

School Improvement Strategy 2023-24

School Improvement is the responsibility of us all.

In the Athelstan Trust we are constantly refining and improving the way we support, challenge and improve our schools. Each school has an individual identity that is rooted in their community but will work collaboratively to deliver a high-quality and inclusive education for all the students we serve.

In schools, one of the elements that leads to sustained improvement is reducing in-school variation. As a Trust, we also need to reduce inter-school variation. As a result, we offer differing degrees of support to schools which is based on need and not entitlement; resources need to be flexible and deployed across all schools where necessary. This strategy underpins the work we continue to do around recovery from Covid-19. Each school continues to have its own recovery premium plan based on their own individual circumstances and risk assessment.

Guided by the principle that school improvement makes the biggest difference to the life chances of the students in schools, we have identified seven elements that are crucial for school improvement:

1. Leadership, vision and culture
2. Curriculum (in and outside the classroom)
3. Classroom provision
4. Professional development
5. Behaviour, attendance and systems
6. Provision for SEND and intervention strategies
7. Self-evaluation and development planning

1. Leadership, vision and culture

Schools that achieve improvement emphasise the importance of focused leadership and a vision that has support from local governors, school leaders, teachers, students, parents/carers as well as the wider community. Embedded within a culture that is motivating and ambitious for all, the potential for *all* students, including disadvantaged children and children with SEND, is enabled.

A clear vision should underpin leadership decisions and as a part of the Athelstan Trust, this vision should also reflect the wider vision and culture of the Trust. The School Leadership team, supported by the CEO and School Improvement Team, will drive the changes needed and work with all staff to ensure that they know what to do and are equipped to make it happen; every member of staff needs to understand their role in helping students to make the maximum progress during their time at the school.

The vision needs to focus on the most important role of the school – to enable all students to learn and make progress in all aspects of their development. The vision needs to be both ambitious and achievable, taking account of the school's current position and the overall trust strategy. The combination of vision and culture provide a good touchstone against which to reflect on practice. All leadership decisions can therefore be clearly linked to the vision and those that directly support more effective learning and progress should be prioritised.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in each school provide clear direction and set clear expectations, as well as providing the support and development that middle leaders need to do their jobs effectively.

The CEO and School Improvement Team will support school leadership teams as needed.

2. Curriculum

The core aim of all schools should be to improve life chances, especially for the most vulnerable. Attainment in all subjects will contribute to the life chances and increase the future choices available to students. The curriculum needs to also have personal development, PSHE, CEIAG, safeguarding and enrichment as part of the core offer.

The curriculum is the essential overarching framework. A quality curriculum considers what knowledge is needed, what is taught, how it is taught and how it is assessed to ensure that students have learned it. The curriculum in our schools will be purposefully enriched for all children. Students who become immersed in wider opportunities will be furnished with meaningful experiences beyond the taught curriculum.

In all our schools, the design of a subject curriculum will be a shared expectation. Through staff discussing and planning together, subject leaders will get to know their curriculum inside and out. They will secure improved understanding of standards, be able to guard against student misconceptions through careful planning and support the ongoing training needs of staff. Clear planning of the detail of the totality of the curriculum should ensure that students have repeated exposure to abstract concepts in different contexts to help ensure long-term remembering.

In EYFS, Key Stage 1, 2 and 3, schools will teach the full range of national curriculum subjects. Subject leaders will know their curriculum overview and the finer detail of its component parts, which will contribute to ambitious end goals. Leaders will carefully have considered the pre-requisite learning so that students can tackle the new learning to come. There is an expectation that leaders insist that our students experience quality resourcing throughout their curriculum.

At Key Stage 4 we believe that it is appropriate for many of our students to access the EBacc suite of qualifications. This route should not be compulsory. Equal opportunity should be given to all groups.

See our curriculum statement here: https://theathelstantrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Curriculum-Statement-September-2023_Athelstan-Vision.pdf

3. Classroom provision

Schools improve when teaching is consistently strong and effective. The work on vision, leadership and behaviour are all about setting a context in which teaching is effective and students learn and achieve.

‘Good’ teaching is not one particular approach or another, it is a craft with a variety of tools to ‘educate’ the person. It should be stimulating, motivating, interesting and impart knowledge and attributes to

equip students for the next chapter of their life journey. Techniques and style will change depending on context and the needs of learners. It is much more than 'teaching to the test' as this can limit the level students reach.

Schools will be confident that they know how to identify and develop effective teaching, and how to be sure that students are learning and making progress. There needs to be open and honest dialogue between teachers about recognising strengths and areas for development. Consequently, a clear and open approach to improving teaching will help ensure that improvements made in one area can be developed elsewhere.

Evaluations of teaching quality need to take account of the progress that students are making. A wide range of sources at teacher and class level will include learning walks, peer planning and observation, Coaching, review, student voice and assessment outcomes. These should all contribute to a wider discussion between teachers and their line managers about their strengths and development needs.

Subject support

Schools can draw upon additional capacity to maintain their standards and improve where necessary.

We have a team of School Improvement leads, a Primary specialist School Improvement Advisor and SLEs to support classroom practice focussing on raising standards and supporting colleagues. Currently there are subject specialists working across The Athelstan Trust in English, mathematics, science, SEND, ASC, Pastoral Care / Primary Transition, Attendance, Reading / Literacy, Mental Health and Personal Development; the team will continue to grow in the future.

Improvement strategies include:

- In lessons – teaching students.
- Team teaching and instructional coaching to develop practice.
- Splitting 'priority groups' to maximise achievement and enable catch up where necessary.
- Small group intervention across the ability range, in line with trust priorities.
- Joint planning with teachers at all levels, alongside observation and feedback.
- Moderating assessment – setting the standard.
- QA (Quality Assurance) – as subject experts making sure standards are high.
- Contributing to the development of trust-wide curricular and subject specific CPD.
- Leadership development.
- Sharing research and current educational theory / best practice.
- Developing resources and improving curriculum content.
- Delivering CPD

Subject networks

In each subject area heads of subject/faculty/ senior curriculum leaders should work together to focus on subject specific training, briefings on current pedagogical and curricula thinking in the subject as well as a forum to share ideas and best practice. Networks also exist for the core subjects and non-core subjects including PSHE/SRE and careers.

Schools have the autonomy to deliver their own CPD packages to their staff dependent on local need. They can engage the School Improvement Leads and draw on trust materials for subject specific CPD, leadership training and curriculum development.

4. Professional development

Effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is at the heart of our work to engage, develop and retain talented staff in the schools within our region. Each school will aspire to a high-performing working culture for all staff that champions the profession whilst promoting collaboration, aspiration and support.

Our CPD will recognise the critical value of high-quality teaching and adhere to the following key principles:

- Built around participants' needs.
- Subject specific content.
- A clear, logical thread.
- Involves explicit discussion, self-evaluation and active research.
- External input from areas of expertise.
- Collaborative learning.
- Powerful leadership.
- Inspires appropriate action that impacts on student learning and progress.

Within each school, CPD programmes will vary according to the needs of a particular context. We offer an extensive CPD programme across our schools which is open to all.

The Athelstan Trust will 'grow its own' and do this at several levels but continue to be outward looking to get the best from the wider system. We will work with partners in our local Teaching School hubs (Odyssey and Balcarras) to offer the full range of NPQs and the ECF in addition to our in-house training offer. In the interests of ensuring a consistent experience for all, each school will use Odyssey Teaching Hub for their ECF provision and as an awarding organisation. We will also continue to maintain strong partnerships with several Higher Education ITT providers across the trust such as the universities of Bristol, Gloucestershire, Bath Spa, UWE as well as Teach first.

The Athelstan Trust CPD Manager will coordinate the CPD offer within the Trust.

5. Behaviour, attendance and systems

Students need to attend school and behave well if they are to learn and make progress. Staff must communicate clear expectations of behaviour and attendance, reflective of the school's vision, culture and ethos.

Consistency is key to improving behaviour, and in line with the school's behaviour and attendance

policy, this requires the school to have a clear, unwavering and known position on what is acceptable and what is not, allowing for reasonable adjustments to be made for students with SEND. This will be evident in the way staff guide and respond to their students at all times of the school day.

Attending school and reducing persistent absence for all groups is a key driver of school Improvement. Schools in The Athelstan Trust are relentless in their approach, especially with the most vulnerable.

Any form of unofficial exclusions, off rolling or encouraging elective home education are not appropriate and have no place in Athelstan Trust schools.

6. Provision for SEND and Intervention strategies

The Athelstan Trust is committed to offering an inclusive curriculum to ensure the best possible progress for all our students whatever their needs or prior attainment. Each school within the Trust values the contribution that every student can make and welcomes the diversity of culture, religion and intellectual style. Each school seeks to raise achievement of the whole community, remove barriers to learning and provide physical and curricular access for all. As such, provision for students with SEND is a matter for each school to prioritise.

All teachers are teachers of students with SEND. The Board of Trustees, the Local Governing Bodies, Headteachers, SENDCos and all other members of staff have important responsibilities. Each Local Governing Body reports to parents/carers on the effectiveness of their school's work on behalf of children with SEND through the Access Plan and the Information Report which is updated annually and is available on each school's website.

Trust SENDCos meet regularly to share best practice and provide peer supervision. SENDCos are supported by the Trust SEND and Neurodiversity Leads and the wider School Improvement Team.

7. Self-evaluation and Improvement planning

The Athelstan Trust recognises the importance of self-evaluation as a crucial part of our schools' ongoing cycle of review and improvement planning. A self-evaluation summary is an important tool in this process, which enables schools to draw together an evaluation of different aspects of their work leading to an evaluation of the quality of education provided overall. There is no fixed time in the year when a self-evaluation might be completed. This will depend on the individual circumstances of each school.

Schools produce a School Improvement Plan every academic year. These documents directly reflect the work that will need to be done in order to achieve targets set and serve as a live and ongoing record of progress towards achieving targets and other school improvement priorities. Although the plan is frequently considered and evaluated over the course of an academic year by middle and senior leaders in the schools, it is also a document that is well-organised, succinct, unambiguous, data-driven and well presented, such that it can be presented to and understood by all stakeholders at any given moment throughout the course of the academic year.

COVID

Every school has a post-Covid recovery plan, monitored by the SLT and Headteachers

- The quality of teaching makes the biggest difference to learning outcomes.
- Interventions should be evidence based and retained only if evaluation shows a clear and positive impact.
- Ensure interventions target the right group of students.
- Establish clear accountability for intervention strategies.
- Facilitate departments working together to coordinate student support.
- Create a clear monitoring, evaluation and review cycle to check progress.
- Rigorous monitoring and use of data.
- Raising student aspirations using engagement/aspiration programmes.
- Engaging parents (particularly hard-to-reach parents) and raising parental aspirations.
- Developing social and emotional competencies.
- Supporting school transitions.
- Providing strong and visionary leadership.
- Small group or 1:1 teaching.
- Peer tutoring.
- Last minute interventions should not routinely be relied upon.

Monitoring

The CEO with the Executive Leadership Group will oversee school improvement across the Athelstan Trust. Headteachers are line managed by the CEO in conjunction with the Chair of the Local Governing Body. The CEO line manages the Senior School Improvement Lead who is responsible for the line management of each School Improvement Lead in the team.

Reviews and Audits

The Trustees and the CEO can require a review or audit of any part of a school's work. We will commission External Reviews when appropriate. Schools can also request a review of any aspect of the work. Examples include:

- Whole school reviews
- SEND Reviews
- Safeguarding Audits
- Subject reviews
- Pastoral reviews

Aims of reviews

- Audit, challenge and support for the school being reviewed, providing a plan of action.
- Identify what is best within the school so others can learn from them.
- Provide a point of reference for subsequent monitoring and evaluation by the school
- CPD for reviewers (by visiting other schools – sharing ideas).