



Welcome- September 2017

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Introduction

I am delighted to introduce you to Ad Astra Academy Trust. The Trust was set up in 2014 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. Four schools are currently in the trust and a further one has been approved by the DfE.

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, legal and strategic or educational leadership. These attributes ensure that both the business and educational aspects of the Trust are in the very best hands. Ad Astra believes in having a Local Governing Body within each school who play a crucial role in ensuring strong local accountability. 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. We have a view that every decision we make must 'land on a child's desk.' 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 and we reminded all of our employees on this at our recent annual conference in that we want to be the #employerofchoice. 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 have invested in a dedicated Trust business support function which 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 the following clearly articulates our priorities and milestones that will enable us to achieve our vision including the continued growth and development of the Trust in the future.

Andy Steel
Chair of Trustees



Our mission, aims and values

Vision

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 surpass national expectations;
- To ensure all of our academies exceed national expected targets;
- To support all of our academies to achieve an OFSTED grading of Outstanding;
- To ensure that leadership and the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding 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;
- To 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 between internal and external stakeholders to the MAT 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 all schools in the Trust 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 our 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.

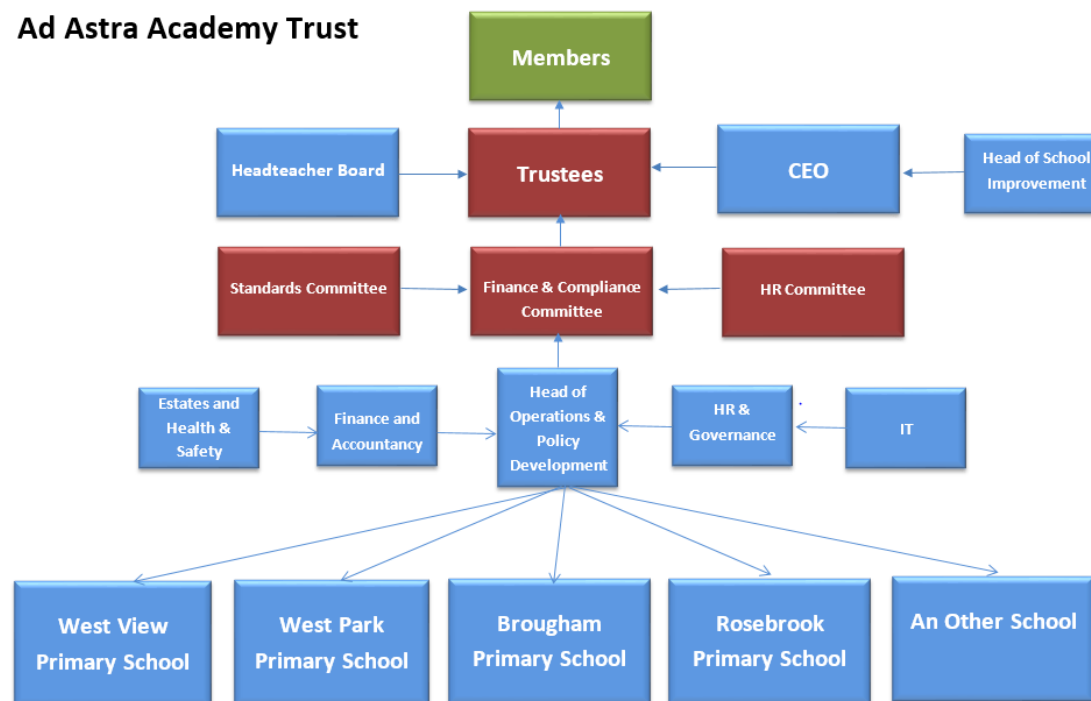
Ad Astra recognises the outstanding work that goes on in each of its schools with regards to many of the above principles from right across the spectrum; leaders, governors, teachers and support staff but will provide an over-arching structure to ensure a consistent approach to this across the Trust.

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 five 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 working very closely with the Headteacher Board.



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 who 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'. The Trust will work relentlessly to achieve this. Ad Astra believes that all schools irrespective of their Ofsted judgement (or below floor standard data) have a lot to offer. We respect the work that is undertaken in each school and the wider community and 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 and political landscape. The vision of the leadership and governance teams at the time was well-placed given the surge of academy conversions in those early years, particularly in the primary sector. The landscape continues to undergo significant and rapid change reinforced by the government's continued emphasis on the 'self-improving schools' system' and not local authorities which has encouraged many schools within the Tees Valley to become an academy. (71% of academies in the North of England are situated in the Tees Valley- May 2017 DfE).

Schools within the Tees Valley 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. 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 (and a school in Middlesbrough due to join the trust) 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 our work. In January 2017, we appointed our Head of School Improvement, an experienced Headteacher of an outstanding Teaching School in the North of England.

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 who are involved in teaching and learning have the right knowledge and experience to ensure maximum impact to raise standards of performance. In July 2017, all Ad Astra employees, during a workshop at the annual conference, developed non-negotiables for teaching and learning in a workshop led by Dame Reena Keeble who was the author of the DfE-Teaching Schools Council Teaching and Learning Review 2016. (See Over)

Ad Astra Non-Negotiables for Teaching and Learning

<p>1. Teaching & Learning</p> <p>Teaching has clarity and relevance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear objectives to improve pupil outcomes with activities matched to the intended outcomes. • Appropriate effective planning with a purpose, timely for the teacher, structured around the principles: review, explain, model, practice, feedback and review. • Explicit modelling of teacher thinking and the intended outcome to provide the guidance and the structure to help pupils understand their learning. • Extended practice in and across lessons to deepen understanding and embed concepts. • Sequencing teaching purposefully - Work from the end goal and breaking it down into small steps for learning – create careful learning sequences of teaching. • Accurate and secure subject knowledge of what is being taught. • Teaching and learning to be at least good with evidence of lessons that are outstanding.
<p>2. Progress & Outcomes</p> <p>Teaching caters for all needs.</p> <p>Expectations for all learners.</p> <p>Application of skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expectations of attainment and a drive for pupil progress. • No limits on learning – the expectation of success for all pupils. • Belief in a consistent mastery approach and challenge for higher attainers to be deepened through greater depth. • SEND pupils make clear and consistent progress against their individual programme of attainment. • Recognise the importance of pupil’s prior knowledge and skills. Referring to prior learning or using pre-teaching to support pupils and build upon learning. • Recognise pupil’s ability and potential is not to be confused with pupil attainment to date. • Effective open questioning for all learners to encourage thinking and shape understanding. • Planned in explicit approaches to reasoning and applying.
<p>3. Assessment</p> <p>Accurate & regular evaluations are used to inform subsequent teaching.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear understanding of the expected outcome, progress to be made and whether pupils have met these expectations. • Regular assessment and feedback to inform planning for impact to be made. • Next steps are focused and matched to the required outcome. • ‘Keep up’ intervention programmes to boost pupil attainment and help all achieve the minimum level. • Visible progress over time in books. • Reflection of children’s deep learning and understanding of underlying concepts that require embedding to inform planning.
<p>4. Stimulating Curriculum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore new and compelling ways to explain and teach. • Creative within the framework of the curriculum. • Learning has explicit relevance to the pupils.

<p>Lessons are organised, engaging, efficient and exciting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective displays and classroom environment that enhance learning and has learning at the heart • Children articulate their learning and a love for learning across the whole curriculum. • Hooks for learning to build curious learners.
<p>5. Attitudes Developing behaviours of and for learning. Developing healthy minds. Developing aspirational young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong and constructive pupil-teacher relationships where teachers explain and model and encourage a pupil to grapple with a concept. • Setting high and realistic expectations in terms of outcomes and behaviour. • Expecting all pupils to have a go and persevere - Children are demonstrating resilience and being given opportunities to develop resilience. • Emphasis on rewarding for effort. • Help children not to fear mistakes rather show how they can learn from them. • Active learners with high levels of engagement and enthusiasm for learning. • Children are motivated about their learning - learning from their own questioning. • Children are happy and enjoy coming to school.
<p>6. Continuous Learning Learning and collaboration with well-being at the heart.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain understanding of effective teaching practices. • Engage in professional dialogue and discussion with colleagues around expectations of pupil attainment, progression and teaching. • Equal and inclusive opportunities across the Trust • Collaborative working across the MAT. • Willingness to share and respond to feedback. • Open climate; honesty and high levels of respect for individuals. • Everyone is a learner – exploring new ways to enhance teaching and learning is always evolving. • Effective CPD in place based on individual, school and targeted needs.
<p>7. Well-being for all</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are safe and well cared for. • Pupil and staff well-being is a high priority • Everyone feels valued: children, all staff in schools, central trust staff. • Children are confident in articulating feelings to adults. • Staff workload is not excessive and regularly monitored across the trust.

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.

- ❖ School Improvement
- ❖ Staff professional development opportunities
- ❖ 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

