

From good to great: trust-led education in England

CST annual review

Academic year
2025/26



**Confederation
of School Trusts**
The voice of school trusts

Welcome

We publish this review towards the end of an important academic year for English schools. Over the last few months we have seen an avalanche of policy changes and initiatives, and the laying out of plans and potential futures that will touch every part of our sector.

We are proud to represent school trusts of all settings and sizes right across England as together we navigate this changing environment. Across the country, more than 60% of pupils attend academies. The work trusts do is crucial to the future wellbeing of not just those children, but their families and wider society.

Our role as the sector body and employer organisation for trusts is to advocate for that work, connect trust colleagues with each other, and support however we can.

This report gives a taster of CST and the sector over the 2025/26 academic year. I am so grateful for our dedicated team of staff, backed by the guiding hand of our trustees, and the generosity of our partners and supporters.

Most importantly we celebrate the sector and its supporters, and I offer my personal thanks to you for being part of this important work.

Leora Cruddas CBE

Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts





“Our best school trusts illustrate the transformational potential of schools working together for children... We will put collaboration at the heart of the system by moving to all schools joining or forming high-quality school trusts”

Schools White Paper, April 2026

All schools in a trust

CST has consistently argued that [trusts should be at the heart of England's school system](#). Through policy papers, research, consultations, and engagement with ministers, we and our members have led the way in popularising the concept of a trust-led system. Thanks to that prolonged engagement this year saw, for the first time, a Labour administration commit to all schools being part of a strong trust in the [Schools White Paper](#).

A fresh start for special educational needs

CST has long advocated for a new approach to special educational needs, rejecting out-dated deficit models and moving towards an approach underpinned by dignity for all our children - exemplified by our [A good life](#) paper published with Tom Rees, Ben Newmark, and Ambition Institute. We have been delighted to see this approach, and the work of our co-sponsored [Inclusion in Practice](#) research, reflected in much of the Government's proposed SEND reforms, with the sector well represented in the DfE's expert advisory panel.

A constructive partner in change

CST meets regularly with politicians, advisers, and civil servants to help shape the government's approach to schools. This year our work helped secure key amendments to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act, including: preserving flexibility for academy teachers' pay; limiting powers to intervene in trusts; ensuring school quality is key to decisions on admission numbers; and a balanced approach to trust inspection. We also worked closely with Ofsted to ensure member views helped shape the new school inspection framework, and responded on behalf of the sector to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, and consultations ranging from funding to food standards.



“The speakers were exceptionally knowledgeable, and the event provided a fantastic opportunity to network with other governance professionals. I left buzzing with ideas.”

**Bee Lopez Bloor, Trust Governance Officer,
Marches Academy Trust
on CST’s Governance Conference**

Bringing the sector together

Collaboration is a key power of the school trust, and CST works to bring trusts together to further develop the system. From our two-day [Annual Conference](#) - the largest annual event for school trust leaders - through our 10 community conferences we will this year bring together over 2,850 delegates to share, learn, and connect together. Delegates have heard from colleagues, government ministers, senior civil servants, specialist suppliers, and vibrant voices from outside of the sector.

Specialist connections that mean you're never on your own

Our [professional communities](#) have grown to be a core and highly valued part of CST's work. We have dedicated networks for many key roles in trusts, from chief executives to communications, from school improvement to safeguarding. 11,850 colleagues from trusts across the country take part in the communities, which offer termly online meetings, 24/7 peer support through our forums, and targeted resources and webinars.

Regular support and topical engagement

We love to hear from our members - and to hear them debate. Every fortnight in term time we hold open [online member engagement calls](#) attracting up to 1200 participants. These give CST members the chance to raise questions on the topics that matter to them, with regular focused briefings on live debates. This year we have put trust leaders directly in contact with HMCI Sir Martyn Oliver to talk about the new Ofsted framework, with DfE Regions Group Director General Dr Tim Coulson to discuss next steps from the Schools White Paper, and Dr Becky Francis to explain the thinking behind her Curriculum and Assessment Review's final report.

Connecting



“An excellent course that had so much information and ‘common sense’ examples. Was relevant to a new or experienced governor alike.”

**Diane Pennington, Rainbow MAT
on CST’s Governing a school trust course**

A clear, calm voice in a changing world

CST supports trusts to continue to improve by producing guidance, governance frameworks, leadership development and professional standards. These often shape the sector view and several of our governance guidance documents are now directly referenced by Department for Education guidance. Our thought leadership work includes [*The partnership dividend: Civic leadership in place*](#), [*Governance at scale*](#), and [*Leading through listening*](#) with guidance on topics including [school trust mergers](#) and [executive pay](#), and continued updates to our long-standing comprehensive [school funding landscape guidance](#).

The trusted source for authoritative training

CST offers [training for governance and executive trust leaders](#), drawing on our expertise of the trust system to ensure our courses are uniquely focused. Our small class courses have this year helped nearly 1,200 delegates upskill to better support their trusts.

Our expanding [mentoring service](#) provides targeted and tailored support for trust leaders, with 20 chief executives helped to deepen their practice this year. We also regularly support trusts with their own in-house development, [speaking at trust conferences](#) and [strategy and development days](#), with 27 engagements this year.

Help when you need it

Our membership and trust development teams are on hand to support trusts when they need it. Our [email enquiry service](#) has helped trusts with queries as diverse as mobile phone rules, supporting medical conditions, industrial action, and funding. Our trust development service has been commissioned for more than 100 projects, including more than 50 [external reviews of governance](#).


Supporting



“Hands down, the event of the year for connecting with trust leaders... the whole place hums with unity and community. If you work with or within school trusts, this is the place to be.”

Danni Fothergill, Head of Marketing, Edurio
on CST's Annual Conference

Trusts now educate more than 60% of pupils. CST members represent:



4.2m
school pupils



9,863
academies



1,084
school trusts



We have a diverse membership with all types and sizes of trusts, covering 82% of England's academies

- 15% of member trusts are single academy trusts, and 70% of member trusts have 10 or fewer schools
- 16% of member trusts run special schools, and 7% alternative provision
- More than half of member trusts provide post-16 education, either standalone or through school sixth forms
- CST members operate in all DfE regions, including 201 member trusts in the South East, 171 in the North West, and 169 in London
- Around 22,700 trust colleagues - staff, trustees, and local governance volunteers - are registered with CST through their trust's membership
- Membership also includes maintained schools looking to become trusts, area-based education partnerships, and dioceses and local authorities supporting trusts

In numbers



CST Platinum
Partner

We are very grateful for the many organisations that partner with us to support school trusts, especially our Platinum Partners:

Arbor

Access Group

Anderson Quigley

Barker

Browne Jacobson

BeReady

CJK

Edurio

Education Mutual

FFT Education

Ginger Energy

Hachette Learning

IMP Software

ImpactEd Group

Lloyds

Pearson

PLMR

RSM

Renaissance

RM

Stone King

Teaching Personnel

Talent Architects

Value Match Sustainability
Services



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