

ATHENA SCHOOLS TRUST PARTNERS UPDATE



ISSUE NO 2 | SUMMER TERM 2020 |



EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

02

All our schools are either 'outstanding' or 'good'; find out more on page 2 about how we support educational excellence.

FINANCES 03

Athena Schools Trust saves its schools money.

Examine our financial performance on page 3.

GOVERNANCE

03

Collective Governor training has been a success this year. 100% of governors report that our training is good or outstanding and assists them in supporting their schools excel. More on page 3.

OUR YEAR

As our second year as a Multi-Academy Trust draws to a close, we mark the end of an extraordinary six months - the like of which has never been seen before in education. The challenges have been significant; yet we have risen and focused on delivering the best for the children in our care.

This year saw the launch of an exciting new initiative – the

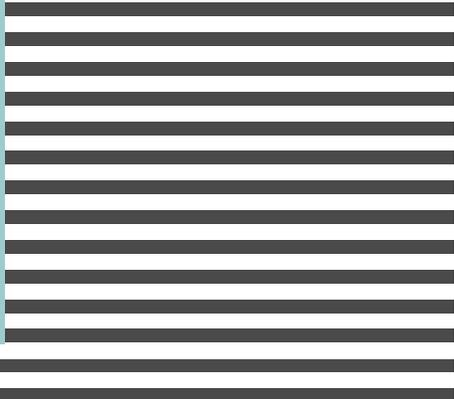
collaborative School Improvement Strategy partnership with Guildford Education Partnership (GEP) Academies. Athena's five and GEP's seven schools have combined their school improvement and development resources to help everyone in both trusts and we look forward to seeing where this project goes in the future.

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

All the schools in Athena Schools Trust are judged either 'outstanding' or 'good' by Ofsted.

Our academic performance is strong with every school delivering provision which is above national benchmarks for attainment and progress.

However, these are achievements which we won't be able to see in figures nor statistical analysis this year due to COVID-19 pandemic. Each school has continued to provide online lessons for students during the lockdown during which the most important matters have been the overall wellbeing and happiness of the students and the richness of the curriculum.



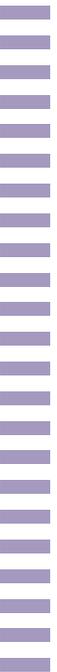
Our Trust believes that educational excellence is about more than just exam results. Each of our schools has a strong tradition of a full, enriching curriculum.

AST will continue to value and support these traditions, providing a rich curriculum for all.

TRUST SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Our collaborative project with GEP Academies saw each of our primary schools focused on curriculum development to ensure coherence and progression. Each school, in partnership with their School Improvement Adviser, reviewed their education provision

and agreed their current strengths and areas for development. Most of the schools have undertaken a supported Self-Evaluation of Governance, and as a result, have targeted action plans to further improve their practice.



FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Athena has continued to develop the services that it provides to schools, with no increase to the service charge rate paid by schools. This means that schools continue to see better value-for-money from Athena, which is essential in times of funding constraint.

Athena actually delivers savings to schools that exceed its running costs, so on average (across all 5 schools), membership actually results in the schools having more money to invest locally in education.

This year, Athena has taken the following actions to improve the value-for-money that our schools receive:

- Additional services added, with no increase in the overall charge (eg budgeting software, additional staff CPD sessions, School Improvement Programme)
- Support with COVID-19 Financial Planning, including helping schools reduce costs and access additional funding such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- Benchmarking of all schools and assessment of staffing models to help LGBs review how they prioritise their expenditure
- Applying for funds for capital projects – this has resulted in Pirbright being awarded funds for a £50,000 project



HOW DO WE SPEND OUR MONEY?

£12,500,000

Annual turnover of AST and its schools

58%

of our funds are spent on teachers
(above the national average)

75%

of our funds are spent on
Learning and Teaching

3%

contribution that schools make to AST's
central running costs. AST delivers
financial benefits back to schools that
exceed this amount.

GOVERNANCE IN OUR TRUST

MEMBERS

TRUSTEES

JGC

LGB

HEADTEACHERS

GOVERNANCE

Governance at Athena consists of five layers. Our **members** are the custodians of the Trust. They meet twice a year, approve our plans, review our audit and are a place for local governors to voice concerns if they perceive the Trustees to be moving against our original values and intentions. **Trustees** provide strategic oversight of the Trust's operations and activities. They are the governance arm of the Trust's central activities.

GOVERNANCE (cont.)

Our JGC, or **Joint Governing Council**, comprises two governors from each school who meet regularly to give feedback to the Trust on areas of focus, positive developments or concerns. In turn, the Trustees and the central team communicate new developments and reflect upon the effectiveness of the Trust's services provided to schools. We are working to improve the means via which the JGC can communicate with the Trustees and LGBs with the introduction of a new *communications cycle* to assist in the practicalities of managing such information flow.

Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) play a central role in running their schools. This is different to some other multi-academy Trusts. At Athena, we do not believe in running schools by 'remote control'. Instead, we empower local governors with the responsibility, accountability and local knowledge to continue running successful schools.

The central aspect of all governance is the **Headteacher**. A core purpose of the Trust is how well it supports and develops headteachers in their role. A happy headteacher leads to a happy school.

We do endeavour to provide training for all these governing arms at work in the Trust. Training and development is central to our vision of an outstanding Trust provider. Learning is one of our core values. This value is just as relevant for the children, our staff, the Trust executive team, our Trustees and all layers of governance.

The table on the right shows the governance training programme for the coming academic year. This has been designed by the JGC and reflects the needs that local governing bodies have identified. Our continuing commitment to governance development, we hope, will feed into better run schools and happy and successful children.

AST & GEP GOVERNORS' TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT 2020-21

| | |
|------------|---|
| 21.9.2020 | Governors and governance compliance |
| 7.10.2020 | Designing an educational and cost effective curriculum |
| 11.11.2020 | Premises and buildings, schools estate management |
| 8.12.2020 | Educational monitoring |
| 18.1.2021 | Ofsted framework |
| 3.2.2021 | Safeguarding: an introduction |
| 2.3.2021 | Budgeting – preparing for the school budgets |
| 15.3.2021 | Annual Governors' Conference |
| 30.3.2021 | Exclusions – best management practices |
| 26.4.2021 | Ensuring accurate assessment and trust wide consistency |
| 25.5.2021 | School funding, financial efficiency & benchmarking |
| 24.6.2021 | Wide educational themes |

All AST and GEP schools are able to send an unlimited number of Governors and Staff to Governance training events.

TRUSTEES

This year, we have been delighted to welcome four new trustees to bring values and talents to the Trust Board: Chetan Modi, Campbell Livingston, Kathy Ashford and Andrew Isherwood.



SURVEY RESULTS



SURVEY PROCESS

We had planned to run a Trust-wide staff survey from a national provider but the rollout of this programme was postponed from the Spring term this year due to COVID-19 school closures. We will carry out our staff survey in the autumn term. We have chosen to use a national survey so that we can compare our results against national benchmarks and returns. We will share our results with you once we have them.

WIDER PARTNERSHIPS

Athena Schools Trust is not a closed club. We are seeking to expand our membership both formally and informally to benefit our staff and students.

High quality education is not something undertaken in closed circles, but a collaboration of partners and equals who must communicate and support each other to deliver effective, life-changing opportunities for children.

Athena Schools Trust will always look to work with a wide range of partners to fulfil this vision. We do endeavour to grow and become a Trust of 15 – 20 schools over the next five years. We believe this is best achieved through local partnerships and a tight geographical area. We envisage this growth to come from within Surrey and its borders. Collaboration between staff and enrichment amongst the children is more effective within local networks.

Athena VALUES and ETHOS

The Athena Schools Trust is driven by the needs of every student in the MAT. We have high aspirations for every school and every individual, irrespective of background, and aspire that every child reaches his or her full potential. We hold a belief that education & learning is a life-long activity and that we all need to be inspired to fulfil our potential. We work to create a safe, supportive and caring environment, ensuring that every student's academic, physical and emotional needs are met.

Collaboration is key to delivering the best education – academic, physical and emotional – for every child, whatever their individual needs, across all ages.

Athena was set up by local schools to develop a MAT that sets high aspirations and goals for every school in the partnership. We believe that all schools have unique qualities and characteristics which make them a special place within their community and do not seek to change this.

NEXT YEAR'S FOCUS?

In the light of our second year experiences, we are pleased to share the strategic aims of the Trust for next year with you.

Better Together: Athena School Trust 2018-21

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>MISSION</p> <p>Schools working together to give every child an excellent education.</p> | <p>VISION</p> <p>To be the schools of choice in our community, offering outstanding education to every child</p> | <p>VALUES</p> <p>Aspiration - Collaboration Local Leadership - Learning</p> |
| Our cornerstones | | |
| <p>Students first</p> <p>Schools will always be led by those who ask what is best for the children</p> | <p>High aspirations</p> <p>We aspire for every student and staff member to reach their potential</p> | <p>Teach Creatively</p> <p>We prize creative and inspiring teaching and providing exceptional teachers in the classroom</p> |
| <p>Robust Business</p> <p>We will centralise services to support schools and use our resources as effectively as possible</p> | <p>Improve schools</p> <p>We expect every school to continually strive to be the best</p> | <p>Govern locally</p> <p>Schools are led best by those who know the students, staff and local communities they serve</p> |
| <p>Staff investment</p> <p>Our schools work together to share ideas, staff development, expertise and career progression</p> | <p>Raise outcomes</p> <p>We aim to become the best performing Trust in the local area.</p> | |

Our 2020-21 objectives:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Grow the Trust</p> <p>Develop a trust structure in accordance with our collaborative values</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Explore growth strategies via aligning trust work with GEP b. Support LGBs in effective & purposeful governance c. Maintain a variety of growth avenues through formal and informal partnerships d. Implement enhanced trading of AST services & personnel to third parties e. Explore executive leadership & shared working throughout the organisation f. Develop the Athena brand |
| <p>2. Align with GEP</p> <p>Implement a vision for trust alignment which benefits all</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Undertake due diligence of GEP to inform risks/benefits of alignment b. Propose legal entity and governance arrangements c. Define aligned Head Office processes, structure and organisation d. Define key policy, process, people and systems changes e. Define critical path for integration of policies, processes, people & systems f. Define benefits of alignment |
| <p>3. Develop effective services</p> <p>Centralise services to achieve operational efficiencies</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support finance systems which result in school savings & balanced in-year budgets b. Provide collaborative HR services c. Utilise ICFF tools to inform effective resource allocation d. Explore trust wide IT provision e. Support H&S, GDPR & policy management with schools f. Explore appraisal system g. Develop an estates vision |
| <p>4. Provide robust school improvement</p> <p>Support schools improve teaching and student outcomes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Embed SIP role & supportive review in schools b. Extend trust CPD and network offering to schools c. Continue to utilise headteacher leadership in trust improvement activity d. Collaborate with GEP & other partners to broaden improvement services, review and training e. Conduct staff survey |
| <p>5. Raise attainment for all</p> <p>Irrespective of personal circumstances all children will thrive</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improve trust performance at KS1, KS2, KS4 & KS5 b. Every school to surpass national norm benchmarks for student progress c. Reduce DA & SEN gaps in attainment in every school d. Develop a trust wide literacy strategy e. Support schools bridge learning gaps resulting from COVID disruption |
| <p>6. Embed a rich and varied curriculum</p> <p>Students are inspired by challenge and variety</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Monitor and evaluate curriculum provision and effectiveness against the national curriculum b. Children enjoy school and attendance is 95%+ c. Promote inclusion through flexible curriculum design, child & parent support and SEND training d. Provide trust wide curriculum enrichment opportunities for every child e. Support enriching curriculum |

TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



In the autumn term, we had a wonderful Athena INSET day. A chance for us all to consider curriculum and our professional development anew and we were very pleased to welcome Mary Myatt as our keynote speaker. Teaching staff enthusiasm for [Mary Myatt's](#) input was very strong. Mary spoke passionately on a wide range of topics. Joyfully treading, and leaving, the 'party line' on occasions.

We particularly enjoyed her work on 'respecting the dignity of individual subjects'. The demise of 'topic' is a good thing, even though we may have to commit and develop subject leadership at primary schools in new (or revert to old) ways. She also spoke of the entitlement for all. Whether a disadvantaged child, an SEN pupil or a child with disabilities, we should not dumb down material or make it 'easy'. The beauty in learning is that sometimes it is hard. It should stretch us.

Her thought experiment highlighted how we do enjoy a challenge and we do benefit from stretch; however, the conditions in which we achieve this are crucial. High challenge - low stress. Her example of the importance of selfassessment and re-call knowledge testing was illuminating. We do not need to collect marks to move learning forward!

Training and professional development has not been limited to our conference. Workshops, moderation sessions, leadership development courses, sharing best practice afternoons, support staff training opportunities have all been utilised this year.

Our half-termly CPD afternoons for class and non-class based staff have been a success this year. We are very grateful for the wide range of colleagues who have led these sessions and collaborated for school development.

We believe this is a cornerstone of supporting our staff to become fulfilled and better equipped to deliver education, of which we are all proud.



AIMS & VALUES

Athena Schools Trust aims to be **'better together'**. We strive to be the schools of choice for our community, offering outstanding education to every child. It is through meaningful collaboration and support that we can maintain and develop the education quality our children receive.

We place our core values at the heart of all our work. We have the highest **aspiration** of ourselves and our students, placing **learning** at the heart of our organisation.

Through **collaboration** we can achieve more together and provide **local leadership** with the support necessary to develop vibrant and creative schools which reflect community values and needs.

Better together.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS' RETURN FOR 1 SEPTEMBER 2020

The government's guidance regarding the planned full opening in September has ongoing challenges for schools, particularly secondary schools, as we all work across the trust to fully reopen all schools after this year's pandemic closures and lockdown.

The trustees and schools' governors continue to be hugely supportive of the headteachers, executive team and school business managers as the latter redraft plans, risk assessments and health and safety documentation.

Each school is being asked to consider and write a summary to describe how they will open while meeting government guidelines and to use internal guidance documents and checklists the central team have written to prompt the schools to consider what measures they will / won't be taking (and why). This will provide a single document that will justify their approach and will provide their governors, the trustees and any other interested party to see what the school is doing to put the guidance into practice. Most areas are quite simple, but some will be complex for some schools depending upon their footprint, age of students and numbers on roll.

Trustees are humbled by the professionalism, dedication and drive colleagues have shown during this time. We have taken steps none of us expected to make and prepare for a September journey which is still unknown.

Plaudits are for everyone in our trust communities for their ongoing work during these extraordinary times - School business managers, teachers, site staff, office leads, out of class staff, caterers, governors, TAs, trustees and of course, headteachers.

Schools are always a team effort – but never more so than in the grips of a pandemic. All have risen to the difficulties and challenges we have faced over the last six months and focused on delivering the best for the children in our care.

BETTER TOGETHER

