



Strategic Business Plan 2016-2017

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce the Strategic Business Plan for Ad Astra Academy Trust. The Trust was set up originally as a result of the vision of two high-performing primary schools in Hartlepool that wanted to take full advantage of the freedoms and autonomy that academy conversion would bring. The leaders of both schools recognised the implications of the changing educational landscape and made an important decision to be 'ahead of the game' and to shape their own future. Much has been achieved since the first conversion in January 2015, however despite the infancy of the organisation, the reputation of the Trust and its infrastructure has grown to the point that now more schools, both within Hartlepool and beyond, are expressing a desire to join Ad Astra with two schools currently already in the conversion process.

Ad Astra is led by a strong team of trustees who each bring significant experience and expertise to the table in areas such as accountancy, IT and strategic and educational leadership. These attributes ensure that both the business and educational aspects of the trust are in the very best hands. The Local Governing Body in each school plays a crucial role in ensuring strong local accountability and the positive contribution they make is vital to effective governance across the Trust.

Schools who wish to join Ad Astra can do so in the knowledge that the educational experience of every one of our children is at the heart of everything we do and the decisions that we make. Ensuring the best educational outcomes for the children within our schools is our top priority and one which we constantly strive for with rigour and challenge at every level. We are proud of all of the staff in our schools, who work tirelessly to support the academic and pastoral achievement of our pupils. To support this we recognise the need for effective and intuitive business management to allow the educational leaders of the Trust to focus on school improvement priorities. To ensure that this is achieved, we continue to invest in a dedicated Trust business support function that provides specialist experience and expertise in key business critical areas.

I have no doubt that the future holds many challenges and rewards both for Ad Astra and the academy family as a whole, however I feel confident that the Trust is in a strong position to meet these with the energy and commitment of all Ad Astra stakeholders. I hope that this plan clearly articulates our priorities and milestones that will enable us to achieve our vision including the growth and development of the Trust in the future.

Andy Steel
Chair of Trustees



Introduction

This strategic business plan aims to clearly define the objectives and priorities for Ad Astra Academy Trust over the next two years. We acknowledge that changes to internal and external contextual factors may influence this plan, however it will be revisited periodically (minimum of twice per year) to ensure that achievements and impact are measured, objectives and priorities are appropriately monitored and also that the contents remain relevant.

This plan also aims to pull together into one document the ethos, aims and values of the Trust and the moral purpose which permeates the work of everyone involved in Ad Astra. In addition the plan will also provide some valuable context and trust-specific information that will support this. It is intended that the document will enable the reader to clearly understand the fundamental principles which underpin the Trust and also gain an insight into the direction of travel with the confidence that the Trust and the schools within it are in good hands.

As this is a strategic **business** plan, clearly the focus is on delivering business related objectives that support the core focus of delivering an outstanding education. We understand that as an academy we operate in a different context to that of a maintained school and the associated risks and challenges have to be appropriately managed. However Ad Astra Academy Trust believes that strong business support is intrinsically linked to strong school improvement. A sound business model that delivers efficiency, effectiveness and economies of scale frees up not only financial resources for re-investment in curriculum priorities but also ensures that the time of our educational specialists can be dedicated to ensuring the educational progress and achievement of all pupils. We do not underestimate the amount of time that can be diverted to non-teaching and learning priorities if the business support function is not properly managed. This plan aims to ensure that this is lead and managed effectively from both a strategic and operational perspective.

Our mission, aims and values

Mission Statement

We will provide an innovative, first class education to inspire our children to achieve their full potential.

Value Statement

Our Trust will be recognised as a leading provider of education. All of our schools will create a safe, stimulating environment that engenders a thirst for learning and gives our children the best start in life.

Aims

To support all of our children to achieve or surpass national expectations;
Ensure all of our academies exceed national expected targets;
Support all of our academies to achieve an OFSTED grading of Outstanding;
To ensure that leadership and the quality of teaching and learning is good or better in all of our schools;
To enable staff in our Trust to be innovative, lifelong learners and to work collaboratively;
To budget effectively, to build capacity within the Trust and to deploy our resources efficiently for the benefit of pupils and staff;
Develop strong relationships between families, the community and stakeholders.

Values

Strive for excellence in all that we do;
Continuously improving the pupil experience is at the heart of everything we do;
Value everyone in the Trust, treating them with dignity and respect;
Foster inclusivity by recognising individuals and removing barriers to success;
Encourage co-operation to achieve our aims;
Create a culture of lifelong learning for all;
Act with moral purpose to make a difference for all.

Purpose of the Trust

The purpose of the Trust is to;

- Support with rigour and challenge those schools in the Trust that are good or better to ensure continuous improvement.
- To provide intensive support to schools in the Trust that require improvement to ensure rapid improvement in outcomes for children.
- To promote and encourage collaboration and participation between schools and act as a vehicle for sharing good practice.
- To develop and implement a cohesive and appropriate programme of development for all staff within the Trust to ensure they have the necessary skills and are adequately equipped to meet the educational challenges both now and in the future.
- To recruit staff who share the moral purpose of the Trust and who have the appropriate experience, expertise and commitment to make a difference.
- To monitor and challenge the business support function to achieve economies of scale and ensure that contracts and service level agreements are both fit for purpose and provide value for money.
- To develop a central team to support all schools in the Trust from an educational and business perspective.
- To ensure strong and effective leadership and governance across the Trust.
- To ensure accountability and transparency across all aspects of the Trust.

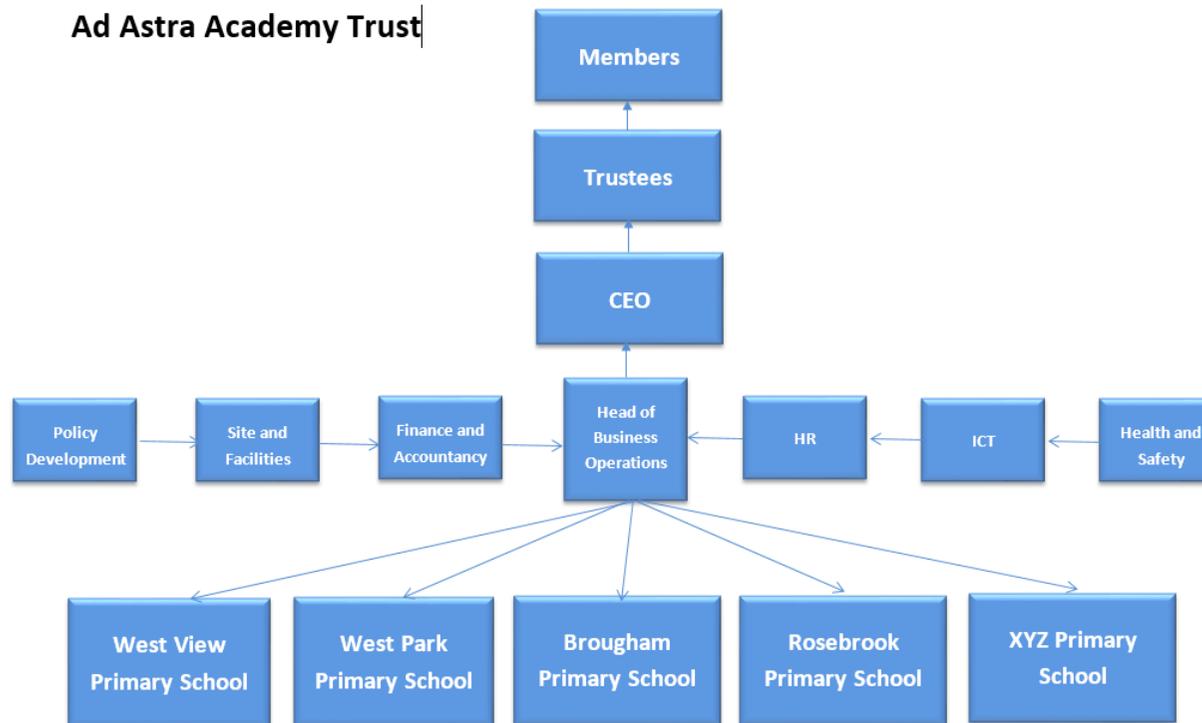
Ad Astra recognises the outstanding work that goes on in each of its schools with regards to many of the above principles from right across the spectrum; leaders, governors, teachers and support staff but will provide an over-arching structure to ensure a consistent approach to this across the Trust.

Leadership and Governance

As a MAT (Multi Academy Trust) the trust board is responsible and accountable for all schools within the Trust in terms of their educational and financial performance as well as compliance with statutory and recommended policies and procedures. We do this by delegating certain functions to the Local Governing Body in each school with a reporting mechanism to ensure transparency and effective communication. The board is also responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Trust. The Trustees meet at least three times per year.

In addition to the board, the trustees are held to account by the members of the Trust who are a group of three people with specific skills and experience that makes them suitable to undertake this role. They meet at least annually in order to consider and sign off the final annual accounts.

The Trust has recruited a CEO to provide strong leadership in driving the Trust forward and facilitating future growth and development.



Earned Autonomy

Ad Astra Academy Trust believes passionately in respecting local governance and accountability where schools are good or better and where their data supports this Ofsted judgement. We accept that schools that join the Trust under a sponsorship arrangement do not meet these criteria and in these circumstances the Trust will intervene to provide the leadership, direction and intensive support to ensure rapid and sustained improvement.

Educational rhetoric frequently refers to the principle that children only get one chance when it comes to their education and therefore every child deserves an outstanding experience that will equip them with the skills and knowledge to allow them to secure employment and lead fulfilling lives. All Ad Astra stakeholders are completely committed to this view and as such underperformance is not accepted or tolerated.

Responsibility and accountability is determined by the agreed scheme of delegation which clearly sets out the level according to the performance judgement of each individual school. Sponsored schools therefore have less local flexibility and responsibility than those who perform better. Schools that are judged good or better with supporting performance data are permitted to operate as they always have with discretion over their delegated budget, staffing and local governance. This has been a distinct selling point in attracting good schools into the Trust. Headteachers value their independent autonomy but with a strong support mechanism in the background when needed. However where schools work hard together with the Trust to secure the necessary improvement then the Trust believes in 'earned autonomy.' In this way underperforming schools are rewarded for improvement and can then enjoy the increased flexibility that this brings.

It is the aspiration of Ad Astra that all schools in the Trust will have 'earned autonomy' and the Trust will work relentlessly to achieve this. Ad Astra believes that all schools irrespective of their Ofsted judgement have a lot to offer and respect the work that is undertaken in each school and the wider community and also the relationships with their respective stakeholders, not least the children themselves. Ad Astra will not seek to rescind these relationships; in fact positive strands will be identified and built upon to achieve overall success.

Strategic and Political Context

Ad Astra Academy Trust was formed at a time which we believe was at the tipping point of change in terms of the changing educational landscape. The vision of the leadership and governance teams at the time was well-placed given the surge of academy conversions in the last two years, particularly in the primary sector. The landscape continues to undergo significant and rapid change reinforced further with the publication of the recent government white paper which has committed to ensuring every school will be an academy by 2022.

Schools in Hartlepool and beyond are detecting the change in pace in government agenda and are therefore beginning to think carefully about their inevitable route to conversion. In addition the focus on Multi Academy Trusts as opposed to single converter academies presents a pressure for the Trust to ensure reasonable growth to facilitate the investment in central Trust functions to support the schools within Ad Astra or alternatively face being subsumed within a bigger MAT that has the necessary infrastructure in place. This presents exciting opportunities for Ad Astra in terms of Trust development which will allow it to become a significant player in the academy market in the Tees Valley and beyond. The Trust can choose to embrace these opportunities or remain stagnated; Ad Astra trustees have chosen to embrace the opportunities and make the most of these to the benefit of everyone involved.

One unique selling point of Ad Astra is that there is a broad difference in the social demographic of the schools that are already in the Trust and those about to join. West View Primary School, Brougham Primary School and Rosebrook Primary School all operate in areas of significant social deprivation and have higher than average entitlement to Pupil Premium grant funding. Conversely West Park Primary School is in an area of social affluence with lower than average entitlement to Pupil Premium. This provides a wide base of experience and expertise of schools at both ends of the social spectrum that can be used to support a range of schools in the future.

School Improvement Strategy

The core function of the Ad Astra Academy Trust and the schools within it is to provide an outstanding education for all children irrespective of their background; equipping them with the skills and abilities to go on to not only be 'secondary ready' but also to be able to continue to develop and lead fulfilling lives with meaningful employment opportunities. The Trust also believes in offering children an enriched diet that encompasses not only the academic skills and knowledge but also provides opportunities for wider interests and experiences and the promotion of life skills such as moral values and resilience. All other activities that the Trust undertakes is in support of this aspiration and therefore the school improvement strategy is integral and crucial to all other aspects of the strategic plan.

We advocate a school-led system that embodies strong networks and inter-school collaboration to build capacity to improve from within alongside a culture that is continually looking for ways to be better. The schools that join our Trust have a voice to help shape all aspects of teaching and learning and school improvement and feel valued for the opportunity to play their part in influencing not only the direction of travel but also the positive impact on children and their education. A strategic approach to continuous professional development that meets the needs of an ever-changing educational environment is key to ensure that all that are involved in teaching and learning have the right knowledge and experience to ensure maximum impact to raise standards of performance.



Our Services

The Trust can offer the following services to all schools that are part of Ad Astra Academy Trust. As we seek to invest in our central staffing team, some of the services below are commissioned from partner organisations that we have carefully selected to provide an excellent service while ensuring value for money.

- ❖ Academy conversion from start to completion
- ❖ Budget preparation and monitoring
- ❖ Preparation of monthly management accounts
- ❖ VAT advice and VAT returns
- ❖ Preparation of financial statements and final year end accounts in line with DfE/EFA requirements
- ❖ Internal and external Audit work
- ❖ Procurement advice and guidance
- ❖ Procurement exercises according to financial thresholds
- ❖ PS Financials installation and support
- ❖ HR support and consultancy
- ❖ IT strategic management
- ❖ IT technical support – remote and bespoke on-site support when required
- ❖ SIMS.net technical support
- ❖ Policy development

Two Year Objectives

Development and Growth

Trustees have made a strong commitment to the future growth and development of Ad Astra and have agreed to consider schools that are within Hartlepool and the surrounding areas. Each school currently contributes 4% of their school budget (excluding ring fenced and school specific grants such as Pupil Premium) to the central budget to cover the costs of the central support functions.

Colour code

Red: Not completed or not currently on track to meet target date

Amber: Not completed but work is in progress and on track to achieve target date

Green: Achieved objective

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
1. To undertake effective due diligence on all schools wishing to join the Trust.	CEO/HoO	Ongoing through the life of this plan	Trustees will feel comfortable in approving future applications to join Ad Astra.	A detailed knowledge of each prospective school will be secured. Any risks are identified and can be appropriately managed.	Rosebrook PS – completed June 2016 Kader Academy – scheduled Oct/Nov 2016
2. To grow the Trust at a rate of a maximum of two schools per academic year with a maximum of no more than 10 schools by August 2020.	CEO/HoO subject to trustee approval	Ongoing through the life of this plan	Growth plan is achieved.	Central Trust operations are financially sustainable and all schools feel adequately supported. Increased inter-school collaboration and CPD to raise standards.	2015/16 – one conversion (Brougham PS) 2016/17 – on target for two conversions (Rosebrook & Kader)
3. To ensure the ratio of good/outstanding schools to sponsored schools is 2:1.	CEO/HoO subject to trustee approval	Ongoing through the life of this plan	Ratio of good and outstanding schools to sponsored schools is achieved.	There is sufficient capacity in the Trust to make rapid and sustained improvement to sponsored schools without a negative effect on existing schools.	No sponsored schools at present. November 2016 – 3:1 ratio.

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
4. To develop a website for the Trust that effectively markets Ad Astra and its services to existing and prospective stakeholders.	HoO	December 2016	A website will be completed and live.	Both statutory and non-statutory information regarding the Trust will be readily available for stakeholders. The website will be an effective marketing tool for prospective schools wishing to join the Trust.	Website construction underway, partially completed. Further content required.

Governance

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
5. To develop and agree a four year strategic business plan for the period 2016-2020 to be reviewed and progress measured at each trustee meeting.	HoO in conjunction with trustees	August 2017	A plan is agreed and in place.	Trustees and central staff will have a plan that focusses on SMART objectives that clearly define the direction of travel of the Trust.	Two year plan completed but further work required for 2018-20
6. To undertake a review of trustee membership in light of new schools joining the Trust and identify an appropriate board structure.	Trustees	January 2017	A review is undertaken and a revised board structure is agreed.	The trustee board is fit for purpose and adheres to DfE ratios for staff and 'Local Authority influenced' trustees.	Initial review completed but further review scheduled for autumn term 2016 in light of expected trust growth.
7. To implement Trust sub committees in light of the reviewed board structure.	Trustees	Mach 2017	Sub committees are agreed and in place.	Detailed work pertaining to the area of focus of the sub committee is undertaken in detail by Trustees and staff with relevant experience and expertise thereby allowing Trust meetings to become more efficient and effective.	Not yet completed, pending board structure review.
8. To undertake a skills analysis of the Trust board and identify any skills	Trustees	January 2017	A skills analysis is undertaken and analysed to	The Trust board comprises experienced and competent people who are able to govern the organisation effectively.	Not yet completed. Pending board structure review.

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
shortage and a recruitment process agreed.			determine the skillset of existing Trustees and any skill shortage is identified.		
9. To consider the structure of the members and determine if this needs to be expanded to include additional skill sets.	Trustees in consultation with the Members	December 2016	A review is undertaken and an agreement regarding the number of members is achieved. If an increase is agreed upon then the appropriate skillset and recruitment process is also agreed.	The Members comprises experienced and competent people who are sufficient in number and able to govern the organisation effectively.	Membership expanded (Dame Reena Keeble) as per June 2016 meeting. Further trustee discussion autumn term 2016.
10. To review the scheme of delegation to ensure it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the evolving organisation.	Trustees in conjunction with the HoO	November 2016	Scheme of delegation is reviewed and any changes are identified.	The scheme of delegation meets the needs of the evolving organisation while also meeting audit and financial requirements where necessary. Effective and efficient decision making is facilitated through the scheme.	Review currently underway (Sept 2016). Not yet completed.
11. To review local governance arrangements and agree a mechanism to allow effective communication to flow between the board of trustees and local governing bodies with regular reports and feedback in place.	Trustees and LGB's	March 2017	Effective communication between the Trust board and LGB's and vice versa.	Both trustees and Local Governing Body members will feel fully briefed in respect of activities and decisions made regarding each partner school.	Review to be completed and communication strategy to be devised.

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
12. To audit the training needs of trustees and local governors to ensure they are fully trained and able to govern the organisation effectively and develop a governance training framework specific to Ad Astra and its schools.	HoO	August 2017	An audit of training needs is undertaken and analysed. A governor training programme is developed, agreed and in place that meets the identified need(s).	Trustees and governors will be fully trained in respect of their areas of responsibility and kept up to date with any developments in education and business management.	Not yet commenced. Priority for Summer term 2017.

School Improvement and Effectiveness

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
13. To embed a Chief Executive Officer with visionary leadership to have responsibility and accountability for performance and standards across the Trust with a particular emphasis on supporting sponsored schools.	Trustees	December 2016	A Chief Executive Officer is recruited and inducted into the organisation.	The Trust will have a suitably qualified and experienced person in post that will drive the Trust forward and be the accountable person for standards of performance across the Trust.	CEO appointed. Substantive role commences November 2016. Secondment from September-November 2016.
14. To recruit a School Improvement Specialist to work across all schools in the Trust providing strong teaching and learning expertise and experience to	Trustees	October 2016	A School Improvement Specialist is recruited.	The Trust will have a suitably qualified and experienced person in post that will be responsible for school improvement work across the trust with a particular emphasis of	Head of School Improvement recruitment process underway (September 2016), expected start date 1st January 2017.

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
facilitate performance improvement.				working with sponsored schools; securing rapid and sustained improvement.	
15. To develop a needs-led, cross-phase programme of CPD that meets the requirements of the changing educational landscape in consultation with all schools across the Trust.	CEO, SIS	August 2017	A targeted and relevant programme of CPD is developed and in place that meets the needs of the organisation.	Staff have access to high quality CPD that is relevant to their role resulting in an improvement in teaching performance across the Trust. An improvement in progress and attainment for schools across the Trust. Staff across the trust develop collaborative networks of support and share good practice.	Awaiting outcome of recruitment for Head of School Improvement post.
16. To explore the potential to establish an Ad Astra Teaching Schools Alliance to provide training opportunities to ‘grow our own’ teachers and leaders to meet the future needs of the Trust.	CEO	December 2016	An effective Ad Astra Teaching Schools Alliance is established.	The opportunity to ‘grow our own’ teachers not only in terms of the national standard but to the Ad Astra standard. Recruitment for teachers, leaders and other staff is aided by the development of a pool of talent.	Teaching School Application completed – awaiting outcome from DfE (expected September 2016).
17. To explore further expanding the school improvement arm of the trust via a needs analysis with an initial focus on central SEN and Educational Psychology services.	CEO	August 2017	Following a needs analysis undertaken with each school in the Trust, a report is produced that determines the appropriate way forward for the Trust.	Schools will feel supported in terms of SEN and other vulnerable pupils if the outcome is to develop a central team of specialist staff. Support for children is increased ensuring they are receiving an educational experience that is right for them and their individual needs.	Not yet completed – awaiting outcome of Head of School Improvement recruitment.

Business Management and Effectiveness

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
18. To recruit an Estates Manager to provide specialist expertise and experience in this field to ensure compliance and value for money for all schools within the Trust.	Trustees, HoO	December 2016	An Estates and Facilities Manager is recruited.	Compliance with statutory guidance is achieved in relation to the trust land and building stock through deployment of specialist expertise and experience. Appropriate asset management plans are in place. Building work is Trust led rather than contractor/supplier led resulting in anticipated financial economies of scale.	Estates Manager recruitment currently in progress (Sept 2016).
19. To recruit a HR and Governance Manager to provide specialist expertise and experience in this field to ensure compliance, good relations and value for money for all schools within the Trust.	Trustees, HoO	January 2017	A HR and Governance Manager is recruited.	Compliance with HR and governance guidance and regulations is achieved through the deployment of specialist expertise and experience. A more responsive and intuitive service is provided for schools across the Trust as individual and school circumstances are known. Good employee and governor relations through effective support.	Not yet completed. Discussions with Trust headteachers currently underway to assess appropriate provision.
20. To evaluate current contracts in line with Ad Astra financial policies and procedures and procurement guidelines to ensure value for money.	HoO, FM	August 2017	Contracts are detailed and evaluated appropriately.	Value for money along with an increased and more responsive service will be secured that meets the needs of the organisation.	Not yet completed. Analysis to take place once current conversions are completed to provide more appropriate overview of need.
21. Review the GAG contribution rate annually in light of the services offered by the central trust team.	HoO, FM	May 2017	Financial modelling is undertaken to determine the level of GAG contribution required to ensure	Trust central services are sustainable and schools feel they receive value for money.	2016/17 – Agreed (4%) 2017/18 – to be agreed in line with financial forward planning.

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
			central Trust sustainability.		
22. To centralise the finance function to achieve tighter controls and increased efficiencies.	HoO	December 2016	The finance function is centralised and financial policies and procedures are amended to reflect the change in the operation of the finance function across the Trust.	Increased effectiveness and efficiency of the finance function. Tighter audit controls and assurance thereby protecting Trust assets. A potential reduction in audit costs.	Two finance and admin staff recruited – commence 3 rd October 2016. Transition arrangements in place until end of the autumn term regarding full centralisation.
23. To review the broadband contract for all schools within the Trust and develop a Trust-wide MPLS network to securely link all schools in the Trust.	HoO, ITM	March 2017	The broadband contract is reviewed and an appropriate contract is identified that meets the needs of the organisation. A MPLS network established that links all schools within the Trust.	A fast, resilient internet connection for all schools across the Trust that meets the ICT needs of the organisation both now and in the short-mid-term. Value for money is achieved. Impact on teaching and learning is improved.	Initial discussions with providers completed to determine options. Specification to be compiled autumn term 2016. Tendering process Spring term 2017.
24. To implement the findings of the ICT 'Road Map' to ensure an ICT provision that is secure and fit for purpose to meet the needs of the evolving organisation.	HoO, ITM	March 2017	Central operations and schools across the Trust have access to a high quality ICT provision that	The ICT provision across all schools in the Trust is fit for purpose, secure and resilient. A costed and appropriate plan for future ICT development is in place to inform future budget planning that meets the	Road map currently being finalised.

Objective	Lead	Timescale	Success Criteria	Impact	Performance Measure
			meets the needs of the organisation.	business and educational needs of the Trust.	
25. To seek a central office location to promote equality of service between schools and also to facilitate effective and collaborative working practices between Ad Astra central staff.	HoO	July 2016	A central office location is identified and central Trust staff are re-located.	Equality of provision across all schools. Increased team approach to Trust operations. Space is released for other priorities within schools.	Central office premises have been source and Trust staff have relocated August 2016.