



Marches Academy Trust

**ANNUAL
REVIEW
2022-2023**

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1. Trust Strategic Priorities 2022-2030

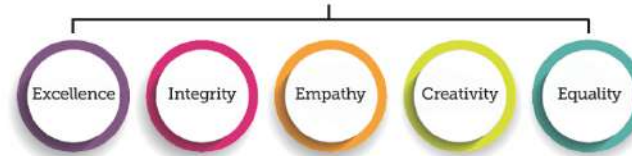
Marches Academy Trust 

Our Vision:

Achievement Through Caring



Our Values:



Our Mission:

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:

People First

An inclusive and diverse culture which enables all children, young people and adults to flourish.

An innovative People First strategy enhancing an adaptive workforce.

Anytime, anywhere learning

Inclusive, accessible and ambitious learning for all.

Reflect, research and develop a cohesive community of learners.

Belonging

A Trust culture where everyone feels seen and heard.

Schools are at the centre of their communities - children and young people are courageous advocates.

Working today to protect tomorrow

Efficient Trust growth.

Smart infrastructure.

2. Reflections - A summary of the year

During 2022 and 2023 we have seen further growth of the Trust with the addition of Idsall Secondary School joining us from September 2023. This makes the Trust over a £40 million concern. More importantly, our Trust will touch the lives of over 6,000 children, young people and their families.

At the heart of all Trust decisions is Achievement Through Caring. We want to ensure that our schools are places where everyone can grow through our values Excellence, Integrity, Empathy, Creativity and Equality. We believe that by encouraging these values to come to life in our schools we will support our children and young people (CYP) to contribute positively to their communities and society.

Our Trust is building a family of learners who work together through collaboration and competing in our cross-Trust varsity events. This has been strengthened this year by One Voice, a forum for CYP to meet together to decide on the projects they believe the Trust should focus on. In September 2023 we have planned for this group to expand, and we will hold our first One Voice conference. We are very much looking forward to a clear plan that our CYP will drive forward during our next academic year.

Funding has created many constraints on schools over this academic year; staffing has had to be reviewed and yet again education is being asked to do more with less. This is in a context of significant reduction in support from social services, health, and police. There are many challenges facing our schools; we are seeing significant increases in CYP who have speech and language and developmental delays which put a great deal of pressure into the system. Our SEND and Safeguarding leads are developing skill sets across the Trust to support teachers and support staff to find ways to build relationships and engage CYP in learning. We have still got work to do, however across all our schools staff are working hard to ensure that CYP are learning effectively by implementing and adapting teaching methods.

Community plans created by Headteachers, and their leadership teams are putting greater emphasis on community events and collaborative working. The Trust are working closely with PACC (Shropshire Parent and Carer Council) to build effective relationships and inclusive partnerships with parents so that their children's learning needs are fully accommodated for. Our family of schools have collaborated to ensure that the Trust has remained strong during turbulent times and continues to move forwards with its prime purpose of CYP at the core of everything we do.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing 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

One of the most important aspects of safeguarding CYP is ensuring they are accessing education, ideally within the classroom, and if not, in other forms that ensure we, as educators, have eyes on the CYP and can support them to progress to a better future.

In November 2022 the DFE appointed an Attendance Advisor to work alongside the Trust. The advisor reviewed the Trust's policies and procedures and found them to be robust; "The Trust has a very clear cycle of school reviews in place" and "The Trust has very clearly established that attendance is not a 'stand-alone' matter, and this is reflected in the 'Learning for Life Framework/WAVE guidance' which clearly sets out a whole student approach with explicit steps and triggers for intervention."

The advisor visited a Secondary School, a Primary School and Woodlands School and found that schools were closely following the new 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance' guidance to return attendance to pre-pandemic levels.



Attendance in all schools has improved from last academic year apart from Grange Primary School and Lower Heath CE Primary School. Action plans are in place and Deep Dives have taken place. Whilst Grange Primary School has seen a drop in attendance there has been a significant improvement in persistent absence and in both measures, Lower Heath CE Primary School remains close to the Fisher Family Trust National Attendance figures for 2022/2023.

Overall, whole Trust attendance has improved 1% over 2021/2022 with some particularly notable improvements seen at Sir John Talbot's School, 3.5% and The Marches School, 2.4%. Persistent absence has reduced by 9.6% with some notable reductions at Sir John Talbot's School, 16%, and The Marches School and Longlands Primary School, 12%.

Structures and systems are now fully in place on the Arbor Management Information System to support attendance improvement, linking attendance intervention to the Learning for Life Framework and to support vulnerable student reviews. Work to fully embed this work in day-to-day practice will continue next academic year.



3.1 Safeguarding – external and internal reviews

In Autumn 2022, all schools submitted their Section 9 and Section 11 audits for quality assurance, and their Section 175 which informed the school-specific safeguarding reviews of all settings. The reviews identified the significant areas of strength in all our schools, and areas for development, either Trust-wide or specific to setting. The reviews permitted school leaders a clear insight into their safeguarding systems allowing rapid action to be taken where there were areas for development and were well-received.

In Summer 2023, an external review, completed by the Safeguarding Network was conducted (report pending) resulting in the summary, 'The Marches Academy Trust is founded in good practice with strong systems and quality assurance, with opportunity to develop in the future'. All actions identified were already in development and this reinforced the intended direction of travel.

2023-24 will see the development of cross-Trust expertise and a key focus on low-level reporting, and contextual safeguarding in each school, including the local community. There will also be more training opportunities and mechanisms to promote the understanding of local governing bodies and trustees.



3.2 Attendance Report – Staff

Over the past academic year, the average number of working days lost for sickness per staff member has fallen by 1.1 days. Similarly, the percentage of staff taking sickness absence has fallen from 49.4% to 42.9%, a reduction of 6.5% overall.

55.6% of teaching staff have had at least one period of sickness absence, a reduction of 11% on 2021/2022. This compares to the latest National figures available for 2020/2021 where 45% of teachers nationally had at least one sickness absence. The biggest increase in sickness absence has been seen in the 40 – 55+ age group where the number of staff having sickness absence has increased by 3.5%, whereas the below 30 age group has seen a reduction of 3.4%.

The percentage of staff having absence for sickness is above 50% in all Primary Schools, Sir John Talbot's School and Woodlands School, whilst The Grove School, The Marches School and Shrewsbury Academy have a significantly lower percentage of staff taking absence for sickness at 39%, 29% and 44% respectively.

4. People First

4.1 Wellbeing

We are committed to developing a supportive and proactive approach to the wellbeing of all staff. We have signed up to the Education Wellbeing Charter and implemented a Wellbeing Policy which:

- sets out our commitment to the 4 wellbeing pillars (emotional/ physical/ social and financial).
- promotes the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff.
- helps us manage our responsibilities for maintaining psychological health and different wellbeing issues such as menopause and stress management.

We have extended our wellbeing offer under the Schools Advisory Service (SAS) to all Trust staff. This ensures that all staff have the same access to a variety of wellbeing services such as counselling, physiotherapy and stress awareness sessions.



4.2 We Thrive Survey

Our 2023 'We Thrive' employee engagement survey has shown an increased engagement rate at 70% which is the highest since we first rolled out We Thrive in 2019 when it was 64%. This is a measure of increasingly positive responses. We have a lot to be proud of.

Our highest scores were:

- School and students - understanding how our work ties in to the school vision and benefits CYP.
- Personal Performance - how clear we are about the performance expected of us.
- Skills - that we have the necessary skills to do our work.
- Attention - that we are able to interact positively with others.
- Common bond - we have positive and constructive bonds with others and a sense of team spirit.

The areas of challenges and the biggest opportunities are:

- Control - feeling in control at work.
- Headspace - having the necessary headspace to be able to reflect and think clearly.
- Free from worry - being able to be free from worry.

These issues are not unique to the Trust or the sector, but we are in the process of analysing the results further so that we can make positive changes.

4.3 Professional Learning - Developing a Culture of Continuous Learning

We are driven by our belief that our staff team should be successful, creative, lifelong learners. We have continued to provide a schedule of professional learning that drives school improvement. From a school's needs analysis our focus has been developing an Inclusive Curriculum, embedding Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, training in Behaviour for Learning strategies, SEND initiatives and Trauma Informed training.

The Trust professional learning offer has also included access to the basic coaching skills programme, and opportunities for colleagues to write and deliver facilitated specialist workshops. In addition to this our staff with specific expertise have been trained as improvement consultants to work across the Trust and beyond. On top of the 30 facilitators trained last year we have trained a further 13 MAT staff in facilitation competencies. We have run Curious Curriculum Leadership Sessions for Primary MAT colleagues with 49 delegates attending the various workshops.

We continue to offer our National Professional Qualifications to our MAT leaders. In 2022 - 2023 we have had 29 on



the NPQ programmes who have successfully qualified and 26 of our MAT staff on our current cohort 2023 - 2024 from specialist programmes to Executive leaders. The Alliance of Leading Learning have supported 306 participants who graduated with an NPQ this year and have 327 participants on the current cohort across the West Midlands and beyond. This year we have 10 international participants on our NPQH and NPQEL programmes.



4.4 Talent Spotting and investing in our Staff

Through identifying talent across our schools and enabling working parties, we continue to drive change. This year 19 talented individuals led workshops at our MAT conference. Our 16 improvement consultants have the skill set to focus on developing expertise to improve the capacity and capability of schools. Our Improvement Consultants have worked cross Trust to address school and Trust priorities. We have also worked externally to support Burton Borough School on a yearlong programme supporting key departments in improving performance.

4.5 Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB)

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging is essential for both our workforce and our children and young people. Our vision of Achievement Through Caring means we want to make sure all our staff and learners can thrive and reach their full potential.

In 2022 – 2023 we have successfully rolled out a robust programme to embed a culture of EDIB. This is driven by our 3-year strategic plan. Our trained EDIB Ambassadors in each school have been pivotal in providing essential support and influence and we have closely monitored the school's / Trust's progress in embedding the strategy. We have followed a strict timeline, conducted interim assessments on the achievement of school objectives, written and delivered EDIB training across the year in every school, captured schools' workforce profile and begun a Governor and Trustee data collection for monitoring the profile of our governing boards. We have reviewed our recruitment process and are reviewing policies to include EDIB. We are in the process of writing our new EDIB policy which will be out for consultation in September 2023.



4.6 MAT Conferences

Our unique Marches Academy Trust Conference had over 400 of our Trust staff attending – giving us the chance to network, embrace expertise and engage with our vision of Learning for Life. Many testimonials recognised the power of working together as a Trust and how we “Empower everyone in our Trust and our communities to live and breathe Achievement Through Caring and reach their full potential”.

We have continued to run our Headteacher conferences ensuring our Heads have the time invested in them to drive their own professional learning and share expertise.



4.7 Shropshire and Telford Educational Partnership (STEP)

As a key partner in our local teaching school hub, we have been instrumental in achieving and surpassing our targets set by the DfE. We have worked with 175 of 223 local schools 78% (surpassing our target), trained 63 new teachers, 163 leaders on our National Professional Qualifications, supported 196 ECTs and 134 mentors with the Early Career Framework.

5. Learning for Life



This year has seen us develop sharp clarity in how we drive learning for life forwards. We used visits to schools not only to quality assure our provision but to think deeply about future improvement. We identified that learners' attitudes, behaviours, knowledge and skill sets needed to be reinvigorated and we sought ways to do this. The collaboration days that we added to our academic calendar have been instrumental in driving change. They have provided opportunities for all schools to think and work together differently. Exciting Trust wide projects emerged from this and have gained momentum and traction. Curriculum leaders and teaching and learning leaders have created a series of Trust principles for an inclusive curriculum, and currently under development are Trust principles for assessment and Trust principles for literacy. The collaboration days have also created opportunities to listen and hear colleagues bringing thoughts and ideas for change, this has been followed up through our online Trust networking opportunities that take place twice per term. The professional learning packages provided for schools have been shaped and adapted as a result of deep listening, thinking and collaboration. The professional learning offer directly impacts on learners' attitudes, behaviours, knowledge and skill sets. This offer has been rich and responsive.

Our Learning for Life Framework has begun to be embedded in our schools. All teachers understand what 'inclusion' truly means and are thinking creatively and intuitively about how to be more inclusive. The EDIB curriculum development work that has taken place in all schools has further deepened this understanding and many more opportunities to explore issues from a range of perspectives are in place.

All schools have worked to improve their curricular offer. Enrichment is now embedded within the curriculum and not seen as 'additional'. Some schools have boldly stripped away outdated curriculum design and placed fresh eyes on their offer, seeking to meet the needs of learners in their context in 2023. This bold leadership has created additional opportunities for rethinking and revisioning education which is already having a direct impact on learners. Work has also focused sharply on the implementation of the curriculum; how we move the curriculum from the written word to a living and breathing experience. This has been challenging due to the pandemic and the societal shifts that were borne within its wake. We are clear about our ongoing work in this area to build confident young people equipped for their future and we are passionate about getting this right. For example, in its

simplest form, we know that when learners put hands up to answer questions, immediately not all learners are engaged. However, by using other methods to check understanding such as voting for correct answers or writing individual answers on mini whiteboards, there is 100% engagement and the ability for teachers to track all learners' progress and comprehension. We know that our learners need more opportunities to talk and discuss ideas with each other and we know that we need to adapt our teaching to support all young people to make excellent progress and to acquire the knowledge they need for their future. We are clear about the inclusive journey we are making to improve enjoyment and engagement in learning for all young people in our Trust.

Literacy has remained a high priority in all of our schools this year. Through our quality assurance of teaching and learning and our Trust wide data analysis, we gathered a clear overview of speaking and listening, reading and writing. We have listened to what students have told us about literacy, we have visited classrooms and we have looked at books and moderated standards at all levels. It is clear that while reading skills continued to build during the pandemic, the complex teaching of writing was hampered during this time and there is work to do to strongly embed writing skills as a coherent, academic, linguistic journey. We have worked solidly and collaboratively towards our shared vision for strong literacy and considerably enriched our offer. In our 2023-2024 we have created opportunities for richer, deeper Trust wide

collaboration through a 'Literacy Project' which will set out the principles for developing excellence in speaking, listening, reading and writing.

All teachers and classroom support staff in our Trust have led an action research project and we have built a strong community of lifelong learners. These projects have been rooted in evidence from personal research that has driven exploration of teaching strategies in the classroom. All teachers and teaching assistants have reviewed the progress of their project at three points in the year and engaged in professional dialogue around the themes and ideas they have been working on. This has raised the stakes in teaching and learning and brought about more opportunities for personal reflection, low stakes experimentation and at times failure. This is where the magic happens, and we are committed to continuing to build our action research work, supported by our partnership with the University of Bristol.

Through working with our primary schools, we identified a need to develop subject leadership skills and knowledge and created a 'Curious Curriculum' professional learning package. The Curious Curriculum sessions focused on one subject area at a time and leaders of that subject were invited to attend a workshop day to develop their curriculum knowledge and build their leaderships skills. The sessions were all led by secondary subject specialists who are trained as Marches Academy Trust Improvement

Consultants. During the sessions primary colleagues completed a SWOT analysis of their current curriculum offer and an action plan for improvement which they were able to take back into their schools to have direct impact. Our Trust Improvement Consultants have also been deployed within our Trust to work in areas where there has been an identified need. In addition, they have worked with schools outside the Trust on outreach school improvement projects.

Recent Ofsted inspections at Tilstock and Grove have demonstrated that the Trust vision, values, systems, processes and quality assurance are robust and having significant impact in schools. The Executive Team are linked to schools and work directly with Headteachers and leaders at all levels to support and challenge. Through direct connection, collaborative working and a shared vision we have a strong family of schools all pulling in the same direction to embed the best possible offer in Shropshire. We have grown a strong sense of family with our young people through a fantastic varsity package of competitions and Trust experiences such as 'The Big Sing' and 'Spelling Bee'.

This considerable work has been completed in the wider context of a national recruitment and retention crisis in education. Systems in schools have supported a high level of transience and supply staffing this year and it is testament to the strength of all members of our trust family that we have been able to continue to drive change.

5.1 Wave system and the development of behaviour and SEND

The wave system has provided a clear guidance to schools on support pathways for CYP. This guidance has also led to many schools improving their SEND systems and as a result, schools are more able to access funding for individuals. The new behaviour policy has encapsulated two years of professional learning, enabling our schools now to implement a restorative, coaching approach to managing behaviour with clear systems and cycles around this.

Each school has been empowered to own their individual mechanism for implementing this through school specific appendices, while it sits under a set of principles which were created through Trust collaboration. The wave guidance then works in collaboration with this, so there is a fully inclusive approach supported at every level. This gives the right support, at the right time and in the right way.

All SENDCos have received support to develop their provision into a financially viable, and stable model. While this work continues in some of our settings, all schools understand the rationale in the approach and in our schools who were early adopters of this approach, including Grange Primary School and Marches School, the approach is paying dividends for its CYP.

To support our specialist SEMH setting, Woodlands School, in its development of the provision for 100% SEND learners (all have an Education Health and Care Plan) we have worked closely with the Local Authority to improve community perceptions, and therefore the lived realities for the CYP that access the school; this has included an increased ownership of processes and importantly, we have secured a 48% increase in higher needs block funding, with the intention to increase commissioned places in the future. The school is about to commence the most significant recruitment drive in its history to support an increase of 28 CYP accessing the setting.



6. Connecting with our Communities

6.1 Funding

It has been another successful year for the Trust, winning funding applications to further develop our school's provision and facilities. In total over £240,000 has been brought into the Trust from numerous funders that include Sport England, the National Lottery Fund, and the Department for Education. Projects that have been possible this year include an outdoor gym at Longlands Primary School, new Duke of Edinburgh equipment and tents for Shrewsbury Academy students and a unique outdoor table tennis classroom at Grange Primary School. The Marches Academy Trust have continued to build a strong HAF provision across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and are now the biggest provider across the region. Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council have funded the Trust for the next 16 months to run a provision.



6.2 4 All Foundation

Just over 12 months ago, leaders within the Trust came together with an idea of establishing a charitable foundation to support communities across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. This vision of supporting numerous local community members over a wide span has now become possible with support from various funding providers that includes Sport England, National Lottery Fund and Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The Foundation has grown and developed into a large charitable organisation, bigger than we first thought, having three main Community Hubs in Market Drayton, Telford, and Shrewsbury. These Hubs see weekly activities take place run by our Community Engagement Officer and Activity Coaches. Sessions include SEND multi sports, a Ukrainian support hub, baby loss support group and yoga workshops. Since the 4 All Foundation was established, we have supported approximately 769 residents from across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin.



Our buy in offer has been developed and has grown remarkably over the past year with our programme now supporting over 20 primary schools across Shropshire. Our redeveloped programmes include CPD, PE Coaching and curriculum support.

In October we saw the third Shropshire PE Conference take place, with this conference being the largest to date! Over 100 delegates attended the event with speakers including Youth Sport Trust CEO Alison Oliver and Olympic athlete Holly Bradshaw all attending. During the autumn term, the Trust were nominated for a Youth Sport Trust award with the Trust finishing runners up for Sports Trust of the Year.



6.3 Physical Education and School Sport

Our varsity programme has grown significantly over the past 12 months with students from both primary and secondary continuing to be involved in competitions along with our Sixth Form students for the first time. Activities have included rowing, volleyball, fives, football, and a dance festival. In total over 350 students have been involved in these events over the past year. These events would not have been possible without the continued support from Shrewsbury School, who hosted these events at no cost to the Trust.

6.4 Apprenticeships

During the year, the Trust have invested time to redevelop the Trust apprenticeship levy fund and the provision we offer. A directory of qualifications has been created for all Trust staff to identify qualifications that are available to them. Since September, the Trust has seen new SENCOs, administrators, sports coaches, and teaching apprenticeships all enroll onto qualifications via the levy fund.



7. Sustainable Future



Sustainability has been at the forefront of our Trust Shared Services PD days this year and at the end of the spring term we released the Trust's CSR (Collective Social Responsibility) statement:

“Working today to protect tomorrow”.

Marches Academy Trust is committed to creating schools of the future that promote learning for life by ensuring we deliver our Trust core values of excellence, integrity, empathy, creativity and equality in everything that we do. An important part of this pivotal role includes the way we engage with our communities to ensure a sustainable, ethical and inclusive future.

Our Trust recognise it is critical to deliver inclusive education, sustainable environments and healthy spaces for all of our children and young people, staff and communities whilst minimising our impact on the environment and protecting the future of our planet.

We embrace our social obligation and recognise that as global citizens, we have a moral responsibility to contribute to the wellbeing of our environment and wider society. As such our Trust seeks to actively make socially responsible decisions in all it does so that together we can grow.



Across the Trust, our family of schools are engaging in a number of sustainability projects including students looking at how to reduce their carbon footprints, encouraging the reduction in energy use in their schools and challenging improvements to waste management. The Shared Services team have also launched several projects, focusing on zero food waste, digital sustainability, thermo zoning, give back projects and Trust recycling of resources.

These initiatives and projects have directly supported the financial stability of our Trust, which has been ever more important this year with record energy prices, inflation exceeding 9% and school funding continuing to get tighter. We are limited in controlling energy prices, but we are in control of our usage and all of schools have been challenged this year to reduce their consumption by 20%. Some great initiatives have been shared as well as improved central monitoring, all of which is helping to manage school energy budgets.

The Trust is fortunate that we have prudent reserves to support with financial instability outside of our control. Decisions continue to be made to ensure a balance is found between investing in our children and young people and the need to be resilient to what the future holds for our schools, Trust and the overall education sector.

With direction from the central team, our schools are now working more collaboratively. This is enabling not only greater efficiencies and sharing of good practice but also some great opportunities to utilise our buying power together, achieving economies of scale and contract deals that would not be achievable if we were all working in silo.

The Trust has continued to invest in our schools to ensure they are fit for the future. Lower Heath CE Primary School will see its capacity increase following the addition of a new two classroom block. We are also delighted to be working with the community in Bayston Hill, Shrewsbury where work has recently commenced at Oakmeadow CE Primary School on a purpose-built Community Hub. The school has also seen the installation of a new efficient heating system. All new capital works now have a sustainability focus that is considered within their infrastructure planning.

All of our primary schools have had or are having a detailed review of their nursery and early years provision with several applying to be able to accommodate children from as young as two years old. Investment from the Trust is to be granted to improve nursery places and to ensure that our nurseries are given a prominent position at the heart of our schools.



For 2023/2024 the Trust will continue to explore additional income streams and opportunities available to support our financial stability, whilst engaging with partnerships that support the Trust's values and further utilising the extremely talented and skilled staff within our Trust family.



8. Marketing and Communications

Marketing and communication play a crucial role in the success of our schools and Trust. It supports growth, building and maintaining brand awareness, and delivering key objectives like our social media and recruitment strategies effectively promoting our unique selling points in a clear and positive way. As technology and consumer behaviours evolve, we continue to adapt our approach to stay relevant and maintain a competitive edge in the education sector.

- **Building Brand Value:** We share consistent messaging, creative campaigns, and strategic brand positioning, helping us to differentiate ourselves from competitors and create a strong brand identity. We continue to use LinkedIn as a platform to help with this alongside our current social media provision. Support has been provided to schools with decoration and rebranding improving the areas to provide better learning environments. The Trust website went live in September improving the user experience and enabling us to showcase exactly what we do and the benefits of being part of a Trust.
- **Relationships with the Community:** We use various channels such as social media, email marketing, and personalised content in our transition programme to help with engagement. We have supported schools with open events and activities that engage and bring the community into the school. The Big Sing, Whitchurch 10k, Nursery events like Twinkle Tots, Futures Week as well as the full transition programmes are key to engaging with the communities. We have also supported with promotion of the 4 All Foundation since its launch.
- **Recruitment:** We have developed new recruitment packs leveraging persuasive techniques in our adverts, emotional appeals, and really talking to the candidates which has had a positive impact on our recent recruitment. The new packs and adverts are being used across most of our schools with a full roll out planned for September.
- **Social Media:** social media has the power to shape opinion, influence society and raise awareness about important issues as well as celebrate success. We have seen followers, engagement and reach increase across all of our accounts this year with the added engagement we are seeing on LinkedIn. The platforms allow us to distribute content quickly and widely whilst being a very cost-effective promotional solution. We have worked with schools to streamline the process of providing content which is driving efficiency within the team. We are currently exploring ways to showcase the Trust using the school platforms to ensure the community is aware of what the Trust is up to and benefits to their children being in a school part of a Trust.
- **Communications and Press Coverage:** The press relationship has developed this year with ITV now working with the Trust on a number of campaigns. BBC Bitesize are covering wellbeing and examination preparation where we are seeing some posts going viral across their platforms increasing our reach across the country and even internationally. Internal communication is improving with a weekly CEO bulletin to all staff.

9. Trustee and Governance



The Board of Trustees continues to have five Members - Anna Burgess, Robert Forrester, David Griffiths, Arthur Walpole and a CECET representative. The Board also consists of eight Trustees with Alex Fry remaining as Chair of Trustees and Catherine Bennett as Vice Chair.

The Trust held a Strategic Governance conference at Sir John Talbot's School and conducted a comprehensive Annual Governance Survey for all Governors for the first time. Both these activities will help develop our strategy, promote the voices of our local tier, and improve our resources and tools to help support our governing boards in delivering excellent and effective governance.



This year the Trust delivered informative Bitesize Governance workshops providing quality learning to help Governors develop their role and increase their confidence when raising challenge at their schools and these have been well received. The sessions included the Understanding the Trust's responsibilities in accordance with the Academies Handbook, Safeguarding KCSiE updates and driving a strong safeguarding culture in schools, curriculum development and how Governors quality assure this, the Governor's role in monitoring student attendance and the Governor's role in Checking, Challenging & Championing Behaviour, Suspensions & Exclusions in schools.

The Trust this year extensively improved our policy and procedures on behaviour, suspensions and exclusions. The Trust's Scheme of Delegation was comprehensively reviewed following the restructure of the Executive team and re-composition of the Trustee's Audit & Risk committee. The Trust's Governor's Handbook was also amended following review of the Link Governor roles responsibilities and the addition of a new Health & Safety Governor link role to closely monitor health and safety data and audit at a strategic level.

External Governance Reviews continue to take place across the Trust with an external school inspection consultant. Thus far The Grove School, Tilstock CE Primary School, Shrewsbury Academy, Lower Heath CE Primary School, Sir John Talbot's School, Oakmeadow CE Primary School and The Grange Primary School have undertaken this process and have greatly benefitted from this valuable exercise. An external governance review is planned for the Board of Trustees in October 2023, which alongside the 360 review of the Chair, will help the Trust continuously improve and assure Governance best practice.

As part of our ongoing commitment to embed a robust culture of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging (EDIB) across our schools and help governing boards ensure they are reflective of the communities they serve, all Trustees and Governors were asked to complete an EDIB monitoring form and anonymised data will be published on our website later this year. The Trust's EDIB ambassadors have regularly attended local governing body meetings to seek consultation on the Trust's EDIB strategy and present the Trust/school's current position and improvement priorities.

The School Link Trustees implemented last year are providing a stronger link between the school, its Governing Body and the Trust Board 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 the Trust Board. Additionally, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees 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 Clerks 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. This year Clerks are participating in a detailed and bespoke skills audit which will be used to identify where they may need to develop knowledge, skills and behaviour to deliver their functions effectively. The Trust's Governance Officer completed the NGA's Level 3 Certification in Governance to enhance their governance knowledge. As part of their course, they prepared a comprehensive Clerking Manual setting out the administrative and procedural requirements of governance within the Trust to drive efficient and effective clerking.



10. Trust Health and Safety and GDPR compliance

The Trust has implemented a framework for GDPR auditing and assessment across all schools; the framework identifies areas of compliance whilst also identifying areas for further work. This systematic approach ensures consistency across all Trust schools, sharing of expertise and eliminates duplication of work.

By implementing the framework, the Trust has confidence that schools comply with legal requirements whilst limiting the potential for GDPR breaches. GDPR audits are RAG rated and action plans are derived from the audit. These plans are reviewed by each school's senior leadership team and local governing boards which creates a focus and demonstrates the Trust's commitment to continual improvement.



The Trust has implemented a framework for Health and Safety auditing and assessment across all schools. This framework ensures robust standards of compliance and supports the Health and Safety Management System (HSMS). This systematic approach to managing health and safety risks across the Trust provides effective policies, procedures, and practices that aim to prevent incidents and injuries and promote a culture of safety and health among employees and students. The HSMS proactively identifies and manages health and safety risks, aiming to protect the well-being of employees and other stakeholders. By implementing the framework, the Trust has confidence that schools comply with legal requirements, improve our reputation within the community, and increase employee morale.

Health and Safety action plans are derived from audit and assessment activities, these plans are reviewed by each school's senior leadership team and local governing boards, this creates a focus and demonstrates the Trust's commitment to continual improvement.

11. Information Technology

Marches Academy Trust IT structure has undergone significant updates and improvements in the past year. Our aim has been upgrading the infrastructure of schools within the Trust to ensure better connectivity and cost savings. This included the installation and upgrade of network switches, wireless systems and phone systems, replacing outdated telephony systems where possible.



To provide schools with a more reliable connection and reduce costs, we initiated the migration to a Voice over IP (VoIP) system called 3CX in August 2022. We are starting this transition early as BT plans to discontinue the current ADSL infrastructure nationwide by 2025. By implementing the 3CX system, schools can take advantage of cheaper SIP packages, resulting in long-term savings. While some schools may experience initial expense to purchase newer telephones, the overall cost reduction will be considerable. Between August 2021 to August 2022 Sir John Talbot's School and The Marches School collectively spent approx. £10,600 just on phone calls. However, since September 2022 to May 2023 their expenses have decreased to roughly around £1,520 significantly reducing their monthly spending.

In response to the growing importance of cyber security, we are placing an increased importance on protecting our schools against potential threats. Educational institutions are often targeted due to perceived weaker security systems and higher susceptibility to user spoofing. Therefore, we have implemented staff training programs to educate them on identifying phishing scams, adopting best practices, and the importance of reporting any security breaches, regardless of their scale.

Under the leadership of Mike Foden and James Ritch, along with contributions from other technicians, our IT outreach program is 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 schools wanting to join the service. We are constantly seeking new partnerships to provide schools with a comprehensive package that includes internet services, backup solutions, and telephony support.



12. Trust Christian Distinctiveness Report 2023

Information taken from website and SIAMs evaluations (SSEF).

12.1 Summary findings:

- All Church of England (C of E) schools have clear values and virtues that are true to their foundation as church schools. There are high expectations ensuring all children receive an enriched offer and most make good progress (although there is variability in outcomes). There is close monitoring to secure progress.
- The importance of Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship is sound in all schools, enabling all to flourish.
- Leaders are dedicated and create strong atmospheres that are based around Courageous Advocacy, spiritual development and following in the footsteps of Jesus. At present, evaluations regarding the impact of the vision in all aspects of church school distinctiveness are variable. In some schools it is higher in profile.

- Improvements in RE mean that there are engaging curriculums, where there are examples of high-quality practice. However, intentional opportunities for students' spiritual flourishing are not clearly identified in planning or seen strongly in all three schools.
- The vision and Christian values shape these warm caring communities in all schools, where students treat one another with dignity and respect. An affirming culture of aspirations raises students' expectations and self-belief, so they flourish.
- Collective worship plays a significant role in enabling students to see what the vision looks like in daily life. However, students do not independently plan, lead or evaluate worship in our C of E schools consistently. There are some examples of this, but this is an area to develop Trust wide.
- All schools work with the Diocese advisory team to continue to review good practice. They have open mindsets to continual reflection and growth.
- All schools have used 'Understanding Christianity' resources and meet the Shropshire syllabus requirements of multi-faith teaching.
- In all schools' partnerships with the church are secure; Church Leaders play a fundamental part in the schools and the church is visited regularly in all our C of E schools.



12.2 Areas for development:

- Develop a systematic approach to evaluating the impact of the Christian vision, resulting in ongoing foci for improvement.
- Enable students to independently plan, lead and evaluate collective worship, to further enhance the school's Christian distinctiveness.
- Look for ways to enhance spiritual development for all students and adults to flourish.
- Provide schools with a Trust Church School network, focussing on improving outcomes for all students.



12.3 Detailed review:

Leaders' use worship to renew the Christian vision and this raises its importance, enabling students to deepen their understanding of its significance. Each school must now look closely at the needs of the locality to continue to enhance this more.

There is an emphasis on extending students' aspirations and progress in all schools. The staff teams are fully committed to the vision and live it out. An understanding of Biblical principles underpins the vision, but this is more evident in some schools than others and not yet consistent across the Trust. Leaders talk about students achieving their God-given potential. They articulate how everyone can contribute to the community, reaching out to others with compassion. Each school has a community plan to reinforce this.

The schools' planning and visions give clear focus for improvements. The standard of behaviour and quality of relationships has risen impressively in all schools, this is particularly noticeable in one where this school has tripled in size over three years. Review pays attention to students' understanding of the wider world and diversity. During reviews leaders state that children are articulate with this and in Trust learning reviews this has been validated.

Leaders are ambitious and passionate about leading a Church school, their enthusiasm is contagious. They make continuous evaluations, addressing priorities. Governors are conscientious.

In all schools, learning experiences are progressively developed, where there is a focus on understanding and retaining new information and vocabulary. Students' understanding of the wider world is enhanced by a range of visits. There is a culture of aspiration, where most students are challenged to be the best they can be. Central to this is the quality of relationships staff make with students, enriching trust. Visitors stimulate interest in future careers, and this widens horizons.

There is focused provision for those with specific educational needs or disability (SEND) through early intervention in all schools, however, is this variable in its degree of quality. This is further enhanced by the support provided by Marches Multi-Academy Trust School support offer.

Learners deepen their understanding of global communities by exploring various countries, raising their awareness of different cultures through wide and engaging curriculum offers in each school. Learning experiences are thoughtfully planned in most schools, yet this is variable in strength, to allow students to respond and act with compassion. For example, studying the rainforest extends their knowledge of the exploitation of the natural world and pollution. In one school they are becoming advocates for change with greater confidence, **this is good practice to model across the other C of E schools (Tilstock C of E Primary).**

Caring for everyone, because they are special, is integral to each schools' vision.

The introduction of 'Understanding Christianity' a resource in RE, deepens staff and students' knowledge of the subject. Leaders work in collaboration with the Diocese and the relationship with the local church is an example of effective practice. These links extend staff and students' knowledge of Christianity. *A recommended next step will be to continue to work with the students so they can articulate the Christian belief of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit fluently in all schools.*

The vision gives a high priority to establishing a community where all feel loved. Everyone appreciates that each person is unique. students treat one another with respect and dignity, working well collaboratively. A strong sense of being part of a caring family is evident. It will be good to explore the student's ability to talk of the significance of forgiveness in future monitoring.



Leaders' improvements, following clear evaluations, make RE an important subject. All staff teach RE, growing their expertise. They are creating an atmosphere of curiosity, encouraging learners to explore their own beliefs. students are developing a secure knowledge of specific religious vocabulary, and learners understanding of core religious concepts is improving. In two schools (Oakmeadow C of E Primary / Tilstock C of E Primary) learners show a thoughtful understanding of world views.

Collective worship is fundamental in enabling each schools' vision to be applied in daily life. Worship is inclusive and invitational, often challenging thinking and attitudes. students are engaged through the visual approach, responding enthusiastically. There are opportunities to reflect, and these are highly valued. At present, students do not always have the opportunity to plan or lead worship independently. Whilst they enjoy coming together as a family, students would benefit from having greater ownership.

The RE curriculum is planned, progressively deepening understanding in all C of E schools. students make efficient progress with some working at a higher level.





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