



Marches Academy Trust

**ANNUAL
REVIEW
2024-2025**

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1. Trust Vision and Values

Achievement through caring

Excellence

Excellence:
striving for
mastery and
personal
success

Integrity

Integrity:
consistently
acting with
honesty,
compassion
and respect

Empathy

Empathy:
embracing and
supporting the
uniqueness of
every individual

Creativity

Creativity:
inspiring and
challenging
through invention,
experimentation
and exploration

Equality

Equality:
ensuring fair
opportunity
for all

2. Trust Strategic Priorities 2025-2026

People First

All staff actively contribute to and live our People First strategy

Anytime, Anywhere Learning

Adaptive teaching and learning is embedded and underpinned by literacy in all schools to achieve outcomes that reach at least national standards.

Belonging

Where everyone is seen, heard and understood in a culture enabling growth.

Working Today to Protect Tomorrow

An innovative Trust providing greater opportunities for our stakeholders.

3. Reflections - A summary of the year

This academic year, our family of schools has continued to grow and thrive despite national and global challenges. Three new schools joined the Trust this year: Selattyn CE, Cockshutt CE, and Criftins CE Primary Schools. We have remained focused on listening to stakeholders and shaping development around their perspectives. Across every role - site staff, catering teams, lunchtime supervisors, sports coaches, cleaners, administration, HR, teaching assistants, accounts, IT specialists, and educators - our collective commitment to placing children and young people at the heart of all we do has never wavered.

Our priority has been to identify best practice, research thoroughly, and collaborate to find solutions that improve education for all. A key milestone was the introduction of The Shore in each secondary school - a dedicated space for Year 7 children to ease transition and strengthen links with feeder primaries. This initiative reflects our long-term vision: to know every child, build on their strengths, and provide opportunities for rich social capital through diverse conversations, work experiences, and enrichment activities.

We have worked hard to achieve clarity and alignment. Every school is now closely linked to the Trust Development Plan, and all staff understand how their role contributes to school and Trust progress. Our “anytime, anywhere” learning approach is embedding adaptive teaching tailored to learners’ needs. Through positivity and collaboration, we have tackled challenges such as social media pressures and post-pandemic resource shortages. Using our Learning for Life framework and Teach Like a Champion (TLAC) strategy, we have improved attendance and achieved a 63% reduction in permanent exclusions, bucking the national trend, despite significant financial constraints as one of the poorest-funded local authorities.

The 4 All Foundation, established two years ago, continues to deliver vital resources such as Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programmes and youth clubs to our most isolated communities.

Our central Shared Services team - Finance, HR, IT, Marketing and Communications, Governance, Attendance, and Operations has ensured robust management of non-educational functions, enabling teachers to focus on learning. Their value was evident during the April 2025 cyber-attack, when the IT team worked tirelessly to minimise impact and maintain continuity for children and young people.

Financially, the Trust remains secure, supported by healthy reserves. This stability enables schools to navigate the challenging economic climate while operating leanly.

Our collective efforts were recognised nationally when The Marches Academy Trust was shortlisted for the TES School Awards 2025 in the Inclusive Trust of the Year category, a significant achievement for a small Trust competing alongside major national organisations. This reflects the impact of initiatives led by our Executive Director of Education, including Learning for Life, Marches Academy Trust Inclusion (MATi, and One Voice, which have embedded inclusive practice across our schools.

At the heart of everything we do is a simple commitment: to provide the best possible educational opportunities for every child and young person. We are proud of what we have achieved together and excited for what lies ahead.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Finch".

Sarah Finch
CEO, The Marches
Academy Trust



4. People First



Professional Learning: Building a Culture of Lifelong Learning

Investing in professional growth remains a cornerstone of our People First Strategy, driving sustained impact across the Trust. In 2024–2025, we delivered a comprehensive programme of development opportunities designed to strengthen teaching, leadership, and collaboration.

Teaching and Learning

This year, our teaching staff focused on Literacy Principles and Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB), with a major emphasis on Teach Like a Champion (TLAC) and instructional coaching.

- TLAC sessions provided a shared language and clear strategies for effective classroom practice.
- Impact was evidenced through Steplab and participant feedback, showing how staff applied these strategies to improve classroom instruction.

Leadership Development

Our Shared Services Middle Leadership training covered:

- Effective Teams and Accountability
- Influencing Without Authority

- Leading Change
- High-Performing Teams

95% of participants strongly agreed these sessions would positively influence their practice.

The Trust professional learning offer has also included access to the basic coaching skills programme, and opportunities for colleagues to write and deliver facilitated specialist workshops for the Trust Conference.

Impact and Engagement

Feedback gathered since October 2024 shows over 70% of staff agree professional learning is improving their school-based practice.

Alliance of Leading Learning and NPQs

As a national provider of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), the Alliance of Leading Learning continues to exceed Department for Education targets:

- 2024–2025: 118 participants (vs target of 101) – 118% achievement
- Since 2021: 597 leaders trained across Shropshire and Telford



Within the Trust, 55 staff completed NPQs this year, from specialist programmes to executive leadership:

- 1 Executive Leadership
- 13 Headship
- 22 Senior Leadership
- 6 Leading Behaviour and Culture
- 1 Leading Primary Maths
- 10 Leading Teacher
- 2 Leading Teacher Development

Talent Spotting and Staff Investment

Our commitment to spotting, developing, and retaining talent begins with Initial Teacher Training (ITT). In 2024–2025:

- 28 associate teachers completed training
- All secured employment
- Four joined Trust schools

Talent pathways empower staff to shape their careers while being supported by their school and the Trust. Central investment ensures access to high-quality, evidence-informed development.

Retention Through Talent Management

Staff testimonials highlight the impact:

- “The Trust’s support and NPQs gave me confidence to progress into leadership.”
- “I’ve been talent spotted and offered endless opportunities – career development is a priority.”
- “I’ve stayed because I feel invested in, mentored, and supported within a warm, aspirational community.”

Workload Reduction and Collaboration

In 2024–2025, the Workload Changers group led initiatives to reduce workload, including:

- Collaboration days for shared planning
- Live feedback and marking supported by TLAC
- Shared curriculum models and EDIB approaches
- Centrally created professional learning sessions
- Networking for role-specific support
- Digital platforms (Arbor, CPOMs, Sistra, Steplab) to cut paperwork

Network meetings fostered collaboration and sparked innovations such as:

- A cross-Trust Careers Fair
- Trust Orchestra
- Willow Theatre
- Early Years Principles

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB)

Our EDIB Strategy reflects a clear commitment to building respectful, inclusive school communities. Guided by strategic objectives, governance, training, and community engagement, the Trust advances its vision of “Achievement through Caring”, preparing learners and staff to thrive in a diverse society.



In 2024 – 2025 two primary school objectives were pursued:

To create a positive, safe environment where everyone is treated respectfully.

We launched initiatives like Ban the Banter to challenge discriminatory language, alongside restorative practices and awareness campaigns celebrating difference – from Pride Month to Black History Month. The impact? Some schools reported up to a 60% drop in discriminatory incidents.

To develop a curriculum reflective of the diverse society

Curriculum audits ensured lessons reflect the society our learners live in. We enriched Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) resources, introduced diverse authors, and brought cultural perspectives into classrooms. Pupil voice grew stronger through inclusive leadership bodies like Parliaments, and cultural learning was deepened with visits and guest speakers.

Empowering EDIB Ambassadors

Our trained EDIB Ambassadors are change-makers. They've led staff training on banning discriminatory banter, tackling school avoidance linked to neurodiversity, and promoting inclusive language and unconscious bias. Their work ensures EDIB isn't just a policy – it's a lived experience.

Connecting with Families and Communities

Transparency and collaboration matter. Through newsletters, open-door policies, and ambassador-led initiatives, schools strengthened community ties. Programmes like Mental Health Heroes and Respect Ambassadors gave children leadership opportunities, embedding values of respect and belonging.

Shared Services EDIB Training

In 2024–2025, our Shared Services team completed EDIB workshops on Inclusive Language, Unconscious Bias, and Ban the Banter to foster a culture of respect.

Key Takeaways from Ban the Banter Training:

- Speak up – language matters.
- Understand what banter is, its impact, and how to challenge harmful behaviour.
- Recognise when banter is appropriate and the role of bystanders.
- Practical strategies for addressing inappropriate comments.
- Think before speaking – could “friendly banter” offend?





Trust Conferences

Marches Academy Trust (MAT) Conferences - Enabling Equitable Education Through Innovation and Creativity

In February 2025, over 400 teaching staff from across the Trust came together for an inspiring day of professional learning, networking, and sharing best practice. Fully funded by the Trust, the event reflected our commitment to putting people first, investing in development and fostering a strong sense of belonging.

The conference focused on strengthening universal provision and delivering high-quality first teaching, ensuring every learner can access meaningful, challenging opportunities.

Highlights

18 Trust-led workshops provided practical strategies and fresh ideas:

- “Outstanding, engaging, and full of tried-and-tested activities to improve CYP thinking.”

“Relevant to our school priorities - great to explore high expectations and trust.”

Keynote Speakers:

Amjad Ali

- “The best keynote I’ve heard in a long time passionate, humorous, and full of practical ideas.”
- “Inspiring and motivating - left me eager to learn more.”



Alistair Bryce-Clegg

- “Insightful EYFS perspective made me want to research further.”
- “Reinforced that learning is most effective when relevant and real.”
- “Inspired us to rethink continuous provision in Year 1 for all learners.”

Headteacher Conferences - Driving MAT Development

Throughout 2024–2025, Headteachers explored mechanisms for change through Balanced Improvement, learning how to adapt and embed these strategies across schools.

Associate Staff Conference: Collaborate, Connect, Communicate

In June 2025 we held our first Associate Staff conference. This event formed part of our professional learning strategy, ensuring all staff had access to training, networking, and a clear understanding of their vital role in achieving the Trust’s mission.

Impact

- “The timeline gave me pride in being part of this journey #togetherwegrow.”
- “Fantastic to meet colleagues and share what we value about our roles.”
- “Reinforced that our work truly matters—without it, young people couldn’t progress.”
- “As a new school, it was great to see values at the heart of the message.”

In summary:

The People First Agenda for 2024–2025 achieved notable progress in professional development, talent management, and inclusive culture. Key accomplishments included extensive professional learning programmes with high staff engagement and positive feedback. The Alliance of Leading Learning exceeded targets for National Professional Qualifications, supporting hundreds of leaders across Shropshire and Telford. A robust talent spotting system led to successful internal promotions and strong staff retention. Significant strides were made in Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB), evidenced by reduced discriminatory incidents and enriched curriculum diversity. Conferences and workshops fostered collaboration and a sense of belonging among teaching and associate staff, reinforcing the Trust's commitment to putting people first.

Supporting Staff Wellbeing and Voice

The Trust is committed to managing staff wellbeing and workload through multiple support routes. Alongside line management structures, colleagues can access wellbeing groups, staff surveys, counselling, physiotherapy, and GP services. In the summer term we introduced Speak Up Guardians, training a team to provide confidential listening support for those who prefer this option.

We have extended cross-Trust collaboration days to three days a year and, following staff feedback, adjusted their placement for next year to ensure they genuinely reduce workload by sharing large-scale development projects. The impact will be evaluated with staff throughout the year.

Staff Attendance

In 2024/25, the average number of working days lost to sickness per staff member was 6.48 days, with 60.6% of staff taking sickness absence. Both figures compare favourably to national averages of 8.3 days and 65.7% (2023/24).

The adoption of SAM People in our HR department has strengthened absence monitoring, providing robust data for each school. This enables bespoke interventions and gives Headteachers visibility of long-term cases and trigger points.

Edurio Staff Survey

In February, the Trust used Edurio for its staff survey for the first time, achieving a 63% completion rate (ranging from 79% to 42% across sites) and earning a 'Good' rating. A total of 474 colleagues responded, supported by personal invitations and reminders.

Highlights:

- 90% feel comfortable asking colleagues for help.
- 88% feel respected by colleagues.
- 76% are clear about the Trust's vision and values.

Areas for improvement:

- Only 7% rarely or never feel overworked; 59% report feeling overworked very or quite often.
- 66% experience classroom disruption constantly or often.
- 55% feel stressed very or quite often.

Follow-up action plans have been developed by each school and the central services team. Examples include:

- Sharing school vision more widely.
- Providing Access Leaders with Steplab.
- Timetabling adjustments to reduce classroom movement.



5. Anytime Anywhere Learning

Embedding Inclusion into Practice

Across 2024–25, inclusion has moved decisively from principle to practice. The Learning for Life framework now actively shapes decisions about children rather than simply informing plans. Over a quarter of schools (27%) have further embedded this approach, with leaders reporting a step change in understanding need, using data effectively, and acting early. This progress is supported by a new review model that begins with the lived experience of children and young people (CYP), sharpening ambition and accountability.

These developments come against a backdrop of national pressures: Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) requests have risen by 27% since 2021, referrals to alternative provision have increased by 60% since the pandemic, and persistent absence remains at 21% nationally. In this context, early identification and strong universal systems are essential.



Voice and Belonging

The Everyone Matters – Building Blocks to Belonging initiative has provided the Trust with a shared, evidence-based language for culture. Voice has been captured from over 80% of learners, alongside staff, families and external partners, through collaboration days, conferences and networks. This feedback has directly influenced next steps, including the redesign of tutor and pastoral systems in all secondary schools from September 2025, placing trusted relationships at the heart of the school day.

Our MAT Voice structure has matured into a powerful engine for change. MyVoice (via Edurio) achieved 95% participation in primary and 78% in secondary, giving schools their clearest picture yet of how children feel about safety, belonging and learning. CYP are now leading improvements to sites, strengthening community links and showcasing their work on “Belonging in the World” across all 11 schools, ahead of onboarding three more in Spring/Summer 2025. Children are no longer just responding to surveys; they are shaping priorities and practice.

MAT Voice

MAT Voice has strengthened significantly this year, embedding a trust-wide system where children and young people (CYP) shape culture, priorities and improvement. Through MyVoice, OurVoice and OneVoice, learners have influenced decisions at school and Trust level, reinforcing the principle that every child’s voice matters.

MyVoice (Edurio) achieved record engagement: 95% in primary and 78% in secondary, giving a robust picture of CYP views on safety, happiness, learning and wellbeing. Primary responses met or exceeded national benchmarks:

- 83% happy at school (+5 above national)
- 94% feel safe in school (+3 above national)
- 96% feel safe travelling to and from school (+4 above national)

These insights have shaped priorities for 2025/26, particularly classroom experience, transitions and daily routines.

OneVoice expanded as a cross-trust leadership programme under the theme Belonging in the World. CYP led projects on community involvement and cultural identity, including environmental improvements, creative cultural work, charitable partnerships and community initiatives. The summer Showcase united CYP from all 11 schools, with Tilstock CE Primary and Idsall School receiving top recognition.

Overall, 2024-25 saw MAT Voice evolve from consultation to collaboration. CYP have shaped strategy, influenced culture, improved environments and contributed visibly to the Trust's vision for belonging and mattering. Their voice is now a central driver of improvement across all schools.



Investment in Inclusive Environments

Working with the Local Authority, the Trust has secured or committed over £1.2 million in capital funding to expand or create resourced provisions at key sites:

- **Sir John Talbot's School** – expansion of provision, development of The Nest and The Helm, and preparation for The Lighthouse (2025/26).
- **Longlands Primary School** – new resourced provision opening September 2025.
- **Tilstock CE Primary School** – redesigned regulation space and Key Stage 1 / Key Stage 2 reconfiguration.
- **Grove School** – Learning for Life Centre established; resourced provision opening 2026/27.
- **Marches School** – resourced provision planned for 2026/27.

Alongside these major projects, enhanced internal inclusion spaces are already improving daily experience for CYP. At Shrewsbury Academy, The Lighthouse has reduced suspensions for its cohort by 86%, complemented by The Bridge and new-build improvements. Grange Primary has introduced a new sensory room, while Woodlands School has improved outdoor provision and redesigned internal flow to support movement, safety and belonging.

These developments ensure inclusion is embedded not only in systems but in the physical spaces children use every day.

MATi: Driving Re-engagement and Support

The 2024–25 academic year marked significant progress for MATi, delivering inclusive education and high-quality alternative provision through the RESUSC model: Restore, Reset, Redirect, Restart and Return. This approach has successfully supported CYP to re-engage with learning, reduce suspensions and exclusions, and improve attendance.

Demand for MATi services grew substantially, with Restart supporting 119 CYP by Summer Term 2 and MATislands supporting 158 CYP on Pupil Premium and 120 accessing Free School Meals. Outcomes are encouraging:

- Restore: 56.9% improved attendance, 55.8% improved behaviour.
- Redirect: 83% improved attendance, 81% improved behaviour, with suspensions reduced for 71% of CYP.

SEND remains a priority, with 19 CYP holding EHCPs and 108 CYP with SEND recorded across Restart alone. MATi staff have secured additional resources where needed and strengthened inclusive practice through targeted interventions. A highlight of the year was a special event in July 2025, when CYP participating in the Field Studies Restart programme met HRH Princess Anne, celebrating achievements and showcasing the value of alternative provision.



External Recognition

The Trust's work on Learning for Life, MATi and inclusive culture led to shortlisting for the TES Most Inclusive Trust Award, signalling that our commitment to inclusion is not only improving outcomes internally but is now visible and credible on a national stage.

Adaptive Teaching and Learning Embedded

At the start of 2025, a curriculum intervention training session was completed with leaders of teaching and learning and curriculum across the Trust. This highlighted curriculum activities that underpin adaptive teaching. Leaders implemented these practices by clearly identifying powerful knowledge and disciplinary vocabulary across the entire curriculum.

Adaptive teaching has been supported through 'Teach Like a Champion' (TLAC) across schools. TLAC brings predictability and facilitates community within the classroom, increasing participation and deeper thinking. It ensures teachers focus on identified powerful knowledge and possible misconceptions. TLAC is a tried and tested approach that has transformed classrooms into learning communities. It is a tool for teachers that can significantly raise outcomes and increase life chances.

- Six comprehensive professional learning (PL) sessions, written in-house, have been delivered across schools throughout the year.
- Sessions remain available for new staff to ensure a sustainable model.

- Evidence from reviews demonstrates that where TLAC strategies are used:
 - CYP are engaged.
 - Learning intentions are clear.
 - Progress is accelerated.

Due to the specific nature of the training, continued effort is required to ensure impact in every classroom.

Steplab has complemented TLAC by exemplifying best practice through video footage and monitoring progress in schools. Adaptive teaching is embedding well across the Trust.

Coaching and Observation Data:

- In September last year, 0% of teaching staff were engaged in coaching; at the same point this year, it was 42%.
- Peak engagement was 55% in June when PL session coaching for all was launched.
- Over 650 coaching observations have taken place across the Trust.
- 12,500 drop-ins occurred in the last academic year:
 - 5,000 from Senior Leadership Teams (SLT).
 - Well over half from non-SLT staff.
- TLAC's impact is evident as it provides staff with a common language to describe effective teaching practices.



Coaching Capacity:

- 245 coaches have completed the Coaching Skills Builder.
- A further 150 are more than halfway through training.
- 479 users are on the platform (including some non-teaching staff).

Schools are using Steplab data to personalise coaching programmes based on emerging needs and tailoring PL sessions to address the highest-impact TLAC strategies.

Enrichment

A 'real world ready curriculum' requires a strong enrichment offer across all schools, and enrichment continues to be a top priority for our Trust. CYP have engaged in a wide variety of educational visits locally, nationally, and internationally. With increasing costs, there has been a greater focus on local visits to build identity and pride in the local area, alongside inviting visitors into schools for specific purposes.

Examples include:

- Visits to rivers, museums, churches, and cities.
- Idsall School's participation in the 'Big Sleep Out' in Birmingham, demonstrating how enrichment can inspire social responsibility.

Enrichment Highlights:

- 724 recorded enrichment opportunities in communities, the local area, and nationally.
- 16 international opportunities.
- 234 Year 7 children visited a university.
- 86 events for local primary children to visit our secondaries.

Collaboration across schools has grown, with initiatives such as:

- The Cross-Trust Orchestra, which held its first performance in July 2025.
- 16 Varsity competitions.

Literacy – Reading Culture

Reading is increasingly identified as a barrier to engagement. The Trust has assessed literacy profiles across all secondary schools and updated Literacy Principles in line with research. Reading remains central to the Trust Development Plan.

Key actions 2024–25:

- Reading culture reviewed in all schools.
- 16 staff trained in intervention strategies.
- Intervention programmes in all schools; Lexonik in three secondaries.
- Grange Primary participated in EEF Lexia trial, significantly improving phonics and Year 2 reading outcomes.

Impact:

- Year 1 phonics: 63% (2024) → 79% (2025).
- Year 2 non-statutory tests: 71% expected, 24% greater depth (up from 63% phonics check in 2024).

Ofsted feedback:

“The school is working to promote a culture of reading. Children with gaps in their reading knowledge are quickly identified and effective interventions are put in place to support them. This work is helping these children develop their ability and confidence to read.”

Ofsted, Isdall, November 2024

“Reading is celebrated here. Expert teaching of phonics ensures that children become fluent readers. The school makes sure that all staff and children use the same words to describe the school’s approach to teaching reading. For example, children speak confidently about phonemes and graphemes. A strong reading culture is evident because children love reading and do so often.”

Ofsted, Oakmeadow, December 2024



The Shore – Supporting Transition

The Shore is now an established provision in all secondary schools, providing a soft landing for Year 7 children transitioning from primary. This approach supports belonging for CYP and staff from the point of joining and is embedded in Trust language and practice.



Key developments:

- Dedicated Shore spaces created in every secondary school.
- Transition planning tool introduced to support in-year transfers and ensure continuity for children joining outside normal entry points.
- Systems now allow leaders to focus on teaching and learning across subjects with a consistent approach.
- Work on The Shore highlighted the need to upskill teachers to support reading across all subjects, leading to targeted CPD.

Impact:

- Attendance for Year 7 improved across all schools (Marches +1.64%, Sir John Talbot's School (SJT) +0.92%, Idsall +0.61%, Grove +1.11%, Shrewsbury Academy +2.01%, Woodlands +9.11%).

- Reduction in persistent absence and avoidable suspensions.
- 86 transition events delivered for primary children.
- Data collection from primaries refined to include targeted, context-specific information.
- Increased family engagement through phone calls, meetings, and drop-ins, improving understanding and relationships.

Future focus:

- Deepening collaboration with feeder schools.
- Continued refinement of transition processes based on 2025 adaptations.

Teaching & Learning Innovation - Curriculum development

This year we have moved away from individual/group Action Research Projects and focused on one area across the Trust: Powerful Knowledge and Subject Specific Vocabulary

All children and young people are entitled to a great education which provides access to clearly identified 'Powerful Knowledge'. Our curriculum should outline the following two elements:

1. The Powerful Knowledge that all children must know and understand.
2. The Subject Specific Vocabulary that allows them to talk, read and write about that Powerful Knowledge, enabling them to speak and write like an historian, a scientist, or an artist for example.

Having a more precise focus has enabled us to work with Teaching and Learning leads to refine curriculum content, develop curriculum plans and empower leaders to drive improvement across the curriculum through collaboration days. Training has been research based and we have worked together to revisit training throughout the year to ensure we maintain the precise focus for moving the curriculum forward.

Opportunities to collaborate have been provided through the Curious Curriculum Extended Networks. 29 schools have accessed the networks providing opportunities to collaborate across phases and schools external to the Trust. 82 teachers and subject leaders attended the networks. Edurio surveys completed after the training collectively state:

- 100% agree that the network will impact school based practice
- 100% valued the collaboration opportunity
- 100% said that the network met their expectations.

"I appreciated the time to meet with other Heads of department and collaborate without a strict structured agenda."

"Focus was appropriately on new and important information, clear appreciation for the professional status of attendees, no time wasted on ineffectual 'break out' activities."

"It was useful to see examples of how to add cultural capital into lessons. The do now/do next/do next year model for prioritising tasks was valuable and knowledge of how Science is monitored and assessed in primary"

"Ideas and suggestions will have a really positive impact in our school"

"Good opportunity to chat to colleagues and see progression from primary to secondary"

The Assessment Principles are being embedded through the TLAC teaching and learning strategies, focusing on class live assessment and adaptation of the teaching plans to close gaps. Schools have invested time in defining their powerful knowledge for their KS3 curriculum and sharing this with CYP in knowledge organisers, with Grove school being most advanced in this, having developed a printed "Orators Chronicle" for Year 7, detailing all the knowledge they will cover through the year.

Closing the Disadvantage Gap

Nationally, 2025 saw a slight widening of the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. This gap remains significantly larger than pre-pandemic levels, particularly on entry and at key assessment points.

Our schools' disadvantaged performance is benchmarked against the national non-disadvantaged cohort, and full 2025 outcomes are not yet available. In 2024, across our five MAT primaries, 48% of disadvantaged children met the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at KS2, compared with 67% for non-disadvantaged children nationally - a gap of 19%. Due to the exclusion of very small cohorts from national datasets, some schools do not have individual measures. Of those that do, Longlands achieved 75%, Oakmeadow 44%, and Grange 25%.

At Key Stage 4 in 2024, the Trust's Progress 8 score was -0.68 (range -0.9 to -0.47), below average compared with England's non-disadvantaged score of +0.16 and the Local Authority figure of -0.19. Within the Trust, SJT led with a disadvantaged Progress 8 score of +0.01, while Idsall recorded -1.65, Shrewsbury Academy -1.01, Grove -0.87, and Marches -0.65.

All schools publish a Pupil Premium report annually, detailing allocation, impact, and review by Local Governing Bodies. Closing the gap remains a priority, supported by Trust-wide targets to maintain focus and accountability.

Safeguarding Children and Young People

Safeguarding has strengthened significantly across the Trust, underpinned by clearer systems, improved collaboration, and a culture of early help and inclusion. While work continues, positive impact is evident.

Permanent exclusions have reduced by 63%, and suspensions have stabilised in 40% of secondary schools, driven by consistent behaviour pathways and a preventative approach. Internal exclusion has been removed in 60% of secondary schools, prioritising time **in** education over time **out**. At Shrewsbury Academy, The Lighthouse has transformed provision for learners struggling to access learning, creating a sanctuary space and fostering belonging.

Early help offers are now more robust, notably at Woodlands School, where early intervention is a core strength. The Crew model, introduced in two secondary schools, has improved connection and attendance for pupil premium learners. Our learning review model continues to mature, placing children's experiences at the heart of decision-making. The development of MATi and MATi Links has enhanced collaboration and responsiveness across settings.

Through the Everyone Matters and Learning for Life frameworks, leaders have focused on culture, professional curiosity, and collective responsibility. This has reduced reliance on personalised learning plans and part-time timetables, enabling more CYP to remain in full-time education through strong universal practice.

Overall, safeguarding is now more coherent, collaborative, and confident, a culture that continues to evolve as we learn together.

Attendance

Attendance across the Trust improved during 2024/2025, with most schools showing gains on the previous year. Primary schools generally performed well, with several exceeding national averages, though some require targeted support. Secondary attendance remains slightly below national benchmarks, and the Special phase continues to face significant challenges.

Persistent absence has reduced across almost all schools, reflecting the impact of focused strategies. Tackling persistent absence remains critical to sustaining improvements in overall attendance.



Embedding the Learning for Life Framework has been central to our approach, enabling early identification of concerns and rapid intervention. This proactive stance is expected to deliver measurable gains against national benchmarks in 2025/2026.

Early indications for the current academic year suggest schools are interrogating the effectiveness of interventions more rigorously, signalling a cultural shift towards evidence-informed practice. By refining strategies and maintaining relentless focus on early intervention, we are confident of further improvements in attendance and reductions in persistent absence.

Detailed data underpinning this analysis is provided in Annex 1.

Project Innovation and Fun – Summary of Outcomes

Introduction

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement and collaborative innovation, this project was designed to think outside the box and explore creative solutions to some thorny issues in secondary schools and strengthen cross-phase partnerships across the Trust.

- **Objective**
 - To adopt innovative approaches in addressing complex challenges within secondary education across the Trust.
 - Inclusion of primary colleagues to provide fresh perspectives, constructive challenge, and collaborative support.
- **Key Findings**
 - Identified critical issues in the Key Stage 2 – Key Stage 3 transition, particularly the quality of writing across the curriculum.
 - Emphasised the need to build upon standards achieved at Key Stage 2 to ensure continuity and progression.
- **Stakeholder Engagement**
 - Capturing the voices of children, young people, and the wider community has been instrumental in shaping Trust priorities for the forthcoming academic year.

- **Impact on Leadership and Culture**

- Enhanced Headteachers' understanding of the importance of listening to pupil voice rather than relying on assumptions.
- Strengthened professional relationships, fostering a culture of informed debate and collaborative problem-solving across primary and secondary schools.

- **Strategic Outcomes**

- Demonstrated the effectiveness of peer-to-peer challenge as a sustainable improvement strategy.
- Encouraged innovative thinking in educational practice and community engagement, driving greater organisational agility.



6. Belonging



Connecting with Our Communities

Our schools sit firmly at the heart of their communities. With dwindling local resources, schools are increasingly being used to provide wider support.

- Each school has a school-based community plan, published on its website.
- Impact is measured by schools and reported to Trustees.

Community engagement has been a focus for CPD through events such as the CST Conference and the Flourishing MAT Network. Case studies have helped shape what future community plans should look like for maximum impact.

Secondary schools have partnered with the Parenting Team to support families in areas such as Teenage Brain Training. Rising need in communities has made leaders more aware of the importance of creating a “school without walls”.

4 All Foundation Contribution to Marches Academy Trust

The 4 All Foundation has had another successful year, continuing to make a meaningful difference across The Marches Academy Trust community. From delivering vital wellbeing and enrichment programmes to launching new initiatives that support families, young people, and schools, the Foundation’s impact continues to grow.



Key highlights from the past year include:

Supporting Our Whole Family of Communities

The Foundation supports the entire family cycle, extending wellbeing and community support beyond CYP to parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. For example, at Shrewsbury Academy, both a grandparent and great-grandparent attend weekly wellbeing sessions at Ditherington Community Centre.

Holiday Support & Vital Enrichment Provision

Over 1,300 children and 600 families enjoyed engaging holiday activities through the Government’s Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

- Delivered across 7 Trust sites, including Lower Heath CE Primary, Longlands Primary, and Selattyn CE Primary.
- At least 830 children attended HAF sessions, with many returning multiple times.
- Almost 2,500 activity places were filled across all venues and dates.

Hygiene 4 All Project

Launched in August, this campaign addresses the lack of access to basic hygiene essentials such as toothbrushes, deodorant, and period products.

- Provides discreet access to toiletries for CYP across the Trust.
- Has supported over 700 children, improving wellbeing, confidence, and access to daily essentials.



• **The Zone Community Hub**

Over the past 12 months, The Zone in Market Drayton has become a vital support centre for 100+ families connected to Grove School and Longlands Primary.

- Open 6 days a week, offering youth clubs, parent workshops led by Zillah Cope, and a study club for Year 10 and 11 children.
- A community fridge food bank has been introduced, strengthening support for families in need.

Partnership with the Diocese and Local Church

2024/25 has been a year of growth in both the number of Church Schools within the Trust and their development.

- Rev Chris Precious joined the Trustees in November 2024.
- Rev Chris hosted the first Open-Door, Open-Heart event at St Alkmund’s Church, Whitchurch, welcoming over 200 Year 3 children from all primaries across two days in June. Plans are already in place for June 2026.

Lower Heath and Tilstock CE Primaries had SIAMS inspections in May 2025, and both schools are securely living up to their foundation as Church Schools. Full reports are available on school websites.

SIAMS Quotes:

“Tilstock CofE Primary School is full of hope, aspiration, love and joy. The Christian vision and associated values inspire adults and children to become the best that they can be.



■ The Marches Academy Trust and Lichfield Diocese support leaders and staff to realise the vision to its full extent.” — SIAMS Report May 2025

“Children and adults ‘let their light shine brightly’ at Lower Heath Church of England Primary School. Inspired by their Christian vision, ambitions are high for this community. The associated Christian values enhance the understanding of the vision. This means that love, respect, faith, thankfulness and fellowship are at the heart of school life. Work with the trust promotes training and school-to-school support. This strengthens staff knowledge and skills, enabling them to do their best for their children.” — SIAMS Report May 2025

The Headteacher network has driven CPD and enrichment across schools. Church School Principles have been developed to support existing schools and those onboarding throughout 2025. In response to a challenge from Foundation Trustees, we now produce two reports per year to Local Governing Bodies outlining vision, strategy, and impact for Christian Distinctiveness and Partnership.

Flourishing MAT Networks

This year we joined the Flourishing MAT Network, which brings Trust leaders together from across England from Trusts with Church and Community foundations.



- The National Society for Education's Flourishing Trusts Network offers a collaborative space to share insights, engage with peers, and hear from experts on educational, business, and Christian perspectives.
- Membership has enabled us to learn about innovation nationwide, hear directly from Government, and contribute to national conversations through the work of the National Society.

Cultural Development

With rapidly changing social cultures, we have focused on the experience of children and young people (CYP) in school and explored 'sticky problems' through our middle leader Project Fun and Innovation.

- The project examined diversity, challenge, enrichment, and partnership work to understand issues such as internal truancy.
- Barriers have been removed through uniform consultation and adaptation, and good practice shared across schools.
- Culture carriers among staff have been identified.

We have continued to build on teaching values, which is well-established in many schools. CYP know Trust values, but further work is needed to ensure these are fully understood and lived by every CYP. Leaders have engaged nationally with schools where cultures are exceptionally strong, and work has begun to develop culture through the Belonging Principles.

Ultimately, our vision is for every person to feel known and seen throughout our Trust. To continually adapt to our rapidly changing society, we must work together to drive Achievement through Caring.



7. Working Today to Protect Tomorrow

Financial Health of the Trust

Despite ongoing financial pressures, our Headteachers and their teams have shown remarkable creativity and resilience, ensuring that children and young people continue to learn in environments that are well-equipped, resourceful, and rich in opportunity. We have achieved this while maintaining strong, positive revenue reserves across all schools. Through innovative initiatives, effective income generation strategies, and collaborative



sharing of best practice, we have cultivated a culture of value for money that we are proud of.

- **Reserves position:** As of 31 August 2025, average revenue reserves across schools stood at 8.2%, with total Trust reserves just exceeding 10%, compared to the Department for Education (DfE) target of 5% for multi-academy trusts.
- **Central procurement:** Trust-wide agreements have delivered savings through laptop leasing, bulk stationery purchasing, educational subscription alignment, and energy tendering.

Our strong financial health enables proactive approaches to funding challenges, with sustainability central to decision-making and growth planning.

This year, supported by the DfE's Trust Capacity Fund (TCAF), we invested in:

- A new finance system for scalability and transparent reporting.
- HR and recruitment systems.
- A transition to a new payroll provider.

All driven by our central team's commitment to achieve value for money and operational efficiency.

Income Generation - Year-on-Year Improvements

To reduce reliance on core government funding, schools have embraced proactive income generation:

- Community engagement through events such as summer fayres and firework displays.
- Operations Managers promoting facilities for external use and pursuing grant funding opportunities.
- Continued investment in nursery provision, resulting in a 32% increase in nursery income from 2023/24 to 2024/25.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, further initiatives are planned to strengthen financial support for school budgets.



Capital Works Including Shrewsbury Academy Build

Growth has enabled increased DfE Capital Funding (SCA), ensuring safe, compliant, and welcoming environments:

- £430,000 allocated for toilet refurbishments across five schools, shaped by pupil voice.
- £250,000 for roof repairs across six schools.
- £400,000 for learning environment enhancements and safeguarding measures.
- Local Authority funding supported a new Resource Provision at Longlands Primary School, opened in September.
- Smaller grants improved SEND and inclusion areas, including repurposing spaces at Sir John Talbot's School.

Major milestone: Completion of the DfE's two-year building project at Shrewsbury Academy, including:

- A state-of-the-art STEM building.
- Integration of Sundorne Infants School onto the site.
- This multi-million-pound development has transformed facilities to meet the aspirations of the Shrewsbury Academy community.

Sustainability Progress and Strategy

Trustees approved the sustainability plan in summer 2025, enabling schools to develop their own plans for autumn.

Focus areas include:

- Reducing carbon footprint.
- Embedding sustainability education.
- Fostering sustainable practices.
- Community engagement.
- Operations Leads working with Let's Go Zero to identify opportunities for improvement.

Compliance, Health & Safety, and GDPR

- GDPR: Appointment of a Data Processing Lead and training from Telford LA have ensured compliance. No reportable breaches to the ICO occurred this year.
- Health & Safety: Audits completed across all schools. Smart Log rolled out as a single point of truth for asset management, PAT testing, accident logs, and site maintenance.
- Single Central Record (SCR) and Websites: External audit of SCRs completed with recommendations for further PA training. Primary schools are moving to a single website provider for efficiency.



Cyber Security and AI Development

- Cyber breach (March): Significant disruption across all schools, managed through resilience and collaboration. Full recovery achieved during summer break.
- Improvements implemented: Multifactor authentication, termly staff training, enhanced backup solutions, and monitoring software.
- AI initiatives:
 - AI working group established across schools and central teams.
 - Trials of English AI marking at SJT.
 - Copilot licences for central staff.
 - AI policy developed for schools.
 - Student use remains restricted, but education on ethical and effective AI use is prioritised.

Tech Bridge Project:

- Delivered technology to disadvantaged children at Grange Primary School, significantly improving Year 4 multiplication outcomes.
- Expansion planned for secondary schools.

Business Continuity and Site Safeguarding

- Continuity plans tested during the cyber event, IT recovery plan proved effective.
- Lockdown procedures refined through drills and peer reviews; external review scheduled for autumn 2025.
- Sites assessed for fencing and lockdown effectiveness; compliance planning underway for Martyr's Law (2027).

Accountability Through SOIR

The School Operations Improvement Record (SOIR) has evolved into a robust self-reflection tool for Headteachers and Operations Leads:

- Drives compliance and best practice.
- Includes termly meetings with Executive members.
- Metrics such as income generation made more challenging.
- Highly valued by Headteachers for clarity and support in operational excellence.

8. Trustees, LGB & Governance



Governance Changes

This year saw several changes to the Trust's governance structure. New members joined the Board, bringing additional expertise and strengthening oversight, while some long-serving members stepped down after making significant contributions. The Board continues to maintain strong leadership and is actively seeking further appointments to ensure a diverse and robust governance team.

Aligned with the Department for Education's priorities, the Board adopted a proactive stance on executive remuneration, commissioning benchmarking from Browne Jacobson and implementing a transparent, defensible policy to strengthen confidence in financial stewardship.

The Board of Members approved revised Articles of Association, aligning with government model articles and reinforcing partnership with the Diocese. Updated policy lists and induction packs for Trustees and Members have enhanced role clarity and governance effectiveness.

To inform the five-year strategy, the Trust held its largest annual strategy conference, enabling knowledge exchange, workshops, and networking. Engagement initiatives included:

- Governance surveys and SWOT analyses
- Networking meetings for LGB Chairs and Clerks

These strengthened understanding of the Trust's vision and improved monitoring of school progress. Lead Governors and Trustees were designated to oversee strategic priorities, ensuring focused oversight and challenge.





Three schools joined the Trust this year: Selattyn CE, Cockshutt CE, and Criftins CE Primary Schools. Integration into Trust systems is complete, and collaboration with their governing bodies is underway. Training and CPD remain central to governance. Five workshops were delivered, covering:

- Scrutinising School Overview Files and KPI reports
- Evaluating curriculum intent, implementation, and impact
- KCSiE 2024 updates
- The Trust's Learning for Life framework (safeguarding and SEND)

These sessions deepened Governors' ability to interrogate data, curriculum design, and safeguarding practices.

School Link Trustees continue to strengthen communication between schools, LGBs, and the Board. Trustees supported schools during Ofsted inspections, attending meetings to evidence leadership quality. Monthly meetings between the Chair and LGB Chairs further enhanced knowledge sharing and best practice. Regular networking meetings have been held to support our governance professionals across the Trust to keep abreast of key changes in legislation, cover topics which are pertinent to effective clerking and discuss local and national issues impacting on their roles and responsibilities.



9. Trust Strategic Priorities 2023-2030

People First

A culture of equality, diversity and inclusion which enables all children, young people and adults to belong and flourish.

An innovative People First strategy enhancing a creative workforce.

Anytime, Anywhere Learning

Excellent and ambitious learning for all.

Reflect, research and develop a cohesive community of learners.

Belonging

A Trust culture of empathy and integrity where everyone feels seen and heard.

Schools are at the centre of their communities - children and young people are courageous advocates.

Working Today to Protect Tomorrow

The Trust grows with creativity and integrity.

Sustainable and smart infrastructure.

Acronym	Full Form & Explanation
LGB	Local Governing Body – School-level governance group
TLAC	Teach Like a Champion – A teaching strategy/framework
HAF	Holiday Activities and Food – Government-funded programme for children and families
EDIB	Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging – Trust strategy for inclusive culture
NPQ	National Professional Qualification – Accredited leadership training for educators
ITT	Initial Teacher Training – Programme for new teachers
CYP	Children and Young People – Refers to pupils/students
PL	Professional Learning – Staff development/training
SLT	Senior Leadership Team – School leadership group
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan – Support plan for children with special needs
PSHCE	Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education – Curriculum area
MAT	Marches Academy Trust – The multi-academy trust itself
MATi	Marches Academy Trust Inclusion – Trust-wide inclusion initiative
SJT	Sir John Talbot’s School – A secondary school in the Trust
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities – Pupils with additional needs
DfE	Department for Education – UK government department
TCAF	Trust Capacity Fund – DfE funding stream for multi-academy trusts
SCA	School Condition Allocation – DfE capital funding for school buildings
SCR	Single Central Record – Safeguarding record for staff
ICO	Information Commissioner’s Office – UK data protection regulator
CPD	Continuing Professional Development – Ongoing staff training
SIAMS	Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools – Church school inspection
KS2	Key Stage 2 – Primary school years 3–6
KS3	Key Stage 3 – Secondary school years 7–9
SOIR	School Operations Improvement Record – Self-reflection tool for operational excellence
GP	General Practitioner – Medical doctor
AI	Artificial Intelligence – Technology for automation and analysis
PAT	Portable Appliance Testing – Electrical safety checks
SAM	Staff Absence Management – HR system for monitoring staff absence
CPOMs	Child Protection Online Management System – Safeguarding software
STEPLAB	Steplab – Digital platform for instructional coaching
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage – Nursery/Reception curriculum
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation – Research organisation
KCSiE	Keeping Children Safe in Education – Statutory guidance
RESUSC	Restore, Reset, Redirect, Restart and Return – MATi’s model for re-engagement



Marches Academy Trust

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