

# Building strong trusts: assurance framework

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# Building strong trusts: assurance framework

## Introduction

To build a school system in which schools are part of a group in a single governance and accountability structure, we need to be explicit and eloquent about what constitutes a strong trust. Underpinning this concept of a strong trust is the concept of education as human flourishing. We need to think hard about how we create school environments where all children flourish, ensuring both the optimal continuing development of their intellectual potential and their ability to live well as a rounded human being. This means a relentless focus on high quality, inclusive education – advancing education for all our children.

But we also need environments where the adults flourish. As Lynn Swaner and Andy Wolfe write: “Where there are few flourishing adults, there will be few flourishing children.” So, we need to care deeply about our workforce and give renewed consideration to what ‘good work’ means and how we might strengthen our understanding of what it means to be a good employer.

And we need to think about the flourishing of our schools working together in deep and purposeful collaboration as one entity, under a single governance structure, to improve and maintain high educational standards across the trust. In our view, deep and purposeful collaboration is at the heart of the trust structure – it is the way we keep the focus on improvement at scale. And from our point of view, structures are in fact very important because they create the conditions for this intensely focused collaboration. In terms of wider public benefit, deep and purposeful collaboration beyond and between trusts is also important – a duty to share excellence and collaborate so all children and communities can benefit, with no child, school or community left behind.

Building strong and resilient organisations is key to education as human flourishing.

## Codifying the features of strong trusts – creating the conditions to keep getting better

The codification of effectiveness is important because it helps us to develop a common language to build strong trusts in every part of the country. We think there is merit in considering wider regulatory theory here, balancing the prevention of harms with promotion of goods. Regulatory theory provides a way of thinking about the role of baseline standards to prevent harms, otherwise it becomes very hard to regulate. However, to promote goods we need more aspirational framing, which is more than a minimum to be met, and more an ideal to strive towards.

Our domains are therefore tentative, iterative, and designed to be developmental. As the sector matures, we need to define organisational strength and resilience in a way that enables the sector to work towards a common understand of what excellence looks like. The domains are indicative so that trusts have room to give creative and innovative expression to what it means to be a strong trust.

The seven domains and 14 elements of the assurance framework are set out below. Everything a trust does should be in service of delivering a high quality, inclusive education. All elements of the assurance framework should serve this



ultimate purpose.

The seven domains and 14 elements of the Strong Trust Assurance Framework

Strategic governance	1. Strategy and culture 2. Accountability
Expert ethical leadership	3. Expertise 4. Ethics
High quality, inclusive education	5. Conception of quality 6. Inclusion
School improvement at scale	7. Culture of improvement 8. Knowledge building
Workforce resilience and wellbeing	9. Working culture 10. Workload and wellbeing
Finance and operations	11. Financial strategy and probity 12. Effective and efficient use of resources
Public benefit and civic duty	13. Collaboration and accountability 14. Civic purpose and wider common good

## How to use this framework

For each of the 14 elements, the framework identifies questions to start with as well as additional questions to consider. It describes what strong and weaker improvement capacity would look like in a trust.

Use the questions and descriptions to rate your trust against each element along a four-point scale:

- Red (needs attention)
- Amber red
- Amber green
- Green (strong capacity).

Descriptions have deliberately not been provided for the 'amber red' and 'amber green' ratings. If you think that your trust matches neither the 'red' nor the 'green' description, think about which end of the scale it is closer to, and choose the appropriate rating. The right-hand column has space to mark your rating. This framework could also be used as the basis of peer review and/or a work programme within a regional trust development network.

This framework is diagnostic, not evaluative, or judgemental. The aim is to identify your trust's most significant areas of strength and challenge, so that you can build your organisational capacity.

A 'green' rating does not mean that an element is currently perfect, just that it is an area of strength upon which to build. Likewise, a 'red' rating does not imply failure or under performance, it simply highlights an area where improvement should be a priority for the trust.



## Priorities for improvement and action planning

As well as capturing the overall scores from your self-assessment you may also find it helpful to make a note of the key issues you identified for each of the priority areas and start to identify the actions you plan to take to address these issues. This is not intended to be about documenting evidence or 'proving' compliance, rather an aide mémoire for understanding your rating and the areas to focus on.

We would commend to you Viviane Robinson's (2018) book, *Reduce Change to Increase Improvement*.<sup>1</sup> Although this book pertains to school improvement, the propositions of distinguishing between change and improvement, how you understand the challenge of improvement and constructing a theory of action are, we think, also pertinent to the challenge of bringing about trust improvement.

## Relationship with the Department for Education's Trust Quality Descriptions

This assurance framework is closely aligned with CST's paper on [Building Strong Trusts](#). It also includes questions based on the DfE's [Trust Quality Descriptions](#).

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, V (2018). *Reduce Change to Increase Improvement*. Corwin.

The questions based on the Trust Quality Descriptors are in noted with a † symbol in the framework; those related to Culture Descriptors are noted with a ‡.

We have aligned the questions for the sake of completeness and to create maximum value, so that boards and executive teams have a single framework that they can go to. There is always a risk of including government definitions in a sector-led document, but we take the view that it is important, as far as a possible, to build a common language and some common concepts. Ultimately, we believe that it would be unhelpful and counterproductive to have misaligned conceptions of quality.

However, we should be clear that the purposes behind CST's paper on *Building Strong Trusts* and the DfE's Trust Quality Descriptions are very different. The DfE's intention is to set out the definitions of quality to inform their regional directors' commissioning work. CST's work is about supporting the sector to build organisational strength and resilience.

If we are to build a common language and some common concepts, they must be aligned to a shared understanding of quality and quality assurance. Ann Gravells' (2020) definition of quality assurance may be helpful: "Quality Assurance is a system to monitor and evaluate a service that should identify and recommend measures to make improvements to standards and performance." She is also clear that assurance seeks to avoid problems, stabilise, and improve services by monitoring them on an ongoing basis. Gravell says this is about "having systems in place to ensure that the teaching, learning and assessment processes are valid and reliable, and that they have been undertaken with integrity." There is an imperative implicit in this definition that assurance should translate into action.

We would want to make a distinction between quality assurance as a driver of action and improvement and inspection which is about external accountability. This framework should not under any circumstances be considered an emergent inspection framework. It is intended to be developmental, and improvement focused.

## Strategic governance <sup>2</sup>

### 1. Strategy and culture

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board set and champion a clear strategy for the trust, which aligns with the trust's charitable objects, covers all pillars of trust quality and, where applicable, sets out its aspirations for growth over time? † <sup>3</sup></p> <p>Does the trust anchor its strategy in the needs of its schools, the communities they serve, and the wider educational system in line with its charitable object/s? ‡</p> <p>How consistent is the trust's strategy with the organisation's purpose, values and culture, and responsibilities for long-term success?</p> <p>Can the board demonstrate that the trust is effective in achieving its charitable purposes and agreed outcomes?</p> <p>Does the board ensure a high performing governance structure where trustees and other non-executive leaders have the expertise to fulfil their functions effectively, with representation that reduces biases in decision-making? †</p> <p>Does the board support effective succession planning by building a pipeline of future trustees and committee members, with a focus on promoting diversity of thought and experience? †</p> <p>Is there a culture of board induction, training, and review? †</p>	<p>The trust does not yet have a clear strategy OR the trust does have a strategy, but it has some weaknesses for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The strategy has an undue focus on short-term time horizons.</li> <li>▪ It is not anchored in the needs of its schools and communities.</li> <li>▪ It is not sufficiently in line with the trust's charitable objects.</li> <li>▪ There is not yet evidence that the strategy is achieving impact in terms of outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>Decisions and behaviours do not align with the trust's stated values and culture.</p>	<p>The trust has a strategy which aligns with its charitable objects, covers all pillars of trust quality.</p> <p>Where applicable, the trust has capacity, and where it contributes to the core purpose of advancing education, there is an articulation of its aspirations for growth over time.</p> <p>The strategy is anchored in the needs of its schools and communities.</p> <p>The strategy is aligned with the trust's purpose, values and culture, and responsibilities for long-term success, including contributing to the wider system.</p> <p>There is evidence that the strategy is having an impact in terms of outcomes.</p> <p>Decisions and behaviours are visibly aligned with the trust's stated values and culture.</p>	

<sup>2</sup> CST has a more in-depth [Assurance Framework for Trust Governance](#) based on our guidance, [Governing a School Trust](#). This is a more detailed framework which delves more deeply into the functions of trust governance and the work of the board.

<sup>3</sup> We do not believe that growth is an end in itself. The first duty of a trust is to advance education for public benefit. Growth can support this and should always be in service to this end.

## Strategic governance

### 2. Accountability

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board hold the executive leadership team to account for the effective implementation of the trust's strategy and operating plans, including in relation to the use of resources and the drivers of impact? †</p> <p>Does the board ensure high quality executive leadership through providing effective support and challenge to the CEO and executive leadership team? †<sup>4</sup></p> <p>Does the board maintain sufficient independence from the executive to allow scrutiny of both their performance and organisational performance? †</p> <p>Can the board assure itself of the integrity of financial information? †</p> <p>Can the board assure itself that there are robust risk controls and risk management systems? †</p> <p>Can the board assure itself that there is compliance with regulatory, contractual, and statutory requirements, including safeguarding? †</p>	<p>The board is led by the executive and/or the board fails to hold the executive to account.</p> <p>The board is dominated by complacent or intransigent attitudes.</p> <p>The board has no processes in place to assure itself of financial information.</p> <p>The board has no processes in place to assure itself of risk controls and management systems.</p> <p>The board does not understand and cannot assure itself of compliance with regulatory, contractual, and statutory requirements, including safeguarding.</p>	<p>The board maintains sufficient independence from the executive to allow effective scrutiny.</p> <p>There is a culture of robust and healthy debate in board meetings.</p> <p>The board accesses independent insight from internal and external audits, reviews of governance arrangements and other forms of expert advice.</p> <p>The board has processes in place to assure itself of financial information.</p> <p>The board has processes in place to assure itself of risk controls and management systems.</p> <p>Compliance with regulatory, contractual, and statutory requirements, including safeguarding is evident.</p>	

<sup>4</sup> The DfE's Trust Quality Descriptions also includes reference to setting clear objectives and effectively managing the CEO to ensure high performance, and securing appropriate levels of remuneration for the CEO and executive leadership team. These two descriptors have not been included in this framework but will be considered in terms of regulatory and commissioning decisions.

## Expert, ethical leadership

### 3. Expertise <sup>5</sup>

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Do the CEO and executive team provide effective strategic leadership that enacts the trust's values, culture and strategy?</p> <p>Do the CEO and executive team have the school improvement expertise to ensure high quality, inclusive of education?</p> <p>Do the CEO and executive team have secure financial expertise?</p> <p>Do the CEO and executive team have the expertise to create a high-performing working culture for all staff that promotes collaboration, aspiration, support?</p> <p>Do the CEO and executive team have the expertise to support the trustees and other non-executive leaders to meet their duties?</p> <p>Do the CEO and executive team have the expertise to contribute to the wider system?</p>	<p>The CEO and trust executive team do not have the expertise required to lead the trust, deliver the strategy, and secure good outcomes for pupils.</p> <p>The trust operating model is ineffective and there is a lack of clarity from leadership about the delivery of trust-level and school-level activities. The operating model is misaligned with the strategy.</p> <p>The executive team do not understand or enact the levels of authority delegated by the board.</p> <p>There is a lack of expertise to ensure compliance with regulatory, contractual, and statutory requirements.</p> <p>There is a lack of expertise to ensure children are safeguarded effectively.</p>	<p>The CEO and trust executive team have the expertise required to lead the trust, deliver the strategy and secure the outcomes for pupils.</p> <p>The CEO and executive team have the expertise to create and implement an effective trust operating model with clarity about the delivery of trust-level and school-level activities, that aligns with the strategy.</p> <p>The executive leadership team acts within the levels of authority delegated by the board.</p> <p>The CEO and executive team have the expertise to ensure compliance with regulatory, contractual, and statutory requirements.</p> <p>The CEO and executive team have the expertise to ensure safeguards and promote the welfare of children.</p>	

<sup>5</sup> CST has been at the vanguard of developing and beginning to codify the leadership knowledge and mental models required to lead school trusts in our work on the [core responsibilities of trust CEOs](#). This is based in an emerging theory of the expertise of trust leaders.

## Expert, ethical leadership

### 4. Ethics

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
Do the CEO, board and leadership team create a culture of ethical leadership, including the Seven Principles of Public Life? ‡	<p>Leaders do not act always solely in the interest of children and young people.</p> <p>Leaders sometimes place themselves under obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work.</p> <p>Leaders do not always act or take decisions impartially and fairly, using the best evidence.</p> <p>Leaders do not always see that they are accountable to the public for their decisions.</p> <p>Leaders do not always act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner.</p> <p>Leaders are not always truthful.</p> <p>Leaders do not always exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and may not be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.</p>	<p>Leaders act solely in the interest of children and young people.</p> <p>Leaders avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work.</p> <p>Leaders act and take decisions impartially and fairly, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias. They are dispassionate, exercising judgement and analysis for the good of children.</p> <p>Leaders are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.</p> <p>Leaders expect to act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner.</p> <p>Leaders are truthful.</p> <p>Leaders exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and are willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.</p>	

## High quality, inclusive education

### 5. Conception of quality

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust have a shared conception of quality in relation to education? This is a clear conception of what excellent education looks like in practice.</p> <p>Has this been widely communicated? Does it drive decision making at all levels?</p> <p>Does the trust know how it will improve the schools in its trust to deliver excellent education?</p> <p>Does the trust oversee the design and implementation of ambitious, broad, well-sequenced curricula in all of its schools? †<sup>6</sup></p> <p>Does the trust enable children to take part in enrichment activities (sport, music and cultural opportunities) that enrich the curricula and support children's wider development? †</p> <p>Does the trust achieve good outcomes for all its pupils by delivering education that is both high quality and inclusive? †</p> <p>Does the trust ensure its schools are places where all pupils attend regularly, are kept safe, feel calm and supported, and are able to actively participate and progress? †</p> <p>Does the trust ensure all pupils leave its schools well prepared for the next stage of education, employment or training and prepared to become confident citizens? †</p>	<p>The trust has not developed/ co-constructed a shared and coherent conception of quality.</p> <p>The trust has not clearly defined its shared curriculum principles, so leaders and staff are unclear about the trust's curriculum intent.</p> <p>The enrichment curriculum across the group of schools is limited and/or inconsistent.</p> <p>Outcomes for pupils are inconsistent and the trust does not pay enough attention to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or those with SEND.</p> <p>There is no trust wide approach to pupil attendance, so it is inconsistent across the group of schools.</p> <p>Behaviour policies are inconsistent and/or unclear so some schools are not calm or orderly environments.</p>	<p>The trust has a very clear co-constructed and coherent conception of quality which is rooted in evidence.</p> <p>The trust has clearly defined, shared curriculum principles so leaders and staff are clear about the trust's curriculum intent.</p> <p>There is a wide and engaging enrichment curriculum across all schools, and most pupils participate with special efforts made to ensure that those pupils who don't get these opportunities at home participate and benefit.</p> <p>The trust can evidence good outcomes for all its pupils.</p> <p>There is a shared approach to attendance and expectations of behaviour and schools feel calm and safe.</p> <p>Destination data shows that pupils leave school prepared for the next stage of education.</p>	

<sup>6</sup> This Trust Quality Descriptor includes 'knowledge-rich' as a description of curriculum. We have decided to fit this question more closely to the expectations in the funding agreement which states that the curriculum is the responsibility of the academy trust and that the trust must ensure that the curriculum is balanced and broadly based.

## High quality, inclusive education

### 6. Inclusion

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust create a culture in all its schools that is motivating and ambitious for all, including disadvantaged children and children with SEND, so that pupils can achieve their potential? ‡</p> <p>Does the trust operate fair access? †</p> <p>Does it welcome and effectively teach disadvantaged children and children with SEND from their local areas? †</p> <p>Does the trust support pupils and schools to address issues so pupils can stay in mainstream school where possible?</p> <p>Does the trust support pupils to re-join mainstream education when they have spent time in Alternative Provision? †</p>	<p>The trust does not see itself as being responsible for establishing a culture of inclusion.</p> <p>Not all schools in the trust are welcoming of pupils with SEND.</p> <p>Assessment processes are inconsistent across the trust and not all are evidence-informed.</p> <p>Teachers do not feel confident to teach all pupils.</p> <p>Support is inconsistent.</p> <p>Not all interventions are evidence informed.</p>	<p>The trust establishes a culture where all children can flourish and are treated with dignity. The trust values different experiences and achievements.<sup>7</sup></p> <p>Schools in the trust see all children as complete humans – difference and disability are seen as normal aspects of humanity.</p> <p>The trust operates fair admissions and access policies so that all children are welcomed into the schools in the trust.</p> <p>Assessment processes in relation to those who find learning hard are rigorous and evidence informed.</p> <p>Teaching is adaptive and responsive, and teachers feel confident to teach all pupils.</p> <p>Intelligent and dignified support is provided to those who need it.</p> <p>Evidence-based interventions are used appropriately where children are falling behind in their learning.</p>	

<sup>7</sup> These statements of what 'good' looks like are indebted to the work of Ben Newmark and Tom Rees (2022) *A Good Life – towards greater dignity for learning disabled people*. CST and Ambition Institute.

## School improvement at scale<sup>8</sup>

### 7. Culture of improvement

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust create a culture of continuous improvement in its schools through self-evaluation, challenge, support, and appropriate action? †</p> <p>Is there a culture of external challenge or review?</p> <p>Does the trust have a clearly defined and effective strategy to improve and maintain the performance of schools that are already part of the trust, as well as those that join? †</p> <p>Does the trust take on challenging schools and transform previously under performing schools by delivering broad and sustainable improvement? †</p> <p>Does the trust support the wider system in sharing learning for best practice; helping under performing schools to improve; and contributing to building a trust-led system? †</p>	<p>There is no model of school improvement OR the model of improvement is limited to a staffing structure and not built from a conception of quality.</p> <p>The model of school improvement is poorly understood by schools.</p> <p>The strategy for improvement is not based on a secure data-driven analysis of all the schools in the group OR is not sufficiently granular to secure improvement.</p> <p>The understanding of where specific expertise exists across the trust is under-developed.</p> <p>Bringing schools (particularly those in challenging circumstances) into the trust would threaten the quality of education in the other schools. There is little or limited improvement capacity.</p>	<p>The trust has an established, codified model of school improvement built from its conception of quality.</p> <p>The model of school improvement is understood and enacted by all schools in the trust.</p> <p>The strategy for improvement is based on a secure data-driven (quantitative and qualitative, internally and externally-validated) analysis of all the schools in the group and is granular enough to secure improvement.</p> <p>Trust leaders have a strong understanding of where specific expertise exists across the trust and how it can be used to support schools and develop leaders.</p> <p>The trust builds its school improvement capacity to be able to bring schools into the trust, particularly those in challenging circumstances.</p>	

<sup>8</sup> The DfE has a [MAT assurance framework](#). This framework is in fact intended to help trusts assess their school improvement capacity. It can be used to do a 'deep dive' into school improvement capacity. The framework was originally developed by trust leaders and the DfE regional team in the South West region, to whom we give our thanks.

## School improvement at scale

### 8. Knowledge building<sup>9</sup>

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust recognise the critical value of high-quality teaching and champion the profession? ‡</p> <p>Does the trust make a positive contribution to the wider system by delivering high quality training and/or placements for trainee teachers. Does it support early career teachers through the Early Career Framework? †</p> <p>Does the trust encourage and enable all staff to build their expertise through evidence-based professional development and mentoring? †</p> <p>Does the trust build an innovative and vibrant community of professionals, collaborating across schools and other trusts to develop and share expertise and evidence-based practice? †</p>	<p>The trust has very little or no concept of teacher quality or its importance.</p> <p>The trust has little knowledge or understanding of the importance of evidence-informed professional development.</p> <p>The trust does not build a professional community and does not collaborate with regard to school improvement or professional development across schools and other trusts.</p>	<p>The trust is intentionally a knowledge-building organisation, meaning that it understands that the goal is for every teacher in every classroom to be as good as they can be in what they teach (the curriculum) and how they teach (pedagogy).</p> <p>The trust leverages its capacity (scale and expertise) alongside its ability to systematically control the conditions and culture in which all staff work, to mobilise the best evidence through professional development.</p> <p>The trust builds innovative and vibrant community of professionals collaborating across schools and other trusts.</p>	

<sup>9</sup> See Bauckham, I and Cruddas, L (2021) [Knowledge building – school improvement at scale](#). CST; and Rollett, S (2021) [Communities of Improvement – School Trusts as Fields of Practice](#). CST.

## Workforce resilience and wellbeing

### 9. Working culture

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust create a high-performing working culture for all staff, which promotes collaboration, aspiration and support? ‡</p> <p>Does it use the flexibilities of the trust structure to create opportunities for staff? ‡</p> <p>Does the trust support the retention of great staff both within the individual trust and across the school system? †</p> <p>Does the trust ensure every member of staff is effectively line managed to maintain high performance and does it actively encourage career progression opportunities across the trust? †</p> <p>Does the trust ensure inclusive working environments, support flexible working, and take action to promote equality and diversity? †</p>	<p>The trust has a poor reputation as an employer or does not understand its employer duties.</p> <p>The trust does not have a people strategy.</p> <p>It lacks a coherent approach to career opportunities for staff.</p> <p>Data show high levels of staff turnover which the trust cannot account for.</p> <p>Line management is inconsistent and/or not well understood or enacted across the group of schools.</p> <p>The trust does not test the alignment between culture, values and operational processes.</p> <p>There is little or no focus on inclusive working processes, equality or diversity.</p>	<p>The trust has a reputation for being a good employer.</p> <p>It has a written people strategy which is based in data and evidence and focused on creating a high-performance working culture with clear career opportunities.</p> <p>The trust ensures that policies and practices align with the organisation's culture, values and ethos.</p> <p>There is a strong and consistent culture of line management and expectations are clearly understood across the group of schools.</p> <p>There is a strong focus on inclusive working processes, equality and diversity.</p>	

## Workforce resilience and wellbeing

### 10. Workload and wellbeing

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust foster a supportive working environment by managing workload, prioritising wellbeing and taking action to support all staff? †</p> <p>Does the working environment prioritise effective behaviour and attendance policies to create a safe environment in which to work and learn? †</p>	<p>The trust pays little or no attention to workloads. It does not attend to the evidence that supports workload reduction for example in data management, feedback and marking, and curriculum planning and resources.</p> <p>Organisational culture does not prioritise a sense of belonging and some or many staff do not feel that the trust cares about them. As a consequence, attrition is high as the trust fails to retain good people.</p> <p>The trust pays little attention to the conditions for staff (and indeed pupils) to feel safe and work in an orderly environment. This is at best inconsistent across the group of schools.</p>	<p>The trust has a rigorous focus on manageable workloads. It attends to the evidence that supports workload reduction for example in data management, feedback and marking and curriculum planning and resources.</p> <p>The trust builds the resilience of the workforce by creating an organisational culture in which people feel they belong and are supported. As a consequence, attrition rates are low.</p> <p>Leaders deliberately and intentionally build relational trust.</p> <p>The trust creates the conditions for staff (and indeed pupils) to feel safe and work in an orderly environment.</p>	

## Finance and operations

### 11. Financial strategy and probity

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust use financial data and intelligence to set a stable, accurate and sustainable long-term financial strategy for the trust? †</p> <p>Does the trust have a clear approach to delivering value for money through effective budgeting and risk management? †</p> <p>Does the trust maintain and invest sustainably in its capital infrastructure, including buildings, digital infrastructure, and technology? †</p> <p>Does the trust operate a well-planned reserves policy that provides sufficient contingency for cashflow and any unplanned, urgent expenditure and aligns resources to expenditure priorities across all its schools? †</p>	<p>The trust does not have a medium to long-term financial strategy or it is not credible.</p> <p>The trust has no capital strategy or capital investment is ad hoc.</p> <p>The trust has no reserves policy or the amount of reserves does not command the confidence of the regulator.</p> <p>Risk management is absent or ineffective.</p> <p>Financial policies and procedures and mechanisms for ensuring financial accountability are underdeveloped or absent.</p> <p>Internal control processes to ensure propriety and value for public money are non-existent or not sufficiently robust.</p> <p>Spending and procurement decisions may not always be compliant or well-managed.</p> <p>Money is not always managed in the way that parliament intends.</p>	<p>The trust has a credible medium to long-term financial strategy.</p> <p>The trust has a capital strategy which includes buildings, digital infrastructure, and technology.</p> <p>The trust has a well-planned reserves policy.</p> <p>Robust processes are in place to manage risk.</p> <p>The trust has financial policies and procedures in place including mechanisms for ensuring financial accountability.</p> <p>The trust has strong internal control processes to ensure propriety and value for public money.</p> <p>Spending and procurement decisions are compliant with internal policies and external regulations.</p> <p>Money is managed in the way that parliament intends.</p>	

## Finance and operations

### 12. Effective and efficient use of resources

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust recognise the importance of effective and efficient use of resources for the benefit of all schools in the trust and the wider education system? ‡</p> <p>Does the trust demonstrate efficient and effective use of resources? †</p> <p>Does the trust have strong financial and information management systems with effective oversight? †</p>	<p>Funding is not always spent effectively or efficiently. This means that funding to the front-line to support the quality of education is not always prioritised.</p> <p>The trust does not understand how its financial health and efficiency and resource allocation compares with similar organisations locally and nationally.</p> <p>There is little financial oversight by the board.</p>	<p>The trust recognises the importance of effective and efficient use of resources and can demonstrate this through ensuring that funding to the front-line to support the quality of education is prioritised.</p> <p>The trust understands how its financial health and efficiency and resource allocation compares with similar organisations locally and nationally.</p> <p>There is evidence of good financial oversight by the board.</p>	

## Public benefit and civic purpose

### 13. Collaboration and accountability

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board oversee strategic relationships with external stakeholders?<sup>†</sup></p> <p>Has the board sought input from stakeholders on key decisions to be comfortable that it has a rounded view on these decisions?</p> <p>How does the trust demonstrate its understanding that it is accountable first and foremost to the communities it serves?</p>	<p>The trust is perceived to be disconnected from parents and the community or communities it serves.</p> <p>The trust is not trusted by its pupils, parents and carers, staff and wider communities.</p> <p>The schools are not perceived to be anchored in their communities.</p> <p>The trust cannot evidence how it is accountable to the communities it serves.</p>	<p>The trust has a secure understanding of the views/needs of parents, carers, and the wider community.</p> <p>The trust enables productive relationships and builds trust and shared ownership.</p> <p>The trust is perceived to be credible, open, and honest.</p> <p>The schools are clearly anchored in the communities they serve.<sup>10</sup></p> <p>The trust can evidence how it is accountable to the communities it serves.</p>	

<sup>10</sup> See Townsend, J, Vainker, E and Cruddas, L (2022) [Community Anchoring – School Trusts as Anchor Institutions](#). CST and the Reach Foundation.

## Public benefit and civic purpose

### 14. Civic purpose and wider common good

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust work collaboratively with schools, trusts, local authorities, dioceses, parents and other civic partners to ensure the delivery of statutory functions and acts in the wider interests of the local community? †</p> <p>How does the trust understand its wider civic responsibilities and work in partnership to build relations across the local education community?</p> <p>What will the trust do to work with other civic actors to advance education as a common good in the locality or localities served by its schools?</p> <p>How does the trust act on (not just in) the local, regional or national system?</p>	<p>The trust is insular and isolationist. It does not work in partnership with other trust leaders or civic actors. It may be perceived to be self-interested and acquisitive.</p> <p>It does not seek to understand (and so it does not understand) the wider interests of the community and what is putting pressure on the families and communities the schools serve.</p> <p>It does not work with others support the delivery of statutory functions and has no sense of its work as contributing more widely to civic purpose.</p>	<p>The trust understands that education is a public good. It works in partnership with other civic actors (for example the local authority, health commissioners and providers, the local policy, university, FE college, employers and other schools and trusts) to advance education for the common good.</p> <p>Trust leaders help to catalyse collective leadership through a theory of action.</p> <p>The work supports to the delivery of statutory functions and the wider interests of the community and is appropriate to the scale and the strengths of the trust and its partners. It is not a distraction from the core purpose of advancing education.</p>	





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