

The Ascent Academies' Trust Strategic Plan 2017-2020



ASH TREES
ACADEMY



**BARBARA
PRIESTMAN**
ACADEMY



HOPE WOOD
ACADEMY



PORTLAND
ACADEMY

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1.0 Mission, Vision and Values

To provide exceptional education and support for young people with special educational needs.

Vision

We will create learning environments where young people thrive, developing physically, academically, socially and emotionally. We will ignite curiosity, ambition, aspiration and aptitudes in our young people so they can play the fullest part possible within their communities.

Values

- We have **high expectations** of ourselves and our pupils and celebrate our achievements.
- We **embrace difference**, celebrate diversity and promote equality.
- We **continually learn** in order that we can respond to the needs of our young people and we **continually improve** through sharing and creating best practice models
- We **build impactful collaborations** in our staff team across the Trust, with parents and with wider partnerships
- We **respect** each person's distinctive contribution and develop their talents and work productively together.

2.0 Context

The Ascent Academies' Trust was established in August 2012 to provide a home for special schools within the North East that wanted to convert to academy status. The Trust currently has four academies who have joined under sponsored and voluntary converter arrangements. The Trust works with three different Local Authorities in dynamic and strategic partnership to transform provision and outcomes for the children in their care. Alongside the improvement work in its current member academies, the Trust is working actively with the LA's and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) to grow its family of academies in line with our growth strategy. This will enable a greater level of system-led improvements, further opportunities for collaboration between leaders and staff at all levels of the organisation and better economies of scale, vital in the current challenging economic climate.

The Ascent Academies' Trust provides an opportunity for special schools to convert to academy status within a well-established organisation that enables;

- Good or better schools to thrive in their own context and in line with their own vision and values;
- Special schools to thrive with specialist and bespoke support matched to our children's needs;
- Dynamic collaboration, working in conjunction with a range of partners, to deliver tailored programmes of school improvement that will meet the needs of each academy;
- Strong, experienced leadership and governance;
- High quality services available to academies that will support improvements to teaching and learning, allowing schools to focus on their core business rather than being distracted by academy business;
- Flexibility to meet schools where they are on their journey and to adapt to their specific circumstances;
- Opportunity to operate in close partnership and strong relationship with Local Authorities and the RSC for the good of our academies.



3.0 Overview by Nick Hurn, Chair of the Ascent Board

We continue to strengthen the leadership capacity of the Trust by appointing Trustees with the skills, knowledge and experience that match the gaps identified within our skills audit and we appointed two new Members in the Autumn Term of 2017 to take the total number of Members to five. We have also strengthened our Executive Leadership Team (ELT) through the promotion of one of our Heads of Academy (HOA). Trustees have seen the impact of our leadership succession planning strategy through the appointment of high quality Heads of Academy, Deputy Head Teachers (DHT) and Assistant Head Teachers (AHT).

We are pleased with the progress we have made in our journey of continuous improvement over the time of the last strategic plan and the Ofsted inspections of Hope Wood Academy, Portland Academy and Ash Trees Academy have provided important external feedback about our work. The inspections have identified the strengths within the leadership of Trustees and senior leaders, and in our support for academy improvement.

Over the period of this plan we will significantly improve the quality of information that is reported to Trustees. This will enable the Board and committees to scrutinise and challenge the pace of improvements in each academy and challenge variance across the Trust. A key part of our work as a Trust has been to further develop governance and governance systems to ensure that there is greater transparency and sharpness in the information given to Trustees. This is reflected in our restructure of governance in Autumn 2017.

The review of Governance undertaken by the Board at the end of the Summer Term 2017 identified a number of strengths and areas for improvement and we are currently measuring the progress we have made as a Board over the past 12 months through an annual external review of Governance.

During the Summer Term 2016 the Trust undertook its first staff Health and Well-being survey. The annual findings of this survey are very informative and continue to help Trustees and the Executive Leadership Team develop their improvement plans. To date, this has resulted in the development of a workload charter and a review of a number of policies, and well-being groups within all academies. We are currently reviewing the Education and Health Care planning process with a view to making the plans more relevant to the needs of our pupils. The findings of each annual Health and Well-being survey will help Trustees to gauge the progress we have made and the areas where we need to focus our energies. This continues to be a priority of the Executive Team, as we aim to reduce staff absence over the next three years of the plan.

During the last year we have strengthened our communications with all stakeholders and we will work with our Executive Leadership Team to build on the feedback we have gleaned from the stakeholder groups we have established in each Academy.

This new plan establishes our vision for the future, setting out clear aspirations linked to measurable aims. This will allow Trustees to hold the leadership of the Trust to account and measure progress towards our strategic ambitions.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "N. Hurn". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

4 Objectives.

Strategic Ambitions

Outcomes

By 2020 all of our current academies will:

- Be judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted;
- Offer a dynamic, shared curriculum that supports academic progress, emotional well-being and the development of independence and preparation for next steps;
- Be high performing and improving academies that continuously respond to the changing needs of their populations;
- Work in partnership with one another to offer shared curriculum, staffing, facilities and resources;
- Actively seek out opportunities to support the development of staff across the Trust;
- Improve the well-being and attendance of its staff and students;
- Be supported with high quality specialist resources;
- Continue to have effective financial management;
- Respond to local need in SEND, growing the Trust in a considered and measured way

Strategic Aims

Outcomes

All academies enabled to reach good or better outcomes for students.

- A. To improve standards in reading, writing and mathematics so that all pupils achieve well in line with the academies' expectations and teaching, learning and assessment are good or better.
- B. To secure high quality teaching and learning across all subjects and all key stages and to deliver a rich, age appropriate and broad curriculum in each academy.
- C. To ensure that vulnerable groups and those at risk of underachieving make good or better progress as appropriate.
- D. To ensure that wider outcomes are clearly measured and communicated to a wide audience.





Academy Improvement

To establish a self-sustaining, system-led, collaborative approach to improvement that enables rapid improvement where required.

- A. To continue to secure an accurate and robust self-evaluation process and a programme of external quality assurance review across all academies;
- B. To develop school-to-school support through the DHT team;
- C. To build links with Teaching Schools and training providers;
- D. To be outward looking, developing networks with a wider range of schools.

People

To improve staff and student well-being, improving staff recruitment, retention and attendance along with pupil attendance and engagement.

- A. To improve pupil attendance levels and reduce number of persistent absentees;
- B. To secure retention of good staff and recruitment of high quality staff;
- C. To improve staff and student well-being;
- D. To deliver high quality SMSC and PHSEC that enables our students to know themselves, relate to others from a range of backgrounds and cultures, to keep themselves healthy and safe and contribute as fully as they can to wider society.

Leadership

To ensure high quality leadership and governance at Trust Board, Committees, the Local Accountability Body (LAB) and the Business Accountability Body (BAB).

- A. To develop a fully-functioning, high-level Trust Board that represents the full range of skills required;
- B. To embed high quality governance at the Committee, LAB & BAB level, focused clearly on raising standards;
- C. To empower Heads of Academy and their teams to lead the improvement journey within and beyond their academies, identifying and growing talent.
- D. Strong, regular communication to all stakeholders about the Trust's progress towards its vision.

Business

To strengthen the Trust and ensure future sustainability, efficiency and growth (including incorporating new academies).

- A. To develop the structure of the organisation;
- B. To deliver high quality services and support to academies;
- C. To deliver a strong financial plan;
- D. To maintain measured and systematic growth.

Resources

To ensure that all Trust resources are well-used, maintained and managed to ensure improvement, capacity and growth for the future,

- A. To ensure all buildings are fit for purpose, safe and well-maintained;
- B. To ensure that IT infrastructures are fit for purpose, secure and accessible;
- C. Finance management systems and controls are strong and robust;
- D. HR systems and processes are safe, transparent, supportive and efficient.



5 Monitoring and Accountability – Achieving our aims.

The strategic plan will be monitored at all levels of governance and leadership. The following sections below demonstrate how our strategic aims are translated in to success criteria, the evidence that Trustees and leaders will request in order to judge and rate our KPIs and the risk associated with not achieving a specific aim.

Outcomes - Current Position

The provision of the highest quality teaching is of paramount importance. Pupils need to experience a wide range of motivating and challenging, well-pitched learning opportunities. Teacher expertise will identify barriers to learning and plan ways to overcome these. There is a belief that all pupils can succeed whatever their individual circumstances.

Review & Reflection from the last academic year

Each academy is managing data related to pupil outcomes in English and maths using the same measures for the first time. This will help Trustees to support and challenge academies and understand whether the academy achieves good outcomes for their pupils. This will be established through the LAB and with interrogation of the data from the Executive Team, Trustees and external educational partners.

The Trust-wide maths curriculum is securing strong progress across all academies and there is a shared ability to moderate and compare learning within each stage of the curriculum across the Trust. Teaching and Learning is externally judged to be at least good in all our academies that have recently been inspected. There is still some way to go to eradicate aspects of weaker teaching and our HOAs are being uncompromisingly challenging on under-performance. We continue to work to improve teaching and learning with the Trust expertise within the DHT team and our Expert teachers, where time will be deployed to provide coaching & mentoring, training and support. There have been a number of external pupil premium reviews undertaken that quality assure our practice and use of the pupil premium grant.

A new Trust wide English, Science and IT curriculum was launched this academic year and which uses the best practice from across the Trust and allows us to share a common approach, language and assessment system.

OUTCOMES

All academies enabled to reach good or better outcomes for students.

- A. To improve standards in reading, writing and mathematics so that all pupils achieve well in line with the academies' expectations and teaching, learning and assessment are good or better;
- B. To secure high quality teaching and learning across all subjects and all key stages and to deliver a rich, age appropriate and broad curriculum in each academy;
- C. To ensure that groups at risk of underachieving make good or better progress as required;
- D. To ensure that wider outcomes are clearly measured and communicated to a wide audience.

Success Criteria

SC 1	Outcomes and progress levels in Maths and English in each key stage are strong, given the students' starting points. (LAB)
SC 2	Outcomes in Y6, Y11, EYFS & 16-19 are on or above expected levels given the student's individual starting points. (LAB)
SC 3	All teaching is good or better in each academy across all key stages and subjects. (LAB) teachers meet or exceed career-based expectations.
SC 4	Groups at risk of under-achieving, are progressing at least in line with other children in the academy and achievement gaps are narrowing. (LAB) The academy uses grants impactfully. (LAB)
SC 5	All academies are judged to be good or outstanding in OFSTED and other external inspections. (SC)
SC 6	The Trust curriculum expands across the core subjects and develops assessment and recording systems so academies can benchmark data in the future. (SC)
SC 7	Wider outcomes are shared with Trustees through clear systems through the LAB e.g. student well-being, leaver destinations, reductions in negative behaviour. (LAB)
SC 8	Pupils are well-prepared for their next steps and transition is well-planned. (LAB)

Evidence

SC 1	E1	Outcomes from ELT reviews on TL&A (Autumn term, annually).
	E2	Outcomes from ELT reviews on progress and attainment (Summer term, annually).
	E3	Evidence from external reviews and Ofsted reports (BPA and ATA Autumn 2017, NBA and HWA – Spring/Summer 2018, Portland external review Spring 2019 and Ofsted Summer 19).
SC 2	E1	Examination outcomes for secondary providers based on progress from starting points including different groups.
	E2	Attainment at Year 6 (for primaries) and Y11 (in secondaries) are strong based on pupil's starting points.
	E3	EYFS and 16-19 academy based data.

Evidence (Continued)

SC 3	E1	Outcomes from ELT reviews on TL&A (Autumn term, annually).
	E2	Any individual academy evidence of improving teaching.
SC 4	E1	Progress data for disadvantaged students against academy population.
	E2	Data for all groups does not show significant gaps.
SC 5	E1	Ofsted Reports.
SC 6	E1	Maths, English and Science curriculum with common assessment systems across all academies.
SC 7	E1	SCERTS data, SLP data, Well-being data, skills data.
SC 8	E1	Destinations data.

Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring
KPI 1	Results are at least in line with and often above academy agreed targets and expected attainment and progress given starting points.	LAB
KPI 2	Attainment and progress of disadvantaged children is in line with their peers.	LAB
KPI 3	100% of teachers meet career based expectations.	LAB
KPI 4	Ofsted reports grade each academy good or better.	SC & Board
KPI 5	100% of 16-19 leavers are in education, employment or training.	LAB

Identified Risk	Strategies to Mitigate
<p>R1 Improvements in T&L are not secured and RI academies remain RI resulting in a reputational damage to the Trust.</p>	<p>M1 Deployment of Trust resources to secure rapid improvement.</p> <p>M2 CPD for teachers who need to improve</p> <p>M3 Trustees to monitor anonymised PM targets of teachers who are experiencing difficulty.</p>
<p>R2 A specific area does not improve rapidly enough and affects the whole academy Ofsted judgement e.g. EYFS/ Post-16.</p>	<p>M1 Deployment of Trust or external resources.</p> <p>M2 Short term action plan monitored by EHT.</p> <p>M3 External support.</p>
<p>R3 Significant groups of students make insufficient progress or there remains significant gaps between groups and the rest of the pupils.</p>	<p>M1 Close monitoring of PPG, year 7 Catch Up and Sports Premium Grant</p> <p>M2 Monitoring of significant groups regularly to identify under-performance.</p> <p>M3 External reviews.</p>



Academy Improvement - Current Position

All staff and Trustees clearly understand the core values of the Trust and the way it operates. Leaders across the trust act in line with these values, encouraging people to work towards the aims of the organisation. Leaders ensure that the core values are at the heart of the organisation's strategy and govern the way it operates. Leaders of the academies provide challenge and support for each other in order that improvement is central to our work.

Each Academy has developed a self-evaluation document and from this, an Academy Improvement Plan that gives details of the actions being undertaken to ensure that good progress is made. This is monitored in the LAB and progress towards Academy level priorities are monitored by the Standards Committee (SC).

Barbara Priestman Academy has retained its 'good' grade after an inspection in November. This was also the judgement of the Challenge Partner review that took place in December. There are key aspects of teaching, learning and assessment that need to be addressed in order that the academy is moving towards the outstanding judgement.

Hope Wood Academy's recent inspection in September 2018 judged the academy to be good with aspects of outstanding, something that we are extremely proud of in our Trust given the starting position of the academy in 2015. However, we appreciate that the academy is a complex organisation with its fair share of challenges which were reflected in the November Challenge Partner Review commentary which agreed the 'good' judgement.

Portland Academy underwent a section 8 inspection in December 2018 that went well. The inspector reported on the significant progress made in key areas. However, there is still some significant work to be done in achieving consistency in teaching and learning and in the more effective use of assessment data. The recent Challenge Partner Review also judged the academy to be 'good'. The next inspection is due before December 2019.

Ash Trees Academy was last inspected in September 2017 where it was rated 'Good' across all areas. This was a sound 'good' and the academy has already moved into outstanding in terms of its leadership and management and behaviour and safety aspects. Their Challenge partner review in March 2019 judged it to be 'good'.

There is a well-established cycle of monitoring and review by the Executive Leadership Team. This group comprises the CEO, Director of Academy Improvement and Chief operating Officer. This process has been sharpened more recently and rather than holding blanket reviews across all academies we are tailoring reviews based on academies' unique position and circumstances.

For the 2018-19 cycle of reviews Trustees have engaged with 'Challenge Partners'-a national network of schools focused on peer challenge and support. They will carry out quality assurance reviews for all academies this academic year. We are also working very closely with a network of regional special schools who have also committed to Challenge Partner membership. Leadership teams at all levels have benefitted from working with CP network, and from formal training via the teaching school alliances.

The group of Deputy Head Teachers (DHT) for Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TL&A) are working across the Trust impacting positively in curriculum developments and teaching, learning and assessment across the Trust.

ACADEMY IMPROVEMENT

To establish a self-sustaining, system led, collaborative approach to improvement

- A. To continue to secure an accurate and robust self-evaluation process and a programme of external review
- B. To develop school-to-school support through the DHT team
- C. To build links with Teaching Schools and training providers
- D. To be outward looking, developing networks with a wider range of schools.



Success Criteria

SC 1	All academies benefit from frequent monitoring review visits from the Executive Leadership Team and external Improvement Partner, in line with the academy's current position, bringing rapid and measurable improvement where most needed. Evaluation by academies matches that of the review which is verified by external evaluation.
SC 2	Academy Improvement Plans align closely with the Trust Strategic Plan and academy priorities are appropriate to the specific needs of each academy. The academy demonstrates rapid progress against short-term targets where performance is less than Good in OFSTED terms.
SC 3	On-going support and development work is delivered increasingly by academy colleagues and resources directed to meet Trust and academy priorities. ELT engagement with training partners and teaching schools provide access to high quality training and support.
SC 4	Executive Head Teachers are deployed to support and challenge the HOA on a needs basis securing improvement in identified areas. External support and challenge comes from a range of providers.
SC 5	There is a range of opportunity for joint practice development across the Trust in curriculum and TL&A that leads to improvement in teaching and learning.
SC6	Performance management processes ensure that staff make a strong contribution to academy improvement.

Evidence

SC 1	E1	Academy SEF judgments for each review judgment matches external review judgements, (e.g. QA's).
	E2	Areas for development from the external review are completed in a short timescale.
SC 2	E1	Progress against key priorities is made.
	E2	AIP aligns to the Trust vision.
	E1	Impact report from EHT with responsibility for DHT team..

SC 3	E2	NQT training impact report and feedback
	E3	Impact of other training/CPD.
SC 4	E1	CEO report on impact of ELT.
	E2	QA reviews and external reviews/accreditation or quality marks demonstrate improvements.
SC 5	E1	Evidence from reviews on TL&A in each academy and input levels from Trust team.
	E2	Progress against academy key priorities in TL&A.

Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring
KPI 6	Academies make progress in terms of OFSTED grade(s)	SC
KPI 7	Trust support in the academy impacts positively in terms of measurable progress and/or impact	LAB & SC
KPI 8	Academies achieve key priorities	LAB & SC
Identified Risk		Strategies to Mitigate
R4	Performance of schools not improving sufficiently or quickly enough impacts on the reputation of the Trust.	<p>M1 Prioritise resources to ensure rapid school improvement.</p> <p>M2 Ensure that monitoring systems and accurate assessments are coming from the ELT and LAB.</p> <p>M3 Link Trustees to provide another layer of support and challenge.</p> <p>M4 Deploy effective leadership effectively.</p> <p>M5 External support.</p>



Leadership - Current Position

We will provide an environment in which everyone is encouraged and supported to develop leadership and management competencies. This will enable Ascent to maximise the talent within the trust and plan for succession. We will review the progress made by the Trust against the organisation's overall investment. We will challenge any under-performance.

There are greatly improved systems for governance including terms of reference, calendars, role descriptions and specific review items on every meeting agenda. There are clear systems and processes for Trustees to have a secure understanding of the strengths and needs of each academy in the Trust. A document that tracks risk is rigorous, meticulous and leads to improvement across the MAT (Multi-Academy Trust). There are regular high quality reports on risk management, finance, safeguarding, behaviour and in particular physical intervention, and health and safety.

The level of detail presented to Trustees is now very streamlined and enables Trustees to have a strategic overview of each academy's performance and that of the Business support service. Evidence shows clear focused developments in Trustees fully understanding the legal framework in which they operate and although the framework had been in place since the establishment of the Trust it recently has become much more valued and understood by Trustees. The Trust has recruited some first-rate and very committed Trustees who fulfil their complex role excellently, utilising their skill sets effectively within the Board and committee structure. There are currently a number of vacancies on the Board. All recent Ofsted reports have judged the leadership from Trustees as very effective.

The Executive Leadership Team has experienced and skilled leaders who have impacted positively on academy improvement over the last 3 years. However, as the academies become increasingly successful and self-sufficient, there has been a need to review the Trust leadership structures. There has also been a reduction in the number of academies in the Trust since the re-brokerage of The New Bridge Academy, and the Trust did not secure the Local Authority Free School which reduces the need for such a large central service team. A restructure has been completed, resulting in a leaner and more affordable team.

Established HOAs are confidently leading their academy forward and continue to make improvements. From September 2019, this will be without the direct support of an Executive Head Teacher.

<p>LEADERSHIP</p> <p>To establish a self-sustaining, system led, collaborative approach to improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. To develop a fully-functioning, high-level Trust Board that represents the full range of skills required; B. To embed high quality governance at the Committee and Local Accountability Body level, focused clearly on raising standards; C. To empower Heads of Academy and their teams to lead the improvement journey within and beyond their academies, identifying and growing talent. D. Strong, regular communication to all stakeholders about the Trust's progress towards its vision.
<p>Success Criteria</p>	
<p>SC 1</p>	<p>There is a full complement of Trustees that meet all aspects of the skills audit. There are clear role descriptions for each Trustee linked to a key area of responsibility.</p>

SC 2	The Scheme of Delegation and committee's terms of reference provide clarity of responsibility and is well understood and implemented.	
SC 3	Leadership, including governance, is judged through our own systems and by inspectors to be Good or better in each academy.	
Success Criteria continued		
SC 4	Accountability Bodies demonstrate clearly through their minutes and monitoring role, that they provide appropriate challenge and are clearly focused on raising standards in teaching and learning.	
SC 5	Substantive leadership at senior level and well-developed middle leaders, and identified potential leaders are demonstrating strong progress in each academy as evidenced by LAB meeting reports.	
SC 6	The Standards Board identifies possible risk and acts accordingly to avert risk. They identify variations in standards and challenge these enabling school to school support and directing resources accordingly.	
SC 7	All safeguarding, health and safety and legal responsibilities continue to be met.	
SC 8	There is secure moderation of appraisal targets across the Trust linked to career based expectations. CPD plays a clear role in developing people and growing future leaders. All staff have performance management targets annually.	
SC 9	Staff, parents and students are clear about the Trust vision and actions taken to achieve it.	
SC 10	There are systems and procedures in place to test academies commitment to equality and diversity.	
Evidence		
SC 1	E1	Recruitment of Trustees is complete and there are no vacant positions.

	E2	Trustees skills are well-matched to roles and responsibilities.
	E3	No identifiable gaps in the skills audit.
Evidence continued		
SC 2	E1	The Scheme of Delegation is used well to enable the right people to make the right decisions.
	E2	The Terms of reference ensure that each Board, Committee or Body fulfil their responsibilities.
SC 3	E1	Ofsted reports –outcome for leadership and management.
SC 4 & 5	E1	Minutes from LAB meetings and the Dynamic Academy Review (DAR).
	E2	Governance review.
SC 6	E1	Information on each DAR from Standards Committee.
SC 7	E1	Headline Contextual data.
	E2	DAR'S
SC 8	E1	External moderation of performance management processes demonstrates compliance of career based expectations.
	E2	Academies all identify prospective leaders.

SC 9	E3	Leaders all access training.
	E1	Information About the Trust vision and strategic plan is shared with parents/carers
	E2	Vision and values are shared through website, newsletters and stakeholder forums
	E3	Wellbeing survey outcomes for section on job role.
SC 10	E1	Equality monitoring.
	E2	Website compliance.
	E3	Academy based polices being implemented, i.e. Accessibility Policy.

Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring	
KPI 9	There is a full Executive Team and all Academies have a full Leadership Team.	Board	
KPI 10	The Trust Board is running at full complement with attendance levels in excess of 85%.	Chair of Board	
KPI 11	Leadership, including Governance is rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted in all academies.	Board & Members	
Identified Risk		Strategies to Mitigate	
R5	Key leaders leave, resign or move from the Trust.	M1	Focus on retention of quality leaders and Trustees.
		M2	Succession planning and talent management.
		M3	Academy ambassadors.

R6	National shortage of high quality school leaders impacts on the ability to recruit to academy teams.	M1 M2 M3	Succession planning within existing staff teams. Programme of leadership training within the Trust. PM career based expectations and leadership roles at UPS (EXPERT) teacher.
R7	The quality of internal and external reviews insufficiently robust and does not identify significant areas of weakness or identify these early enough.	M1 M2	Bespoke ELT support in challenging academies. Bespoke timescales on reviews and external inspection.

People-Current Position

Ascent in an inclusive Trust, the skills and experience of staff are valued and utilised in striving for excellence. No groups are discriminated against. We value each person equally whilst being mindful of the needs of the whole Trust.

During the last two years there has been a clear focus on staff well-being, workload and its impact on staff work-life balance and also on reward and recognition. This work has been a priority as we recognise that there are some high levels of staff sickness absence in a number of our academies. This work has resulted in an established annual well-being survey with key areas for development. The Workload Charter was published in summer 2017 and this is discussed with staff through regular appraisal meetings to ensure that the academy is working within the charter. A Reward and Recognition policy was published in summer 2017 that ensures that staff feel valued. Heads of Academies lead established well-being working groups in each of their academies and well-being representatives are working with staff to an accreditation framework. The staff well-being survey for 2019 demonstrated improvement in all academies except Barbara Priestman Academy. Overall the Trust has shown improvement on last year's results with most aspects scoring above 3 (demonstrating a positive outcome).

Staff absence was one of the key areas that the Trust staff wanted us to address and as a result of some hard work with HR, staff well-being and training this has begun to reduce. This has been significant in some academies whilst in others there is still some way to go.

Pupil absence levels have also been a challenge in terms of those pupils identified as persistent absentees across the Trust. Again, we have seen a reduction in most academies due to the hard work and tenacity of DHT pastoral along with the pastoral teams. Portland's pupil attendance figure for Autumn 2018 was 94%, only 1% off our target of 95%.

The Deputy Head Pastoral team have been working closely together to assimilate PHSEC curriculum and qualifications and curriculum policies.

<p>PEOPLE To improve staff and student well-being, improving staff recruitment, retention and attendance along with pupil attendance and engagement.</p>	<p>A. To improve pupil attendance levels and reduce number of persistent absentees; B. To secure retention of good staff and recruitment of high quality staff; C. To improve staff and student well-being and ensure equal opportunities and equity for all; D. To deliver high quality SMSC and PHSEC that enables our students to know themselves, relate to others from a range of backgrounds and cultures, to keep themselves healthy and safe and contribute as fully as they can to wider society.</p>
Success Criteria	
SC 1	Pupil attendance in all academies improves year on year and numbers of persistent absentees decrease.
SC 2	There are no unfilled leadership vacancies in any academy due to non-recruitment rounds. Aspirant/potential leaders are identified in each academy and these talents are nurtured and grown.
SC 3	The Trust attracts strong fields of applicants for most teaching posts and support roles.
SC 4	Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are clear about their line manager –(survey role section)

SC 5	Well-being survey data demonstrates a positive picture in each academy and workload is less identified as an issue.(survey demand section) Increasing numbers of staff participate.
SC 6	Each academy has a strategy to address mental health, health & safety and well-being of its staff and students. There is a comprehensive PHSEC and student well-being programme.

Success Criteria (continued)

SC 7	Staff attendance rates improve year on year, or where already high maintain the level.
SC8	SMSC, PHSEC and SRE are judged good or better

Evidence

SC 1	E1	Headline contextual data.
	E2	Case studies of PA reduction.
SC 2	E1	Vacancies are recruited to in round 1.
	E2	Adverts and information to candidates clearly reflects the vision and ambition of the Trust and the relevant academy.
	E3	High quality materials are sent to candidates that reflect an effective and efficient organisation.
SC 3	E1	There are at least 3 shortlisted candidates for teaching and leadership posts and strong fields for support staff posts.
SC 4	E1	Survey section on roles is >3 for the Trust
	E2	Clear job descriptions in place for all posts
	E3	PM meetings held half termly

SC 5	E1	Survey results.(DEMANDS AND PERSONAL WELL-BEING SECTIONS)
	E2	Workload Charter applied in each academy.
	E3	Policies are checked against workload.
SC 6	E1	AIP targets, CPD records, wellbeing survey outcomes for personal wellbeing & work life balance.
SC 7	E1	Headline contextual data, health & safety information
SC8	E1	Feedback from the PDBWA review days and pupil forums



Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring
KPI 12	Pupil attendance in all academies is above 91%.	LAB & SC
KPI 13	Levels of PA is below 20% in secondary academies and 15% in primary academies.	LAB
KPI 14	All leadership vacancies are filled.	SC
KPI 15	Teacher absence rates are at or less than 4% in each academy.	LAB & SC
KPI 16	Support staff absence rates are at or less than 4%.	LAB & SC
KPI 17	Safeguarding of all staff and students is effective in each academy.	LAB & SC
KPI18	Well-being scores >3 for each section overall	Annual Survey
Identified Risk		Strategies to Mitigate
R8	Staff absence rates continue to rise and supply costs place budgets at risk.	<p>M1 Close monitoring of the budget position by EHT.</p> <p>M2 Staff absence insurance policy.</p>
R9	Staff absence significantly affects the stability of the academy to deliver high quality TL&A, behaviour and safety and therefore outcomes.	<p>M1 Flexible deployment of resources across the Trust.</p>



Business - Current Position

The Trust has an established structure of staff and services to support academies. The central teams of staff work closely with external partners and advisors to develop services and to improve support to academies. Systems, process and procedures are established and embedded and policies set out clear direction.

Services to academies are well received and in recent surveys, valued by academies and staff within. We will be looking to continue to improve support and service to academies whilst looking for efficiencies to generate capacity for growth. Structures and system were designed to accommodate future growth.

Since the Trust was formed there has been significant savings made through collaborative procurement, staffing restructures and generally value for money through economies of scale. The Trust have been successful in several revenue grants and to date, one capital bid. This recent successful bid for £0.140m from the Condition Improvement Fund for roofing works at Hope Wood Academy. This is an area that we will be concentrating on going forward as capital investment is required in all our buildings.

Financial plans for the Trust are based on breaking even from 2018/19 onwards and include maintaining a healthy reserve without depending upon grant funding.

Future growth could increase capacity and improve economies of scale.

BUSINESS To strengthen the Trust and ensure future sustainability, efficiency and growth (including incorporating new academies).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. To develop the structure of the organisation. B. To deliver high quality services and support to academies. C. To deliver a strong and robust financial plan. D. To maintain measured and systematic growth.
Success Criteria	
SC 1	The corporate services functions and staffing structure are clearly developed to manage school improvement, finance and human resources efficiently and effectively.
SC 2	Academies express high levels of satisfaction with Corporate and Business Support Services.
SC 3	Financial forecasts demonstrate stability and sustainability for all academies and across the Trust as a whole. The Trust is self-sufficient and not dependent upon external funding. Financial planning facilitates effective decision making.
SC 4	The Trust is able to effectively manage growing pupil numbers in majority of academies.
SC 5	To attract Good or Outstanding converter academies to strengthen the Trust's profile and add capacity.

Evidence		
SC 1	E1	Corporate Services brochure which defines services, people, roles and responsibilities.
	E2	Feedback from academies on service provision.
SC 2	E1	Feedback to service managers.
	E1	Service satisfaction surveys / questionnaires.
	E3	Benchmarking of service standards against other providers.
SC 3	E1	Clear financial plans in place.
	E2	Medium term financial plans identifying risks and opportunities.
SC 4	E1	Financial and resource plan.
	E2	Full due diligence for all proposed new ventures.
SC 5	E1	A minimum of 1 new academy into the Trust by 2020.
	E2	Full due diligence for all proposed new ventures.
Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring
KPI 19	Academies operate at least a break- even budget position.	FRR
KPI 20	Projected expenditure to be within the funding available in year per academy.	FRR

Identified Risk	Strategies to Mitigate
<p>R10 Insufficient capacity to support all academies.</p>	<p>M1 Effective planning and managing staffing resources. Large staffing base and flexibility to move staff around the Trust.</p> <p>M2 Healthy reserves to enable investment in capacity when required.</p> <p>M3 Recruitment and retention strategies in place, including succession planning.</p>
<p>R11 An academy becomes financially unviable.</p>	<p>M1 Effective financial planning and management systems in place.</p> <p>M2 Experience of managing similar situations and implementing recovery strategies over short, medium and long term.</p> <p>M3 Effective use of resources across the Trust.</p>
<p>R12 Changes to high needs funding leaves academies unable to balance budget.</p>	<p>M1 Effective financial planning systems in place. Horizon scanning and scenario planning when funding changes are proposed.</p> <p>M2 Robust EHCPs to ensure appropriate resources are identified to meet pupil needs.</p>
<p>R13 Falling roles / reduction in planned places.</p>	<p>M1 Effective financial planning and management systems in place.</p> <p>M2 Experience of managing similar situations and implementing recovery strategies over short, medium and long term.</p> <p>M3 Effective use of resources across the Trust.</p>
<p>R14 Impact of the Free school if the Trust is not the sponsor.</p>	<p>M1 Place planning strategy to understand financial implications.</p> <p>M2 Use of temporary contracts if there is a need to reduce staff numbers.</p> <p>M3 Retention strategies for retaining key staff.</p>
<p>R15 The Trust grows too quickly.</p>	<p>M1 Redeploy staffing within the Trust.</p>
<p>R16 New ventures are high risk and/or unsuccessful.</p>	<p>M1 Full due diligence, including risk register and financial forecast.</p>

Resources - Current Position

The new structure of the Corporate Services Team enables resources to be monitoring closely in key areas and support be given to individual academies to ensure the resources available and provided to them are fit for purpose and support their AIPs. The restructure has reduced staffing in finance and HR, whilst maintaining a full IT service. Heads of Academy are now directly line managing their facilities and office staff.

Despite key changes, there have been noticeable improvements in each of the centrally led areas. Each academy now has a site development plan informed by and including building condition surveys, accessibility plans, academy priorities and action plans incorporating several external reports, audits and risk assessments. There is a service improvement plan for every corporate service function. There is a detailed IT service improvement and development plan and an evolving IT strategic plan being compiled in consultation and with input from all academies. New HR processes are more robust and streamlined now and through additional training and support, the systems and processes are proving to be very efficient. There are half termly meetings between all Corporate Services Managers and academy leaders to discuss resources and to inform planning and effective decision making.

Resources are tight. Funding is reducing year on year whilst costs increase and budget pressures become greater. As a Trust we are maximising efficiency savings in an attempt to mitigate pressures and to ensure resources can still support pupil needs and academy improvement.

RESOURCES To ensure sufficient and appropriate resources are available to support academy improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. To ensure all buildings remain fit for purpose, safe and well-maintained. B. To ensure that IT infrastructures are fit for purpose, secure and accessible. C. Financial management systems and controls are strong and robust. D. HR systems and processes are safe, transparent, supportive and efficient.
Success Criteria	
SC 1	All academies are externally inspected every half term to ensure they are safe and well maintained. As part of internal reviews by the Executive Leadership Team, outcomes are at least Good. Facilities and health and safety are assessed as Good and any recommendations quickly acted on.
SC 2	Each academy regularly reviewing health and safety, including accidents and incidents and injuries, and near misses through SEN teams.
SC 3	Regular analysis, investigation and benchmarking of academy issues and incidents relation to ICT. Half termly feedback from academy leaders. All academies to have addressed e-safety within AIPs.
SC 4	All HOAs had H&S, safer recruitment and sickness management training.
SC 5	Academies address any weakness in resource provision identified in external reports.

Success Criteria (continued)

SC 6	Effective recruitment systems, processes and procedures ensure safe recruitment of Trust staff.
SC 7	Full review undertaken of support staff responsibilities to ensure fairness and equity across the Trust.
SC 8	Implementation of all policies is monitored regularly in each academy to ensure compliance.
SC 9	Financial Management Framework of systems and controls is efficient, effective and compliant.

Evidence

SC 1	E1	External health and safety inspection reports and audits.
	E2	Reports from internal reviews.
SC 2	E1	Academy and Trust monitoring of incidents, accidents and near misses.
	E2	Headline contextual data.
	E3	Minutes of SEN team meetings.
SC 3	E1	Meet IT needs of academies, as assessed through feedback and surveys.
	E2	All AIPs to include and address e-safety.
	E3	All academies specific IT needs incorporated into IT strategic improvement plan (clear links).
	E4	GDPR compliant as assessed by auditors and through reviews by IT support providers.
	E5	IT security in line with latest standards and guidance, assurance provided by external IT provider/s.
	E6	Training records and CPD evidence.

Evidence (continued)

SC 4	E1	Training records and CPD evidence.
SC 5	E1	AIPs.
SC 6	E1	Internal QA of processes and review from HR advisors.
SC 7	E1	Report to Trustees, including timeline, financial implications and analysis of impact on staff of Workforce Remodelling.
SC 8	E1	Report from external reviews and minutes from LABs and SEN team.
SC 9	E1	Termly Internal Assurance Reports.
	E2	Annual External Audits.

Key Performance Indicators		Responsible for Monitoring
KPI 21	Ofsted reports and external reviews (safety section) are Good or better.	FRR
KPI 22	Reduction in Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR) reportable accidents/incidents.	FRR & SC
KPI 23	Reduction in sickness absence as a result of work related accidents/incidents and work related illness.	FRR
KPI 24	SCR is effectively maintained and compliant for all academies and Trust staff as measured by Ofsted.	FRR

Identified Risk	Strategies to Mitigate
R17 HSE investigation/intervention following multiple reported accidents or significant harm to staff/pupil/ visitor resulting in potential fines or prosecution.	<p>M1 Robust procedures in place for investigating and reporting accidents/incidents.</p> <p>M2 Risk assessments in place for pupils, activities etc.</p> <p>M3 Regular H&S inspections, audits and reviews from external H&S advisor.</p> <p>M4 Strong and evolving H&S culture.</p>

Identified Risk (cont.)	Strategies to Mitigate (cont.)
<p>R18 Staff member, family or visitor sues the Trust for an accident resulting in risk of financial and reputational loss.</p>	<p>M1 Risk Protection Arrangements in place to cover any liability costs. M2 Use of experienced media/PR support providers to mitigate any reputational damage.</p>
<p>R19 Significant damage to a Trust building or resource resulting in high cost repair.</p>	<p>M1 Risk Protection Arrangements in place to cover any property damage costs.</p>
<p>R20 SCR does not capture all adults in the building and is not found to be compliant resulting in a risk to an Ofsted outcome and/or danger to pupils.</p>	<p>M1 Effective systems in place, tested and reviewed regularly both internally and externally. M2 Safeguarding training for all staff and in particular specific training for those involved with the SCR. M3 Effective security arrangements and procedures in place for entry and exit of academy buildings.</p>
<p>R21 Sickness absence levels increase as a result of incidents/accidents at work.</p>	<p>M1 Accidents/incidents reviewed by SLTs and analysed by SEN teams. M2 Raising awareness with staff from lessons learnt. M3 Evolving H&S culture. M4 Mental Health training for senior leaders.</p>
<p>R22 Financial resources are insufficient to fund pupil needs.</p>	<p>M1 Effective financial planning with academy leaders. M2 Robust ECHPs identifying needs and resources. M3 Firm approach with commissioners regarding places to ensure appropriate level of funding for each and every pupil.</p>
<p>R23 Building maintenance costs are unaffordable and capital funding bids are unsuccessful.</p>	<p>M1 Building condition surveys completed for all building to identify priorities and investment required to inform financial planning. M2 Seek additional funding and/or alternative income sources.</p>
<p>R24 IT systems are hacked and data lost.</p>	<p>M1 Business continuity arrangements in place for backing up data, both on and off site. M2 Additional investment in new improved IT network and systems to improve security.</p>

Providing strategic clear direction to all academies and where academies are under performing in any way the Trust has provided additional support and challenge to ensure that rapid improvements have been made and sustained. This is evident in the findings of the recent Ofsted inspections and in individual Academy Self Evaluation Frameworks (SEFs).

The systems and processes around quality assurance and monitoring are helping us to strengthen peer challenge and support and disseminate exceptional practice. This is evident in the work of our committees and the Local Accountability Bodies that are now firmly embedded in all of our Academies.

During the last year we have strengthened the work of Executive Leaders who work in partnership with one another to challenge, support and provide quality assurance to all Academies. This is evident in the peer support and challenge provided in thematic reviews and the work of the Challenge Partners.

The Trust continues to be alert to opportunities to contribute to regional, national and international activity. This includes membership of all school forums, supporting other potential academies and Trusts, our Challenge Partner hub and National involvement and more recently national representative on Federation of Leaders in Special Education (FLSE)

In 2017 the Ascent Conference was revised and a more bespoke approach was implemented to ensure that the work had an even clearer focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils. During 2017/18 the Executive Team will evaluate the impact of this and other aspects of professional development through the appraisal process.

Although financial management has proved to be challenging each year the Trustees and Executive Team have successfully prioritised and targeted resources, having provided a significant support where challenges have been identified (for example in New Bridge Academy). The feedback from the Ofsted inspection of Portland Academy (July 2017) was very positive about the challenge and support provided to the academy by Trustees and the Executive Team stating: *"Since the last inspection, trustees and leaders have transformed the way they lead and manage the school. Pupils are achieving better outcomes as a result of this determined drive for improvement"*

In addition to the strong challenge and support by the Trustees and Executive Leadership Team, the Trust has a robust Corporate Services Team and robust financial processes which are led and managed by the Deputy CEO and a dedicated team of professionals. The Trust is subject to regular external audit and scrutiny. Additionally, the Trust commissions high quality external support for finance, human resources and health and safety, which ensures that the Trust is compliant in its statutory duties, delivers best practice and is as efficient and effective as possible.

6.0 Financial Plan

	2017/18 £'000	2018/19 £'000	2019/20 £'000
Income	13,856	14,100	15,697
Expenditure	13,925	14,100	15,697
Surplus / (deficit)	(69)	0	0
Reserves B/F	1136	1067	1067
Reserves C/F	1067	1067	1067
Reserves as a % of income	7.7%	7.7%	7.7%
Number of Academies	5	5	7
Pupil Numbers	799	810	900
Average funding per pupil	£17,342	£17,407	£17,441
Academy % contribution to central costs	4%	4%	3.8%

Assumptions and Guidance

1. Financial Planning Model for 2017/18 is based on the budget approved by Trustees in July 2017 and for later years assumes all academies will be operating within a balanced position from 2018- 19 onwards. All additional academies opened by the Trust or joining the Trust will aim to achieve a 3%-5% surplus in year.
2. 2017/18 based on 5 academies, no new additions in the year. £69k in year deficit budget due to overhanging costs from surplus vacant site (New Bridge Lower – in process of surrendering lease and handing back to the LA in year).
3. 2018/19 based on 5 academies, although preparing for the opening of the new Free School and additional converter academy in 2019/20. Balanced budget forecast and surplus site disposed of. Increase in commissioned placed at 2 academies taking pupil/place numbers to 810.
4. 2019/20 based on 7 academies, including the new special free school in Sunderland and the planned addition of another Good or Outstanding special school joining the Trust. Small surplus budget set as a result of the Free School. Pupil numbers increased by 30 from the Free School and an estimate of 60 from the other additional converter academy. Academy contributions to central Trust costs forecast to reduce to 3.8% as a result of the additional academies and contribution they make to central services/costs.
5. Reserve policy to remain at 5% of annual income to ensure the Trust remains in a healthy and stable position and enable flexibility for capacity building and future investment and growth. Guidance indicates that academy trusts should maintain surplus funds of between 3% and 5% of total income.
6. Central support costs include Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Finance, HR, Facilities, IT and Governance Managers/Lead, support staff, external audit, internal audit, pension audit costs, safeguarding and health & safety for all academies and assumes a 4% contribution of annual income from all academies.
7. Financial plans are challenged annually by Trustees through the Finance, Risk and Resources Committee.

7. Growth Strategy

The Ascent Multi- Academy Trust aims to provide exceptional support for pupils with a range of Special educational needs. The Trust aims to have between 8 and 10 special schools working in hubs over 2 geographical areas in the North-East over a 5 year measured expansion plan. This will include the application for the Free School in Sunderland.

These areas will include, current Local Authorities (Sunderland, Durham and Stockton) and in addition we will consider other authorities such as Redcar & Cleveland, Middlesbrough and Gateshead. Given the collaborative model of the Trust, a maximum of 45 minutes travelling time between academies within the hub has been identified. Hubs will enable a North/South collaboration.

Two collaborative hubs; one in the North and one in the South of the region would provide a sustainable collaborative model of school to school support and enable a level of local governance.

The Trust intends to grow through the converter approach of high performing special schools coming in to the Trust reflecting the Government agenda of all schools becoming academies by 2020. We will only consider sponsorship of underperforming schools when the existing academies in the Trust are all Good or Outstanding. The Trust has no current plans to expand outside of the region.

An expanding MAT of this size will inspire greater collaboration and innovation, built on current good practice. When a school is proposed to be part of our MAT we consider:

- Moral obligation
- Size of school and designation
- Financial position of school
- Distance between schools
- Ofsted category of the school

However, our moral obligation to raise standards and address underperformance remains the overriding consideration and this must be considered in terms of ensuring no existing students are at detriment.

- Our intention and ambition is to create a network of outstanding special schools that thrive through collaboration and interaction.
- We feel a sense of responsibility and obligation to expand. We will only expand when we have the capacity to do so. It is the responsibility of the Trust to build capacity as it develops.
- Our Trust will serve a range of communities including those with relatively high levels of deprivation.

What we won't do.....

- Put competition before collaboration.
- Expand through sponsorship without all existing academies being in a strong position
- Nor do anything that would be detrimental to any young person, staff or school in a neighbouring community.



Glossary

Academies	ATA – Ash Trees Academy BPA - Barbara Priestman Academy HWA – Hope Wood Academy NBA - New Bridge Academy PA – Portland Academy
AIP	Academy Improvement Plan
BAB	Business Accountability Board
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPD	Continued Professional Development
DAR	Dynamic Academy Review
DHT	Deputy Head Teacher
EHT	Executive Head Teacher
ELT	Executive Leadership Team
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
H&S	Health and Safety
HOA	Head of Academy
LA	Local Authority
LAB	Local Accountability Board
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
PA	Persistent Absentee
PHSE	Personal Health & Social Education
PPG	Pupil Premium Grant
QA	Quality Assurance
RE	Religious Education
RI	Requires Improvement
RSC	Regional Schools Commissioner
SC	Standards Committee
SEND	Special Education Needs and Disability
SCERTS	Sensory Communication Emotional Regulation Transitional Support
SEF	Self Evaluation Form
SLP	Student Learning Plan
SMSC	Social Moral Spiritual and Cultural
TL & A	Teaching Learning and Assessment
UPS	Upper Pay Scale