	<u>17,907,362</u>

	2023 £	2022 £
<b>Analysis of support costs</b>		
Support staff costs	3,687,299	3,795,893
Depreciation	177,824	144,464
Technology costs	124,431	124,419
Premises costs	845,272	733,855
Legal costs	97,819	116,192
Other support costs	607,998	826,354
Governance costs	27,720	22,740
	<u>5,568,363</u>	<u>5,763,917</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

### 10 Staff

#### Staff costs

Staff costs during the year were:

	2023 £	2022 £
Wages and salaries	10,406,659	9,553,653
Social security costs	950,473	895,119
Pension costs	2,310,551	3,662,149
	<u>13,667,683</u>	<u>14,110,921</u>
Staff costs - employees	13,667,683	14,110,921
Agency staff costs	1,187,849	706,159
Staff restructuring costs	34,384	17,167
	<u>14,889,916</u>	<u>14,834,247</u>
Staff development and other staff costs	111,176	126,141
	<u>15,001,092</u>	<u>14,960,388</u>

Staff restructuring costs comprise:

Redundancy payments	34,384	17,167
	<u>34,384</u>	<u>17,167</u>

#### Staff numbers

The average number of persons employed by the academy trust during the year was as follows:

	2023 Number	2022 Number
Teachers	96	93
Administration and support	278	280
Management	20	15
	<u>394</u>	<u>388</u>

#### Higher paid staff

The number of employees whose employee benefits (excluding employer pension costs and employer national insurance contributions) exceeded £60,000 was:

	2023 Number	2022 Number
£60,001 - £70,000	4	4
£70,001 - £80,000	2	1
£80,001 - £90,000	2	2
£90,001 - £100,000	1	1
£110,001 - £120,000	-	1
£120,001 - £130,000	1	-
	<u>10</u>	<u>9</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 10 Staff

(Continued)

##### Key management personnel

The key management personnel of the academy trust comprise the trustees and the senior management team as listed on page 1. The total amount of key management personnel benefits (including employer pension contributions and employer national insurance contributions) received by key management personnel for their services to the academy trust was £479,429 (2022: £401,434).

#### 11 Trustees' remuneration and expenses

One or more of the trustees has been paid remuneration or has received other benefits from an employment with the academy trust. The principal and other staff trustees only receive remuneration in respect of services they provide undertaking the roles of principal and staff members under their contracts of employment, and not in respect of their services as trustees.

The value of trustees' remuneration and other benefits was as follows:

C Morgan (CEO):

Remuneration: £120,000 - £125,000 (2022 - £115,000 - £120,000)

Employers pension contributions £25,000 - £30,000 (2022 - £25,000 - £30,000)

#### 12 Trustees' and officers' insurance

The academy trust has opted into the Department for Education's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA), an alternative to insurance where UK government funds cover losses that arise. This scheme protects trustees and officers from claims arising from negligent acts, errors or omissions occurring whilst on academy trust business, and provides cover up to £10,000,000. It is not possible to quantify the trustees and officers indemnity element from the overall cost of the RPA scheme.

#### 13 Tangible fixed assets

	Leasehold land and buildings	Plant and machinery	Computer equipment	Fixtures, fittings & equipment	Motor vehicles	Total
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Cost</b>						
At 1 September 2022	43,068,113	69,273	758,011	664,830	110,975	44,671,202
Additions	485,879	-	33,599	126,485	125,205	771,168
Disposals	-	-	(426,867)	-	(94,741)	(521,608)
At 31 August 2023	43,553,992	69,273	364,743	791,315	141,439	44,920,762
<b>Depreciation</b>						
At 1 September 2022	6,643,568	46,147	554,339	359,098	110,975	7,714,127
On disposals	-	-	(426,867)	-	(94,741)	(521,608)
Charge for the year	1,073,216	6,039	113,180	54,382	4,223	1,251,040
At 31 August 2023	7,716,784	52,186	240,652	413,480	20,457	8,443,559
<b>Net book value</b>						
At 31 August 2023	35,837,208	17,087	124,091	377,835	120,982	36,477,203
At 31 August 2022	36,424,545	23,126	203,672	305,732	-	36,957,075

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

### 14 Fixed asset investments

	Shares in subsidiary undertakings £
<b>Market value</b>	
At 1 September 2022 and 31 August 2023	1
	<u>1</u>
<b>Historical cost:</b>	
At 31 August 2023	1
	<u>1</u>
At 31 August 2022	1
	<u>1</u>

#### Holdings of more than 20%

The academy trust holds more than 20% of the share capital of the following undertakings:

Company	Country of registration or incorporation	Shares held	
		Class	%
<b>Subsidiary undertakings</b>			
Ascent Extra Limited	England and Wales	Ordinary	100

The aggregate amount of capital and reserves and the results of these undertakings for the last relevant financial year were as follows:

Principal activities	Capital and reserves	Profit/(loss) for the year
	£	£
Ascent Extra Limited	-	-
	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>

### 15 Stock

	2023 £	2022 £
Stationery	7,644	9,756
	<u>7,644</u>	<u>9,756</u>

### 16 Debtors

	2023 £	2022 £
Trade debtors	23,062	14,881
VAT recoverable	32,380	65,865
Prepayments and accrued income	217,094	514,140
	<u>272,536</u>	<u>594,886</u>



# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

### 17 Creditors: amounts falling due within one year

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	£	£
Government loans	38,469	42,218
Trade creditors	1,092,945	763,685
Amounts owed to group undertakings	1	1
Accruals and deferred income	883,316	881,699
	<u>2,014,731</u>	<u>1,687,603</u>

### 18 Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	£	£
Government loans	196,357	231,044
	<u>196,357</u>	<u>231,044</u>

<b>Analysis of loans</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	£	£
Not wholly repayable within five years by instalments	70,737	89,772
Wholly repayable within five years	164,089	183,490
	<u>234,826</u>	<u>273,262</u>
Less: included in current liabilities	(38,469)	(42,218)
Amounts included above	<u>196,357</u>	<u>231,044</u>

#### Loan maturity

Debt due in one year or less	38,469	42,218
Due in more than one year but not more than two years	38,469	42,218
Due in more than two years but not more than five years	87,151	99,054
Due in more than five years	70,737	89,772
	<u>234,826</u>	<u>273,262</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 18 Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year

(Continued)

Loans of £22,282 from Salix Finance Ltd which is provided on the following terms: Salix Energy Efficiency loan (Ash Trees Academy) - Interest free loan repayable through GAG in 6-monthly installments of £2,228 from March 2019.

Loans of £5,574 from Salix Finance Ltd which is provided on the following terms: Salix Energy Efficiency loan (Barbara Priestman Academy) - Interest free loan repayable through GAG in 6-monthly installments of £1,858 from March 2019.

Loans of £21,562 from Salix Finance Ltd which is provided on the following terms: Salix Energy Efficiency loan (Portland Academy) - Interest free loan repayable through GAG in 6-monthly installments of £2,156 from September 2019.

Loans of £16,899 from Salix Finance Ltd which is provided on the following terms: Salix Energy Efficiency loan (Hope Wood Academy) - Interest free loan repayable through GAG in 6-monthly installments of £3,380 from March 2019.

Loans of £12,208 from Salix Finance Ltd which is provided on the following terms: Salix Energy Efficiency loan (Barbara Priestman Academy) - Interest free loan repayable through GAG in 6-monthly installments of £814 from March 2021.

Loans of £17,920 from Salix Finance Ltd which is provided on the following terms: Salix Energy Efficiency loan (Pottland Academy) - Interest free loan repayable through GAG in 6-monthly installments of £1,280 from September 2021.

Loans of £8,871 from Salix Finance Ltd which is provided on the following terms: Salix Energy Efficiency loan (Portland Academy) - Interest free loan repayable through GAG in 6-monthly installments of £1,183 from September 2022.

Loans of £6,077 from Salix Finance Ltd which is provided on the following terms: Salix Energy Efficiency loan (Hope Wood Academy) - Interest free loan repayable through GAG in monthly installments of £506 from March 2022.

Loans of £56,265 from Department of Education which is provided on the following terms: Department of Education loan (Barbara Priestman Academy) - 10 year loan repayable through GAG in monthly installments of £520 from March 2022. Interest is charged at 2.22% per annum.

Loans of £19,564 from Department of Education which is provided on the following terms: Department of Education loan (Ash Tree Academy) - 10 year loan repayable through GAG in monthly installments of £201 from March 2022. Interest is charged at 2.22% per annum.

Loans of £16,769 from Department of Education which is provided on the following terms: Department of Education loan (Barbara Priestman Academy) - 10 year loan repayable through GAG in monthly installments of £156 from March 2022. Interest is charged at 2.22% per annum.

Loans of £15,559 from Department of Education which is provided on the following terms: Department of Education loan (Hope Wood Academy) 10 year loan repayable through GAG in monthly installments of £145 from September 2022. Interest is charged at 2.22% per annum.

Loans of £15,890 from Department of Education which is provided on the following terms: Department of Education loan (Hope Wood Academy) - 10 year loan repayable through GAG in monthly installments of £148 from March 2022. Interest is charged at 2.22% per annum.

Loans of £37,822 from Department of Education which is provided on the following terms: Department of Education loan (Hope Wood Academy) - 10 year loan repayable through GAG in annual installments of £342 from September 2023. Interest is charged at 1.49% per annum.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 19 Deferred income

	2023 £	2022 £
Deferred income is included within:		
Creditors due within one year	17,866	152,723
	<u>17,866</u>	<u>152,723</u>
Deferred income at 1 September 2022	152,723	30,952
Released from previous years	(152,723)	(30,952)
Resources deferred in the year	17,866	152,723
	<u>17,866</u>	<u>152,723</u>
Deferred income at 31 August 2023	<u>17,866</u>	<u>152,723</u>

At the balance sheet date, the Trust was holding funds received in advance in respect of Local Authority Top Up fees, Supplementary Grant fees and Universal Infant Free School Meals.

#### 20 Funds

	Balance at 1 September 2022 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Gains, losses and transfers £	Balance at 31 August 2023 £
<b>Restricted general funds</b>					
General Annual Grant (GAG)	614,592	7,520,529	(7,017,230)	(452,387)	665,504
UIFSM	-	19,920	(19,920)	-	-
Pupil premium	-	396,196	(396,196)	-	-
Catch-up premium	-	272,607	(272,607)	-	-
Other DfE/ESFA grants	-	120,106	(120,106)	-	-
Other government grants	-	8,536,823	(8,536,823)	-	-
Pension reserve	(1,437,000)	-	(423,000)	1,538,000	(322,000)
	<u>(822,408)</u>	<u>16,866,181</u>	<u>(16,785,882)</u>	<u>1,085,613</u>	<u>343,504</u>
<b>Restricted fixed asset funds</b>					
DfE group capital grants	36,937,863	158,104	(1,251,040)	-	35,844,927
Capital expenditure from GAG	-	-	-	452,387	452,387
	<u>36,937,863</u>	<u>158,104</u>	<u>(1,251,040)</u>	<u>452,387</u>	<u>36,297,314</u>
<b>Total restricted funds</b>	<u>36,115,455</u>	<u>17,024,285</u>	<u>(18,036,922)</u>	<u>1,538,000</u>	<u>36,640,818</u>
<b>Unrestricted funds</b>					
General funds	718,000	252,910	(250,386)	-	720,524
	<u>718,000</u>	<u>252,910</u>	<u>(250,386)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>720,524</u>
<b>Total funds</b>	<u>36,833,455</u>	<u>17,277,195</u>	<u>(18,287,308)</u>	<u>1,538,000</u>	<u>37,361,342</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

#### 20 Funds

(Continued)

The specific purposes for which the funds are to be applied are as follows:

The General Annual Grant (GAG) must be used for the normal running costs of the Trust. Under the funding agreement with the Secretary of State, the academy trust was not subject to a limit on the amount of GAG that it could carry forward at the balance sheet date.

Other DfE/ESFA grants include teachers pay and pension grants, pupil premium, PE and sports grant and other DfE/ESFA grants.

Other government grants comprise funding received from the Local Authority.

The costs and income associated with the defined benefit pension scheme have been recorded in the restricted fund. Staff costs are paid from this fund, including contributions to Local Government Pension Scheme ('LGPS') and the pension liability has therefore been aligned with these funds. The restricted funds are in deficit as a result of the deficit on the LGPS pension scheme alone.

The inherited fixed asset fund reflects the fixed assets acquired from the Local Authority on conversion to academy status. Depreciation on these assets is charged against this fund.

DfE/ESFA capital grants received in year consist of capital grants received in the year which have been received for expenditure on acquisition and maintenance of fixed assets.

Unrestricted funds can be used for any purpose at the discretion of the academy trust.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 20 Funds

(Continued)

Comparative information in respect of the preceding period is as follows:

	Balance at 1 September 2021 £	Income £	Expenditure £	Gains, losses and transfers £	Balance at 31 August 2022 £
<b>Restricted general funds</b>					
General Annual Grant (GAG)	428,224	7,160,000	(6,515,683)	(457,949)	614,592
Pupil premium	-	419,607	(419,607)	-	-
Other Coronavirus funding	-	97,264	(97,264)	-	-
Other DfE/ESFA grants	-	503,887	(503,887)	-	-
Other government grants	-	7,282,876	(7,282,876)	-	-
Pension reserve	(15,510,000)	-	(2,092,000)	16,165,000	(1,437,000)
	<u>(15,081,776)</u>	<u>15,463,634</u>	<u>(16,911,317)</u>	<u>15,707,051</u>	<u>(822,408)</u>
<b>Restricted fixed asset funds</b>					
DfE group capital grants	37,222,920	232,159	(975,165)	-	36,479,914
Capital expenditure from GAG	-	-	-	457,949	457,949
	<u>37,222,920</u>	<u>232,159</u>	<u>(975,165)</u>	<u>457,949</u>	<u>36,937,863</u>
<b>Total restricted funds</b>	<u>22,141,144</u>	<u>15,695,793</u>	<u>(17,886,482)</u>	<u>16,165,000</u>	<u>36,115,455</u>
<b>Unrestricted funds</b>					
General funds	718,704	226,981	(227,685)	-	718,000
	<u>718,704</u>	<u>226,981</u>	<u>(227,685)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>718,000</u>
<b>Total funds</b>	<u>22,859,848</u>	<u>15,922,774</u>	<u>(18,114,167)</u>	<u>16,165,000</u>	<u>36,833,455</u>

#### Total funds analysis by academy

	2023 £	2022 £
Fund balances at 31 August 2023 were allocated as follows:		
Portland Academy	-	-
Barbara Priestman Academy	-	-
Hope Wood Academy	-	-
Ash Trees Academy	-	-
Central services	1,386,028	1,332,592
Total before fixed assets fund and pension reserve	<u>1,386,028</u>	<u>1,332,592</u>
Restricted fixed asset fund	36,297,314	36,937,863
Pension reserve	(322,000)	(1,437,000)
Total funds	<u>37,361,342</u>	<u>36,833,455</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 20 Funds

(Continued)

##### Total cost analysis by academy

Expenditure incurred by each academy during the year was as follows:

	Teaching and educational support staff	Other support staff costs	Educational supplies	Other costs excluding depreciation	Total 2023	Total 2022
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Portland Academy	2,670,050	615,620	484,119	62,607	3,832,396	3,440,793
Barbara Priestman Academy	2,411,508	570,921	287,950	91,811	3,362,190	3,188,492
Hope Wood Academy	3,518,290	1,059,875	438,649	95,882	5,112,696	4,517,498
Ash Trees Academy	2,143,443	796,622	327,504	68,423	3,335,992	3,023,769
Central services	225,952	598,812	132,016	13,215	969,995	876,450
	<u>10,969,243</u>	<u>3,641,850</u>	<u>1,670,238</u>	<u>331,938</u>	<u>16,613,269</u>	<u>15,047,002</u>

#### 21 Analysis of net assets between funds

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted funds: General	Fixed asset	Total Funds
	£	£	£	£
<b>Fund balances at 31 August 2023 are represented by:</b>				
Tangible fixed assets	-	-	36,477,203	36,477,203
Fixed asset investments	1	-	-	1
Current assets	720,523	2,641,766	54,937	3,417,226
Current liabilities	-	(1,976,262)	(38,469)	(2,014,731)
Non-current liabilities	-	-	(196,357)	(196,357)
Pension scheme liability	-	(322,000)	-	(322,000)
<b>Total net assets</b>	<u>720,524</u>	<u>343,504</u>	<u>36,297,314</u>	<u>37,361,342</u>

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted funds: General	Fixed asset	Total Funds
	£	£	£	£
<b>Fund balances at 31 August 2022 are represented by:</b>				
Tangible fixed assets	-	-	36,957,075	36,957,075
Fixed asset investments	1	-	-	1
Current assets	717,999	2,259,977	254,050	3,232,026
Current liabilities	-	(1,645,385)	(42,218)	(1,687,603)
Non-current liabilities	-	-	(231,044)	(231,044)
Pension scheme liability	-	(1,437,000)	-	(1,437,000)
<b>Total net assets</b>	<u>718,000</u>	<u>(822,408)</u>	<u>36,937,863</u>	<u>36,833,455</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

---

### 22 Pension and similar obligations

The academy trust's employees belong to two principal pension schemes: the Teachers' Pension Scheme England and Wales (TPS) for academic and related staff; and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for non-teaching staff, which is managed by Durham County Council, South Tyneside Council and Middlesbrough County Council. Both are multi-employer defined benefit schemes.

The latest actuarial valuation of the TPS related to the period ended 31 March 2020, and that of the LGPS related to the period ended 31 March 2022.

There were no outstanding or prepaid contributions at either the beginning or the end of the financial year.

#### Teachers' Pension Scheme

##### Introduction

The Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) is a statutory, contributory, defined benefit scheme, governed by the Teachers' Pension Scheme Regulations 2014. Membership is automatic for teachers in academy trusts. All teachers have the option to opt out of the TPS following enrolment.

The TPS is an unfunded scheme to which both the member and employer makes contributions, as a percentage of salary. These contributions are credited to the Exchequer. Retirement and other pension benefits are paid by public funds provided by Parliament.

##### Valuation of the Teachers' Pension Scheme

The Government Actuary, using normal actuarial principles, conducts a formal actuarial review of the TPS in accordance with the Public Service Pensions (Valuations and Employer Cost Cap) Directions 2014 published by HM Treasury every 4 years. The aim of the review is to specify the level of future contributions. Actuarial scheme valuations are dependent on assumptions about the value of future costs, design of benefits and many other factors. The latest actuarial valuation of the TPS was carried out as at 31 March 2020. The valuation report was published by the Department for Education on 30 October 2023.

The key elements of the valuation and subsequent consultation are:

- employer contribution rates set at 28.68% of pensionable pay (including a 0.08% employer administration charge)
- total scheme liabilities (pensions currently in payment and the estimated cost of future benefits) for service to the effective date of £262,000 million, and notional assets (estimated future contributions together with the notional investments held at the valuation date) of £222,200 million giving a notional past service deficit of £39,800 million
- the SCAPE discount rate, set by HMT, is used to determine the notional investment return. The current SCAPE rate is 1.7% above the rate of CPI, and is based on the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast for long-term GDP growth.

The next valuation result is due to be implemented from 1 April 2024.

The employer's pension costs paid to the TPS in the period amounted to £1,004,967 (2022: £998,160).

A copy of the valuation report and supporting documentation is on the Teachers' Pensions website.

Under the definitions set out in FRS 102, the TPS is an unfunded multi-employer pension scheme. The academy trust has accounted for its contributions to the scheme as if it were a defined contribution scheme. The academy trust has set out above the information available on the scheme.

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED)

### FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

#### 22 Pension and similar obligations

(Continued)

##### Local Government Pension Scheme

The LGPS is a funded defined benefit pension scheme, with the assets held in separate trustee-administered funds. The total contributions are as noted below. The agreed contribution rates for future years are 15.00 - 17.50% for employers and 5.50 - 12.50% for employees.

Parliament has agreed, at the request of the Secretary of State for Education, to a guarantee that, in the event of academy closure, outstanding Local Government Pension Scheme liabilities would be met by the Department for Education. The guarantee came into force on 18 July 2013 and on 21 July 2022, the Department for Education reaffirmed its commitment to the guarantee, with a parliamentary minute published on GOV.UK.

<b>Total contributions made</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	£	£
Employer's contributions	867,000	785,000
Employees' contributions	310,000	276,000
	<u>1,177,000</u>	<u>1,061,000</u>

<b>Principal actuarial assumptions</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	%	%
Durham County Council Pension Fund		
Rate of increase in salaries	3.60	3.70
Rate of increase for pensions in payment/inflation	2.60	2.70
Discount rate for scheme liabilities	5.00	4.00
Inflation assumption (CPI)	2.60	2.70
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
Tyne & Wear Pension Fund		
Rate of increase in salaries	4.10	4.20
Rate of increase for pensions in payment/inflation	2.60	2.70
Discount rate for scheme liabilities	5.00	4.10
Inflation assumption (CPI)	2.60	2.70
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
Teesside Pension Fund		
Rate of increase in salaries	4.00	4.10
Rate of increase for pensions in payment/inflation	3.00	3.10
Discount rate for scheme liabilities	5.20	4.30
Inflation assumption (CPI)	3.00	3.10
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

The current mortality assumptions include sufficient allowance for future improvements in mortality rates. The assumed life expectations on retirement age 65 are:



# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

### 22 Pension and similar obligations

(Continued)

	2023 Years	2022 Years
Durham County Council Pension Fund		
Retiring today		
- Males	21.70	22.10
- Females	23.90	24.20
Retiring in 20 years		
- Males	22.90	23.20
- Females	25.00	25.70
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
 Tyne & Wear Pension Fund		
Retiring today		
- Males	21.00	21.80
- Females	24.10	25.00
Retiring in 20 years		
- Males	22.20	23.50
- Females	25.50	26.70
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
 Teesside Pension Fund		
Retiring today		
- Males	20.50	21.70
- Females	23.50	23.50
Retiring in 20 years		
- Males	21.30	22.90
- Females	25.00	25.30
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

Scheme liabilities would have been affected by changes in assumptions as follows:

	2023 £	2022 £
Discount rate + 0.1%	(430,000)	(605,000)
Discount rate - 0.1%	445,000	610,000
Mortality assumption + 1 year	(549,000)	(699,000)
Mortality assumption - 1 year	549,000	699,000
CPI rate + 0.1%	392,000	186,000
CPI rate - 0.1%	(388,000)	(186,000)
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

### 22 Pension and similar obligations

(Continued)

The academy trust's share of the assets in the scheme

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>Fair value</b>	<b>Fair value</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Equities	12,358,000	12,278,000
Bonds	588,000	612,000
Corporate bonds	2,888,000	2,548,000
Cash	497,000	982,000
Property	2,770,000	2,629,000
Other assets	2,658,000	2,394,000
Asset restriction	(2,738,000)	(281,000)
	<u>19,021,000</u>	<u>21,162,000</u>

The actual return on scheme assets was £(105,000) (2022: £(292,000)).

#### Amount recognised in the statement of financial activities

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Current service cost	1,257,000	2,617,000
Interest income	(897,000)	(363,000)
Interest cost	930,000	623,000
	<u>1,290,000</u>	<u>2,877,000</u>

#### Changes in the present value of defined benefit obligations

	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
At 1 September 2022	22,599,000	36,446,000
Current service cost	1,257,000	2,617,000
Interest cost	930,000	623,000
Employee contributions	310,000	276,000
Actuarial gain	(5,278,000)	(17,101,000)
Benefits paid	(475,000)	(262,000)
	<u>19,343,000</u>	<u>22,599,000</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

### 22 Pension and similar obligations

(Continued)

#### Changes in the fair value of the academy trust's share of scheme assets

	2023 £	2022 £
At 1 September 2022	21,162,000	20,936,000
Interest income	897,000	363,000
Actuarial loss	(1,002,000)	(655,000)
Employer contributions	867,000	785,000
Employee contributions	310,000	276,000
Benefits paid	(475,000)	(262,000)
Asset restriction	(2,738,000)	(281,000)
	<u>19,021,000</u>	<u>21,162,000</u>
At 31 August 2023	<u>19,021,000</u>	<u>21,162,000</u>

### 23 Reconciliation of net expenditure to net cash flow from operating activities

	2023 £	2022 £
Net expenditure for the reporting period (as per the statement of financial activities)	(1,010,113)	(2,191,393)
Adjusted for:		
Capital grants from DfE and other capital income	(158,104)	(232,159)
Investment income receivable	6 (306)	(253)
Defined benefit pension costs less contributions payable	22 390,000	1,832,000
Defined benefit pension scheme finance cost	22 33,000	260,000
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	1,251,040	975,165
Decrease in stocks	2,112	3,031
Decrease in debtors	322,350	98,457
Increase in creditors	330,877	554,401
	<u>1,160,856</u>	<u>1,299,249</u>
<b>Net cash provided by operating activities</b>	<u>1,160,856</u>	<u>1,299,249</u>

### 24 Analysis of changes in net funds

	1 September 2022 £	Cash flows £	31 August 2023 £
Cash	2,627,384	509,662	3,137,046
Loans falling due within one year	(42,218)	3,749	(38,469)
Loans falling due after more than one year	(231,044)	34,687	(196,357)
	<u>2,354,122</u>	<u>548,098</u>	<u>2,902,220</u>

# THE ASCENT ACADEMIES' TRUST

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (CONTINUED) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2023

### 25 Capital commitments

	2023	2022
	£	£
Expenditure contracted for but not provided in the accounts	5,380	-
	<u>5,380</u>	<u>-</u>

### 26 Related party transactions

Owing to the nature of the academy trust and the composition of the board of trustees being drawn from local public and private sector organisations, transactions may take place with organisations in which the trustees have an interest. The following related party transactions took place in the financial period.

#### Expenditure related party transactions

##### **Federation of Leaders in Special Education**

A company related by C Morgan being both a Trustee of The Ascent Academies Trust and a director of Federation of Leaders in Special Education.

The academy trust purchased training totalling £850 (2022 - £275).

In entering into the transaction the academy trust has complied with the requirements of the Academy Trust Handbook 2022.

At the balance sheet date the amount due to Federation of Leaders in Special Education was £Nil (2022 - £Nil).

### 27 Members' liability

Each member of the charitable company undertakes to contribute to the assets of the company in the event of it being wound up while he or she is a member, or within one year after he or she ceases to be a member, such amount as may be required, not exceeding £10 for the debts and liabilities contracted before he or she ceases to be a member.

### 28 Agency arrangements

The academy trust distributes 16-19 bursary funds to students as an agent for ESFA. In the accounting period ending 31 August 2023 the academy trust received £64,872 and disbursed £33,600 from the fund. An amount of £Nil is included in other creditors relating to undistributed funds that is repayable to ESFA.

Comparatives for the accounting period ending 31 August 2022 are £46,441 received, £24,462 disbursed and £Nil included in other creditors.