



Marches Academy Trust

**ANNUAL
REVIEW
2023-2024**

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1. Trust Strategic Priorities 2023-2030



As a Trust, it's our mission to empower everyone in our Trust and our communities to live and breathe our values and Achievement Through Caring, to reach their full potential.

Our Strategic Priorities 2023 - 2030



2. Reflections - A summary of the year

During 2023 to 2024 our schools have had a period of consolidation; everyone in the Trust has concentrated on ensuring that engagement of children and young people in learning is our core purpose.

Our family of schools are building strong cultures where we demonstrate our care through kindness. In our schools you will see an emphasis on respect; children, young people and adults speaking to and behaving respectfully with each other. Achievement through caring is seen in action and everyone can speak with confidence about their experiences. This was evidenced in the summer term 2024 term by a visit from Challenge Partners, an external group of CEOs and Executive Leads from across the country. They visited all our schools and commented that "Creating and sharing a dream that 'together we grow' is starting to create an essential sense of belonging not just for the pupils, but also for the communities that the Trust serves."

The expectation is that our children and young people care about achieving their best, they care about one another, and they care about their schools and communities. At the beginning of the academic year children and young people from all schools in our Trust came together at our inaugural One Voice Conference. This was held at AICO in Oswestry and was rooted in two key themes of sustainability and mental health. Teams of ten children from each school listened to keynote speakers Nicci Vasey CEO of Waterwise and Ben West, mental health activist and author. Each group then worked under the leadership of Sixth Form facilitators to devise a project focusing on either wellbeing or sustainability they would take back to their schools and lead across the entire academic year. The projects have been innovative, exciting and most importantly have addressed issues raised by children with solutions found by children. The One Voice Celebration Event in July brought the projects to an end for this year and provided all participants with the opportunity to share the impact of their project and collectively celebrate their innovation. Initiatives like these for staff, children and young people are the key drivers that help our Trust to move forward.

Staff from each school also have the opportunity to collaborate with their peers across the Trust. There are regular networking opportunities, collaboration days and conferences to share learning. They visit each other's schools, respectfully challenging each other. Our collective mission is to ensure learning in every one of schools is the best it can be.

In 2022 the Trust set up our own charitable organisation - the 4 All Foundation, supporting children, young people, adults, and older residents in Shropshire and the surrounding counties, to reach their full potential. In less than two years they have made a huge difference and had a positive impact to children in our Trust and the wider communities. Participants in the workshops, Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programmes or community events have ranged from 2 months to 98 years old! Trust staff have also got involved in volunteering on projects such as a litter pick in Market Drayton and helping at Shrewsbury Food Hub.

The School Resource Management Adviser (SMRA) comprehensive report for Marches Academy Trust states that “The Trust is in an excellent financial position both in terms of in-year and cumulative positions.” We pride ourselves on having developed a strong central team that supports our schools effectively and efficiently so that they can concentrate on their core purpose ensuring that every child and young person gets the best education we can provide.

MATi has been an important development for us this year. It is intended as an ‘early identification, early intervention’ strategy supporting children with behaviours that challenge; the focus on maintaining learners’ position within mainstream curriculum as opposed to removal. These aspects are bringing about lasting change. All schools have committed to the model and resultantly, there are seven alternative educational offers available across our schools, supported by centrally MATi funded transport including construction, outdoor education, boxing and forest schools.

The Trust have invested in an external safeguarding review of all our schools, following June 2023’s phase one of the Trust’s External Safeguarding Review; phase two was completed in June 2024, reviewing four schools to triangulate Trust judgements of safeguarding at schools.

Our family of schools continue to strive to improve learning for all and this year we have researched and planned a new initiative called The Shore. All five secondary schools created areas for the new Year 7 to ensure they have a soft landing into their secondary education. The aim of The Shore is to know children and families, encouraging full participation in school life so that all feel a sense of belonging. As we know from research when children feel that they belong in a school they are able to focus on their future aspirations. I look forward to sharing the impact of the Shore in next year’s annual report.

The Marches Academy Trust has worked hard again to drive forward in these times of fast-paced change. We have harnessed our creative leaders across the Trust to think further, which has led to an exciting year. Development driven by our leaders creates a unity and comradery that encourage others to find out more, which often leads to them wanting to be part of a forward-thinking group of educational leaders. This year more schools have applied to join the Trust and we look forward to welcoming these schools into the Trust in 2025.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "S. Finch". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sarah Finch
CEO, The Marches
Academy Trust

3. Safeguarding CYP, including attendance of CYP and staff



In a year that included six graded Ofsted inspections, plus three monitoring visits to Idsall School, we are delighted that safeguarding was found to be effective in all seven schools. The integrated system of safeguarding, found within the Trust's Learning for Life Framework in the pillar, 'Safeguarding and Attendance' is key to the effectiveness of all schools' cultures of safeguarding. As a Trust we have continued to focus on early identification and early intervention through the Learning for Life Framework and waded approach. We recognise that "support that is provided to a child or family to meet identified needs as soon as possible" (Working Together to Safeguard Children, DfE, 2023) is far more effective than reactive practice. Such ambition was reaffirmed in June 2023's first phase of the commissioned external review of Safeguarding by the Safeguarding Network, and in the triangulation activities in phase two completed in July 2024.

All inspection and review activities reaffirmed Trust judgements and identified areas of development for individual schools. As a Trust we have a comprehensive system of quality assurance and support for safeguarding development, and this was recognised in all reviews.

All schools have highly experienced Safeguarding Teams who, through close working networks with colleagues in other Trust schools, have strong mechanisms of support for matters arising, especially in such an everchanging landscape of safeguarding. All teams have stayed abreast of national changes and all secondary schools, and Woodlands School, our Specialist SEMH school, attended the pilot project with AXIS and WMRSASC on Safer Streets. All schools have developed a CYP Safeguarding Board, although this practice now needs to be embedded in settings consistently.

New DfE attendance guidance, Working Together to Improve School Attendance, effective from August 2024 states, "Good attendance is a learned behaviour, and the most effective schools recognise the importance of developing good patterns of attendance from the outset. Schools that have good attendance recognise that it is not a discrete piece of work but rather it is an integral part of the school's ethos and culture." Attendance was a clear focus in all our school inspections, and we now have the systems in place to ensure that attendance is great.

Our schools have a clear 'head start' in ensuring that attendance is not tackled in isolation. Attendance and safeguarding are woven together throughout the Trust's Learning for Life Framework, and Ofsted inspectors noted that there were clear and systematic systems in schools to address attendance concerns and frequently referred to the Learning for Life Framework as a model of good practice.

One of the key areas of focus this academic year has been a continued aim of reducing the number of children and young people (CYP) who are persistently absent. Relentless emphasis on this group has ensured that persistent absence has fallen by nearly 10% across Trust in 2023/2024, a significant reduction in the number of CYP who are missing more than 10% of their education.

Attendance across our schools has also improved by nearly 2%, with every Trust school improving their attendance.

The new DFE Attendance guidance also requires Trusts and schools to recognise that attendance is never solved and that children missing from education can act as a vital warning sign to a range of safeguarding issues such as Child Sexual Exploitation or Criminal Exploitation. Development work of our systems has therefore continued to ensure that actionable attendance information is readily accessible to the Trust and School Leaders. The Trust Dashboard now provides live analysis of attendance data and Ofsted inspectors commented on how useful this information was, and how it will enable us to continue focussing on safeguarding and improving the outcomes for all our CYP.

3.1 Attendance Report – Staff

Over the past academic year, the average number of working days lost to sickness absence per staff member across the Trust is 10.6 days. Figures for the previous year show that it was 13 days, so this represents a decrease of 2.4 days.

The percentage of staff in the Trust taking sickness absence has fallen from 65.2% last year to 48.4% this year. This represents a difference of -16.8%.

The percentage of Trust staff having sickness absence this academic year is 48.4%.

59.8% of teachers have had at least one period of sickness absence during this academic year. This is a reduction of 13.7% from last year.

This compares to the latest national figures available for teachers' absence (2021/2022) where 67.5% of teachers nationally had a least one sickness absence. (The national figure was up significantly from the previous year where the figure was 45.3%).



4. People First

4.1 Wellbeing

At Marches Academy Trust our central focus is Achievement through Caring. Wellbeing is at our core, and we are beginning to drive cultural change across the Trust to ensure our staff teams can flourish. We provide free and confidential services that are offered to each Trust employee – namely through the Schools Advisory Service.

To further support the wellbeing of staff, all Trust schools have signed up to the [Education Staff Wellbeing Charter](#). Signing up to the charter is a public commitment to actively promote mental health and wellbeing through Trust policy and practice.

This year we have formed a Workload Change Makers Team with representatives from across our Trust. We reflected on the steps we have already taken to reduce workload and discussed possible next steps. In June we issued a workload survey to all schools. Our next steps are to analyse the results as a team, gather reflections from schools and coordinate possible solutions. Next year we hope to work collaboratively with staff and unions to create a Marches Workload Charter.



4.2 We Thrive Survey

The Engagement survey was launched 29th January running until 21st February 2024. 743 of our staff were surveyed with 532 completions (72%). The completion rate was 20% higher than 2023 and 2022 indicating a positive response to completing the survey.

We have a lot to be proud of. Some of our highest scoring areas were Personal Performance (81%) – clear about the performance expected from us at work, Skills (81%) – have all of the necessary skills to do our work, Attention (88%) – able to interact positively with others, Common Bond (81%) – have positive and constructive bonds with others and a sense of team spirit. The biggest opportunities for improvement are in the areas Headspace (50%) – having the necessary headspace to be able to reflect and think clearly and Free from worry (52%) – being able to work free from worry. These issues are not unique to the Trust or the sector.

Each school responded with clear actions to address these, and other areas for development, to make positive change in creating a supportive and conducive working environment where staff feel empowered, informed, and adequately supported to fulfil their roles effectively amidst various challenges.

4.3 Professional Learning

We embrace and celebrate continuous learning and have created a culture where all learning is valued. Our vision is for our Trust to provide high-quality, trust wide, professional learning – ensuring life changing impact on our children and young people.

We have continued to provide a schedule of professional learning that drives school improvement across the year. From a school's needs analysis our focus for 2023-2024 has been Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB), Behaviour for Learning, Embedding the Learning 4 Life Framework, speech, language, communication, reading and writing, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) and formative assessment. Through the [Alliance of Leading Learning](#) we are leaders in providing the National Professional Qualifications to our MAT staff, and nationally, as part of a leadership development strategy for leaders, both current and aspiring.

We continue to offer our National Professional Qualifications to our MAT leaders. In February 2024 we had 39 leaders join our NPQ programmes from



specialist programmes to Executive leaders. Since the launch of the new NPQs in 2022 our Trust now have 42 MAT leaders who have successfully completed an NPQ with a 100% pass rate.

The Alliance of Leading Learning have supported 90 participants who graduated with an NPQ this year and we currently have 603 active participants on the current cohort across the West Midlands and beyond. This year we have 7 international participants on our NPQH programme.



Our feedback is outstanding, and we been central to recent NPQ Provider visits from OFSTED, both of which resulted in an “outstanding” result. Participant feedback which is collated throughout the duration of programmes by the licence is consistently above the provider average (8.4 out of 10).

The Trust is investing heavily in the development of staff and staff spoke of the significant number of opportunities, for instance 300 members of staff have undertaken NPQs in the last 5 years, and this has certainly supported the culture of being research-driven. They spoke about always being a learner. The Trust uses research in developing professional development modules that staff can deliver in their school.

(Challenge Partner's Report June 2024)

The impact of the reputation of our NPQs is far reaching and outward facing. Westcliffe Federation approached the Trust to join the MAT as two of the Headteachers had done NPQH and NPQEL with the Alliance of Leading Learning.

4.4 Talent Spotting and investing in our Staff

The Marches Academy Trust invest in talent management, to ensure our staff team have a clear sense of purpose, an appreciation of everyone's unique contribution to the Trust and a strong sense of belonging recognising that the Trust exists to deliver the highest standards of education.

Our Talent Pathway enables our staff team to identify the standards of excellence that pertain to their role, the professional development they have had to support them to reach these and the next steps they will be undertaking.

Talent pathways are a strength. 'We grow our own.' School leaders feel their career progression has been very well supported through the Trust's Talent Pathway and through personal encouragement. (Challenge Partner's Report June 2024)

We continue to identify talent across our schools and enable working parties to invest in our individual talent and support our retention strategy. In 2023 – 2024 the Alliance of Leading Learning have trained the following number of Trust staff: 19 in Basic Coaching skills, 13 Improvement

Consultants, 13 Curious Curriculum facilitators, 20 in Restorative Practice run by Mark Finnis and 24 MAT conference Facilitators.

Our Improvement Consultants have worked cross Trust to address school and Trust priorities. We have also worked externally to support Birches Head Academy.



4.5 Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB)

In 2023 – 2024 we have continued to embed our EDIB 3-year strategic plan which was launched in 2022. We have monitored the achievement of EDIB school objectives, delivered staff EDIB professional learning across the year in every school, held information sessions with governors and Shared Services and captured data through surveys with staff and children and young people.

We are now seeing the impact in our journey to be an inclusive organisation. In 2023 92% of staff reported their awareness of the importance of EDIB had increased.

The end of year survey measuring impact with staff and our children and young people is [available here.](#)



This year we have launched a new EDIB policy, conducted a Trust workforce profile survey, ensured EDIB is on LGB agendas, had regular EDIB ambassador meetings and a conference to further develop their knowledge and understanding. Our EDIB Ambassadors have been pivotal in embedding an inclusive approach for our staff team, developing an inclusive curriculum and leading on new initiatives.

Progress against the Cultural Competency Assessment Framework has been reviewed and every school has made significant measured improvement from the benchmark data in 2022.

Interim assessments of progress against school objectives and the final review for this year has evidence of a range of successfully completed school initiatives and projects. Ofsted reports confirm the impact of the EDIB strategy on providing an inclusive curriculum.

The EDIB Ambassadors' project has enabled these to meet and share ideas and resources. The impact of this project is that they feel empowered to lead on EDIB in their school, to challenge others, to develop the teachers who are EDIB Ambassadors and to give them a sense of belonging. This was a great example of Trust dividend and is being used as a structure in other developments.
(Challenge Partner's Report June 2024)

4.6 MAT Conferences

In February 2024 our Trust conference was held at Idsall School. Over 400 of our teaching staff attended and embraced the opportunity to access cutting edge professional development and network with colleagues from across the Trust and share expertise. This is a unique fully funded experience by the Trust to ensure we put our people first, invest in their learning and develop a sense of belonging.

One of our key priorities across the Trust is building a feeling of belonging. Keynote, Owen Eastwood provided a refreshing and thought-provoking session, giving staff ideas and practical ways to deepen the connection with our children, young people,

each other and our communities. Feedback confirmed staff were encouraged to look at how we can now apply some of the ideas as we deepen the sense of connectivity, and confidence in our sense of place.

Henry Exham also provided staff with practical insights on utilising AI in education and feedback confirmed staff were inspired with the exciting possibilities it brings.

92% of attendees rated the keynote speakers highly. 76% strongly agreed or agreed that the conference was relevant to PD needs, materials provided were helpful, the facilitators were effective, and they took away strategies to implement in their own teaching. 19% were neutral.

The Trust's MAT Development Conferences for Headteachers took place in November 2023, March 2024 and June 2024.



The conferences give Headteachers the opportunity to come together and embed our sense of family, move their learning forward and have discussions that lead to significant Trust developments. Headteacher collaboration is valued, and the termly two-day conferences are seen as a great benefit to coherence and support.

(Challenge Partners Report June 2024).

Feedback from the conferences from our Headteachers is 100% positive.

4.7 Shropshire and Telford Educational Partnership (STEP)

As a central key partner in our local teaching school hub, we have been instrumental in achieving and surpassing our targets set by the DfE. We have trained 76 new teachers, 260 leaders on our National Professional Qualifications against a KPI of 133 and supported 154 ECTs and 120 mentors with the Early Career Framework.



5. Anywhere Anytime Learning



All schools in the Trust have worked to produce the Assessment Principles Document for staff, detailing our view of formative assessment and rapid gap closing at the point of need being the key to good learning and outcomes, so that all CYP can make age related expectations.

Secondary schools have reviewed their curriculum for KS3 to slim and build in time for consolidation, with a reduction in time spent on topic testing. This work will continue into next year, with a focus on teacher's classroom practice

For 24/25 there will be a common Trust assessment for English, maths and science and primary schools have aligned their testing products, leading to the ability to benchmark across the Trust.

At KS4 we have worked with the Raising Standards Leaders in each school to build effective monitoring and intervention in each school. Pillar meetings with the Headteachers to challenge and share best practice have led to changes in practice including the concept of a 200-week plan for a child in secondary school and a set of Progress Principles, now in their first version that will be followed by all schools through next year.



A different group of staff from across our family schools have co-created our Literacy Principles. The principles outline an entitlement for all children and young people in our schools to receive high quality learning foundations formed through strong listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The Literacy Principles complement our Inclusive Curriculum Principles, our Learning for Life Framework and our Assessment Principles.

The introduction of Trust Collaboration Days has made space for collaboration and strategic development across our Trust. The impact of these days has been seen in the alignment of our Principles Projects which provide clarity and coherence for our teachers. This aligned thinking and shared strategy enables us to share staff across our schools, providing the talent where it is needed, at the time it is needed to benefit our children and young people. The use of Collaboration Days for this work also ensures that staff are not completing the same work in each school but sharing ideas and best practice to alleviate workload challenges. It also means that many voices shape the way forward. This of course ensures we are using our talent pathway to support the growth of our workforce and develop the next generation of leaders.



Networking across our family schools has continued to grow this year. Subject teams meet together online to collaborate and share best practice once per half term. This work has seen the development of our Assessment Principles but also has provided space for standardisation, moderation and curriculum development.

During this academic year seven of our schools have received Ofsted inspections. In addition, Oakmeadow Primary School also received a SIAMS inspection, resulting in an excellent report. All Ofsted visits have commended the schools' curriculum intent and many strengths have been identified within curriculum provision such as 'The school's curriculum is well designed and ambitious', 'Subject leaders ensure that the curriculum is organised in a way that enables pupils to build on what they know, year on year' and 'The school has a well-planned curriculum that identifies the important knowledge that teachers want pupils to know.' However, we know that the curriculum is never finished and we are planning considerable curriculum development throughout the next academic year.

Action Research Projects were carried out again this year as part of teacher, teaching assistant and access leader Professional Performance Review. The projects provided a vehicle for personal development, investigation and exploration. All teachers under the guidance of their headteacher explored and experimented with practice to support growth and development in their

pedagogy. This ranged from improving learning engagement in the classroom, to raising standards in outcomes for key groups, to experimenting with reading strategies to improve knowledge acquisition. Action Research Projects have continued to provide staff with a vehicle for personal growth and development which positively impacts on pupil engagement, outcomes and skill development.

This year teachers and associate staff have begun to explore the use of Artificial Intelligence. This has been used to support workload, assist with innovation and to broaden horizons. The IT Team have supported this development by creating a safe digital learning environment and guidance for staff. Henry Exham, guest speaker at our Trust Conference provided a whistlestop tour of AI for teachers which whet appetites and inspired teachers to explore it in the classroom with confidence.



5.1 Learning For Life and The Wave

This year, we have ensured consistency in shared values of inclusion through the enactment of Learning for Life: early identification, early intervention, through a broadened universal offer and improved methods of tracking individual CYP through data rich systems. 2024 – 2025 will be the year these practices are embedded and realised in improved KPIs and outcomes for CYP.



6. Belonging

One of our Trust's strategic priorities is connecting with our communities and this has been a key focus during 2023-2024.

6.1 Funding

During the 2023-2024 academic year, the Trust received over £100,000 in HAF funding to support communities through funded holiday programmes across 15 locations. These locations included Longlands, Tilstock, Grange, and Selattyn, providing valuable resources and opportunities for local families and children during school holidays.

6.2 4 All Foundation

During the academic year, the 4 All Foundation has grown considerably, expanding its reach and impact within local communities. Responding to feedback from pupils and the community at Tilstock CE

Primary School, the Foundation launched a weekly youth club at the village hall, creating a dedicated space for young people to engage in positive activities. This initiative has been well-received and marks just one of the many ways the Foundation is addressing the needs of the communities it serves. In addition to the youth club, the 4 All Foundation has delivered a variety of programmes designed to support families and individuals. These include parent and carer workshops, digital learning programmes, community sports initiatives, and activities specifically tailored for children in care. Each of these programmes reflects the Foundation's commitment to fostering inclusive, supportive environments for all members of the community.

Financially, the 4 All Foundation has had a successful year, securing over £130,000 in funding to sustain and grow its efforts across the county. This financial support

has been crucial in enabling the Foundation to continue its work, and as a result, it is becoming increasingly recognised as a trusted and well-known organisation in Telford and Wrekin.

6.3 Physical Education and School Sport

The 2023/24 academic year marked the biggest year yet for our varsity programmes, with pupils from primary, secondary, and Sixth Form all actively participating in a range of competitions. Supported by organisations such as Shrewsbury School, M7 Education, and Panathlon, students engaged in a variety of events, including rowing, football, fives, rounders, and cricket.





A standout moment came in July 2024, when, with the support of M7 Education and the 4 All Foundation, all primary schools from across the Trust, along with invited schools Cockshutt C of E Primary School and Criftings C of E Primary School, took part in an athletics varsity held at the Commonwealth Games stadium in Birmingham. This event was a celebration of sporting achievement and collaboration, providing students with a once-in-a-lifetime experience at a prestigious venue.

6.4 Apprenticeships

For the first time, an apprenticeship directory of qualifications had been created to assist staff members and schools in recruiting and retaining employees. The directory highlights a range of qualifications in areas such as teaching, IT, sports, and maintenance, providing valuable guidance for professional development.

Current data shows that 41% of Trusts are utilising their apprenticeship programmes. Within our Trust, 62% of the apprenticeship levy funding is currently being used, with more staff enrolling in qualifications. This represents the highest number of apprentices we have had to date, reflecting the growing interest and investment in staff development across the organisation.



6.5 CSR Projects

This year, the Trust proudly contributed to several Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects, strengthening partnerships with local charities, organisations, and initiatives that support both our schools and wider communities. Our efforts spanned five impactful projects, including collaboration with the Shrewsbury Food Hub, where we aided food distribution efforts to local families in need. We joined forces with the Market Drayton Canal Trust to organise a litter pick and clean up, enhancing the environment and preserving our natural spaces. Additionally, we supported Little Stars Baby Bank, providing essential resources to families with young children, along with two other projects dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of our community members.



7. Christian Distinctiveness



2023/24 has been a year of coming together for our Church Schools. School leaders have worked collaboratively to evaluate the quality of Collective Worship, Religious Education, community impact and our vision and values. The Christian vision is lived by all in our flourishing communities, and this is a strength within our Trust.



Oakmeadow CE Primary SIAMS inspection in February 2024 stated that "Driven by a vision to ensure pupils experience a full life, an inspiring curriculum has been designed. Leaders and teachers effectively collaborate as a school and as part of the Marches Academy Trust. This ensures that pupils can thrive as learners." This external verification demonstrates that we support all our children and young people to achieve well.



Spirituality is not just for Church Schools! All schools are required to support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children and young people. This year we have focused on the purpose of spiritual development within the curriculum, and the growth of the individual with all of our Headteachers across the Trust. This golden thread through every phase and school foundation, seeks to champion the child and the adult, enabling everyone to Flourish.

The peer review in June 2024 celebrated the true sense of belonging felt across our schools. This is a significant find because in order to belong we have to first know who we are as an individual. Where in the past people may have been reluctant to talk about spirituality and its development in our community schools, we now have an understanding that our diversity across the Trust is actually our strength. Whether you are 2 or 18 you are encouraged to be reflective and make a difference in your community.

Strong connections continue to grow with the Diocese. We have evaluated our Trust vision alongside the Church of England Vision for Education. The Diocese recognise that our whole Trust vision and values align with the bigger vision across the country. Our Church schools continue to have strong links with their local Churches ensuring that the schools each live up to their Christian Foundation. The Christian Distinctiveness support provided to schools by Louisa Harrop has been excellent. The schools have really benefitted from having the same advisor throughout the year and this has added depth to our collaboration.

Training has been accessed to support our development of Collective Worship and the most recent "Space Makers" training is having a huge impact on the importance of making time and space to reflect (personally) during the school

day. This training has been shared with all primaries within the Trust as it can be adapted to support religious or non-religious reflection. Adults have also benefitted from a moment to stop in the busy school day.

We are now positioned well for growth in the Trust. We have a clear offer for Church Schools who join, along with expectations such as attending leaders peer support meetings and having an SLA with the Diocese for continued support. This ensures that we are developing together through well-established support and challenge.

Over the next year we will be developing our Church School Principles and formalising Trust policies such as the Collective Worship Policy. We will be expanding our reach by organising events where pupils can visit other places of worship beyond their local setting, and we will continue to encourage our pupils to be courageous advocates.

Christian Distinctiveness in schools is something which can be felt. Taking a look around our schools, walking in a spiritual garden or joining a Collective Worship is a good step for anyone wanting to understand what it means to be a Church School. There is an open invite to join in.



8. Working Today to Protect Tomorrow

One of our strategic priorities is to ensure the financial sustainability of our Trust through efficient growth and development. This is not only growth in the number of Trust schools but also growth and development in our existing schools. Providing smart and efficient environments, fit for purpose in enabling our CYP to achieve their very best.

8.1 Capital Improvements

During 2023/2024 the Trust spent in excess of £2m on capital enhancements across its schools. This ranged from new computer equipment (including new servers and wireless network connections) to modernising and enhancing learning spaces with new furniture and teaching equipment. Using the Trust's School Capital Allocation (SCA) funding, each school has benefited from building improvements throughout the year. This has included:

- Renovation of school and room layouts to better meet the needs of our CYP. Also, creating and renovating private, quiet spaces and staff rooms to support the wellbeing of our staff.
- School pedestrian access, pathways and carparking improvements including new fencing providing safe and safeguarded environments for our CYP.



New Astro pitch at Sir John Talbot's School



Sixth Form area at Marches School

- Fire door installation across our schools to provide compliance with the latest fire regulation requirements.
- New roofing, roof repairs and guttering enabling all school spaces to be occupied and prevent future maintenance issues.
- Sports Hall Tendering at Shrewsbury Academy: The Trust has commenced work on tendering for a new sports hall, a major development that will benefit students and the local community. We are hopeful to have a contractor in place by the next academic year, providing new opportunities for physical activity.

For the first year, the Trust was able to offer all schools an allocation of funding to allow them to freshen up and decorate key areas in need of modernisation. With school budgets under so much pressure, this was very much welcomed and has made noticeable visual improvements.

Oakmeadow's new 'Oaklands Community Hub' was completed in the Spring and now accommodates a number of community events weekly. This is vital to our Trust's vision in connecting with our communities and we are excited to see this engagement continue to develop over the coming year.

Utilising unused space at Grange Primary School, the Trust has been able to create additional office and meeting space for all Trust staff at what is now known as 'Trust Central'.

Many of the Trust's central team are now located there and there is greater opportunity to host wider Trust events, allowing staff to come together for meetings and collaboration. This is important in ensuring that all of our staff feel a sense of belonging and part of the Trust.

Outside of capital investment, funding was secured for:

- New Astro Pitch at Sir John Talbot's School: We secured external funding to provide a new astro pitch, a significant investment that will enhance both student and community sports provision. This achievement reflects our ongoing commitment to improving facilities for our schools.

8.2 Nursery Provision

In 2023/2024 the Trust applied to the DfE to lower the age range at Grange Primary, Tilstock Primary and Lower Heath Primary to 2 year olds. This now means that all of the Trust's primary schools offer a nursery provision for 2-4 year olds. This has helped to ensure the financial sustainability of these schools whilst meeting the demand in their communities.

8.3 SRMA Audit

To ensure that the Trust is using its revenue and capital resources effectively,

the Trust requested a School Resource Management Audit (SRMA) from the DfE in the Spring term.

During this process the Trust's financial governance, financial data, key metrics and overall approach to resource management was scrutinised. We were delighted that the observations made during the deployment and within the final report are testimony to the Trust's efforts and stance on financial governance and its responsibilities in ensuring value for money is achieved throughout its schools and daily operations.

"The Trust is in an excellent financial position both in terms of in-year and cumulative positions." SRMA advisor, July 2024.



By continuing to plan, build and embed strong financial and operational systems and practices the Trust is well equipped in creating capacity for growth. The strong foundations in place across the Trust can provide experienced, effective and successful support to ensure the success and financial sustainability of those schools joining.

8.4 Financial Results

All schools made an in-year revenue surplus in 2023/2024 and all have positive reserves carried forward. Overall, the Trust's revenue reserves represent in excess of 8.5% of its revenue income, exceeding the government's expectation of 5%. This demonstrates the financial strength of the Trust and its proven record in managing and monitoring budgets closely to ensure financial resilience with the many external challenges.



9. Marketing, Communications and Enrichment

This academic year has been a busy and successful one for our Trust in terms of marketing initiatives, website development, and community engagement.

- **Social Media Growth and Engagement:** Social media continues to be a valuable asset for the Trust. With schools now contributing regular content, we have optimised the use of algorithms, resulting in greater engagement and reach across platforms. Our social media channels remain an effective way to connect with our communities and showcase school life.
- **Trust Website Evolution:** The Trust website has undergone significant improvements, enhancing our 'shop window' to the public. We've updated content to better reflect the work we do, from supporting staff and children to engaging with wider communities. These changes have made the site more visually appealing and informative, allowing us to better share our successes.
- **School Websites:** Shrewsbury Academy, Grove School, Idsall School, and Sir John Talbot's School have all received new websites, making them easier to navigate and improving the user experience. These websites are now built on more robust platforms, ensuring improved security and reduced cyber risks.
- **Open Evenings and Transition Engagement:** Our open evenings continue to be highly successful, with increasing attendance year-on-year. Moving forward, we see a valuable opportunity to make use of the data we capture during these events to maintain engagement and 'keep people warm' throughout the transition period for prospective families.
- **Recruitment Pack Development:** Our new recruitment packs have been a key development, ensuring potential staff have all the information they need about the Trust and its schools in one easy-to-understand document. This has helped to improve the recruitment process and made our schools more appealing to job seekers.

- **Ofsted and SIAMS Reports:** The reports which have been shared digitally with a wide audience have highlighted the success of our schools and the work we do to continually improve.
- **Sports Hall Tendering at Shrewsbury Academy:** The Trust has commenced work on tendering for a new sports hall, a major development that will benefit students and the local community. We are hopeful to have a contractor in place by the next academic year, providing new opportunities for physical activity.
- **New School Consultations:** We have conducted successful consultations and presentations with new schools, fostering relationships and demonstrating the benefits of joining our Trust. These efforts are key to growing and strengthening our network.
- **Enrichment and Inclusivity:** This year, we have continued to offer a diverse and exciting range of enrichment opportunities for our students. In response to trip cancellations beyond our control, we have successfully submitted and received insurance claims to reimburse families. We remain committed to making trips and activities inclusive for all students, ensuring that every child has access to valuable learning experiences.

Overall, this year has been one of growth, innovation, and community engagement. The continued development of our digital platforms, alongside investments in school facilities and staff recruitment, will enable us to keep moving forward and offer even more opportunities for our students and staff.

10. Trustee and Governance



The Trust continues to have five Members. This year the Board of Trustees recruited a new Trustee Rob Peters taking it to a total of nine Trustees with Alex Fry remaining as Chair of Trustees and Catherine Bennett as Vice Chair.

This year Trust have focused on streamlining LGB agendas and tightening supporting governance documentation. A new LGB annual planner was launched to assist Headteachers and LGBs with forward planning and timely circulation of agendas and associated documents. Additionally, a new Headteachers report was launched to easily allow for scrutiny and triangulation of evidence in areas discussed. Link governor roles and duties have been reviewed to better align with the Trust's strategic priorities thus helping schools and LGBs drive these. Clearer guidance on the way the link Governor roles are organised and signposting key resources and questions relevant to a particular link role will improve focus and raise confidence in asking relevant questions to hold Headteachers and senior leaders to account. New safeguarding & SEND Governor visit forms were also devised for Link Governors across all schools to use helping drive robust challenge in these areas.



The Scheme of Delegation was updated providing increased clarity of expectations of Church schools within the Trust, stronger oversight within the matrix of responsibilities and an in-

depth review of the Board of Trustees terms of reference. The Trust is in the process of reviewing their Articles of Association and liaising closely with the Diocese. All policies have also been reviewed and reformatted to a legal format to allow for easier reference.

During Autumn 1 the Board of Trustees undertook an in-depth External Governance Review with an external consultant. The review concluded that our Trustees paid strong attention to safeguarding, CYP and staff wellbeing and were committed to acting with integrity and making decisions in the best interests of the Trust's CYP. The consultant found the Board strongly supported Headteachers, benefited from robust knowledge of school local contexts and strove for effective communication with the local governance tier. Trustees presented as evaluative and forward-thinking with data monitoring and regular checks on attendance, persistent absence and exclusions evidenced as being high on the agenda. Trustees showed good knowledge of how self-evaluation feeds into the Trust's strategic priorities and the education standards committee were commended on their triangulation of information from the school development plans. The Board was also commended for having strong financial oversight, guided by the impact on pupils.

Additionally, Trustees presented very well on compliance with an informed knowledge of policies and well-established routines for reviewing and agreeing these.

They were also found to be well-informed about statutory duties and ensured they followed legal advice. Finally, Trustees were found to be informed about national benchmarking, make well-considered decisions and ask pertinent questions. There were development areas to consider, and the Trust has prepared an action plan to address these and further tighten governance at Board level. Headteachers, LGB Chairs and Governance Professionals across each Trust school have collaborated and prepared their own action plan to address development areas in their own External Governance Reviews conducted last year.

Undertaking training is an important part of successful governance and the Trust continues to invest in CPD for its Trustees, Governors and Governance Professionals by hosting in house Bitesize Governance sessions and providing access to NGA's Learning Link and National College. Governors and Trustees provided positive feedback on the three informative Bitesize Governance workshops held this year. Autumn 1's workshop outlined KCSiE updates and how governance helps facilitate a whole school & Trust approach to safeguarding and child protection ensuring it is at the forefront and underpins all process and policy.

The Trust continues to work hard to embed a culture of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB). As part of this, and in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, it delivered a Bitesize Governance session on the Trustee & Governor's roles in championing &

monitoring EDIB within the Trust in Autumn 2. The session gave an update on the Trust's EDIB strategy and provided an overview of the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) informing Trustees and Governors how they can monitor that the Trust/their school prevents unlawful and discriminatory behaviour and makes reasonable adjustments for individuals with disabilities.

The third workshop was delivered on the Trust's Learning for Life Framework and covered how the layered approach to inclusive practice and waded approach reduces the risk of underachievement, risk of absenteeism and exclusion, prospect of misbehaviour, and the likelihood of child-on-child abuse.

School Link Trustees continue to provide a strong link between each school, its LGB and the Board of Trustees thus enhancing effective sharing of information across the Trust's levels of governance and providing a further informal channel of communication and support between the school and Trustees. This year Trustees also supported schools through their Ofsted inspections, attending meetings with inspectors providing strong evidence of quality leadership.

Additionally, the Chair of the Board of Trustees and Trust Governance Officer have held monthly meetings with all LGB Chairs to further enhance knowledge, provide support and share best practice. Regular networking meetings have been held to support our governance professionals across the Trust to keep abreast of key changes in legislation, cover topics which are pertinent to effective clerking and discuss local and national issues impacting on their roles and responsibilities.



11. Trust Health and Safety and GDPR compliance

Our experienced team of Operations Managers continue to support our schools across the Trust to ensure Health and Safety and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance.

11.1 GDPR

Support and guidance is provided with queries relating to GDPR to ensure schools remain compliant but also comfortable handling data which can be very daunting. Following on from the annual GDPR audit, schools are being supported to understand the key areas of compliance from their privacy notices to the handling of Subject Access Request. Support on implementing any new areas of legislation is provided and good working practices are shared to address areas schools feel least comfortable with or where areas could be improved with support and guidance.



11.2 Health and Safety

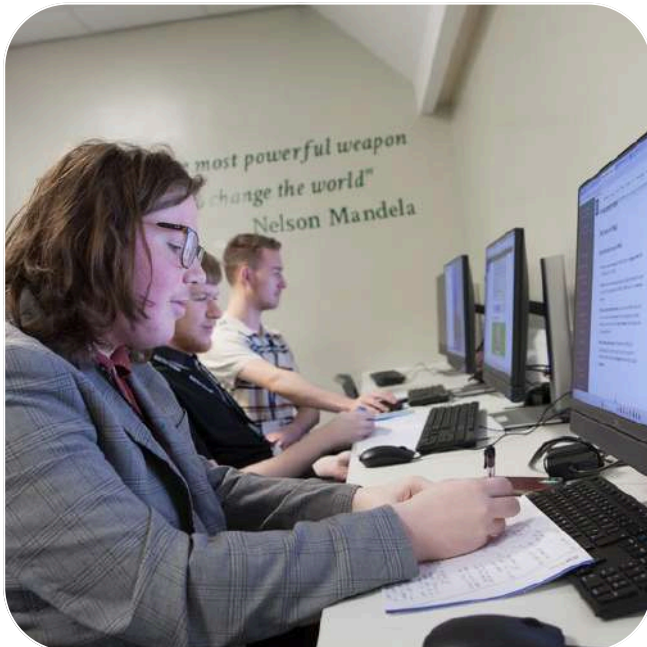
Over the last 12 months Health and Safety audits have been conducted in all our schools, reporting findings back to Headteachers and the Trust and following up on implementation of recommendations.

A new system, SMARTLOG, has been introduced in our schools to enable a better reporting system for not only Health and Safety issues and investigations but also school site compliance, accidents, first aid and asset management.

All schools continue to receive support and guidance on all Health and Safety matters as and when required.

12. Information Technology

IT across the Marches Academy Trust has continued to develop over this past year. Our aim has been to continue upgrading the infrastructure in our Trust schools to ensure better connectivity and cost savings. We have added more schools to our 3CX phone system reducing costs for schools and allowing more flexibility of making phone calls. Due to the constant changing landscape of cyber threats we are continuing to improve and introduce new measures to counter these.



We have run multiple threat simulations throughout the academic year and each time we have seen a decline in numbers and an increase in tickets being logged as suspicious emails. We have delivered more compliance training outlining different areas of being cyber resilient, not just in the work environment but also when at home.

Under the leadership of Mike Foden and James Ritch, along with contributions from other technicians, our IT outreach program is still very successful. This service offers schools in Shropshire a traded service, providing technician time and knowledge. Schools favour this service instead of relying solely on local authorities. We have continuous subscriptions over several years and have been contacted by more and more schools wanting to join the service.

We have now started to work with partner companies Tier 1 and IC Technology that provide reconditioned devices. So far we have purchased over 100+ devices, both laptops and desktops. The primary beneficiaries of this initiative are our students. By leveraging these reconditioned devices, we can put more technology into their hands. This not only enhances their learning experience but also equips them with the tools necessary to thrive in a digital world.

Moreover, this initiative is a testament to our commitment to environmental sustainability. E-waste is a growing concern in today's digital age, and through the use of reconditioned devices, we are doing our part to mitigate this issue. By giving these devices a second life, we are reducing the amount of electronic waste that ends up in landfills, contributing to a greener and more sustainable future.





Marches Academy Trust

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