

# School trusts as civic institutions

Exemplifications of the civic mindset

*in association with*

**Browne  
Jacobson**

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**Confederation  
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**The voice of school trusts**



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Bringing together trusts from every region and of every size, CST has a strong, strategic presence with access to government and policy makers to drive real change for education on the big issues that matter most.

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## Foreword

Asking the apparently obvious question is often the right one to ask. Whilst on the face of it asking “what is the function of schools in our society?” is straightforward to answer, we all know that on deeper reflection it unearths real complexity.

For many years the “conventional wisdom” has been that increased globalisation was inevitable and, on the whole, would bring benefits to societies across the world. However, the turbulence created by the global pandemic as well as recent economic and political stability has caused many (including myself) to ask whether we were moving into a period of de-globalisation. In a discussion paper the McKinsey Global Institute argues that the evidence suggests that “global integration is here to stay, albeit with nuance” and argues that the challenge is to “harness the benefits of interconnection while managing the risks and downsides of dependency”.<sup>1</sup>

The paper also argues that no region is self-sufficient. This brings to mind the image of islands in the stream. Schools, school trusts, and even the school system itself are all islands in the stream. Perhaps though, rather than a stream it feels like schools are operating in a social landscape that feels more like a raging flooded river.

The paper concludes:

*“Looking at the entire range of global flows, it is clear that the world is not defaulting to deglobalization, but that global connections are reconfiguring. Firms that reimagine rather than retreat from interconnection can reshape value chains in ways that contribute to both growth and resilience.”*

To my mind this speaks directly to the importance of the work by CST advocating that school trusts are a new form of civic structure. Indeed, CST’s paper finishes on the tenet of building a connected system. Just as global connections are reconfiguring so too are intra-country connections. The work of CST to share case studies and describe some tenets of civic leadership is therefore very apposite.

Understandably, school leaders can be nervous because so often schools are expected to pick up the pieces in their communities across a range of issues outside their direct responsibility such as poverty and mental health. That said CST advocates a compelling case for trust leaders to take a risk and embrace a civic mindset. CST also sets out some exemplifications to help leaders take a first step. I very much hope it helps you do just that.

**Nick MacKenzie**  
**Partner, Browne Jacobson**



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<sup>1</sup> McKinsey Global Institute (2022) [Global flows: The ties that bind an interconnected world](#)

# Introduction

In February 2019 the UPP Foundation Civic University Commission launched its final report, *Truly Civic: Strengthening the connection between universities and their places*.<sup>2</sup> The report sets out how universities have the capability, opportunity and responsibility to be civic partners and further support the places where they are based to solve some of their most pressing and major problems.

Lord Kerslake, then Chair of the Civic University Commission said: “The deep economic and social changes that are happening in Britain today have, alongside Brexit, made the civic role of universities even more vital to the places they are located in.”

CST gave evidence at the Commission. We believe school trusts are also well set up to play this role. Some trusts may be quite large employers in an area and will have the capability and capacity to act with other civic partners. But even smaller trusts can all play a role – as many already do – as good civic partners.

We first made the case for school trusts as a new form of civic structure in January 2020.<sup>3</sup> We published a joint paper with Public First setting out an emergent civic trust framework. Four years on, we have reviewed this original paper and amended it significantly.

Since the Commission concluded in 2019, we have had a global pandemic followed by a period of significant geo-political tensions and economic challenges. This has had an enormous detrimental impact on some of our children and communities.

The 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report for England<sup>4</sup> gave us the stark and terrible finding that one in ten UK pupils reported that they did not eat at least once a week because there is not enough money to buy food. And we have seen recently from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, *Destitution in the UK*,<sup>5</sup> that there are now more than one million children in the UK living in destitution—that is, living without proper shelter or without enough food.

And in December, UNICEF published a report<sup>6</sup> which shows that child income poverty rates in the UK is the highest among the world’s richest countries, and that we rank bottom of the table for changes in those rates in the past decade.

To be clear, we do not think that public institutions, even working together in civic partnership, can solve the complex problem of poverty. This is why we are calling on all political parties to ensure that urgent action is now taken across government to eradicate child poverty.

It is worth returning to Lord Kerslake’s prescient words from 2019. The situation he described then is even more complex now with greater implications for our public services and our public institutions. The deep economic and social changes that are happening in Britain today have made the civic role of public institutions even more vital – not just to the places they are located in, but in leading a response to the renewal of our communities and of civic life.

This requires something different of public leaders – a different mental model of leadership – which is truly civic.

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2 UPP Foundation (2019) *Truly Civic: Strengthening the Connection between Universities and their Places*. The final report of the UPP foundation’s consideration of the civic role of universities.

3 Cruddas, L and Simons, J (2020) *School trusts as new civic structures – a framework document*, Confederation of School Trusts and Public First

4 Department for Education (2022) *PISA 2022: National report for England*

5 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023) *Destitution in the UK*.

6 UNICEF (2023) *Child poverty in the midst of wealth*.

## The civic mindset

It is perhaps worth noting at the outset that a civic mindset is one that looks up and out, not just down into the organisation you lead. A civic mindset involves asking a few simple questions:

- What is putting pressure on the children, young people and communities my schools serve, and impacting negatively on their capacity to learn?
- The core purpose of schools is to advance education for public benefit, but what are the factors that may be mitigating against this?
- Who are the civic organisations or actors that need to work together to address this issue (or these issues)?

The civic mindset accepts that the complexity of social issues means that it is unlikely that a single public institution, acting alone, will be able to solve any particular issue.

In the following pages we look at some of the approaches available to school trusts to put a civic mindset into practice, and examples of this in action.





## Four approaches

Taking the first step can be intimidating. The size of the problem can feel huge and complex – with no discernible beginning or end. You may not personally know the leaders of other public institutions. Reaching out can be hard. We set out here four different approaches to maximising civic impact. These approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive and in some cases, there are significant overlaps in relation to purpose, intent and impact.

The approaches might be viewed as a pathway, with the commitment to wider educational purposes reflecting current practice and the community convening approach being perhaps the least enacted across our sector.

### The wider educational purposes approach

Perhaps the most common exemplification of the civic mindset is what might be called the wider educational purposes approach. In CST and Edurio's annual survey 2023, many CST members responded with examples of this kind.



### Cultural and curriculum projects

- Annual curriculum projects with national partners like the Royal Shakespeare Company and National Gallery.
- Promotion and event partnership with a local history trust, including engaging the trust and other schools in the history trust's work, linked to the curriculum.
- Working with cultural partners (including theatres, production companies, and galleries) to develop the arts in communities which currently have under-representation.

### International education projects

- Working with a local food bank and an international education project to help build and support a girls' school in Ghana.

### Business and employer links

- A partnership with local businesses to improve the careers education information, advice, and guidance curriculum and provision for students.
- A project with the NHS to look at the range of potential career opportunities within the sector.
- Work with representative and convening organisations such as local enterprise partnerships – for example, a partnership for primary careers education.

One of the most established and successful of these is the Embark Federation.

## Embark Federation: Cultural education

*Rosie McLaughlin, appointed part-time by Embark Trust, has been instrumental in generating substantial funding and organising a series of impactful events for children. Her efforts have significantly enriched the educational and creative experiences of the children, breaking financial barriers and fostering a supportive environment. Key initiatives have included:*

- *Collaborations with artists and West End stars: Sophie Isaacs and Victoria Farley from the West End recorded the Federation song with 70 children; a week-long workshop with six West End stars for 23 disadvantaged children, culminating in a performance; a jazz day with Hot House Jazz saw over 120 children forming a band; a day trip to Pineapple Dance Studios to work with cast members from The Lion King in London followed by lunch and watching them perform in the matinee.*
- *Workshops and events: Illustrator Lucy Truman and local artist Sophie Edwards conducted workshops to inspire creativity; partnerships with Derby Kids Camp, the Back Dane Trust, and Derbyshire Children's Holiday Home provided holidays for children; a West End World Book Week where stars, including the cast of Matilda, worked with disadvantaged children.*
- *Sports and outdoor activities: Annual Embark primary and secondary football events at professional grounds with top coaches and Premier League footballers; a football day with Premier League players, including Ben Osborn*
- *Community and cultural Engagement: visits to Chatsworth House facilitated by a partnership with Lord Burlington; a project involving railway businesses to deliver a first-class train carriage to a school playground, creating a library, sensory room, and creative space; healthy living initiatives, including Travel Smart and Team Mode Shift programmes; family events hosted by schools and community hubs, focusing on literacy, inclusion, gardening, and more.*
- *Funding and bursaries: partnership with the Tim Henman Foundation providing £20,000 in bursaries for talented children in music, arts, and sports; substantial fundraising efforts involving local businesses, parent teacher associations, parents, staff, and children to support various causes.*
- *Major annual events: Annual Embark Awards featuring GB athletes, dancers from Diversity, and BAFTA Award winning TV stars; events sponsored by Derbyshire businesses, allowing high-quality experiences without financial barriers.*

*Future plans include the Embark Olympics with past Olympians, workshops with Baasit Siddiqui, and a swimming gala with Becky Adlington or Adam Peaty.*

*These initiatives, have had a profound impact on the children, enhancing their confidence, creativity, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.*



## The problem identification approach<sup>7</sup>

Consider starting with one issue – it will perhaps be the issue that is upper most in your mind – the intractable problem that is causing you the most worry, which could be particular to a school or across a group of schools in an area. Then consider initially a small number of leaders of other organisations that may be necessary to solving this problem.

**Finding the strategic focus:** One of the problems we face as leaders, particularly

<sup>7</sup> This section draws heavily on the work of Viviane Robinson. See Robinson, V (2018) *Reduce Change to increase Improvement*, Corwin; and Robinson, V (2023) *Virtuous Educational Leadership: Doing the Right Work in the Right Way*, Corwin.

in the current context, is the sheer number of issues affecting our children, young people and communities. So strategic thinking is needed in finding a focus and determining the scope.

**Analysing the problem:** Inquire into the causes and seek to understand the root causes in an analytic, no-blame way. Test rather than assume the validity of your own beliefs or assumptions about the problem. Build a more accurate and complete picture about the causes and possible solutions.

**Creating and co-constructing solutions:** Robinson reminds us that the process of forming and integrating constraints is a highly creative process.<sup>8</sup> In the context of this work with civic partners, creativity refers to “the production of viable or workable new, or original solutions to complex, novel ill-defined problems.”<sup>9</sup>

In our current context, the strategic focus could be any one of a number of intractable and complex problems for example, persistent absence rates in one of our schools, the rising tide of adolescent mental health problems, the problem with gangs and youth violence, food and/or shelter insecurity perhaps affecting one of our schools very acutely.

### A hypothetical example of what this approach could achieve

Before we offer a real case study – Oasis Community Learning’s community hubs initiative– let’s apply the problem solving approach to the rise in adolescent mental health. We offer this analysis in the spirit of humility and curiosity about what could be.

- **Finding the strategic focus:** adolescent mental ill health is a significant contributing factor to persistent absence in one school. There are very long waiting lists for the children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in the local area, with waiting lists typically over a year. Educational psychology services are now deployed only towards servicing statutory processes of education, health, and care plans. There is very little community based ‘early intervention’ provision in the local area.
- **Analysing the problem:** Prior to 2010, the local authority commissioned some early intervention mental health services through its CAMHS grant. In 2010, this grant was un-ringfenced and put into an area-based grant. Over three successive years, the area-based grant was cut from local authority settlements. The local authority in this area understandably and reluctantly had to decommission community-based provision. This put upward pressure on clinic-based services and the result was that the threshold for clinic-based services was raised. The global pandemic exacerbated adolescent mental ill health at a time when provision in the community was very limited and the upward pressure on CAMHS resulted in long waiting times.
- **Creating and co-constructing solutions:** you work with the council’s Director of Children’s Services to invite the chief executive of the mental health trust and chief executive of the local integrated care board to a breakfast meeting. You learn that ‘Did not attend/ Was not brought’ rates for the local CAMH clinic is between 14% and 20%. This means that approximately 1 in 5 children and young people were not brought or did not attend their clinic appointment. This is a significant concern for the NHS mental health trust. The school in your trust with high rates of persistent absence and high rates of mental ill health is in an area where poverty is endemic. The school is two bus journeys from the clinic. CAMHS does not routinely send reminders of appointments that could have been made up to a year ago. You offer to create a community based

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, V (2023) *Virtuous Educational Leadership: Doing the Right Work in the Right Way*, Corwin

<sup>9</sup> Mumford et al (2014).



local hub in the schools to provide a 'clinic' closer to home with extended opening hours and you all agree that a messaging service to parents will be implemented. This clinic will also be available to other children and young people in the immediate local area – not just the children in the school.

We now turn to two real examples from Oasis Community Learning – a hub in one Oasis school designed to address some of the problems associated with food and shelter insecurity and a hub in another Oasis school designed around youth violence reduction.

## Oasis Community Hubs

### **Oasis Hub Foundry**

*Once known as the 'school on Benefits Street', now rated as an Outstanding school, Oasis Academy Foundry is part of the local community of Winson Green, Birmingham. The local neighbourhood is rich in people, diversity, talent, and community spirit – alongside multiple deprivations that create daily challenges.*

*Local community members invest their time, skills, and life experience in helping each other. The Oasis Hub Foundry team has set up food pantries that provide 1,400 meals a week, with 60 families visiting each week to access good, affordable food. Open to everyone in the community, the pantries were set up with local community members, and are run by local volunteers.*

*A 'Warm Space' operates alongside the Pantries in winter, and during the spring/summer a 'Place of welcome' provides advice services and 'lived experience advocates' who help with everything from housing and school applications to debt, form-filling, benefits support and many volunteering opportunities aimed at improving employability. The team also run regular art therapy wellbeing sessions and practical events like slow cooker courses and air fryer demonstrations open to the local community.*

*The Oasis Community Hub team have worked with partner organisations in the local community to transform an under-used school field into a community garden and event space. Many local families live in over-crowded housing with little access to green/outdoor space, so the community garden has become a centre for community-gatherings, a source of pride in the local area, and a creative space providing room for everything from holiday activities, food growing in polytunnels, and regular community events like fireworks and summer festival days with up to 250 people. The local neighbourhood is significantly impacted by poverty, evidenced by levels of pupil premium funding, families with 'no recourse to public funds', and the turnover of families in temporary accommodation. The community team provide direct and intense support to families referred from the school contributing to the school's contextual safeguarding, as well as helping to support school attendance. The Hub model means that the community team can pick up wider issues that the school (alone) doesn't have capacity for, creating 360 degree holistic care, greater stability, and community cohesion.*

### **Youth work at Oasis Hub Hadley**

*Oasis Academy Hadley is a high-achieving all-through academy in an area of London with high levels of serious violence affecting young people (10th highest in the country). The Oasis Hub model has created a community and youth team around the school providing wraparound support for school families as well as serving the wider local community. Oasis Hub Hadley community outreach programmes provide family support, advice work, a food pantry and free café (accessed by around 300 families), a baby clothes and uniform bank, early years*



*sessions modelling positive play and supporting development milestones and a weekly luncheon club and small groups for seniors – all delivered by staff and community volunteers.*

*Oasis Hub Hadley also has an extensive youth team, whose work alongside the academy both prevents and responds to serious violence. Open access and targeted group programmes run each week, as well as 1-2-1 mentoring. The academy is able to refer higher risk young people to mentoring and small groups, and to support provided by a youth mental health specialist on the team; young people are also able to self-refer, alongside attending open access sessions.*

*The youth service has a team of workers embedded in the nearby North Middlesex hospital (funded as part of the London Violence Reduction Unit, London Boroughs of Enfield and Haringey). This team receive referrals for any young people aged 11-24 who have attended A&E as a result of violence. The hospital-based team provide mentoring for up to 48 weeks following any incident, and typically work with 200 young people each year. The hub model provides an eco-system of support around young people – meaning that mentoring can be accompanied by work with the wider family through the community team, as well as linking-up with in-school support and response. The mix of community, school, and hospital-based work provides Oasis Hub Hadley with crucial intelligence around local issues, neighbourhood needs and emerging trends around teen violence – benefiting the school's contextual safeguarding and holistic care of students and helping preventative action. The hub model provides targeted support beyond the capacity of academy staff (alone) and provides a strong and positive local neighbourhood presence.*

## The relational approach

Whereas the problem solving approach focuses on one issue, the relational approach focuses on one relationship. One of the problems in the leadership of public institutions is that we do not know each other. We do not understand what is putting pressure on us as leaders. We could probably broadly define each other's core purposes, but not with any nuance or real understanding. We do not know or understand the factors mitigating against the aims and purposes of our organisations, so we cannot explore in any real way whether working together may help us solve some of our problems.

In this approach, the leaders of the organisations build a relationship of trust, which then enables greater levels of inter-organisational trust. This is because an organisation cannot trust another organisation, but the leaders of organisations that trust each other can decide on resource prioritisation towards mutually defined goals. This can in turn lead to a situation where decisions and actions are made collectively, resulting from the orientation of trust among top management or leadership of each organisation.

The real-life case study below charts the journey of trust between a chief executive of a school trust and the chief executive of an NHS trust. Initially, the relationship is focused on building trust through understanding some of issues facing any chief executive. The relationship develops in a way that allows the two chief executives to explore mutual priorities and resource allocation towards those priorities.



***Dawn Haywood, Chief Executive Officer, Windsor Academy Trust and Glen Burley, NHS trust chief executive***

*When we met 18 months ago, our discussions initially focused on cross-sector knowledge sharing in areas like strategy, financial sustainability, and governance. Identifying significant areas of overlap, we explored partnerships to drive public benefit, such as preventing health issues in young people, establishing community health provisions on school sites, and developing the future workforce.*

*Our discussions underscored that a collaborative approach would yield the most meaningful impact over time. Education significantly influences health, and schools possess a unique capacity to shape societal behaviour and choices. To prioritise prevention, it is crucial to establish a gateway connecting NHS Trust managing directors with school trust CEOs and headteachers to facilitate collaboration.*

*Earlier this year, we initiated efforts to connect local health and education providers in each of our geographic areas. This involved aligning and connecting other school and NHS trusts outside of our own in order to facilitate this broader collaboration. This approach has borne fruit, with Windsor Academy Trust already forging partnerships with multiple NHS trusts that directly serve our school communities.*

*Initiatives spanning prevention, community health services in schools, and workforce development are now underway. In collaboration with Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust we are exploring the provision of preventative health support services within Windsor Academy Trust's school communities, from addiction prevention to mental health education.*

*Our new free school Windsor Olympus Academy is partnering with Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust to establish asthma-friendly environments in school. Students are being trained as "Asthma Champions" and will educate local primary schools about asthma triggers and treatment. In time, once we have achieved Asthma Friendly School status, an asthma clinic and inoculation program will be hosted at the school. We are also exploring partnerships with local doctors' surgeries to offer a centralised health agreement for the community.*

*NHS Allied Health Professional Health Fairs hosted at Windsor Olympus Academy will support our ambitions to diversify the NHS workforce inspiring students and parents, reinforced by the "I Can" campaign that highlights the 350 different jobs within the NHS. 50 of our students visited Birmingham Children's Hospital to tour the wards, meet staff, and learn about the range of job roles within the NHS.*

*We are particularly proud to have been invited by Satish Rao, Acting Chief Medical Officer at Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System, to be part of an initiative that is bringing health professionals and educators from across the city together to begin co-producing a Birmingham NHS Academy. Through collaboration across both sectors, the vision of the Academy is to reduce health inequalities in young people.*

*In our secondary schools in North Staffordshire, we are working closely with the NHS Mental Health Support Team to provide mental health education to students, wellbeing workshops for our staff and information evenings for parents in an effort to take a whole school approach to mental health. As part of this, we have been invited to sit on a trust network in Stoke and North Staffordshire to facilitate further collaboration between the NHS and school trusts in this area.*

*We are working with the NHS' workforce development team in Stoke and North Staffordshire to develop a primary school careers pilot, which is being informed*



*through pupil voice. Once developed, this will then be trialled in our Stoke primaries before being rolled out to all primaries across the county.*

*In Walsall we are working closely with Public Health to look at hosting a new NHS community healthy eating programme from our primary schools, providing a location for pop up immunisation clinics, and supporting Public Health with an emotional health and wellbeing pilot aimed at primary school aged children.*

*Windsor Academy Trust's Community Foundation - a fund set up to support young people and their families in the community - will also play a role in these initiatives. Our first fundraiser for the Foundation, WAT a Run, saw staff run two marathons in two days while students took part in sponsored fun runs at their respective schools. The event not only raised vital funds for the Foundation, but it also helped deliver on our civic purpose by using physical activity to support both physical and mental health.*

*While joint collaborations between the NHS and Windsor Academy Trust are still in their infancy, Neil Carr, CEO of Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, aptly noted we are "pushing on an open door." We have confidence that together, we can significantly impact our communities. Aligning our efforts will secure the wellbeing and prosperity of our communities while fulfilling our civic duty.*

*In time, these partnerships will extend beyond education and healthcare as we work toward building interconnected, thriving communities where individuals' wellbeing and aspirations take centre stage. This collaborative approach serves as a beacon of hope and progress for the future of our society, echoing the words of Dr Martin Luther King: "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."*

## The community convening approach

Community convening can be defined as the art of bringing together relevant community actors to act collectively to address common challenges. It typically involves the concept of collective action.

Riley (2021) argues that leaders who are place-makers understand their students and build trust by "making meaningful connections to families and locating the school within the wider archipelago of surrounding communities."<sup>10</sup> The pandemic has underlined the importance of these relationships.

Below is a real-life case study of community convening – the Feltham Convening Partnership which is the brainchild of the Reach Foundation. They have been inspired by successful projects from both in England and the United States which have used 'collective impact' approaches to deliver positive change for children, young people, parents and communities, such as [Strive Together](#) and [Right to Succeed](#). These projects have created a substantial evidence base for the effectiveness of collective impact approaches.

Collective impact projects aim to harness the expertise, insights and ideas of multiple different people and organisations in order to achieve significant change together. Rather than just helping many individual organisations do things differently, the fundamental aim of collective impact projects is for different organisations and people to learn together about particular community problems and community assets, decide upon strategies for action, and then work together to deliver carefully-considered and joined-up activities which can achieve lasting change.

In order to enable these partnerships to develop and work together effectively,

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<sup>10</sup> Riley, K (2021) 'Contemporary challenges in building trust and collaboration between schools and communities', *School Leadership and Education System Reform*. Bloomsbury.



collective impact projects are supported by a 'backbone' or 'planning' team which provides operational and administrative support to all the project's partners – taking care of the nuts and bolts of the work so that everyone else who is involved can focus on making decisions and deciding upon actions. This type of civic work therefore requires investment. The Mohn Westlake Foundation is dedicating significant funding for the next seven years to the Reach Foundation to deliver the Feltham Convening Partnership.

## The Reach Foundation: The Feltham Convening Partnership

*Since 2012, The Reach Foundation has prioritised deeply understanding the lives of local babies, children, young people and their families through Reach Academy and the Reach Children's Hub.*

*Through the Academy and the Hub, Reach provides education and wider holistic support to hundreds of local families, but the Reach Foundation leadership know that the only way to achieve lasting, significant change in any community is through genuine collective effort among a wide range of local stakeholders: schools, council departments, local services, local organisations, community leaders, local businesses, parents, and young people.*

*To improve lives in Feltham, the Feltham Convening Partnership facilitates this genuine collective effort by bringing together - convening - these passionate local individuals and organisations whose work and activities influence the lives of 0–21-year-olds and their families.*

*The goal is that, through professionally, neutrally facilitated discussion, these partners can agree upon a set of common goals to pursue and achieve them by working collectively. This means identifying where they might pool resources to work more collaboratively, change policies to better support pupil outcomes or build cross-sector relationships to strengthen wider support. Each partner plays a role which matches their expertise, capacity, and level of resource.*

*Key examples of this approach starting to have an impact in Feltham include the two initiatives below, both of which are deepening cross-sector relationships - a precursor to further sustainable change:*

### **A preventative mental health and well-being offer for pupils**

*In response to pupils', parents' and teachers' concerns about the rising mental health crisis facing children and young people, a mental health & wellbeing working group has been established. This comprises school mental health leads, SENCos, pupils, parents, educational wellbeing practitioners, a local counsellor and a CAMHS specialist teacher. Having identified the need for greater preventative support in local schools, the group established a Primary Mental Health Cluster and a Mental Health & Wellbeing Network to strengthen school staff's capacity to offer this. So far, this has involved:*

- *Creating a peer support network for local secondary schools to build relationships with each other, and share challenges and best practice;*
- *Facilitating free training and professional development opportunities from mental health professionals via half-termly webinars. These improve school staff's knowledge and awareness around different mental health topics (the webinars are specifically tailored to the needs of local students);*
- *Connecting school staff with the local authority's Mental Health Support Team to develop easy-to-embed strategies to support teaching and learning.*





### **A Young Researchers' network for local secondary pupils**

*In response to feedback from local young people about the lack of meaningful activities to engage in during school holidays, members of the post-16 working group (which includes schools, local universities, the Local Authority, charities, local employers and young people) decided to set up a Young Researchers' network to provide:*

- *Training and paid work opportunities to local young people during the summer holidays and over the course of the academic year;*
- *Networking opportunities with local young people, employers and universities;*
- *The opportunity to learn research and employability skills and complete an action-research project to contribute to improving outcomes for local young people.*

*As cross-sector relationships continue to deepen, we very much look forward to further system changes emerging and embedding.*

Dixons Academies Trust has taken a slightly different approach to community convening. Working with Citizens UK and other trusts in Bradford, they have brought together the Bradford Citizens Alliance.

### **Dixons Academies Trust Collaborative Convening Approach**

*Dixons Academies has a mission to challenge educational and social disadvantage in the north. They have a three-step approach to their civic responsibility work:*

- *Working with others to create a platform for students and their families to have a voice about what they want to see change in their community to help them be successful*
- *Acting on this feedback by building relationships with civic partners, such as community centres, academia and the NHS*
- *Working with others to build the right structures in a place to ensure that the services around young people can communicate and coordinate effectively*

*In Bradford, where Dixons runs 10 schools, this work involved working with Beckfoot Trust, Bradford Diocesan Academies Trust, Exceed Academies, Priestley Academies and others to build a Bradford Citizens alliance in partnership with Citizens UK, which gives young people in the city a powerful voice. They have consistently campaigned on cost of living, anti-racism, and the need for mental health support.*

*Off the back of this work, partnerships have been built with others to tackle each of these three priorities, including hosting NHS workers and other support services in schools. Finally, Dixons has supported the creation of Bradford's Education Alliance for Life Chances, a collaborative partnership of public sector organisations and others aimed at coordinating support for young people in the city, underpinned by Bradford's research community.*



## Afterword: Some tenets of civic leadership

### The protection and promotion of public values

We believe wholeheartedly that leaders must have the domain specific knowledge to lead their organisations. But we increasingly think that the domains of leadership required to address the challenges we face in our school system go beyond the knowledge and expertise of leading a group of schools – essential though this is.

Civic leadership is about the protection and promotion of public values and addressing issues of place or public concern. Civic leaders create the conditions for collective impact by addressing complex issues affecting children and young people that require different actors to work together.

### Catalysing collective leadership through a theory of action

The pandemic has left us with a host of negative legacies – educational, social, economic and health. On top of these challenges has come a global economic crisis which in England has resulted in more families living in absolute poverty. It is beyond the reach of individual organisations to support our families and communities through this. It requires a collective response.

As Peter Senge points out, the deep changes necessary to accelerate progress require leaders who catalyse collective leadership.<sup>11</sup> But simply catalysing collective leadership is unlikely to be sufficient. We will need to develop a collective theory of action.

### Building a connected system

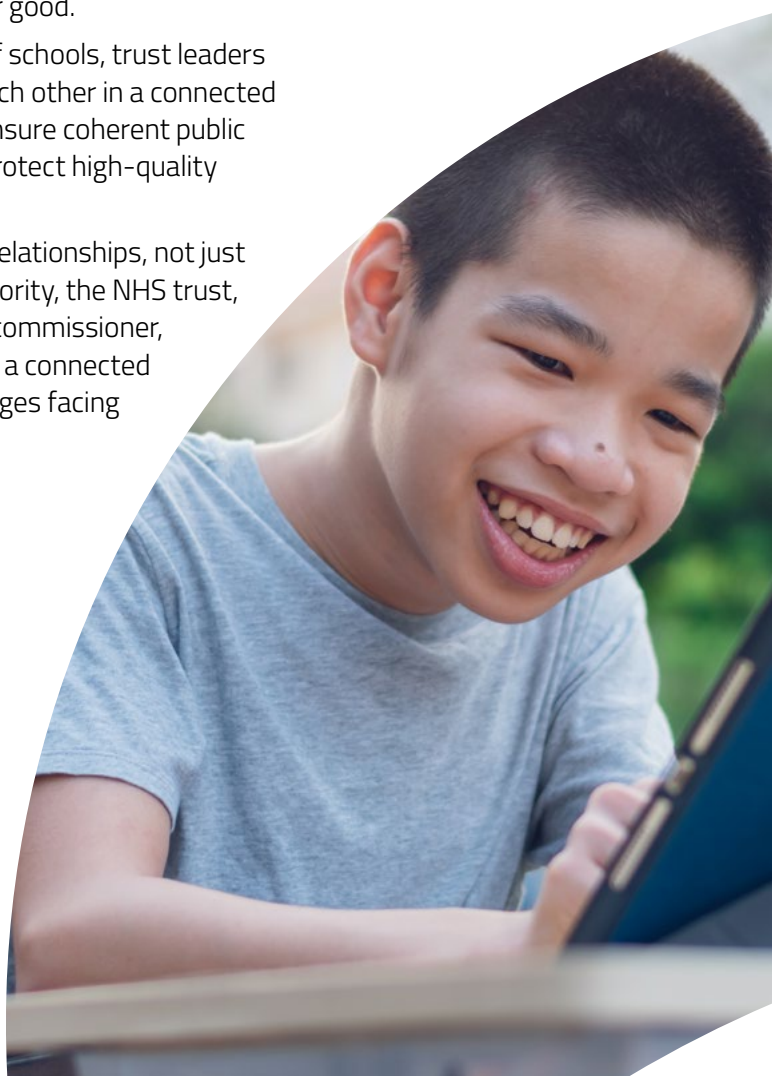
If we are to build a *connected* system in which all actors work together, trust leaders must also understand their role as civic leaders. As such, leaders have a duty to engage with each other and other civic actors for the wider good.

Trust leaders are civic leaders. As well as leading a group of schools, trust leaders also look out beyond their organisation. They work with each other in a connected system, and they seek to work with other civic actors to ensure coherent public services, and that the collective actions of all civic actors protect high-quality education.

This means that trust leaders ensure that they build local relationships, not just with each other but with wider civic actors – the local authority, the NHS trust, the mental health trust, health commissioners, the police commissioner, the university vice chancellor etc. It is only through building a connected system that we will be able to address the multiple challenges facing our communities.

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<sup>11</sup> Senge, P (2006) *The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Random House.





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