



Academies Trust

Trustees' Report
to the Co-op Academies Trust Annual Governor
Conference

29 January 2022

Welcome

from the Chair of the Trust



It is my pleasure to introduce an overview of the work of the Co-op Academies Trust Board during 2021.

The past 12 months have proven to be an enormously challenging period for all involved in the education sector. As we know, Covid doesn't play fair and targets individuals and communities which are the most vulnerable. So we can be very proud of the role our academies have played to help and support our students and their learning, often in really tough circumstances.

Of course none of this would be possible without the commitment and dedication of our colleagues - teachers, classroom assistants, support staff, school leaders and our central trust team. We thank them most sincerely for all they do each day to provide a great co-operative education for over 17,000 young people.

We'd also like to put on record our thanks to the Co-op - whether it be support with vouchers ensuring all our students could access lunch when schools were closed, or the provision of extra IT kit to those without, or the development of a Whole Trust Approach to Mental Well-Being with MIND, our relationship with our sponsor is genuinely unique.

Good governance is a cornerstone of an effective trust and we continue to benefit

from highly engaged and skilled governors at a local level. This has been important as we navigate through the challenges posed by the pandemic - but it also helped drive thinking on the changes we have made during 2021 to our Scheme of Delegation, which is designed to make much clearer "who does what" within our Trust. Although our new ways of working are still bedding in, we are already seeing positive signs of how our newly named Academy Governing Councils are embracing the need for greater community and stakeholder engagement, as well as the development of hub-level connections with our Chief Education Officers.

As part of our governance review, we have also sought to address the composition of our Trust Board. During 2021, we have appointed four new trustees who each bring important qualities and perspectives from their differing backgrounds and we intend to continue the process of refreshing our Board in 2022 as the terms of office for some conclude. Much of our business is conducted through our Board committees and the chairs of each have provided a summary of their work during the year which you can read in this report. We have also introduced a new sub-committee to oversee the increasingly complex area of colleague remuneration, sitting alongside our existing performance management sub-committee.

In the autumn, the Board commenced its review of the Trust's Strategic Plan. Our existing strategy was developed in 2017 and was rooted in our ambition to accelerate the growth of our Trust, both to develop our school improvement and organisational capacity and bring more Co-op Academies to the communities we serve. The Board's ambition is to have the next phase of our Strategy in place for the start of the new academic year and so a programme of engagement - with our academies, the Co-op and yourselves - will be a priority for the first half of 2022.

There is, of course, still much we need to do to truly achieve our potential and the Board is determined that our new strategy will be bold and ambitious. We can do this because we know we are building on firm foundations - our academies are improving, our finances are secure, our internal capacity is growing and our talent pool is deepening in all parts of the Trust.

And crucially, our co-operative values and principles - encapsulated by the Co-op's Vision of "co-operating for a fairer world" - will continue to provide a sense of direction and purpose which will guide us through the next phase of our development.

Thank you again for all you have contributed during the past year.

Russell Gill
Chair of Trust Board





Welcome

from the Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to our conference, based this year on the crucial theme of Educational Recovery for our pupils, following two years of a very challenging period for education.

It has been a very difficult time for staff, students, parents and governors, in fact for anyone associated with education. Pupils have missed vital educational time and, despite the best efforts of remote learning, we know their academic and social progress has been affected. Our response to this challenge must be to embrace the opportunity for recovery, working smarter not harder to ensure our pupils have a bright future to look forward to with optimism. Our conference today will give a real insight into how, as governors, you can help to play your part in this key role you have within educational leadership.

Firstly I would like to thank you all for your continued effort, commitment and contribution to our academies and communities. Your contribution is vital, so thank you. Secondly this is your budget's "rainy day", so, more than ever, spending all your Pupil Premium grant and helping the most vulnerable students who have been most affected is vital. The Trust's strategy for Pupil Premium spend is based on Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) research: 50% on great teaching, 25%

on academic intervention and 25% on whole school strategies. We published all this guidance at the start of the academic year in September 2021. Writing the plan is vital, but then implementation is even more crucial, i.e. making sure the money is spent on effective intervention strategies to help those who most need it with real positive impact. In education, intervention is discussed at great length, but we all know that a pupil being well taught consistently every day is the best way to help any student including the most vulnerable. We are lucky we have an excellent set of teachers and support staff, doing their very best every day, so it is crucial we keep investing in them and developing their skill set. There have been many opportunities across the Trust to discuss the best uses of Pupil Premium spend, with further opportunity today, including how we help our pupils who are on the Special Educational Needs register within our academies. As an academy we are only as strong as how we help, support and make progress with our most vulnerable pupils. That is key to our success and something we will continue to benchmark across the Trust in measuring the quality of education we provide.

Notice that, in my introduction, I referred to the importance of both academic and social progress. For a pupil to be successful at school they need to feel safe but also

socially confident. Pupil Premium spend and educational recovery isn't just about academic intervention but also about giving the student a range of experiences so they can grow in confidence and feel happy in school. In a recent Headteachers' meeting Kevan Collins (Recovery Tsar) gave an excellent presentation outlining the need for enrichment activities to be a key part of any educational recovery strategy. Hence why today we have asked Stevie Spring, the Chair of MIND, to talk to you. Mental Health must be given serious consideration in all our academies. Since the pandemic started we have a Mental Health champion in every academy that all belong to a network across the Trust, we have Senior Mental Health First Aid staff in every school (with further opportunities funded by the Trust this year to increase the amount of staff qualified in this area) and finally, in partnership with MIND, funded by the Co-op, all our academies have an action plan outlining key strategies building on the best practice, to develop the right culture so we can support staff and students with Mental Health. As Governors this is on the AGC's agenda for meetings two, four and six, so please make it a real topic of interest and ensure it is delivered to really help those that need the support. A huge thank you to Stevie Spring for all her help and support with this and, of course, for her input today.

Lastly I would like to thank the Governance Team for organising and setting up the conference. This is my third conference and they have been truly excellent, very positive, energising and informative, so thank you for your attendance.

Dr Chris Tomlinson
Chief Executive Officer



Our Trust Board



Mags Bradbury



Neil Braithwaite



Jane Cowell OBE



Gill Gardner



Russell Gill
Chair of Trust Board



Mike Greenacre
Vice-Chair



Patsy Kane OBE



Shaheen Myers



Arati Patel-Mistry



Dave Robertson



Gill Robinson OBE

The Trust Board

There are four main committees to the Trust Board:

- Outcomes Committee
- Growth and Development
- Audit and Risk
- Finance

Details of committee membership and terms of reference are available at:

coopacademies.co.uk/about-us/governance/

The Members

The Members oversee the work of the Trust Board and appoint Trustees.

Rebecca Birkbeck
Gill Gardner
Russell Gill
Andrew Lang
Caroline Sellers

We're growing

27

Academies at the end of 2021 and one free school in the process of opening.

⬆️ Up from 26 in 2020

£143m

Income

⬆️ Up from £135m in 2020

17,361

Students

⬆️ Up from 17,289 in 2020

2,536

Colleagues

⬇️ Down from 2,548 in 2020

83

Co-op Governors

⬆️ Up from 81 in 2020

£299m

Assets

⬆️ Up from £294m in 2020



Financial Summary	Total 2021	Total 2020
	£000	£000
Operating Income	138,543	122,589
Transfers / Conversions	4,532	12,231
TOTAL INCOME	143,075	134,820
Operating Costs	(136,794)	(127,673)
Revaluation of Pension Liabilities	(6,557)	(9,558)
NET MOVEMENT OF RESERVES	(276)	(2,411)
CUMULATIVE RESERVES	187,270	187,546

Balance Sheet	Total 2021	Total 2020
	£000	£000
Tangible Assets	299,470	293,648
Net Current Assets	12,138	7,977
	311,608	301,625
Liabilities > 1 year	(124,338)	(114,079)
NET ASSETS	187,270	187,546
TRUST RESERVES	187,270	187,546

The summary financial statement takes into account the technical reporting requirements of both Accounting Standards and the Regulator (through the Academies Financial Handbook). We are required to show movement in the annual liability through our Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA). From an operating perspective, the Trust made a surplus of £6.3m during the year, which included the new academy opening, and £1.2m of capital receipts which will fund capital projects during the current academic year.

The Work of the Trust Board Committees

Growth and Development Committee

The Growth and Development Committee has met six times in the last 12 months; twice for single agenda item meetings to deal with important operational issues. As reported last year, one of the effects of the pandemic has been governing bodies of schools potentially interested in joining the Trust, prioritising the management of the pandemic over consideration of structural change.

The Committee is very pleased to report that we are welcoming two outstanding primary academies to the Trust; Glebe Academy in Stoke-on-Trent and New Islington Academy in the City of Manchester, both likely to convert towards or at the end of this academic year, subject to the Regional Schools Commissioner's approval.

The work of the committee has centred on:

- Ensuring the growth strategy overall and at Hub level remains fit for purpose and specifically exploring the potential for other, smaller, Trusts to join the Trust and for further applications for new Free Schools.
- Ensuring scrutiny of the risks associated with the capital works and pre-opening plans for our two approved Free School applications: a Special School in Leeds and Belle Vue secondary academy in Manchester. Belle Vue Academy opened to Year 7 pupils in September 2021 in a new extension to Connell Sixth Form College. The extension will provide the additional growth required to support Connell growth plans once Belle Vue students transfer to the new building currently under construction.
- Ensuring our procedures and processes for taking schools into the Trust are working well via a post Transfer Review for Clarice Cliff which joined the Trust in December 2020.
- Maintaining oversight of student number trends in our existing academies and consideration of proposed changes to Pupil Admission Numbers.
- Ensuring that all Funding Agreements have been reviewed and are in line with national requirements.

Audit and Risk Committee

This committee supports the Trust Board by advising on the effectiveness of strategic processes for risk management, internal control, governance and information assurance. It takes the lead on liaison with the internal and external audit teams in agreeing their plans and following up on the results of their work, and oversees the production of the Trust's annual report and accounts. During this academic year we were able to confirm the continuing development of the internal control framework required to match the growth in the size and complexity of the Trust. Whilst a great deal was achieved in the year, further work will be completed this year on finance systems

and processes, IT security and GDPR. The further development and roll-out of the trust-wide risk management system 4Risk this year has gone well and the Committee has been able, therefore, to focus its attention on risk appetite and strategic level risks to help underpin the development of an updated Trust wide strategy. We were pleased to receive the external audit report, which noted the very smooth external audit process again this year underpinned by the Civica financial system and the quality of the work of the Finance Team in the preparation of the year-end accounts.

Finance Committee

This committee supports the Trust Board, primarily, by considering the detail of the Trust's financial plans, forecasts and ongoing financial performance, the Trust's Financial Regulations, Asset Management Strategy and Reserves Policy. We were pleased to note the continuing strong financial performance of the Trust overall and the maintenance of reserves in line with the Trust's policy.

Outcomes Committee

The Outcomes Committee's role is to oversee outcomes across the Trust, from pupils' achievements to staff experience. Whilst the committee has seen the impact of Covid across the academies on pupil and staff attendance, the committee has also seen the resilience and innovation of our academies.

Key areas focused on by the committee:

- Strengthening governance, including the development of link trustees.
- SEND, including the introduction of SEND reviews across the Trust and a bespoke Curriculum Statement for the special schools.
- Safeguarding, including scrutiny of the outcomes of the trust-wide audit and the development of a trust-wide policy.
- Mental Health and Wellbeing, including oversight of the Trust's partnership with MIND and the actions resulting from this.
- Pupil outcomes, including scrutiny of the greatly improved data collection and analysis across the trust.
- Diversity, including the updating of the Trust's equality objectives and the developing work around the curriculum.
- Staff Development, including the development of a Trust People Strategy, with a clear focus on growing our talent within the Trust and creating an inclusive, supportive and innovative workforce culture.

