

Issue 22 Autumn 2025

# DesignEd

A Central Region Schools Trust Publication



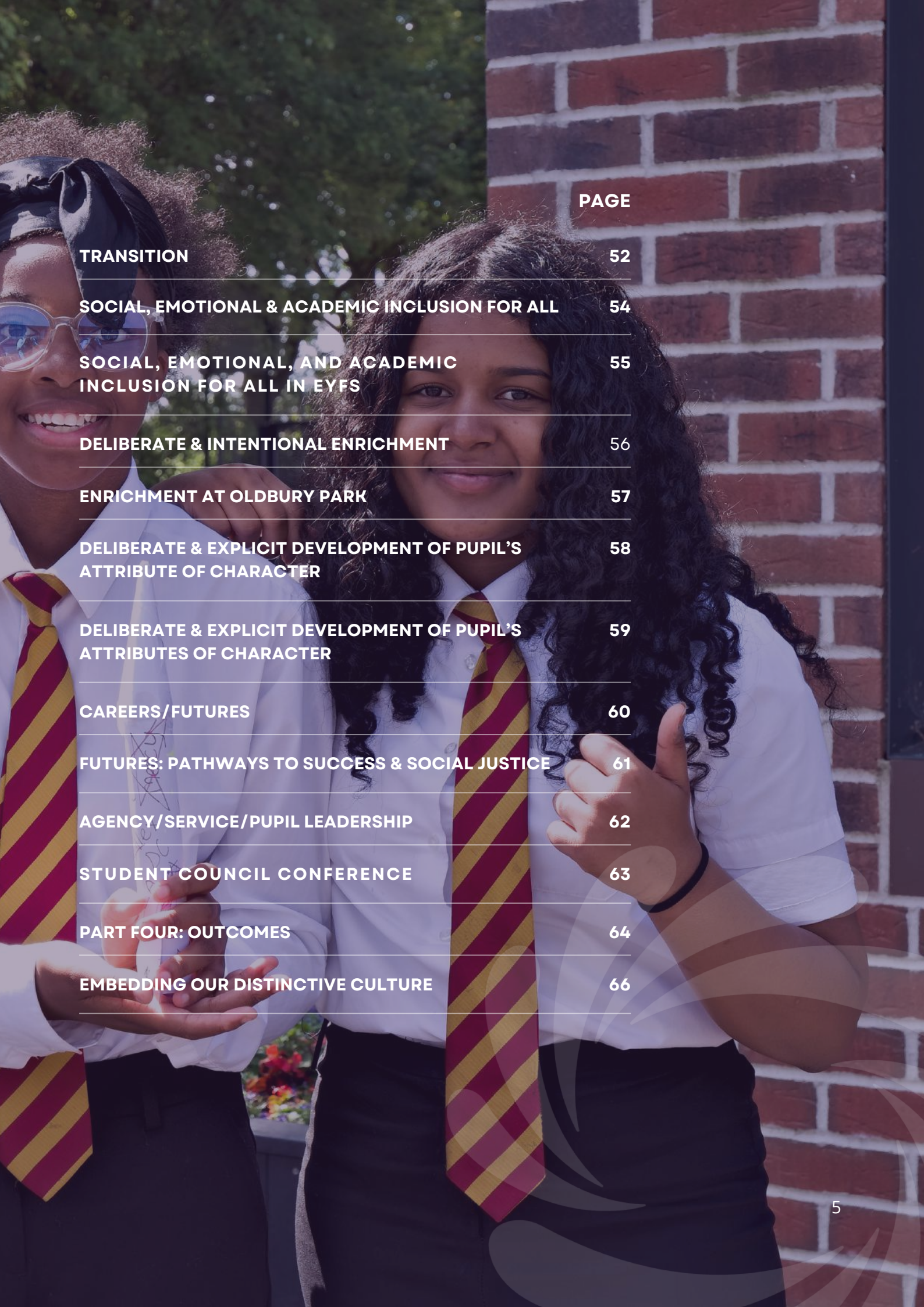


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# Meet the Team...

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Executive Principal of Gospel Oak School

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Executive Principal of Arrow Valley First School  
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### Samantha McMonagle

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### Matthew Purslow

Head of CRST People Development Institute (CPDI),  
Trust Lead for People Development & Secondary Co-Design

### Angela Crawley

Trust Lead for Primary Co-Design Reading

### Claire Round

Trust Director of SEND

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Trust Lead for EYFS & Phonics

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Trust Lead for ITE & Early Careers (Teach Central)

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Trust Lead for Writing & Primary School Improvement Lead

### Daniella Duignan & Angela Crawley

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Trust Lead for Safeguarding

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### Francesca Stanley & Daniel Wright

Trust Leads for Professional Development

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Trust Lead for Creative Arts

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Trust Lead for Geography

### Jenna Brown

Trust Lead for Modern Foreign Languages

### Matthew Purslow

Trust Lead for Drama & Computing

### Alice Pearson & Warren Jones

Trust Leads for Religious Education

### Josh Prentice

Trust Lead for Physical Education

### Dawn Salter

Trust Lead for Food Technology

### Michelle Martin

Trust Lead for Art & Design

### Chloe Burke

Trust Lead for Music

*a note from our*

## CHIEF EXECUTIVE

At the heart of our trust, founded by The RSA, sits a clear and unwavering mission of supporting social justice through exceptional schools, shaped by our shared vision and values. From this strong and deeply held foundation flows our strategy that enable exceptional schools to flourish - what we call **OUR DISTINCTIVE CULTURE**; our people; our places and our processes. When these are aligned, they create the environment in which strong culture can thrive, both for our pupils, but also for our staff.

When we maximise the delivery of our distinctive culture, we enable the outcomes that matter most for our children:

- ◆ A strong sense of belonging, supporting high attendance.
- ◆ Academic and vocational success.
- ◆ High self-esteem.
- ◆ Confidence.
- ◆ Resilience.

These outcomes, of course, help ensure readiness for next steps and future success, including positive destinations beyond our schools.

This special edition of DesignEd reflects a year of significant progress for the trust. It brings to life the framework we have been developing for the effective delivery of Our Distinctive Culture Strategy. The framework sits on a side of paper, bringing together the key components for delivery in simple form.

Of course, excellence of delivery is more complex. What sits behind each part of the framework are the questions leaders need to ask every day to develop and sustain our culture in school.

This edition of DesignEd lays out the framework for delivery of our strategy across our schools ( numbering 14 from January 1<sup>st</sup>, with the excellent Matchborough First School in Redditch joining us!). It highlights the framework, the simple questions that sit behind the framework, and then case studies and articles from across our schools and teams to bring the delivery to life by exemplar.

As we strive to deliver our mission, it is important to note that none of it happens by chance. It is made possible through the professionalism, commitment and care shown every day by staff across our trust. Great thanks must be given to all colleagues in every role (paid and volunteer) for the difference they make in the lives of our young people. The collective effort is greater than the sum of its parts. Each school's mission delivery relies on bringing our strategy to life on the ground. This framework strongly supports each school making a massive difference to our communities, rooting our schools as the heart of them.

*Amy Shears*

Chief Executive Officer





# How do we deliver 'Our Distinctive Culture'?

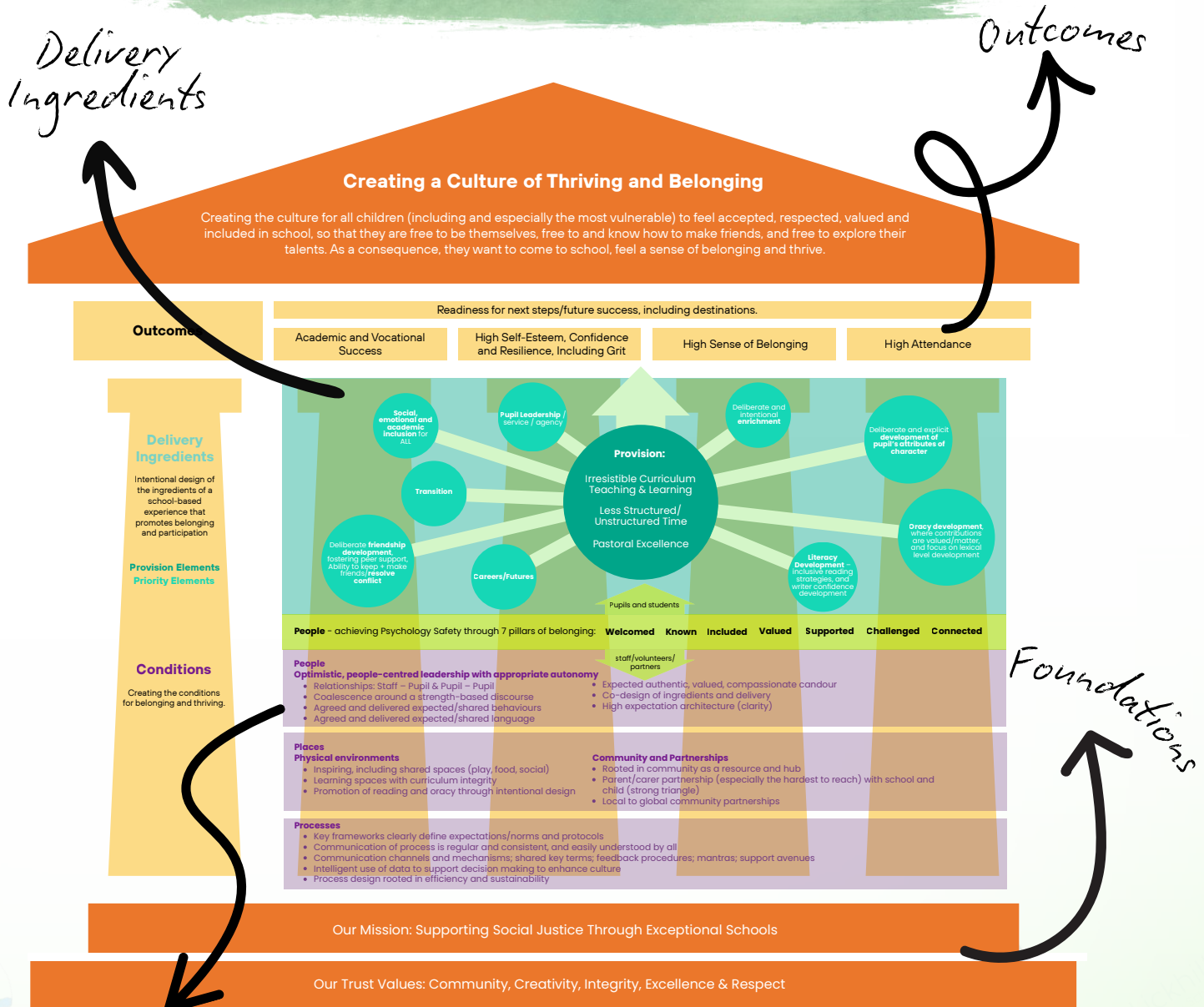
The CRST Executive Team have been working with school leaders across the trust to detail a framework for leaders to follow to ensure each of our schools enables a culture of thriving and belonging for pupils, and for staff. This work has been complemented by a research project Sam McMonagle, our Director of School Improvement, with 5 other trusts, as well as a DfE RISE Community of Practice (former CEO Learning Set) that Guy Shears, our CEO leads.

The framework is simple. It is in 3 parts:

- ▶ It covers the **CONDITIONS** that underpin our culture in purple – most especially ensuring connection and belonging for our **PEOPLE** (staff and volunteers), how we recruit, develop and retain them, and the expectations we have of each other. It also included how our **PLACES**, and our **PROCESSES** contribute to growing connection and a culture of belonging.
- ▶ It then covers the **DELIVERY INGREDIENTS** from a pupil perspective, and the **PROVISION** and **PRIORITY DELIVERY AREAS** that support the fostering of connection and belonging for them, so that they thrive.
- ▶ The aim is to establish the conditions and delivery in each of our schools, so that we deliver the third part of the framework, namely the **OUTCOMES** for the pupils, so that they get the best academic outcomes, have high levels of confidence, resilience and self esteem, attend because school is irresistible, and go out into the world to great destinations and to add positive value to society. (our mission of supporting social justice through exceptional schools thereby fulfilled).

At face value it looks like a list of the things that schools do! But the questions that sit behind the above, for us to understand and question as the CRST community, are underpinned by a wide range of research. Therefore, by delivering, for instance, deliberate and intentional enrichment in a way that actively promotes connection, especially for the most vulnerable in our schools, is vital to supporting our mission of supporting social justice through exceptional schools.

# Framework for Creating a Culture of Thriving and Belonging



## Conditions

The framework should be read not as a checklist but as a shared lens through which we design, test and refine our work. Each element prompts deliberate questions about impact, coherence and equity: how leadership decisions are experienced by staff and pupils; how everyday practices either strengthen or weaken connection; and how intentional choices can reduce disadvantage rather than inadvertently reinforce it.

Grounded in a strong evidence base and shaped through collaboration beyond our own trust, the framework invites professional curiosity and collective responsibility. When applied with integrity, it helps ensure that what we do, how we do it, consistently serves those who need it most and keeps our moral purpose firmly in view.





# Part One: Framework Foundations

# Part one: Framework Foundations

We are a Trust founded by The Royal Society of Arts – a 271 year organisation rooted in supporting social justice.

Our mission is in supporting social justice through exceptional schools.

We hold true to our founding principles – which define our mission, vision, values and Our Distinctive Culture Strategy.

This is who we are.

This framework is underpinned by who we are and supports how we turn powerful thinking into practical action to deliver our mission.

# DELIVERING OUR DISTINCTIVE CULTURE

**SO1. PEOPLE:** Great people, living our values, engaging and inspiring in collaborative pursuit of social justice.

**SO3. PROCESSES:** Our processes, informed by evidence, support best practice, enabling pupils/students to take ownership of their futures.

**SO2. PLACES:** Safe and inspiring places that have strong curriculum integrity, enable pupils/students to excel and are a beacon of pride for the community.

**MISSION**  
Supporting social justice through exceptional schools.

**VISION**  
What CRST endeavours to achieve:  
As a Trust founded by The Royal Society of Arts, our exceptional schools work together to create learning that is inspirational for all: igniting imagination and enabling creativity and curiosity which results in the highest achievement. People are valued and happy, developing their knowledge, attributes, skills and networks for success and fulfilment. In our empowered communities, everything is possible and aspirations are high.

Outcomes are highly impressive.

**VALUES**  
The ethics and drivers of CRST

**Community**  
Building empowered communities and networks where everything is possible and aspirations are high.

**Creativity**  
Creativity is fostered to encourage powerful thinking into practical action.

**Excellence**  
Integrity in everything we do, in our leadership and practice, in our approach and in the ways we build the character of our children.

**Integrity**  
Integrity in everything we do, in our leadership and practice, in our approach and in the ways we build the character of our children.

**Respect**  
Respect for others is intrinsic in all our behaviours and ensures we embrace all strands of inclusion.

## OUR STRATEGY

SO.1



**PEOPLE:**  
Great people, living our values, engaging and inspiring in collaborative pursuit of social justice.

**SO1.1:**  
Developing **EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS**

**SO1.2:**  
Recruiting, Developing and Retaining **EXPERT PEOPLE**

**PEOPLE**

SO.2



**PLACES:**  
Safe and inspiring places that have strong curriculum integrity, enable pupils/students to excel and are a beacon of pride for the community.

**SO2.1:**  
Creating, developing and maintaining **INSPIRING PLACES**

**SO2.2:**  
Building **EMPOWERED COMMUNITIES** and developing **LASTING PARTNERSHIPS** to support the development of social justice

**PLACES**

SO.3



**PROCESSES:**  
Our processes, informed by evidence, support best practice, enabling pupils/students to take ownership of their futures.

**SO3.1:**  
Achieving **EXCELLENCE** of sustainable operational **INFRASTRUCTURE**; operating efficient and effective **SYSTEMS**.

**SO3.2:**  
Developing and delivering **EXCELLENCE** of **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORKS** at scale.

**PROCESSES**

# Part Two: Framework Conditions



## People

### Optimistic, people-centred leadership with appropriate autonomy

- Relationships: Staff – Pupil & Pupil – Pupil
- Coalescence around a strength-based discourse
- Agreed and delivered expected/shared behaviours
- Agreed and delivered expected/shared language
- Expected authentic, valued, compassionate candour
- Co-design of ingredients and delivery
- High expectation architecture (clarity)



## Places

### Physical Environments

- Inspiring, including shared spaces (play, food, social)
- Learning spaces with curriculum integrity
- Promotion of reading and oracy through intentional design

### Community and Partnerships

- Rooted in community as a resource and hub
- Parent/carer partnership (especially the hardest to reach) with school and child (strong triangle)
- Local to global community partnerships



## Processes

- Key frameworks clearly define expectations/norms and protocols
- Communication of process is regular and consistent, and easily understood by all
- Communication channels and mechanisms; shared key terms; feedback procedures; mantras; support avenues
- Intelligent use of data to support decision making to enhance culture
- Process design rooted in efficiency and sustainability



# People

*Great people and professionals, living our values, engaging, and inspiring in collaborative pursuit of social justice.*



# Places

*Safe and inspiring places that have strong curriculum integrity, enable young people to excel, and are a beacon of pride for the community.*



# Processes

*Our processes, informed by evidence, support best practice, enabling young people to take ownership of their futures.*

# PEOPLE LEADERSHIP:

Optimistic, people-centred leadership with appropriate autonomy

- Relationships: Staff – Pupil & Pupil – Pupil
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## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Are leaders leading with authenticity and integrity, with fidelity to defined culture, and especially the codified behaviours and language?
- 2 Are leaders optimistic and people focused?
- 3 Does the school improvement strategy and chosen priorities leaders have identified reflect where the school is at, choosing where to focus on in this framework, adopting a pragmatic and patient approach, with fidelity to effective implementation?
- 4 As climate moves to culture, do leaders continue to reinforce routinely all of the key ingredients that have been established over time?
- 5 Do leaders utilise data intelligently to monitor key indicators of culture?
- 6 Do leaders champion the agreed culture emphasising the evidenced reasons behind the chosen approaches to fostering strong culture, with a strong lens on how this works for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged?
- 7 Are mistakes embraced and learned from?
- 8 Are the selection processes of staff deeply designed with fostering a culture of thriving and belonging? (see processes)
- 9 Is the pastoral role of all staff emphasised and valued by leaders, with an emphasis on inclusive and relational care?

# The CRST People Development Institute

Celebrating a Term of Collaboration, Professional Growth and Shared Purpose

This autumn term has been a vibrant and productive season for staff development across the Central Region Schools Trust. Colleagues from all phases and subject areas have engaged in conferences, workshops and collaborative events designed to strengthen practice and enrich the educational experience of our young people. This work reflects our commitment to developing expert professionals through our People Strategy and reinforces our shared belief in delivering “social justice through exceptional schools.”

## Supporting Trainee and Early Career Staff

Our Teach Central trainee teachers continue to thrive in their school placements, contributing with enthusiasm and professionalism. Recruitment for the 2026–27 cohort is now open; enquiries and applications are warmly welcomed. For more information, please contact Teresa Wilson.

We are also excited to support our Early Career Stage staff through the upcoming conference at ASSAY Studios on 5 January. This event will provide inspiration, collaboration, and professional learning, helping colleagues build strong foundations for their teaching careers.

On the same day, we will host our inaugural Achievement Assistant Conference at Arrow Vale School. Practical workshops will focus on strategies to support SEND pupils, with contributions from Worcestershire County Council, BeReady apprentices, and specialist SEND adviser Hannah Hall.

## Developing Evidence-Informed Practice

This term saw the launch of our Research Disciplined Inquiry Programme, supporting recently qualified teachers in embedding evidence-informed approaches to their classrooms. By grounding practice in research, we continue to develop confident, reflective practitioners across our schools.

## Excellence in Curriculum and Standards

Secondary colleagues have participated in subject-specific conferences in Geography and Music, exploring co-design and collaborative planning.

Cross-phase strategic work has united primary and secondary staff around safeguarding, attendance, outcomes and overall standards. Secondary subject areas have also engaged in online meetings and in-person moderation events, maintaining excellence across all key stages. Primary subject leads have met throughout the term to share best practice and refine curriculum planning.

## National Engagement and Leadership Development

Leaders across the Trust have attended and contributed to national landscape updates, including the Schools and Academies Show in Birmingham, the Teacher Development Trust Annual Conference in London, and the National SEN Awards in Birmingham, ensuring our work is informed by the latest developments in education policy and inclusive practice.

## Developing Skills Across the Trust

Staff development extends beyond the classroom into operational and functional areas. Mentoring, shadowing, and industry-focused CPD continue to strengthen practice in IT infrastructure, finance processes, and business support. We actively maximise the apprenticeship levy across all areas, working with new partners to deliver high-quality professional development for both teaching and operational excellence.

## Looking Ahead: Leadership and NPQs

From January 2026, we will deliver our own NPQs in Leading Teaching and Leading Teacher Development, in collaboration with Tudor Grange Teaching School Hub and Best Practice Network. Our new subject and pastoral leadership courses will launch in February 2026, with expressions of interest encouraged through your CPD Lead.

Together, these initiatives—from trainee support and early career development to leadership programmes, NPQs, conferences, national engagement, and operational CPD—demonstrate our shared belief that investing in our people strengthens every classroom, every team, every function, and ultimately every child's future.

MATTHEW PURSLOW  
HEAD OF PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

“Our work changes lives” *NASEN Awards*

# Celebrating Colleague Success

## NPQ Achievements

The Central Region Schools Trust is proud to celebrate colleagues who recently successfully completed their National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) in a range of disciplines. Best of luck to those whose results will be published in January 2026.

## Apprenticeship Levy Success

We also recognise colleagues who have developed their skills through the apprenticeship levy:

- ★ Alex Fisher – Level 3 IT Technician
- ★ Poppy Davies – Level 3 Early Years Educator
- ★ Arshdip Singh – Level 4 Network Engineer
- ★ Rhona Lampitt – Level 3 Assistant Accountant

## Outstanding Individual Recognition

Special congratulations go to Hannah Alabaster, Assistant SENDCO at Arrow Vale School, who was nominated for Support Practitioner of the Year in the NASEN Awards. Hannah attended the prestigious ceremony with colleagues from across the Trust celebrating her achievement.

We are also proud to celebrate Jenna Brown (Senior Lead Practitioner, Gospel Oak School) and Roshida Nessa (Lead for ITT and ECT, Holyhead School), who graduated from Coventry University with Distinctions at Level 7, achieving their master's in educational leadership.

## Featured in National Publication

In addition, Jenny Lewis (Church Hill Middle School), Dean Salisbury (Trust Primary School Improvement Lead), and Dani Duignan (Assistant Principal, Sutton Park School) were all featured in John Tomsett's publication, 'Great Teachers and what we can learn from them', showcasing their influence and professional expertise.

These achievements reflect the Trust's commitment to its people, offering bespoke, career-stage-appropriate CPD that develops, retains, and inspires expert professionals across all areas, ensuring colleagues thrive and continue to make a difference to the young people in their care.



Hannah A at NASEN



NASEN awards



Jenna & Nessa  
Graduation day

# PEOPLE

## CODIFIED LANGUAGES & BEHAVIOURS:

Optimistic, people-centred leadership with appropriate autonomy

- Relationships: Staff – Pupil & Pupil – Pupil
- Coalescence around a strength-based discourse
- Agreed and delivered expected/shared behaviours
- Agreed and delivered expected/shared language
- Expected authentic, valued, compassionate candour
- Co-design of ingredients and delivery
- High expectation architecture (clarity)

### QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

#### Codified Languages

- 1 Is there an agreed 'codified' set of staff behaviour expectations that align with fostering a culture of belonging?
- 2 Are these behaviours explicit, promotional and the rationale for each understood by staff?
- 3 Do leaders model and promote these behaviours?
- 4 Is action taken when behaviour varies from expectation?

#### Codified Behaviours

- 1 Is there an agreed 'codified' shared key language?
- 2 Is language explicit, promoted and the rationale for it understood by staff?
- 3 Is deficit discourse accurately challenged by leaders?
- 4 Is negative labelling of pupils avoided and challenged?

## Our Staff Behaviours

# Developing Our Distinctive Culture – People

We know and understand the powerful role we have in intentionally fostering Our Distinctive Culture through our behaviours and mindsets. These shape our thinking, communication and actions. We all encourage and empower others by being respectful, positive and optimistic.



**Integrity**



**Excellence**



**Creativity**



**Community**



**Respect**

The following behaviours will enable us to live out this vision and fulfil our mission of supporting social justice through exceptional schools.

### **Prioritise the success of our young people at all times**

All members of our community advocate on behalf of pupils/students and make decisions with them at heart. We have the highest expectations of all pupils/students and understand the importance of showing them how to achieve the habits that will lead them to success.

### **Be a role model**

We are ALL responsible for building our culture, trust and credibility. All members of our community need to walk the talk - all of the time. We all lead by example.

### **Communicate effectively**

Our staff are direct, honest, act with integrity and communicate appropriately all of the time. We use honest, timely and professional face to face communication as a priority.

### **Keep your promises and stick to your organisational commitments**

We see the importance of professional integrity and aim to keep our word around our organisational commitments.

### **Commit to the development of others**

Our community members are our most valuable asset. We all commit to our own professional growth in order to improve the outcomes for pupils. We see line management commitments as a priority and fully engage in the process.

### **Have a solution focused approach**

Our community have a positive can-do mindset and seek well thought through and appropriate solutions to problems. We are proactive and aim to prevent issues. We are committed to continually improving and seek constructive feedback.

### **Demonstrate full commitment to the bigger picture**

Our colleagues demonstrate loyalty to the Trust. We challenge each other appropriately and support each other at all times. We show flexibility and a willingness to be adaptable or, where necessary, compromise.

# PEOPLE PROCESSES:

- Key frameworks clearly define expectations/norms and protocols
- Communication of process is regular and consistent, and easily understood by all
- Communication channels and mechanisms; shared key terms; feedback procedures; mantras; support avenues
- Intelligent use of data to support decision making to enhance culture
- Process design rooted in efficiency and sustainability

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

### Recruitment and retention

- 1 Do selection processes emphasis fit to a culture of belonging (attributes/values)?
- 2 Is there a clear approach to retention (through belonging), including the above expectations?
- 3 Do leaders seek to understand the reasons why all leavers (including those they are reluctant to lose, but also carefully those that are less so) are leaving?
- 4 Does the school recruit appropriately from the local community, with potentially marginalised members of the community to help staff understanding and reduce parental concerns, which is likely to improve engagement and retention for pupils belonging to that community?
- 5 Is there an appropriate strategy to deliver authentic and valued wellbeing, rewards, celebration? How do leaders know?

### Professional learning and development

- 1 Do staff/leaders/decision makers have appropriate agency?
- 2 Is there a strong professional development/learning programme, including clearly mapped pathways for staff – do these link to clear and systematic talent identification, professional growth and succession mapping planning?
- 3 Does the professional learning programme involve co-construction and collaboration? Is it contextually designed (school context, team context, individual context)? Is it valued and valuable?
- 4 Do adults understand their role in fostering a strong culture of belonging for staff and pupils? Is this explicitly developed, supported (and challenged when actions, behaviours and words do not align to expectation)?

# DEVELOPING AND RETAINING GREAT TEACHERS

On December 12th, the Central Region Schools Trust hosted a highly engaging afternoon session for Trusts, academies and school leaders at ASSAY Studios, which focused on developing and retaining great teachers. The event brought together senior leaders, educational researchers, and policy influencers to share insights and practical strategies for supporting colleagues across all career stages.

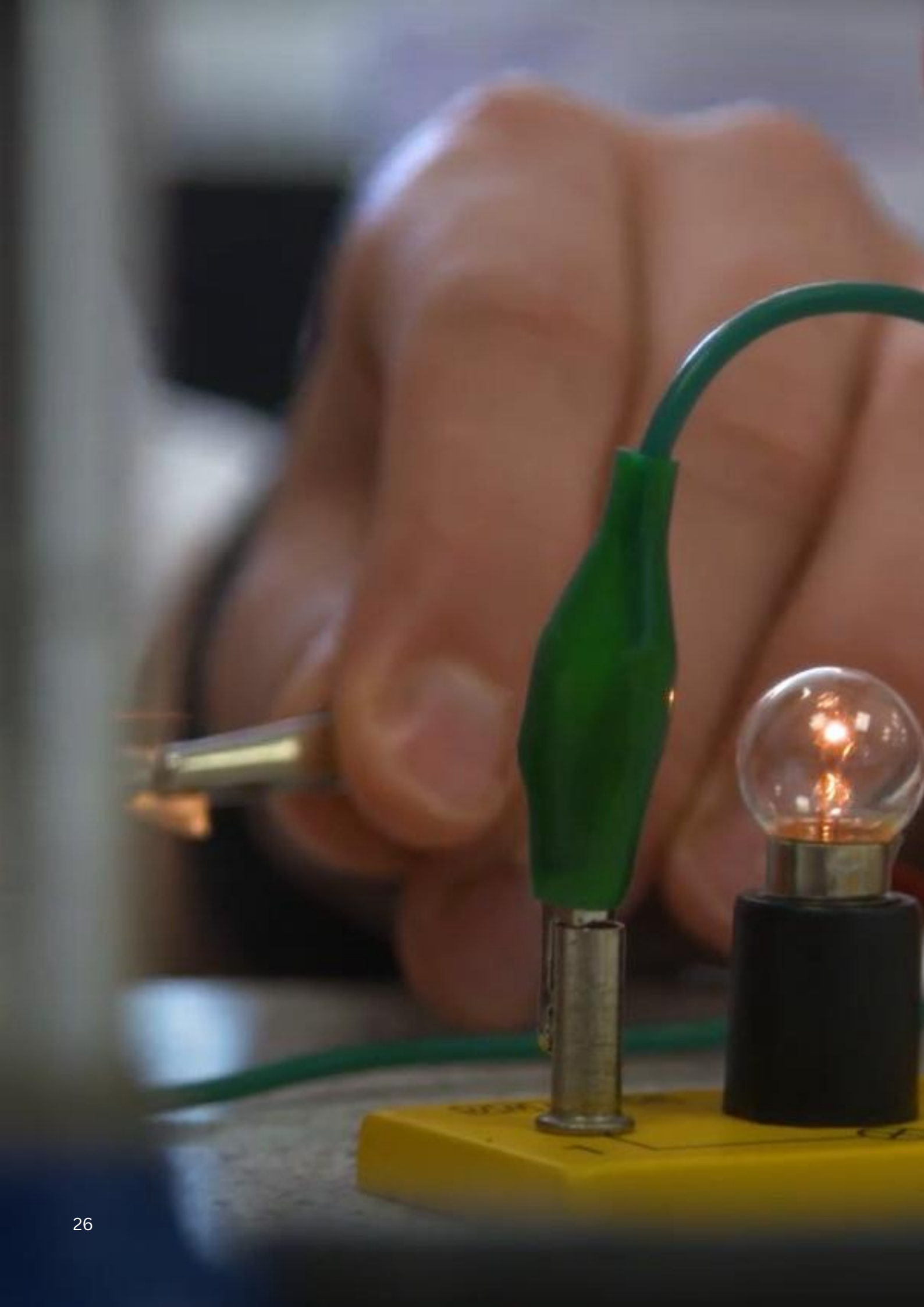
The session began with an introduction from our CEO, Guy Shears, who set the tone for an inspiring afternoon of professional learning. We were privileged to welcome Mary Myatt and John Tomsett, both renowned for their research and influence on national education policy as keynotes.

A highlight of the afternoon was a lively panel discussion, chaired by John Tomsett, featuring Mary Myatt alongside two CEOs from local Trusts: Matt Meckin (Rivers Trust) and Claire Maclean (Tudor Grange). Questions from attendees explored the retention of colleagues across all career stages and building a culture in which all staff can thrive and make a real difference to the young people in their care.

In addition, the Trust partnered with Aristotal AI to demonstrate how virtual coaching can support teacher development and progression, providing practical insights into technology-enhanced professional growth. Aristotal's CEO Gary Swabel gave a demonstration of the tool and answered questions from attendees. The afternoon concluded with a summary from Sam McMonagle, Director of School Improvement, who reflected on key takeaways and next steps. The event highlighted the Trust's commitment to investing in its people, promoting professional excellence, and ensuring every teacher can flourish in a supportive, forward-thinking environment.

**SAM MCMONAGLE**  
DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT





# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN PARTNERSHIP PHIZZI LIGHT & SOUND CPD

On 26th November 2025, staff from across our Trust came together for a highly engaging Ogden Trust Phizzi Light & Sound CPD session. The training was hosted by Church Hill Middle School and delivered by Jenny Watsons from The Ogden Trust. The session welcomed colleagues from our partner primary schools: Ipsley, Church Hill, St. Stephen's, Arrow Valley, and Oak Hill.

This professional development session focused on the key physics concepts of light and sound, offering staff a wealth of hands-on, practical activities and experiments they can now take back into their classrooms. The atmosphere throughout the day was one of energy, curiosity, and collaboration, with staff fully immersing themselves in the role of learner as they explored scientific ideas in interactive ways.

One of the highlights of the programme is that each attending school will now receive an Ogden Trust equipment box, enabling teachers to confidently deliver high-quality physics lessons using robust, engaging resources. This investment will ensure that our pupils benefit directly from the training, with opportunities for enriched practical learning in their science curriculum.

The staff who attended the session will now begin to disseminate their improved subject knowledge within their school teams. This includes supporting colleagues through planning discussions, modelling practical tasks, and embedding strong physics pedagogy across year groups. By strengthening staff confidence and expertise, we are collectively working towards giving every child in our Trust the best possible experience of physics in primary education.

Looking ahead, we are excited for the next Ogden Trust Physics CPD, which will focus on Key Stage 3 and take place in January. In addition, preparations are already underway for a Trust-wide space-themed event at the start of February. This event promises to ignite curiosity and enthusiasm for science across all ages – bringing our schools together in a celebration of exploration, discovery, and the wonder of space.

Together, these opportunities reflect our continuing commitment to promoting high-quality science education and ensuring that pupils across our Trust develop a lifelong love of learning and enquiry.

**JENNY LEWIS**  
TRUST LEAD FOR SCIENCE



Role play

# PROCESSES FRAMEWORKS:

- Key frameworks clearly define expectations/norms and protocols
- Communication of process is regular and consistent, and easily understood by all
- Communication channels and mechanisms; shared key terms; feedback procedures; mantras; support avenues
- Intelligent use of data to support decision making to enhance culture
- Process design rooted in efficiency and sustainability

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Are key frameworks in place to CLEARLY define expectations, for instance in behaviour, teaching and learning?
- 2 Are they communicated regularly and applied consistently?
- 3 Are processes easily understood by pupils, staff and parents, and are they sensible?
- 4 Are there clear mechanisms for dealing with complaints?
- 5 Are complaints, when justified, highlighted as exceptions to culture, embraced and learned from?
- 6 Does intelligent use of data support decision making to further enhance culture?

# Key Framework:

## Teaching & Learning Policy

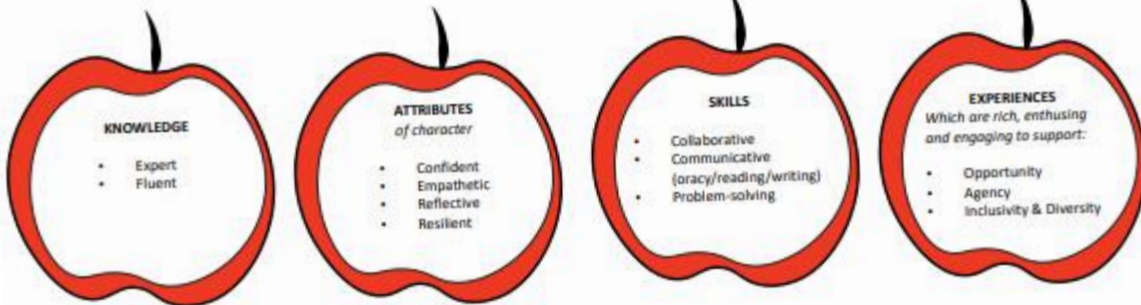
### Curriculum Underpinning Principles: KASE



Central Region Schools Trust

Founded by the RSA

Our underpinning principles outline the **K**nowledge, **S**kills and **E**xperiences that pupils are entitled to at CRST schools and the conditions in which our core **A**tttributes of character will be nurtured, as we seek to develop **exceptional learners** who can thrive in an ever-changing world.



### 10 Components of Great Teaching and Learning



### Designing Great Learning The cycle

Our recommended "Learning Model" can be described as a flexible cycle; these components are within all sequences.



# PLACES:

Trusting relationships and communication between schools and families can have a positive impact on students' achievements in school, and so it is important to ensure families feel like they are part of their child's learning journey. Involving community organisations and learning from families in the school can support design and delivery of interventions that seek to remove barriers for busy families, disadvantaged families and those seen as 'hard to reach'.

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

### Community and Partnerships

- 1 Is the school rooted in its community as a community resource, with strong knowledge of community partners, working to meet the needs of the local community collectively?
- 2 Are ALL parents viewed as highly valued partners?
- 3 Does the school ensure that family partnerships are part of school strategy, building systems to proactively involve students' families as partners in learning? [including the potentially less/not engaged families as a priority?]
- 4 Is the school flexible in understanding and removing barriers to engagement for families facing disadvantage, making use of community organisations and settings to build bridges with families who may struggle to trust schools?
- 5 Are local and wider partnerships forged to promote culture?

### Physical Environment

- 7 Does the physical environment, Inside and out, contribute to the development of culture by:
  - a Inspiring pupils, ensuring they know they are invested in (by regular improvements, changes, temporary provocations etc.?)
  - b Ensure learning spaces that have curriculum integrity?  
Promote reading, writing and oracy through intentional design?
  - c Celebrate pupils' success through display, installation and other creative means (e.g. radio etc..)?
  - d Inspire thinking about spiritual moral, social and cultural (SMSC) dimensions of life

## SHAPING AN EVEN BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR TIPTON - PUTTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT THE HEART OF GOSPEL OAK SCHOOL

This article demonstrates how purposeful use of place strengthens trusting relationships between schools, families and communities. By working alongside local organisations and listening to community voices, Gospel Oak School has designed meaningful opportunities that remove barriers to engagement and ensure families and students feel part of a shared journey.

Gospel Oak School has partnered with a dynamic coalition of local organisations and students – aptly named Tomorrow’s Leaders, led by Helen Tanner and Sarah Wilkins – to drive projects that will shape the future of Tipton.

The initiative launched in February with a forum attended by over 40 local stakeholders and the Intensive Engagement team. This event sparked meaningful discussions about key issues affecting the community. Since then, a dedicated working group has met monthly to focus on raising aspirations and strengthening community ties.

In October, the vision expanded with the creation of a 40-strong student leadership body representing Years 7 to 13. These Tomorrow’s Leaders hosted their inaugural student conference, bringing together school staff, local councillors, Sandwell Public Health representatives, the Black Country Museum, Sandwell SIPS (School Improvement Partnership Service), and the Intensive Engagement team – all united by a commitment to Tipton’s future. The day began with an inspiring keynote from the Black Country Museum, emphasising the importance of community and the simple yet powerful idea of “looking after your step.” This message set the tone for the practical activities that followed.

Students then took part in an interactive walk-to-school study, analysing routes and identifying safety concerns in key areas. The exercise included a litter pick on the Railer and Rocket Pool areas, reinforcing students’ sense of ownership and responsibility for their environment. These hands-on activities not only improved local spaces but also fostered conversations with councillors and police officers, creating a tangible example of community spirit in action. This initiative marks the beginning of a long-term commitment to collaboration, empowerment, and positive change. Together, Gospel Oak School and its partners are shaping brighter futures – one step at a time.

**STEVE BROWNLOW**  
EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL



# ECT PLACES PROJECT

As outlined in the three Ps of the Trust culture document, we strive to ensure our campus environments reflect our values and support delivery for our pupils. Our commitment to this aspect of our culture, as a Trust, led to the launch of an initiative, by Guy, to support the enhancement of, and to create inspiring and engaging places within our schools, and classrooms. The focus for this annual project is our early career stage staff, with a modest budget made available to each ECT, to think creatively about their teaching and learning spaces, and to then propose an idea to identify how this proposal would improve the daily experience for their young people.

## Example one: Abbeywood First School

Redecorating the cloakroom has made such a noticeable difference to the feel of that part of the school day. It is now calmer, cleaner and far more organised, which has really helped pupils come into class more smoothly and with less of the low-level disruption that often comes from a busy, cluttered space.

Having a clear, well-structured cloakroom has also encouraged the children to take more responsibility for their belongings and their routines. We have already seen the impact in the classroom as pupils settle more quickly and arrive more emotionally ready to learn.

What has been lovely to see is how much pupils appreciate the change. When they notice that a space has been thoughtfully improved, it sends a powerful message that we value them and care about their experience in school. A calmer cloakroom also means less crowding, fewer disagreements and a lot less stress during those busy transition times, which has really supported their wellbeing.



The redecoration is not just a short-term improvement; it is something that will benefit pupils for years to come. Future classes will enjoy a welcoming space that reflects pride in our school, clear routines that help them become more independent, and a positive daily experience that sets the right tone for learning. In many ways, it leaves behind a legacy of respect, organisation and community.

This project also fits perfectly with the Trust's guiding principles. **People:** We put pupils first by improving their safety, wellbeing and comfort, and it has helped strengthen positive relationships between staff and children. **Places:** By investing in a calm, organised and high-quality space, we are sending the message that school is somewhere our young people truly matter.

Overall, the cloakroom redecoration has been a small change with a big impact and has genuinely improved the day-to-day experience for everyone.



SHARON COOK, LIAM TURNER & CHLOE GAREY  
KS2 TEACHERS



**Example two: Ipsley CE Middle School**

**How has the initiative/project supported outcomes and pupil learning?**

The project has had a positive impact on pupil learning. The flipchart is especially useful during practical lessons in science, as it provides a space for pupils to refer to the method and safety instructions rather than being overly reliant on the teacher. This has encouraged pupils to seek answers themselves and embed the knowledge the practical requires rather than becoming over reliant on the teacher/constant reminders. It has also provided opportunities for me as the teacher to focus my efforts on those pupils who may need extra support, knowing that others can work independently whilst still having support from the information displayed on the chart. The models have really helped in allowing the pupils to visualise the information about the human body and organ systems. Rather than just pointing at a body part or seeing a vague picture on the board, the models help create an image in the pupils' mind of where the specific organ is in the body and how it interacts with other body parts. This has helped remove several misconceptions held by the pupils and therefore supporting their outcomes and learning.

**What impact has this had on pupil wellbeing and pupil-teacher relations?**

The project has helped the wellbeing of pupils as they often have something to refer to in class even when the teacher may be preoccupied helping other pupils. Previously, especially during experiments, the lab could become an overwhelming place for some, especially if they did not feel assured in themselves to carry out the task. I can use the flip chart to provide simple instructions and visual reminders that may help those overwhelmed pupils feel more confident in their work. The models always strike up a conversation whenever a new pupil enters the classroom. They are immediately drawn to them and have many questions about the different parts. The conversation that follows is a great way to build relationships with the pupils and make them feel more comfortable in the classroom and with myself as the teacher.



**What legacy has this provided for young people?**

I hope that the project has helped spike pupils' interest in scientific topics and encourage them to follow up on their interests and learn more about the things we cover in class and what they have seen on the models and flipcharts. I also think that by making the classroom a more interesting place to be in, the pupils will have a brighter outlook on science as a subject and see it more positively.



**How has this supported practice?**

Thanks to the models and the interest pupils show in them, I have managed to build very strong relationships with the pupils in my classes. This has really helped with my behaviour management and the overall feeling pupils have when working in science. I feel more assured in being able to identify and get rid of misconceptions, and the flipchart gives me more time to provide additional support to those pupils who need it most. In turn, I hope this allows all pupils to have a deeper interest in science, view it more positively, and reach the outcomes they are targeted to achieve.

**DARRAGH SHEEHAN**  
ECT2 SCIENCE TEACHER

As an initiative, we are immensely proud of the achievements of our colleagues, and to how they have 'crafted' places which inspire and engage our young learners.

**TERESA WILSON**  
TRUST LEAD FOR ITE AND EARLY CAREERS

# Part Three: Provision & Delivery Priorities





Provision

Priorities

Deliberate and intentional enrichment

Deliberate and explicit development of pupil's attributes of character

Pupil Leadership / service / agency

Social, emotional and academic inclusion for ALL

Irresistible Curriculum Teaching & Learning  
Less Structured/ Unstructured Time  
Pastoral Excellence

Oracy development, where contributions are valued/matter, and focus on lexical level development

Transition

Deliberate friendship development, fostering peer support, Ability to keep + make friends/resolve conflict

Careers/Futures

Literacy Development - inclusive reading strategies, and writer confidence development

# PROVISION:

## Irresistible Curriculum Teaching & Learning

Children spend most of their day in the formal curriculum. Their experience can seriously enhance a sense of belonging (or indeed do the opposite!). Interest, enjoyment, relationships, choices and feedback all have a part to play in enhancing a sense of belonging.

### QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Is the curriculum broad, balanced, and inclusive of pupils' personal values, interests, and goals?
- 2 Does it effectively balance knowledge acquisition with skills development?
- 3 Is teacher subject expertise strong so that pupils feel secure in what is being taught?
- 4 Is there space in required knowledge and content delivery to enable pupil-teacher relationship development?
- 5 Are pupils given opportunities to make choices in their learning and contribute to curriculum development?
- 6 Does teaching methodology enable enjoyment, collaboration and building of empathy?
- 7 Does the curriculum allow time for meaningful pupil-teacher relationships and student choice in learning?
- 8 Are teaching methods engaging, collaborative, and supportive of empathy and mental, emotional and social well-being?
- 9 Is teacher feedback/marking of pupil work provided regularly enough to foster connection and growth?
- 10 Are learning environments well-resourced and aligned with curriculum goals (curriculum integrity)?
- 11 How does the curriculum reflect and affirm diverse identities (e.g., race, culture, gender, language)?

# Why Having An Irresistible Curriculum Matters

An irresistible curriculum is one that captivates students, fostering a deep sense of belonging and engagement. It goes beyond delivering knowledge, aiming to create an environment where children feel valued, inspired, and connected. Integral to this approach is the recognition that interest, enjoyment, relationships, choices, and feedback are pivotal in shaping a child's experience within the formal curriculum.

At Central Region Schools Trust we place great emphasis on the importance of Knowledge, Attributes, Skills, and Experiences (KASE) in curriculum design. These components are seen as entitlements for every pupil, ensuring a holistic approach to education. By integrating KASE, we endeavour to craft a curriculum that not only meets academic goals but also nurtures personal growth and social development. For instance, fostering curiosity and critical thinking (Knowledge), resilience and empathy (Attributes), collaboration and problem-solving (Skills), and meaningful, enriching activities (Experiences) ensures that every child feels included and empowered.

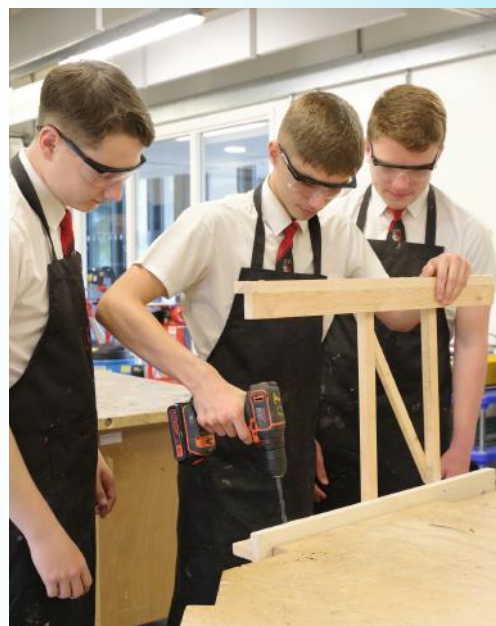
The formal curriculum, where children spend much of their day across our schools, plays a pivotal role in shaping their sense of belonging. When lessons are designed to spark interest and enjoyment, students feel more connected to their learning environment. For example, incorporating real-world applications, creative problem-solving, and opportunities for exploration can make learning irresistible. This approach nurtures curiosity and builds confidence, encouraging students to see themselves as active participants in their education.

**A sense of belonging is cultivated when children see themselves reflected in their learning and feel their contributions are valued. Interest and enjoyment are key drivers here – when lessons are engaging and relevant, students are more likely to connect with the material.**

Relationships are equally vital. Positive interactions with teachers and peers create a supportive atmosphere where students feel valued and respected. Feedback, when constructive and personalised, reinforces this sense of belonging by showing students that their efforts are recognised and their growth matters.

The KASE framework further enhances this by balancing academic knowledge with the development of essential attributes like resilience and empathy, practical skills, and enriching experiences. By offering choices within the curriculum, students can pursue their interests, fostering autonomy and ownership of their learning journey.

Ultimately, an irresistible curriculum transforms education into a dynamic, inclusive experience, ensuring every child feels they belong, are capable, are inspired to achieve their potential and can navigate their everchanging world.



# PROVISION:

## Unstructured (or less structured) Times

The opportunity to utilise unstructured times, before school, break and lunchtime, and after school, to foster connection and belonging is high. The careful design and use of activities, leadership responsibilities, social spaces and food can all be used to foster belonging based on research. Lesson changeovers and careless unstructured times present a significant barrier to belonging

### QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Is there a deliberate effective approach to managing unstructured times, in a way that promotes safety, positive behaviour and respectful interactions, with staff visible, approachable and proactive in supporting pupils?
- 2 Are their inclusive spaces and enrichment activities designed to cater for different interests needs, and personalities? Are there varied resources and zones (quite areas, active play, creative corners?)
- 3 Is the role of food (including choice, quality, quantity, nutrition and environment) carefully considered to support connection, sense of 'family'
- 4 How well developed is the physical environment to intentionally support quality, encourage positive interaction, creativity and calm?
- 5 Are unstructured times used appropriately to develop social skills?
- 6 How is agency utilised to support unstructured time, promoting connection and kindness?
- 7 Are pupils ideas and feedback used to improve the experience of unstructured times?

# The Importance of Less Structured Times in Schools to Support Participation and a Sense of Belonging

In schools, the rhythm of the day is shaped not only by lessons but also by the spaces in between. Unstructured times - before school, during breaks, lunchtimes, and after school - hold immense potential for fostering connection and belonging among pupils. These moments, often overlooked, can be powerful opportunities for young people to build friendships, strengthen peer networks, join in with enrichment activities and feel part of a wider community.

Reducing unstructured time altogether may seem like a solution, but it risks removing valuable opportunities for social growth. The challenge lies not in eliminating these periods but in reshaping them. Schools must balance structure with freedom, ensuring that pupils have spaces to connect while maintaining a supportive framework. Staff presence, planned activities, and thoughtful deliberate scheduling can make all the difference.



When schools intentionally design these periods, they can become safe and inclusive environments where pupils interact freely, share experiences, and develop social confidence. A welcoming breakfast club, a supervised playground, or after-school activities can transform messy 'gaps' for students to navigate into meaningful encounters. Such initiatives can encourage collaboration, empathy, and resilience, all of which contribute to a stronger sense of belonging and are key to our attributes of character work.

However, the reality in many schools is that lesson changeovers and poorly managed unstructured times can present significant barriers. Crowded corridors, rushed transitions, and unsupervised spaces often lead to feelings of isolation or even conflict. Instead of nurturing connection, these moments can heighten anxiety and disengagement. For pupils already struggling to find their place, careless handling of unstructured time reinforces exclusion rather than alleviating it.

Examples of this have been seen in our culture exploration days which we conducted with John Tomsett throughout 2023 and 2024.



From Oldbury Park and Sutton Park where senior leaders went out of the school into the roads where parents dropped off to welcome families to Arrow vale High welcoming pupils, managing lates and ensuring a safe tutor group space for pupils who found school difficult; we saw how the beginning of the day was not left to chance. The large site at Gospel Oak is managed by all senior staff and key pastoral staff being on the gates at the edge of a lengthy drive to welcome and the precision of the duty rota is managed by a senior Vice-Principal.

The principal is a presence in all the schools on the gate and in the playground at the start of the day. Holyhead run a highly successful breakfast club open to all and Church Hill have transformed their work on breakfast clubs with rising numbers.

In our larger schools, there is significant staff presence at break and lunch times (with senior staff in hi-vis jackets so pupils can see them clearly) and this has enabled large spaces to feel safe and 'managed' whilst still enabling students the freedom to chat and socialise.

Libraries are well utilised for pupils who may want a quieter space to sit and chat whereas Holyhead run a board game club where peers and staff play together. Designated spaces for ball games so pupils aren't dodging balls in one shared space also help and Church Hill have utilised sports coaches for lunchtime. Play leaders, and in Sutton Park lead pupil ambassadors, support with equipment and playing with each other.

**Ultimately, belonging is not built solely in the classroom. It thrives in the informal exchanges, the shared laughter at lunch, relationships between staff and pupils and the quiet conversations before lessons begin.**





For this reason, it is important that we as school leaders treat the management of unstructured time as a strategic priority rather than an afterthought. Connection and belonging cannot be left to chance. As leaders we should regularly audit these moments; check the systems in place, QA how unstructured times look, look at metrics and indicators of this work including number of incidents logged/pupil voice and ensure unstructured times are built into pupil tracking activities.

We need to strive to ensure that every corridor, playground, and lunch hall is designed to support inclusion - we aren't there yet but it is a key part of our work and the PD/Pastoral leaders' briefs. When leaders actively monitor and refine this work, they send a powerful message: that every pupil's sense of belonging matters, every day, in every space. This vigilance transforms schools from places of compliance and instruction into communities of care, where belonging is safeguarded and strengthened by deliberate leadership.

School leaders have worked hard on enrichment opportunities and tracking, breakfast clubs, intentional spaces and ensuring staff are visible in transitions. We know all of this supports a school feeling safe and building relationships and we know we need to continue to work at this and focus on it. We know we can do more on this with lunchtimes in large settings in particular- how shared food and discussion around the table can be privileged, supported and elevated is a key next step in many of our settings.

The enrichment tracker is enabling us to be more deliberate and precise in what we put on and how we target pupils and we know this work has to be ongoing and will make a real difference to the children we serve.

**SAM MCMONAGLE**  
DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

# PROVISION:

## Pastoral Excellence (including family inclusivity)

Pastoral excellence creates a safe, supportive environment where every pupil feels valued and understood. By fostering strong relationships with pupils and their families, promoting wellbeing, and responding to individual needs, it strengthens pupils' sense of belonging and connection to their school community, enabling them to thrive both personally and academically.

### QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

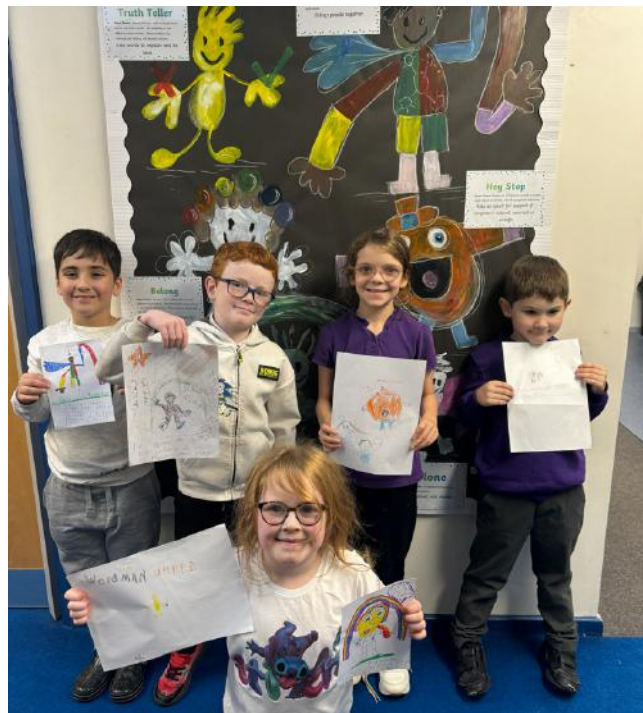
- 1 Is there a consistent, school-wide approach to fostering a positive, inclusive, and emotionally safe environment for all pupils?
- 2 Is pastoral care a high priority in staff development, ensuring ALL staff model kindness, empathy, and respect?
- 3 Do all staff understand the vital nature of this work, and what 'great' looks like?
- 4 Do pupils experience staff as caring, fair, and approachable for personal support?
- 5 Are school routines and activities designed to foster attachment, connection, and a sense of belonging?
- 6 Is there a structured approach to developing friendships, peer mentoring, and conflict resolution skills?
- 7 Are transitions tailored to individual pupil needs with sustained support? (see 'transition')
- 8 Are relationships and communication with families effective and deliberately inclusive, especially for those facing disadvantage?
- 9 Is behaviour management supportive and focused on developing self-regulation and metacognitive skills?
- 10 How does the PSHE curriculum contribute to emotional and social development?

# PASTORAL EXCELLENCE: ENSURING A SENSE OF BELONGING

Pastoral excellence isn't just about kindness in the corridors. It is a deliberate, evidence-informed practice that underpins every lesson, every assessment, and ultimately every pupil's potential to succeed. In Central Region Schools Trust, pastoral care is woven into our curriculum, through our emphasis on oracy and metacognition, and our belief that every child deserves expert teaching, rich experiences, and the confidence to have their say.



Pastoral excellence at CRST schools operates based on the conviction that care and curriculum reinforce one another, as identified on the following pages. Our KASE framework (Knowledge, Attributes, Skills, and Experiences) provides the foundation: deep subject mastery (Knowledge), resilient dispositions (Attributes), critical thinking and communication (Skills), and authentic, culturally enriched encounters (Experiences). When pastoral care is designed as pedagogy, relationships become the engine of learning.



In conclusion pastoral excellence is the foundation of a successful education. When care is designed as deliberate pedagogy – rooted in the KASE framework, strengthened by CPD, and enacted through every interaction – every pupil not only learns more deeply but becomes more confident, resilient, and ready to contribute to their communities.



# PASTORAL EXCELLENCE: ENSURING A SENSE OF BELONGING

## The CRST approach to pastoral care:

- ✓ Agency, safety, positivity, inclusion, respect and equity are the drivers for optimal culture creation. Each of these elements are fundamental to ensuring pastoral excellence and none of them stand alone. Deliberate activities rooted in these areas and the use of explicit language helps the children to recognise the importance of each aspect.
- ✓ Enrichment guarantee: Every pupil gains access to visits, activities, and texts that broaden horizons and connect learning to real-world contexts. Pastoral work ensures these opportunities are inclusive and accessible to all.
- ✓ Proactive inclusion: Pastoral excellence goes hand in hand with both inclusion and safeguarding. Tailored interactions and curriculum access, SEND provision, and mental-health support are embedded in daily practice, not siloed in a corner of the school.
- ✓ Professional Development Institute: Teachers grow as researchers and reflective practitioners. Through bespoke CPD and reflective teacher programmes, staff continuously refine how care and teaching intersect.

## What pastoral excellence looks like in practice:

- ✓ Strong, visible relationships: Every pupil has trusted adults they can turn to, and staff view relationship-building as essential pedagogy, not an add-on.
- ✓ Clear routines and fair expectations: Consistent behaviour routines support learning. Staff model positive reinforcement and restorative approaches that preserve dignity and promote growth.
- ✓ Proactive wellbeing offers: Regular wellbeing check-ins, pupil mentoring, and targeted interventions are woven into the timetable, with scalable supports for those who need them.
- ✓ Voice and agency: Pupils contribute to decisions about school culture, curriculum access, and enrichment, ensuring their experiences shape the learning environment.
- ✓ Family and community partnerships: Parents and carers are informed, involved, and supported to reinforce wellbeing and learning at home.
- ✓ Pupils experience a secure base from which to take intellectual risks.
- ✓ Interventions are timely, personalised, and embedded in the curriculum, not added on.
- ✓ Attendance, engagement, and resilience rise alongside attainment as pupils see their identities reflected in learning.





**Practical actions for classrooms:**  
Start each day with a wellbeing check-in during form times.



Build in low-stakes talk routines (think-pair-share etc) to develop oracy and metacognition.



Use a simple, restorative approach to behaviour: acknowledge the disruption, discuss impact, co-create a next step.



Create quick safety nets: clear pathways to SEND support, mental-health resources, and online-safety guidance where needed.



**'Our pastoral offer hinges on the genuine belief that every child is special.'**

Sarah Callanan - Executive Principal St Stephens and Arrow Valley First Schools.

**'Pastoral excellence is creating a wholeheartedly nurturing and supportive environment in order for children to thrive.'**

Dean Salisbury – Primary School Improvement.

**'The mantra is – every pupil, every day – no exception.'**

Sarah Allen – Principal Oak Hill First School.

**'Pastoral excellence for me is enabling pupils to thrive and be their best selves in all aspects of school and home life, through love and kindness.'**

Ange Saul – Principal Ipsley Middle School.



ANGELA CRAWLEY  
TRUST PRIMARY EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL

# PRIORITY:

## Literacy Development Inclusive reading strategies, and writer confidence development

Development of meaningful literacy experiences support pupils to development confidence and connection.

### Reading

Proficiency and a genuine love of reading open doors to knowledge, imagination, and shared experiences. When pupils read confidently and with enjoyment, they connect with ideas, cultures, and communities, fostering a deeper sense of belonging within their school and the wider world.

### Writing

High-quality writing provision empowers pupils to express themselves clearly and creatively, building confidence and pride in their work. By teaching writing as a tool for communication and self-expression, schools help pupils feel heard and understood, deepening their sense of belonging and connection to the learning community.

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Is there a clearly defined, whole school approach to teaching reading and writing?
- 2 Do the texts and writing opportunities reflect the diverse identities, cultures and experiences of the school and wider community?
- 3 How are the school environment and routines used to promote and celebrate reading and writing?
- 4 Does the school approach to literacy emphasise student voice, choice, and identity in reading and writing?
- 5 Is use of reading and writing data fit for purpose, sophisticated, enabling analysis, intervention and the tracking of improvement?

### Reading specific questions:

- \* How confident are subject leaders (and then same for classroom teachers) in supporting struggling readers?
- \* Is there a culture of reading and text discussion at the heart of the school day?
- \* Is there an agreed methodology for collaboration/peer-support in reading, including: reciprocal reading, echo reading and choral reading?
- \* Is there a strong reading culture where pupils read and talk about books?

### Writing specific questions:

- \* Are pupils self-perception and attributes to writing explicitly delivered, including collaborative strategies (writing pairs/teams)?
- \* Do pupils write regularly so others can read it, such as display, presenting to other classes, and sending copies to parents/carers? Does the school approach to writing encourage authentic writing (e.g., personal narratives, blogs)?

## INCLUSIVE LITERACY: BUILDING CONFIDENCE, CONNECTION AND BELONGING THROUGH READING AND WRITING

At Central Region Schools Trust, inclusive literacy development sits at the heart of our mission to strengthen confidence, connection and belonging for every learner. Meaningful literacy experiences do more than build technical skill: they shape identity, voice and participation in the wider school community.

Our reading approach prioritises strategies that ensure all pupils feel represented and supported. This includes carefully curated, culturally responsive texts; structured reading routines that promote fluency; and dialogic practices that encourage every student to contribute. When pupils recognise themselves and others in what they read, understanding deepens – and so does confidence. These inclusive reading experiences also foster social connection, helping students feel anchored in a community of shared stories.

Writing, too, is a powerful tool for belonging. When pupils write for authentic audiences – peers, families, community partners – their work gains purpose and visibility. Celebration of writing through showcases, digital publication, and classroom displays signals that every voice matters. Structured support, such as modelling, success criteria and guided drafting, ensures all pupils can participate fully. Over time, students begin to view themselves as capable writers with ideas worth sharing.

By embedding inclusive reading strategies and purposeful writing opportunities, we create literacy ecosystems where confidence grows, belonging strengthens, and every learner feels seen.

**HAYLEY FARNELL**  
SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LEAD FOR ENGLISH



# PRIORITY:

## Oracy Development

Where contributions are valued/matter, and focus on lexical level development

Developing oracy empowers pupils to express themselves confidently and listen actively, creating meaningful dialogue within the classroom and wider school community. Knowing what they say is valued matters to them. The shared language experience fosters mutual respect, inclusion, and understanding, enhancing pupils' sense of belonging and connection to others.

### QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Is there a clearly defined, whole-school approach to oracy (including lexicon development and accountable talk) that is valued and consistently implemented?
- 2 How is oracy scaffolded and promoted in classrooms and other framework ingredients through talk-rich strategies (modelling, sharing process thinking, expert questioning and explanation)?
- 3 Is there an expectation of accountable talk and development of pupil sense that their contributions in class matter, and are valued?
- 4 What training and support do all staff (including teachers and TAs) receive to develop and facilitate high-quality pupil talk?
- 5 How does the physical and social environment (e.g. seating, shared spaces) encourage meaningful talk and interaction?
- 6 How does oracy contribute to pupils feeling that their voice matters in shaping school life?

## FINDING THEIR VOICE: WHY ORACY BUILDS BELONGING IN OUR SCHOOLS

Teaching students to speak and listen with confidence isn't just about academic success - it's the foundation for inclusion, identity, and thriving communities across our schools.

Oracy – the confident speaking and attentive listening that facilitate meaningful dialogue – plays a central role in fostering belonging across CRST school communities. When spoken language is deliberately taught and nurtured, it does wonders for students' sense of inclusion, identity, and connection to peers and teachers.

A compelling evidence review in 2023 by the English-Speaking Union highlights oracy's multifaceted benefits, including stronger relationships and improved personal outcomes for all students – suggesting that a lack of spoken engagement can contribute to isolation and disengagement. When every young person is given the tools to express themselves – whether sharing ideas in class or exploring complex concepts with peers – they recognise their voice matters. That recognition builds confidence and a feeling of belonging.

Equally compelling is the evidence put forward by the Education Endowment Foundation, which underscores the academic and social value of structured classroom talk. At Voice21, who Gospel Oak School worked with on a Sandwell based project, they highlight that well-designed oracy programmes can accelerate pupil progress by approximately six months annually, while also deepening cognitive engagement through talk across all subject areas. But oracy's power extends beyond academics – by encouraging students to talk about their experiences and listen to others, schools build emotional safety and connectedness. The result is a community where students understand each other and feel part of something bigger.

In our delivery of the framework, embedding oracy means weaving it into all provision and delivery priorities, and ensuring our staff understand their role in oracy and lexical level development.

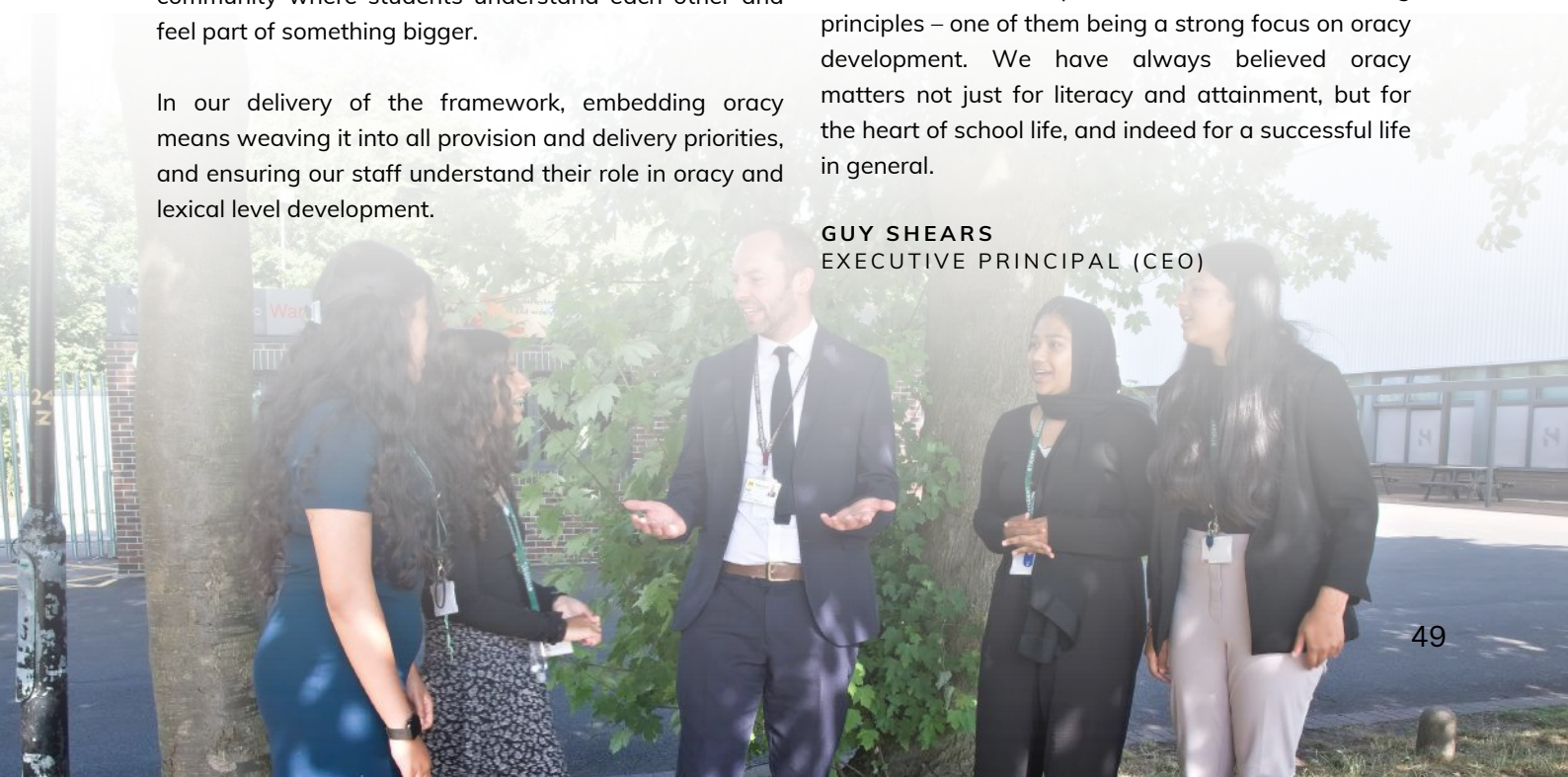
Whether through structured debates, peer-led discussions, or reflective storytelling, our schools proactively champion student voice. There is strong research that shows that if pupils feel their voice matters, and is listened to, this in its own right deepens their feeling of psychological safety. It is a vital aspect of Our Distinctive Culture strategy delivery. Clearly the essential delivery element is through our 'people' but our also recognises the role of our 'places' in our strategy:

**‘Developing pupils’ communication and language oracy skills, are fundamental to leading a fulfilling life. Spaces that promote dialogue, from careful resourcing in early years to quality seminar spaces for student collaboration in preparation for university and employment, can be found throughout our schools.’**

Consistent strong practice does more than develop communication, it constructs inclusive environments where belonging isn't the exception, but the norm.

The National Curriculum and Assessment Review, led by Professor Becky Francis, highlights the importance of oracy, alongside reading and writing. Becky was Director of Education at The RSA at the point of our foundation, and helped us create our founding principles – one of them being a strong focus on oracy development. We have always believed oracy matters not just for literacy and attainment, but for the heart of school life, and indeed for a successful life in general.

**GUY SHEARS**  
EXECUTIVE PRINCIPAL (CEO)



# PRIORITY:

## Deliberate Friendship Development

Fostering peer support, including 'belonging' interventions. Ability to keep & make friends/resolve conflict.

By supporting positive, trusting relationships within school communities, schools can become environments where staff and young people feel a sense of belonging. These relationships form a foundation for support that meets young people's needs, leading to improved learning, attendance and behavioural outcomes.

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Is there a very carefully designed enrichment offer, before, during and after school, as well as weekends/evenings/holidays based on pupil need (inc., but not exclusively understanding pupil desire)?
- 2 Are pupils exposed to a wide range of experiences to broaden their horizons and affirm their identities?
- 3 Does the school develop enrichment clusters that provide a structure for time-bound projects where students work together to develop skills and build positive relationships?
- 4 Are unstructured times utilised to best effect to enrich pupil experience?
- 5 Is uptake carefully tracked, impact monitored with responsive programme design adjustment?
- 6 Where appropriate are programmes co-designed and/or pupil led?
- 7 What steps are taken to mitigate/remove barriers to access/participation (cost, timing, transport, confidence)?

# BUILDING BELONGING: A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO DELIBERATE FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT – SKILL BUILDING USING FRIENDSHIP SUPER HEROES AT OAK HILL

The evidence is compelling: pupils who feel they belong at school achieve better academically, attend more regularly, and engage more positively with learning.

## From 'Be Kind' to Deliberate Development

Deliberate friendship development is about moving beyond hoping friendships will naturally occur, to actively and systematically teaching, facilitating, and supporting the skills and opportunities children need to form meaningful peer relationships. Just as we wouldn't expect a child with dyslexia to suddenly spell correctly without explicit teaching, scaffolding, and appropriate support, we can't expect children to navigate complex social relationships and just 'be kind' without the same systematic approach.

## Our Friendship Superheroes Approach

The children at Oak Hill have created a group of Friendship Superheroes. Developed using the children's own creative and imaginative designs, they embody values and traits that help us all develop kindness, resilience, communication and inclusion. A project genuinely led by pupil voice, agency and ownership.

Children and staff use these characters to form narratives and exemplify behaviours we value. Through the superheroes, we teach how to initiate conversations, join groups, resolve disagreements, and maintain friendships. Abstract social concepts become tangible through character personas, enabling children to visualise and remember social strategies more easily.

Discussing character behaviours feels less threatening than discussing personal struggles. Children can explore conflict through scenarios, apply taught strategies and reduce shame and defensiveness. Complex social situations are broken down into accessible terminology, so children can identify and discuss social challenges without feeling criticised.

Most importantly, they're fun - children learn to "defeat" social problems rather than feel defeated by them, helping them become happier, healthier and experience the sense of belonging we want for all our young people.

**JAYNE WINTERBOURN**  
SEND COORDINATOR AT OAK HILL FIRST SCHOOL



# PROVISION:

## Transition

Successful support around the transition from primary to secondary school involves developing the skills that young people will need to thrive in their new school environment, particularly academic preparedness and social-emotional skills. Interventions that support young people to build positive relationships with their new peers can be an effective way to build a sense of belonging and help students feel settled.

### QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Does the school plan structured programmes with local primary schools, allowing support to continue as students begin secondary school. Does the school involve families in this, ensuring they have access to information that will help them support children at home?
- 2 Do leaders focus on building young people's sense of belonging in their new school, thinking particularly about the role of school staff in facilitating positive peer relationships and developing students' social-emotional skills?
- 3 Do leaders understand that the data shows that transition points (every year group, as well as major transitions) are hard particularly for more disadvantaged pupils and for boys from more challenging backgrounds?
- 4 What deliberate work occurs in primary to support transitions between key stages?
- 5 What deliberate work occurs to support transition to secondary over an extended period?
- 6 Is every year group transition understood as a potential barrier to feeling connected, and are the issues sought out and mitigated?
- 7 What mentoring, role modelling and early identification/intervention takes place to support pupils with transitions, and especially the most vulnerable?
- 8 What data is used to support transition and identify risks enabling proactive work by the school?
- 9 Is transition seen as a bridge to belonging?
- 10 Is there a communication strategy to ensure positive promotion of culture and opportunity?
- 11 Are pupils' views and concerns sought and acted upon, including learnings from previous transition?

# TRANSITION

In my experience, transitions are more than just moving schools; they are launches into a different learning ecology. When primary pupils step into secondary school, their success hinges on two intertwined foundations: academic preparedness and social-emotional readiness. Within our Trust we strive to equip our young learners with both, therefore meaning the new environment stops feeling like a leap and begins to feel like a natural next step.

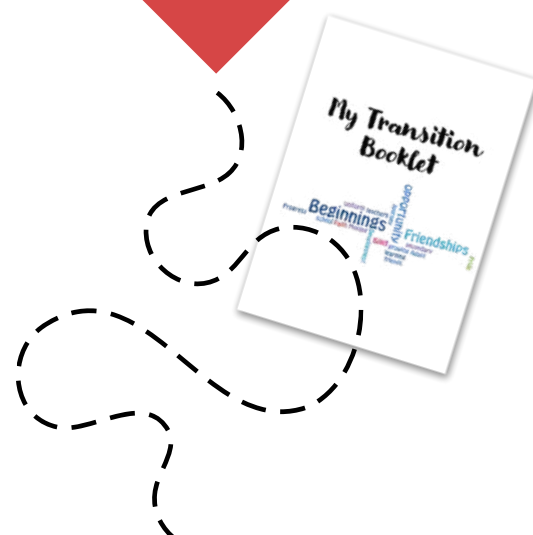
Academically, schools should scaffold knowledge and skills so pupils can meet the new demands of secondary school with confidence. Within the Central Region Schools Trust, this begins very early on within a pupils' educational journey, with visits to secondary schools common even as early as Year One within our schools. A knowledge-rich transition curriculum, rooted in the KASE framework, foregrounds essential concepts and vocabulary from key subjects, while embedding retrieval practice and study habits. Rosenshine's principles – clear modelling, guided practice, and regular checks for understanding – remain invaluable during this time of change.

Social-emotional learning is equally vital. Building positive relationships with new peers reduces anxiety and fosters belonging. Structured opportunities when attending transition days such as buddying with a Year 7 pupil, rotational small-group challenges and collaborative projects, provide early, low-stakes social practice. School-wide routines that model respectful dialogue, provide emotional support and give peer feedback strengthen confident interaction. The CRST Enrichment Guarantee is used to create shared experiences; with visits and performances to main feeder secondary schools regularly arranged so pupils recognise people and places before September and feel welcome when they arrive.

For our SEN/Vulnerable pupils, interventions are incredibly inclusive. Extra visits in small groups, a staged plan for induction week and an initial term of targeted social coaching and cross-phase mentoring, ensures all pupils feel seen and supported. On top of this, our families are involved through clear communication, transition evenings, and opportunities to contribute to a transition plan. When students feel known, heard and capable, they settle quickly, engage deeply, and thrive. All of this is on top of a detailed handover conversation between our Teachers, SENCO's and the secondary Year Seven Leads, mean that this almighty leap is supported by many mini steps.

A successful transition is not a single event but a carefully designed journey that blends knowledge, relationships and agency. That in my opinion, is how learners flourish when moving from primary to secondary today.

**DEAN SALISBURY**  
CRST SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LEAD (PRIMARY)



# PROVISION:

## Social, emotional and academic inclusion for ALL

When schools actively develop social, emotional, and academic inclusion for all pupils, they create an environment where every child feels respected, supported, and able to succeed. This inclusive approach nurtures positive relationships, reduces barriers to learning, and ensures that every pupil feels a genuine sense of belonging and connection to their school community.

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 How is inclusion defined and communicated with staff, pupils and families?
- 2 Does the school seek to truly support all children of appropriate age in the immediate community to join the school, attend and succeed?
- 3 Is there a programme of support for pupil emotional stability from universal to targeted? (mental health)
- 4 Is there a clear professional learning programme for inclusive practice for all staff?
- 5 Are social and emotional learning skills explicitly taught across the culture ingredients, and embedded in everyday practice and interactions across the ingredients?
- 6 Are social, emotional and academic learning skills explicitly taught across the culture ingredients, and embedded in everyday practice and interactions across the framework priorities?
- 7 Is quantitative and qualitative data captured and used on pupils' sense of belonging, esteem, confidence, with regular opportunities for pupils to share experiences and influence school culture?
- 8 Are all aspects of this framework designed to be truly inclusive, with barriers to feeling included actively tackled?

# Social, Emotional, and Academic Inclusion for ALL in EYFS

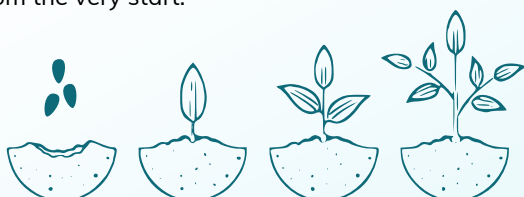
In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), inclusion is more than a principle – it is a practice that ensures every child feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive. Social, emotional, and academic inclusion must work hand in hand to create a nurturing environment where diversity is celebrated and individual needs are met.

## Our CRST Vision reflects this:

- ★ In our CRST schools we offer **engaging** Early Years **environments** where children will develop **curiosity, independence** and a **love of learning** through purposeful play.
- ★ Adults enable children to learn through **intentional interactions**, and support children to become **skilful communicators**.
- ★ Our **nurturing** approach builds **positive relationships** creating a **sense of belonging, security** and **resilience**, ready for the next stage in their learning.



**Social inclusion** begins with fostering a sense of belonging. This starts before the children even start at school, with Teddy Bear's Picnics, Forest School Sessions, Open Days and visits home being some of the ways in which the relationship between home and school are fostered. Children need opportunities to build friendships, collaborate, and engage in play that respects their varied cultural backgrounds and abilities. Inclusive settings encourage empathy and respect, not just token gestures, helping children develop positive relationships from the very start.



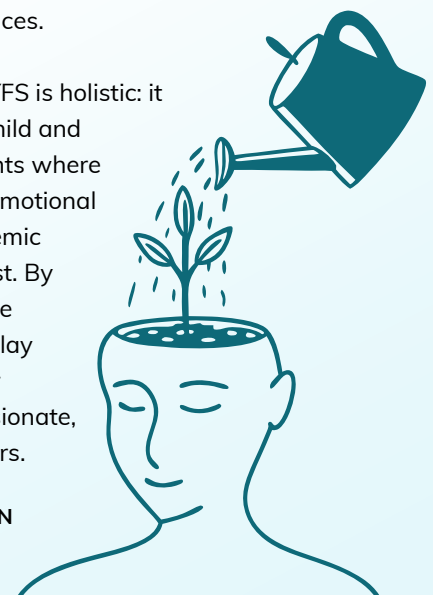
Emotional inclusion is equally vital. Young learners require safe spaces where their feelings are acknowledged and validated. Practitioners play a key role in modelling emotional literacy, teaching children to express themselves and manage emotions constructively. Children are explicitly taught how to identify and name emotions in every setting. This foundation supports resilience and well-being, which are essential for lifelong learning.



Academic inclusion ensures that every child can access the curriculum at their level. Differentiated teaching, adaptive resources, and targeted interventions allow all learners – including those with additional needs – to progress confidently. High expectations combined with tailored support help close gaps and promote equity. Ongoing professional development for all staff ensures that all practitioners are up to date with the latest research and practices.

True inclusion in EYFS is holistic: it values the whole child and creates environments where social interaction, emotional security, and academic achievement coexist. By embedding inclusive practices early, we lay the groundwork for confident, compassionate, and capable learners.

**CAROL NEWMAN**  
DIRECTOR FOR  
EARLY YEARS



# PROVISION:

## Deliberate and Intentional Enrichment

Clubs and activities that take place outside of usual lessons provide spaces for young people to follow their interests, create positive change in the community, develop skills and strengthen relationships with their peers and teachers. These benefits can be linked to increased engagement in learning and improved educational outcomes, both in school and as young people step out into the world of work.

### QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Is there a very carefully designed enrichment offer, before, during and after school, as well as weekends/evenings/holidays based on pupil need (inc., but not exclusively understanding pupil desire)?
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# Enrichment at Oldbury Park

Our **enrichment guarantee** is a vital framework for our schools to deliver as part of fulfilling our mission. This article illustrates how deliberate and intentional enrichment creates spaces where all pupils can thrive. Through thoughtfully designed after-school provision, it shows how targeted, inclusive activities strengthen relationships, nurture skills, and foster belonging – directly reflecting the framework’s commitment to meaningful enrichment beyond the classroom.

The bell at the end of the day rang with its usual finality, a sound that typically signalled a rush for the exit. But for a select group of Year 3 and 4 children, it has been an invitation to a different rhythm entirely. They converged on Oldbury Park Primary School’s newly furnished Art Studio, a converted classroom that smelled distinctly of paint, PVA glue and possibility, the home of after-school Clay Club.

Not only seen as enrichment, this was an elective sanctuary for many. Staff greeted them as they shrugged off heavy backpacks, the atmosphere shifted to relaxed anticipation, creativity and meditative focus, as they took their places in this designated space, each receiving a fresh, cool wedge of grey clay.

The club has been a melting pot of school life: those children who needed a creative release, those who wanted to spend time with friends or try something new. What was less immediately visible was how intentionally accessible the club had become for all our learners. Due to deliberate outreach and a targeted approach, a disproportionate number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds found inclusion here. In this room, the socio-economic pressures that possibly invade their lives at other times, dissolve here, with no segregation - only unique creations and experiences.



The primary lesson of the Clay Club wasn't about creating the perfect slip or removing every crack; it was about resilience. A pot would collapse, a handle would snap off, or a vision would fail to translate from mind to form. The children were taught to wedge the clay back into a lump; a powerful, tactile metaphor for starting over.



In this room, the noise of social prejudice and anxieties faded into the background, replaced by the soft slapping of clay being flattened and the quiet scrape of shaping tools. Friendships formed over shared frustrations with acrylic paint and the mutual admiration of a particularly good coil pot. When they left 45 minutes later, hands dirty and minds clear, they carried more than just their breath taking sculptures; they carried a sense of calm and accomplishment.

**SARAH DAVIES**  
DEPUTY HEAD OF OLDBURY PARK  
PRIMARY SCHOOL



# PROVISION:

## Deliberate and explicit development of Pupils' Attribute of Character

Where school leaders deliberately and explicitly develops pupils' character attributes—such as respect, confidence and resilience, and empathy—through curriculum, daily routines, and shared language, they create a culture where pupils feel connected, valued, and part of the community. [Confidence and resilience are the 2 key attributes for determining future success for economically disadvantaged pupils.]

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 What key character attributes (e.g. resilience (inc. grit), confidence) does the school aim to develop, and are they embedded in the school's core values and culture?
- 2 What deliberate actions, programmes, or practices are in place to help pupils build these attributes?
- 3 How does the school link character development to pupils' future goals, aspirations, and career/futures readiness? Is there a strong programme of building future aspirations and goals in all ingredients (ref futures/careers)?
- 4 Do pupils understand the importance of these attributes? Do pupils actively seek to develop the attributes identified by the school, knowing why they are important for future success?
- 5 What tools or systems are used to track pupils' sense of belonging, self-esteem, confidence, and resilience over time?

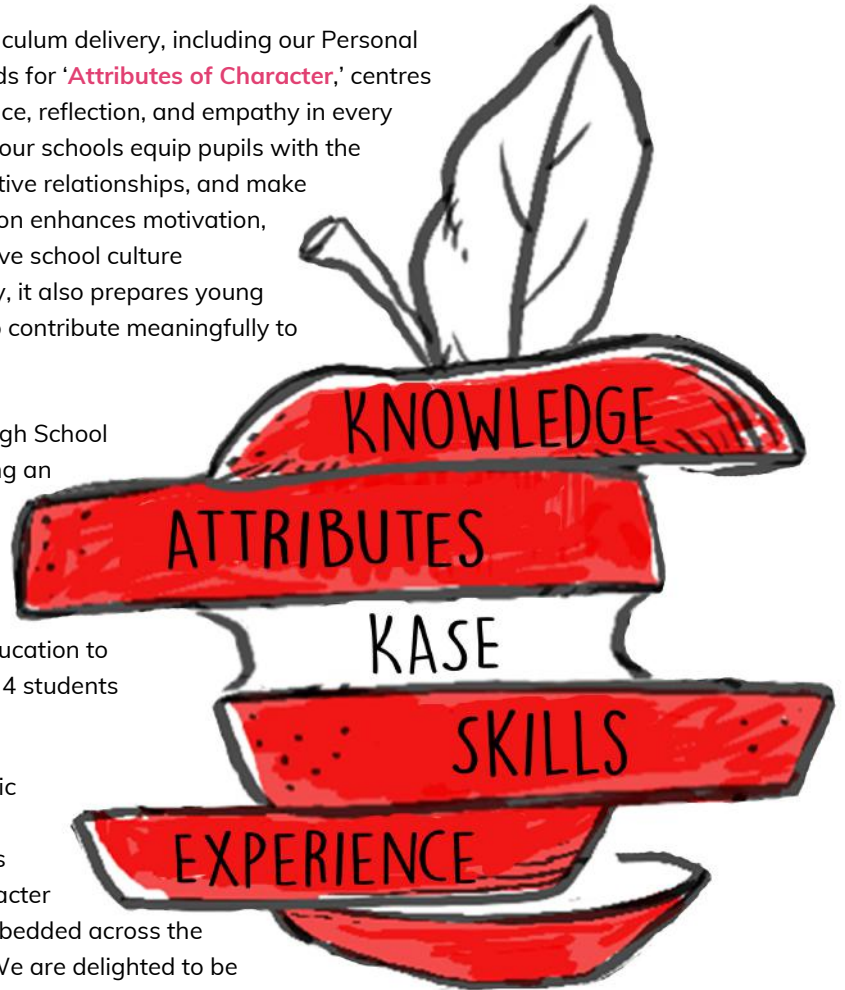
# Deliberate and explicit development of pupil's attributes of character

Our Trust principles of KASE underpin our curriculum delivery, including our Personal Development programmes. The **A**, which stands for '**Attributes of Character**,' centres around our work to nurture resilience, confidence, reflection, and empathy in every student. By intentionally teaching these traits, our schools equip pupils with the skills needed to manage challenges, build positive relationships, and make thoughtful decisions. Strong character education enhances motivation, supports wellbeing, and contributes to a positive school culture where pupils feel valued and capable. Crucially, it also prepares young people for life beyond school, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to their communities and future workplaces.

Two schools within the Trust, Waseley Hills High School and Arrow Vale High School, have been trialling an innovative approach that draws on sport performance psychology. This method helps pupils view stress more positively, manage pressure effectively, and build resilience. Their partnership with Moonshot Education to deliver SPARK modules to all Key Stage 3 and 4 students has been an exciting development.

Moonshot Education is led by Team GB Olympic psychologist Katie Mobed, whose mission is to translate the strategies used with elite athletes into tools for school aged children. When character development is purposeful, consistent, and embedded across the curriculum, its impact can be transformative. We are delighted to be collaborating with Katie and her team and we look forward to seeing how this pilot continues to grow.

**FRANCESCA STANLEY**  
TRUST LEAD FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT



# PROVISION:

## Careers/futures

Well-designed futures (inc. Careers) education helps pupils understand the world of work and the world beyond school, be able to identify pathways from learning to future opportunities, making education feel purposeful and relevant. By connecting pupils' aspirations to their school experience and fostering confidence in their next steps, it strengthens their sense of belonging and engagement within the school community.

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Are careers opportunities and awareness strongly developed through curriculum from EYFS through to Post 16?
- 2 Are there age-appropriate expertise to the ways of work, meaningful engagement with employers and a wide range of opportunities in place?
- 3 Are workplace visits in place?
- 4 Is high quality work experience available to all pupils in KS3 and KS4?
- 5 Is uptake carefully tracked, impact monitored with responsive programme design adjustment?
- 6 Where appropriate, are programmes co-designed and/or pupil led?
- 7 What steps are taken to remove barriers to access/participation (cost, timing, transport, confidence)?
- 8 Are pupils exposed to a wide range of experiences to broaden their horizons and affirm their identities?

# Futures: Pathways to Success and Social Justice

At Gospel Oak School and Holyhead School, our Futures programme is about more than career planning. It is about giving every student the chance to succeed and showing them how their future can help build a fairer society.

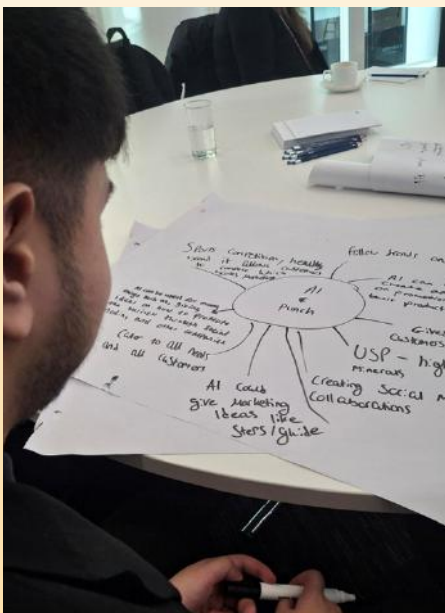
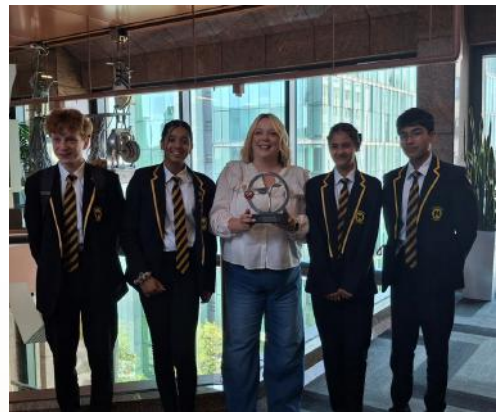
Through Futures, we partner with leading organisations such as Morgan Stanley, KPMG, Praxis, Canal and River Trust, Women in Property and the NHS to name just a few. These partnerships provide mentoring, workshops, and real-world experiences that open doors for students who might not otherwise have access to such opportunities. They help break down barriers and show young people that top careers are within their reach.

Futures also encourages students to explore careers that make a difference in society. Whether in finance, law, property, or community-focused industries, students learn how their work can support fairness, inclusion, and positive change.

Collaboration is at the heart of Futures. Staff, students, and partners work together to ensure guidance is inclusive and tailored. This means every student, regardless of background, can imagine and plan for a future where they thrive and contribute to tackling inequality.

In this way, Futures is not just about jobs. It is about social justice: giving young people the skills, confidence, and vision to succeed, while inspiring them to use their futures to help create a more equal world.

**SARAH WILKINS**  
DIRECTOR OF CAREERS



# PROVISION:

## Agency/Service/Pupil Leadership

Authentic pupil leadership, agency, and service give students a real voice and meaningful responsibility within their school community. When pupils lead, contribute, and serve with purpose, they feel valued and empowered.

Inclusive pupil agency opportunities linked to real decisions, with sensible and tangible resource, are more likely to contribute to improved engagement with learning than tokenistic leadership. Agency of pupils within school, and out into the community (local to global) generate psychological connection and therefore a strong sense of belonging.

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Do leaders identify meaningful opportunities for students to make real-life decisions, ensuring students can contribute to tangible change in their school and community?
- 2 Does participatory work to include all young people – does it specifically target those less likely to take part (marginalised groups, those facing increased barriers, 'troublemakers')?
- 3 Is there designed structure to pupil leadership? Where appropriate are programmes co-designed and/or pupil led?
- 4 Is there a minimum expectation of agency/service opportunity in school?
- 5 Are there authentic opportunities for pupil leadership/agency projects with budget?
- 6 Is pupil voice regularly and authentically listened to and acted upon appropriately. When change has happened, or if there are unexpected barriers to change, keep young people informed with 'feedback loops'?
- 7 Are rich partnerships (inc. family) in place to support pupil agency/service/leadership?
- 8 What steps are taken to remove barriers to access/participation (cost, timing, transport, confidence)?
- 9 Are pupils exposed to a wide range of experiences to broaden their horizons and affirm their identities?
- 10 Is uptake carefully tracked, impact monitored with responsive programme design adjustment?

# STUDENT COUNCIL CONFERENCE

On Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> October student leaders from across the Central Region Schools Trust came together for the annual CRST Student Council Conference.

The CRST Student Council aims to not only develop the leadership and collaborative skills of the young leaders within it but also connect young people with a wider community network and provide opportunities for cross school and phase working.

Sixth Form Lead Ambassadors started the event by leading specialist skills development sessions for the young leaders in the trust. Sixth Form Lead Ambassadors from Waseley Hills and Arrow Vale planned and delivered a session on the power of collaboration and supported the young leaders in developing skills to allow them to work together with their own student councils and wider committees, whilst Gospel Oak and Holyhead Sixth Form Lead Ambassadors planned and delivered a session on core leadership skills; enabling our young leaders to go out and lead with confidence. The Sixth Form Lead Ambassadors demonstrated, and role modelled the behaviours required to be a successful student leader exhibited incredible levels of maturity and skills they demonstrated.

As the day continued the young lead ambassadors from all student councils within the trust heard from various guest speakers from a range of charities and organisations to kick start their agency work with purpose. We had the pleasure of welcoming Jay from Birmingham Children's Hospital, our trust partner charity, to share with the council ideas for sustained fundraising opportunities to add to the incredible £22,500 already raised by students across the trust for the charity. Students will continue to work with their charity committees, and with Jay, to plan events for our primary and secondary charity week in addition to extended events to raise money for the charity.

Students were then challenged to join the School Network of the European Hydrogen Academy, organized by the Hy.Academy.EU Project, alongside Bertz Associates. The CRST Student Council and their respective eco committees now have the opportunity to create and develop learning materials, and educational tools to raise awareness of Hydrogen Energy and its' environmental benefits to share with other organisations and schools. This is an exciting project where students will not only develop their own expertise in this new energy source but also have the opportunity to work alongside professionally designers and industry experts when developing their resources.

Dan Lloyd, a local volunteer working with The Heart of England Forest, STEM Learning and Smartphone Free Childhood, shared his experiences of giving back to his community through his volunteering work and challenged our CRST Lead Ambassadors, along with their civic committees, to identify sustained volunteering opportunities that they could get involved with, helping them to fulfil their civic responsibility.

Finally, our CRST Student Council were introduced to the More in Common Network through the Jo Cox Foundation. They will work together with the foundation and their diversity committees throughout the year to develop their own More in Common Network and organise and lead events that bring together their local community to celebrate diversity and all we have in common.

Students will now return to their individual school councils and committees and begin to plan and deliver these various drives and projects, with the support of staff within school. They will work together with our external collaborators throughout the year and our Sixth Form Lead Ambassadors to bring their concepts to fruition, we look forward to seeing what they achieve.

**GEMMA LOVERIDGE**  
DIRECTOR OF CAREERS



Ensuring  
readiness for  
next steps and  
future success,  
including  
positive  
destinations  
beyond our  
schools by  
embedding:

A strong sense of belonging,  
supporting high attendance.



Academic and vocational  
success.



High self-esteem, confidence  
and resilience, including grit.





# Part Four: Outcomes

As a Trust, our people recognise the importance of a broad range of outcomes. We give deliberate attention to securing these and most especially with a particular focus on the outcomes opposite. By doing this, we know that our young people will leave us not only well prepared for the wider world, but inspired and equipped to contribute positively and do good within it.



*Embedding*

## OUR DISTINCTIVE CULTURE

Across England, school leaders are grappling with the challenge of pupil attendance. The debate often circles around systems, rewards and sanctions; attendance codes, penalty notices, new statutory guidance. Yet, while compliance frameworks are necessary, they are rarely sufficient. Beyond being an administrative target, attendance is itself an outcome – the visible sign of an invisible culture of belonging.

At Central Region Schools Trust, we believe belonging can be designed. It grows from an intentional culture: one defining not just what we do, but how we do it. Culture determines whether a child feels safe, known and valued. When belonging thrives, attendance follows.

### **Culture as the foundation for belonging**

Before the change in government, I worked with the Department for Education's West Midlands Regions Group to establish a CEO Learning Set focused on developing a culture of belonging at scale. This work culminated in a framework we shared with the DfE West Midlands Regions Group Officers on creating a culture of thriving and belonging. Our starting point was simple: belonging is not accidental. Our approach to building belonging has been through coherent alignment across people, places and processes, all underpinned by lived values.

In our Trust, values are treated as daily habits shaping relationships and routines. Culture is codified in behaviour: staff who model optimism, warmth and fairness. These behaviours form the connective tissue of trust between adults and pupils. When young people know they are seen and cared for, attendance becomes a natural response.

### **People: behaviours that build trust**

The culture framework starts with people. Every member of staff plays a role in making school a place pupils want to be. Codified behaviours, from prioritising young people's success to communicating with integrity, create consistency across our schools. Leaders model these expectations daily, recognising that culture erodes when left to chance.

Belonging starts in micro-moments; a greeting at the gate or a teacher's response to a mistake. These moments need to be treated as part of learning, not peripheral to it. They teach young people that school is a safe space to take risks and grow. Attendance, in this light, is a measure of trust.

### **Places: designing environments that inspire**

Physical environments communicate who and what a school values. Our buildings need to be deliberately designed to say, "You belong here." Clean, well-resourced classrooms and displays celebrating pupil achievement all signal that pupils are valued.

Unstructured times (whether lunchtime or lesson transitions) are not left to chance. Staff are visible and proactive. Spaces for quiet reflection sit alongside zones for active play, supporting different needs. When children have agency in shaping their environment, they feel ownership of it and return to it willingly each day.

Processes: systems that reinforce values

Culture is sustained through processes making desired behaviours easy and consistent. Our curriculum design, feedback systems and enrichment guarantee are all aligned with our purpose: supporting social justice through exceptional schools. Lessons link learning to life beyond the classroom, helping pupils understand why it matters.

Alongside adult behaviours, we focus on the pupil experience: the elements of school life that, when deliberately designed, foster connection. Our framework sets out provision and priority areas that drive belonging through an engaging curriculum and pastoral excellence, including enrichment, character development and high-quality oracy and literacy work.

Our Learning Set also developed reflective questions for leaders, ensuring design decisions are evidence-based and focused on belonging.

Enrichment, friendship development and reading are built into the fabric of our day. These experiences broaden horizons and ensure every pupil sees themselves in the life of the school. When enrichment is deliberately shaped for and with vulnerable pupils, connection grows. Experiences involving service or agency deepen belonging further.

Relationships matter too. The size and quality of pupils' friendship groups correlate with attendance. Leaders who invest in strategies for friendship development, conflict resolution and social confidence create schools where children feel secure in their peer relationships – and therefore more motivated to attend.

Reframing attendance as an outcome of culture

If we want pupils to attend, we must make schools worth attending. Focusing on belonging reframes attendance as connection. It challenges leaders to ask: what makes a pupil want to be here?

The attendance crisis demands system-level responses, but its solution begins with culture. We cannot code belonging into a register, but we can design it through our values, our environments and intentional provision and delivery.

*Amy Shears*

Chief Executive Officer



"Supporting social justice through  
exceptional schools."

Community | Creativity | Integrity | Excellence | Respect



Central Region  
Schools Trust

*Founded by the RSA*



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