

ANNUAL | REPORT 2023

We empower | We respect | We care



Our vision

To inspire.

To raise aspirations.

To create brighter tomorrows.

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The Board works with its local academy committees to build strong relationships and represent the communities which it serves.

Ofsted, 2023

Foreword by the Chair

There is a shared sense of pride in the strength of our Board and wider governance team, all of whom place the impact the Trust has on its communities at the heart of all decisions.

We enjoyed a busy and productive 2022/23, supported by the expertise of our long-serving members and trustees, alongside those new to the Board, who brought fresh thinking to the team. Together, we worked as a motivated, engaged and cohesive group to confidently govern our academies.

The Trust's strategic objectives remained a collective focus, allowing us to refine our workstreams and advance the quality of our educational offer. We also developed our growth strategy and addressed areas for development arising from the November 2022 external governance review.

Our members and trustees are passionate about the positive roles they play and the impact their decisions ultimately have on the communities we serve. We continue to strive for the very best education for our children and young people.

As always, our settings shared a common mission of nurturing curiosity, developing wellbeing and empowering children and young people to go beyond their aspirations. Together, we believe we can make a difference in our diverse communities, and in the lives of those who learn with us and work with us.

Going forward, we aim to expand the diversity and skills of our Board in order to maintain a strong, well-run governance that can lead the Trust through the changing educational landscape.



Mike Quigley MBE
Chair of Board, Diverse Academies Trust

Introduction from the Chief Executive Officer

The academic year 2022/23 was all about returning to pre-pandemic ways of working, sharing knowledge and ideas, bringing people and teams together - and ensuring our children and young people could access a breadth of opportunities to reach their full potential. In particular, it was wonderful to see the return of a huge range of extra-curricular activities, curriculum enrichment initiatives, trips and visits.

We have continued to deliver against our 2021-26 strategic plan, with a focus on developing high performing people and teams, embedding our vision and values, developing a quality curriculum offer, and engaging our communities to ensure they are at the heart of everything we do.

By following the strategic plan's improvement model of 'explore, prepare, deliver, sustain', we have seen a continued positive impact, with four more academies receiving positive Ofsted inspection outcomes.

Our financial position remains strong, thanks to our holistic and collaborative approach to budget planning which has an effective curriculum at its heart. This gives us the flexibility to target improvement priorities, whilst maintaining a sensible level of reserves. It has also enabled us to secure new buildings for two of our academies, and successfully bid for a new school at the Thoresby Vale development in Edwinstowe, which we expect to open in 2025.

As a Trust, we are going from strength to strength and have much to be proud of. Our professional development offer is growing and is being accessed in greater numbers than ever before. And whilst we cannot avoid the challenges the sector as a whole faces, we are in a strong place - as a team, culturally and financially.

I look forward with positivity to the exciting opportunities we can explore together.

David Cotton

Chief Executive Officer, Diverse Academies Trust



FOUNDED IN
2011

14
ACADEMIES

SIX
SECONDARY

6
PRIMARY

TWO
SPECIAL

CORE TO OUR FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

TOGETHERNESS

CONNECTIVITY

COLLABORATION



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
AND LINCOLNSHIRE



AGES
3-19



In some of the
most socially
deprived
communities
in the
country



DIVERSE
STAFF AND STUDENT
COMMUNITIES

Our mission

We nurture curiosity, develop wellbeing and empower children and young people to go beyond their aspirations. Together, we make a difference in our diverse communities and in the lives of those who learn with us and work with us.

MORE THAN
8,500
PUPILS

Governance and responsibilities of the Board

The Board determines the Trust's vision, ethos and strategic direction, and is responsible for holding executive leaders to account for the performance of their academies and staff. As well as engaging with stakeholders, parents and carers, staff, students and the wider community, the Board also oversees the financial performance of the organisation and ensures money is well spent.

Continuous improvement is at the heart of our culture. We regularly evaluate the work and skills of the Board and our local academy committees, and create plans to develop and evidence the impact of our actions. We also challenge and support our academy's executives and leaders, and regularly review our growth plan in line with capacity for improvement.

To ensure our volunteers have the greatest impact on our organisation and in our local communities, we:

- focus our recruitment process on getting the best people in the right roles;
- place value in both the life experiences and skills that trustees and governors bring; and
- select parents, carers and locally appointed governors who are familiar with the academy and community.

We support and develop our governors through:

- a central annual training plan that incorporates national and regional priorities;
- termly meetings between various trustees/governors and strategic leaders;
- regular trustee, chair and vice-chair networking meetings; and
- statutory training in areas including safeguarding and data protection.

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The Trust has a strong sense of vision, values and organisational culture that is well understood and respected by both members and trustees.

Browne Jacobson,
external review 2022/23



We are proud of our children, young people, leaders and colleagues who have continually demonstrated resilience and adaptability against an unprecedented backdrop of turbulence and uncertainty. Together, we have overcome many of the challenges presented by the pandemic and worked hard to deliver against our three strategic objectives.

Strategic objectives

- 1.** Develop a high-performing organisation which is agile and sustainable within an ever-changing global context.
- 2.** Secure the best outcomes for all pupils and students, so they achieve their full potential academically and have the skills to be able to actively contribute to a global society.
- 3.** Improve the integration, agility and flexibility of resource management to enable sustainable school improvement.

Increasing the social mobility of all our children and young people is routed in our mission, from early years to post-16, and beyond into adulthood. Our focus is to provide the best possible curriculum within our available resources, and to enable our children and young people to take advantage of every opportunity they can.

We must prepare them for the world they will encounter in the years to come and ensure they can look outwards with positivity and the necessary skills to succeed. To do this, we draw on research and devise innovative strategies to enhance practice across all our settings. Our shared aims drive our collective efforts to deliver consistently within our academies.



The 'golden thread' - four step school improvement model

Explore

We define the problem we want to solve and identify appropriate programmes or practices to implement.

Prepare

We create a clear implementation plan, judge the readiness of the academy/function to deliver that plan, then prepare staff and resources.

Deliver

We support staff, monitor progress, solve problems, and adapt our strategies as the approach is used for the first time.

Sustain

We plan for sustaining and scaling an intervention from the outset and continuously acknowledge and nurture its use.

Adapted from Education Endowment Foundation (2019)



Educational performance

Four of our academies had Ofsted inspections in 2022/23 and all were judged to be 'good', including one which received four of the five areas of inspection graded as 'outstanding'.

Our first results since 'returning to normal' measures were introduced were broadly in line with national averages, reflecting on our recovery from the pandemic. Pupils in our special schools also demonstrated good progress and a readiness for their next steps.

All academies focused on enhancing their personal development offer to ensure pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences. Since Covid-19, we have experienced challenges related to attendance and mental health, and we're addressing this under our second strategic objective. 'Raising attainment meetings' have also helped us introduce effective interventions and share best practice across the Trust.

People

We have continued to offer our people a range of flexible options to support their work/life balance - which was a key feature of our summer staff survey. The results of the survey were shared with leaders, and action plans are in place focusing on key areas for development.

Employee engagement is explicit in our vision, mission, values and people strategy, and various informal and formal structures support this. A culture of coaching is being embedded, encouraging staff to network and participate in inter-disciplinary working groups and empowering them to drive forward and own their personal professional development at all levels.

Through this culture, we are developing a workforce that is accountable for and engaged in their development in their role whilst being supported by the Trust to achieve success. Our consultancy committee also engages with trade unions to discuss issues relating to employment.

Our wellbeing champions ensure staff can access support and advice regarding their physical, mental and financial health. All our colleagues are covered by the Equality Act - specifically with regards to protected characteristics - and reasonable adjustments are considered in the recruitment and retention of staff.

Going forward, the development and welfare of our people will remain at the heart of our Trust, as will outstanding student performance and outcomes. We want all our staff to be highly professional, technically skilled, and at the peak of their wellbeing.



Communities

We are incredibly proud of the impact our academies have on their local communities.

This year, our partnerships enabled us to sponsor a new school at Thoresby Vale and achieve NHS Foundation status at Retford Oaks Academy. NHS Foundation status provides opportunities and widens participation for students interested in pursuing a career in the health service - raising aspirations and introducing employment pathways.

Queen Elizabeth's Academy took part in a pilot scheme to support local fish suppliers, working with Fish Heroes - Food Teacher's Centre UK, which aims to develop more positive attitudes towards eating fresh fish sourced in the UK.

Walton Academy collaborated with Lincolnshire Music Service, The Noise Academy UK and Peachy Events theatre to live stream a beatboxing workshop to more than 120 primary and secondary schools across Lincolnshire.

And our mini police cadets from Wainwright Primary Academy celebrated their graduation. Our partnership with Nottinghamshire police gives young children the opportunity to learn about their safety, their role in the community and how the police keep people safe.



Togetherhness

Our core values of 'we empower, we respect, we care' enable the Trust to work as one organisation across diverse settings.

We have a strong organisational culture and achieve co-development through partnership and collaboration, which is integral to our operations. For example, we commenced work across the Trust to develop 'teachers' toolkits' which share common aims and reinforce a sense of unity and cohesion.

We have also partnered in a research initiative to explore how we gather information about pupil voice (delivered and funded through the University of Derby and National Association for Special Educational Needs), which will develop how we work with and listen to the children in all our academies.

Our work is supported by a strong sense of staff and student belonging, which requires a collaborative effort between teachers, students and the wider staff body.

We care for, respect and value everyone. And we build strong relationships, encourage student involvement, celebrate diversity and provide support in all our settings.



Sustainability

We focus on sustainability in its widest sense to ensure future generations are supported with issues such as climate change, poverty and equity for all.

Our curriculum continues to educate our young people about the wider global challenges facing current and future generations.

We also use our resources effectively and incorporate digital advancements to maximise our impact. This includes ensuring that we use and develop technology to help us work smarter and more efficiently, as well as ensuring our children and young people have the digital skills they'll need in their next steps in education or employment.

During 2022/23, we commissioned surveys on the physical condition of our buildings alongside the use of energy, with the aim of becoming net zero.

This included a full assessment of energy usage, efficiency and equipment, and the type and nature of the building construction - including materials, insulation levels and glazing. As a result of this work, we are undertaking re-building programmes for Yeoman Park Academy and The Holgate Academy.

Once again, we were awarded a SchoolMark accreditation in recognition of adopting best practice, running an efficient financial model, and delivering an effective strategy that puts young people at the heart of school resource management.

Our financial health

Despite market forces driving up costs, we continued to enjoy a strong and stable financial position in 2022/23, whilst ensuring our priorities remained resourced, and we had a healthy level of reserves.



We implemented a three-year financial strategy in line with our objectives, vision, mission and values, with a laser focus on value for money and sustainable planning. This strategy allows us to invest in our improvement priorities, support our children and young people, and secure our long-term financial wellbeing.

Most of our income comes from the UK Treasury via the Education and Skills Funding Agency, or from local authorities. This income is allocated based on a combination of pupil numbers, needs-based funding (such as pupil premium and free school meals funding) and various grants - including the sports premium and Covid-19 recovery premium.

Our annual turnover is around £60m, which is average for a Trust of our size in the East Midlands. Our curriculum and the needs of our pupils sit at the heart of our resource deployment and drive how we spend our money.

We have developed a robust approach to integrated curriculum financial planning. Our leaders use a range of benchmarking tools - including the Advanced School Optimisation Tool and the Department for Education's View My Financial Insight - to help us make well-informed decisions based on accurate, contemporary financial intelligence. This allows us to respond to the changing landscape of the education sector.

In line with previous years, we invested almost 80% of our total revenue income on 'front line' teaching, educational support and classroom supplies and services. A further 11% was spent on our sites and IT infrastructure, ensuring every pupil can access a safe, secure and engaging learning environment with the best possible resources.

Our carefully crafted pupil premium, sports premium and special educational needs and disability plans ensure all our pupils have the support they need to reach their aspirations, regardless of social disadvantage or specific additional needs.

Collaborating with other schools, trusts, local authorities and external bodies remains a crucial part of our work within the sector. This is reflected by our SchoolMark accreditation, which recognises the positive impact our approach to resource management has on the education of our pupils.



Our risk environment and opportunities

We have a collaborative approach to risk management which is embedded across the Trust through fostering a positive risk management culture and a forward-thinking programme of education. We also integrate risk ownership into our strategic planning and operating model, and implement and monitor risk control and the related financial resources.



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Our external auditors have confirmed our financial regularity and management for 2022/23.

Our comprehensive internal and external audit programmes:

- connect with our risk register and the risk appetite set by the Board;
- assure compliance with regulatory and legislative requirements;
- highlight ways of working that go beyond compliance; and
- evidence the effective use of our resources.

Our external auditors have confirmed our financial regularity and management for 2022/23, evidenced by robust practice and sustainable improvements.

Looking forward, our view of future risk reflects the sector's challenges – which include changes to funding, pay increases, volatile energy costs, the recruitment and retention of teachers, and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) places and provision.

We will effectively manage these risks in collaboration with external partners and regulators. Together, we'll put mitigation measures and interventions in place to ensure our children and young people aren't disadvantaged in any way.

Priorities for the year ahead

We are committed to developing our activities and operations by building on the strong foundations we've already laid. Over the next year, our focus will be on:

- developing and embedding a single school improvement model across all academies;
- supporting our workforce through our Diverse Association for Professional Learning;
- developing our school business practitioners and utilising this support;
- improving our approach to recruitment, retention and attraction;
- enhancing our culture and practice of equity, diversity and inclusion;
- strengthening and implementing our governance and growth strategies;
- embedding mature systems and operations to maximise their impact and efficiency; and
- ensuring our capacity and capability fully supports organisational performance and development.



When it comes to the children and young people we teach, we are committed to:

- every child attending every day and focusing our work on supporting this;
- ensuring all pupils are well-prepared for exams and reach their potential;
- prioritising pupil voice;
- implementing a progressive personal development curriculum;
- supporting pupils through improved mental health support; and
- improving attainment in phonics, speaking and debating across all academies.

By implementing improvements and enhancements with clarity, consistency and collaboration, we are confident we can meet these objectives in the coming year.



Diverse Academies Trust, Old Hall Drive, Retford, Nottinghamshire, DN22 7EA

01777 861402 | office@diverse-ac.org.uk | www.diverseacademies.org.uk

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