



United Learning
The best in everyone™

2025 - 2026

Secondary Academies School Improvement Way

'Excellence to 80'



However good we are, we can always be better.

Welcome to the Secondary Academies School Improvement Way, which is designed to provide an overview of the Central team and the support and services we offer our schools. We are all part of United Learning and whether or not we work at the centre or in schools we all want the same goal which is to make our schools amongst the best in the country giving the greatest opportunities to the children we serve. 'Excellence to 80' is our target where we aspire for 80% of pupils to achieve 4+ in English and Maths, 60% to achieve a 5+ and 30% to achieve a 7+. This aspiration is underpinned by an unwavering belief that pupils are capable of extraordinary things and will achieve excellence in our schools.

Our priorities for the year ahead will be raising academic achievement (particularly for those groups of pupils who typically do less well in our schools), fostering a sense of belonging and creating truly inclusive schools where everyone can flourish and reach their full potential. We will not lower expectations or make excuses for the challenges we face but strive to continue our school improvement journey with the same tenacity and high standards.

All our efforts centrally will continue to be focused on providing support and enabling ever more collaborative practices so that our schools are able to respond positively to the challenges we face. With 59 Secondary Academies and 14 Secondary Independent schools across the country, we have an abundance of good practice and expertise within our schools and our Central team is guided by the highest standards at all levels.

School improvement starts with excellent leadership. From the recruitment and induction of new leaders to the development of our current heads, we will strive to give leaders the support they need to deliver sustained improvement in their schools. We will also seek to identify and develop our future leaders, both through our leadership programmes and our Excellence Visits which include high performing schools both inside and outside the Group.

What happens in every classroom and the quality of teaching and learning in our schools is the key driver of school improvement and this year, as ever, we will concentrate our energies on ensuring that this remains the central priority. Underpinning that of course, is a well sequenced and ambitious curriculum, good attendance and behaviour and a positive culture which motivates pupils to feel valued and individual even within large secondary schools. We welcome feedback on anything set out on the pages that follow as we are always looking to improve and for better and more effective ways of doing things.

“
Education is the most powerful weapon we
can use to change the world.”

This quote from Nelson Mandela continues to strike at the heart of the work we all do. I wish you a successful year ahead.

Ben Antell

Key Priorities for 2025-26

Our two key priorities for this academic year are:

‘Excellence to 80’ – Achievement for all

The outcomes all pupils achieve across all our schools remains pivotal. ‘Excellence to 80’ sets the goal of 80% of all pupils achieving at least a 4+ in English and maths, 60% at 5+ and 30% at 7+. We know that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, those identified as SEND and poor white British pupils do not yet achieve in line with their peers. We therefore want to continue our focus and emphasis on the performance of these pupils who will be the first in line for the best of our and your support.

‘Belonging’ – The Inclusive School

Pupils and staff in all our schools feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others to give and achieve their best. Pupil attendance returns or is close to pre-pandemic levels with a continued focus on disruption and distraction free learning in all our classrooms. Character Education underpins all this work through a systematic, rewards based, ‘best in everyone’ approach.



Section 1: School support – our approach

While we expect the very best from everyone, we recognise the specific culture and context of each school. Our approach therefore balances a common ambition for all schools, with the flexibility to increase our support for those that need it most. We therefore have a universal offer with a tiered approach to targeted school improvement.

Universal Support

All our schools’ benefit from the following support at an individual school level:

Regional Directors

Regional Directors define and develop support for leaders of secondary academies. They have line-management responsibility for Headteachers, provide focused challenge and support to ensure continuous improvement, and review the progress of school improvement activities. All schools will receive at least two visits a term (the T meeting and the Support and Review visit).

Termly Meeting

Termly (T) Meetings take place each term, chaired by the Regional Director. The meeting is primarily with the Regional Director, the Principal, and Local Governing Body (LGB) Chair, although other senior leaders can be invited in for specific agenda items. These meetings typically include analysis of assessment, attendance, exclusions and financial information, implementation and impact of the school Improvement plans and aspects specific to that term. The newly devised school scorecard plays an important role in the accountability cycle and should be viewed as a ‘live’ document. The scorecard will be used as part of the T-meeting cycle focusing on educational standards, people, money and wider contribution.

Support and Review Visits

These visits take place in the second half of each term with the Regional Director and other members of the Central Office team as required. The focus of

the visit is set by the Principal in discussion with the Regional Director and generally focusses on one or two specific areas of school improvement. A report is produced from the visit identifying priorities for improvement.

Subject Adviser Visits, including Careers and Inclusion

Our team of Subject Advisers support sustained school improvement through specialist subject guidance. Subject Adviser visits provide the opportunity for leaders in school to work with subject specialists, including Careers, Inclusion, Literacy and Sixth Form. Advisers will review school approaches and support the development of subject specific strategies for further improvement.

School visits are allocated according to need, but we are always open to requests for visits: please contact your Regional Director to discuss further.

Getting Ready for Inspection Day (GRID Visits)

Regional Directors and Subject Advisers provide support for schools throughout the inspection process. All schools receive support tailored to their place in the Ofsted Inspection cycle. This includes onsite support during the actual inspection from Regional Directors and relevant members of the Subject Adviser Team.

A Tiered Approach to School Improvement

In addition to our universal offer, we recognise that every secondary academy in our Group is at a different stage in their school improvement journey. As such, we have a tiered approach to individual school support, so that the needs of every school can be met whilst we continue to strive for excellent practice and continuous improvement. We have four broad categories of school which balances a common ambition for all schools with the flexibility to support those schools that need it most. These are:

Excelling Schools

- These are our strongest schools, with excellent academic achievement over time where all students, including SEND and disadvantaged students, thrive and where excellence is embedded throughout the curriculum, including sports and the arts.
- These schools are ‘capacity givers’ to other schools in the Trust, providing models of best practice for others to follow and benefit from. Leaders of these schools seek to improve the system, as well as their individual school.

Embedding Schools

- Our Embedding Schools all share a good and improving profile of academic achievement over time, where students achieve well.
- Most subjects are strong, although a small number are improving and may need some Subject Adviser support to ensure this improvement continues and becomes embedded.
- Other indicators such as behaviour, attendance, survey responses are good, although there may be certain areas for improvement which may require additional Regional Director input in specific areas.

Accelerating Schools

- These are schools where academic achievement has not improved in line with Trust expectations and where improvement on a range of measures needs to be accelerated in order to ensure all students have a high-quality educational experience.

- Nevertheless, there are other indicators that the school is moving forwards and has a positive learning and pastoral culture, such as a good personal development and enrichment offer, growing pupil numbers, and broadly positive responses to annual surveys in a number of areas.
- Support will be provided by Regional Directors and Subject Advisers to these schools in line with their school improvement priorities, such as curriculum and subject development, behaviour, attendance, literacy or SEND etc.

Resetting Schools

- Our resetting schools are our highest priority. Rapid improvement is required in these schools, with a reset of key systems, culture, ethos, and standards likely required.
- These schools will receive intensive support across a range of areas to build capacity and ensure that the required changes are brought about swiftly but sustainably.
- Financial flexibility may be provided to these schools to help ensure improvement at the required pace.

New Starter Schools

All new starter schools will be added to one of the 4 categories within 6 months of joining the Trust. The decision to categorise can come much earlier than the 6-month deadline and will be decided by the appropriate Regional Director and Education Director.

Section 2: Support within the classroom

As well as individual school level support, we provide a wealth of support and opportunities across the Trust all aimed at supporting leaders, teachers, and support staff.

United Learning Curriculum

All teachers have full access to the United Learning Curriculum. This supports high quality teaching because substantive and disciplinary knowledge is carefully sequenced across key stages, and meaningful links are made between the subjects. It empowers teachers by providing them with the subject knowledge they need to teach the subject well. The curriculum has been carefully reviewed from a diversity perspective and provides opportunities for all pupils to see themselves reflected positively in the curriculum, as well as open their eyes to new perspectives. It provides a selection of resources that teachers can adapt for their classes.

All of our curriculum resources can be found on our curriculum website. The subjects covered include English, Maths, Science, History, Geography, Modern Foreign Languages, PE, Music, Art, Religious Studies & PSHE. Further subjects will be developed over time through the work of our extensive and growing number of curriculum writers.

Assessment

We also provide common assessments aligned to our curriculum which enables schools to benchmark themselves against other schools in the Trust. These are mandatory for end of year, and we also have mid-year assessments which schools can opt to use if they wish. The Head of Assessment continues to drive this work forward and ensure all assessment across the Trust is valid, purposeful, of an awarding body standard and helps to improve classroom practice.

Digital Independent Learning Platforms

We have established partnerships with Seneca Learning, Uplearn and Sparx (for Maths, Reading and Science). United Learning schools are signed up to these platforms which align with our curriculum and help promote independent learning. A recently

launched Digital Market Place allows school leaders to view all approved online platforms and decide which are best for their school.

Targeted Reviews

We offer targeted reviews in specific areas, such as Disadvantage, Year 11 and Behaviour.

Disadvantage: The Disadvantage Review provides schools with a valuable opportunity to request expert support in assessing and enhancing the current provision in place for disadvantaged students. The review critically examines how effective prior and current strategies are in meeting the needs of disadvantaged students and identifies areas for further consideration. Additionally, it offers an opportunity to holistically review how well the school is poverty proofed, and provide actionable strategies, where identified, to further reduce the attainment gap.

Year 11: Where Year 11 outcomes may be an area of concern, we will review current strategies and approaches in school and offer support, advice and guidance on how practice can be sharpened further. This may include looking at approaches to intervention, exam access arrangements, setting and tiering, and the most effective use of data to leverage impact.

Behaviour: Our Behaviour Reviews will take place in schools where metrics indicate support may be required. We will work alongside school leaders to review current behaviour management strategies, explore approaches to sanctions and suspensions, and look at how rewards and positive messaging can help reshape behaviour expectations.

Careers

Our Strategic Careers Lead supports schools to ensure students receive well-rounded and meaningful opportunities that broaden their aspirations and prepare them for their lives beyond United Learning. Career Leads are provided with access to a range of high-quality CPD, networking opportunities and regular team meetings and conferences, as well as in-school support where required.

Sixth Form

We also have dedicated support for our schools with Sixth Forms. We expect all our Sixth Forms to cater for the unique challenges of Key Stage 5 provision, for example with a careers programme that opens up top universities and careers, and a programme of PSHE and enrichment that equips pupils to flourish once they get there. No teacher should teach in isolation. As well as support from our Subject Advisers, we also have established designated Sixth Form Subject Leads who provide opportunities for collaboration and support in other subjects like sociology, psychology, politics, and economics.

Literacy and Oracy

Our Trust Literacy Lead provides advice and guidance to schools on how to ensure they have a robust, evidenced based literacy programme in place that uses data in an intelligent and adaptive way to ensure evidenced based intervention and support is targeted and impacts the right students. The Oracy Lead continues to develop the use of spoken language through the curriculum and provide guidance and support to schools through a Trust-wide Oracy Framework.

Behaviour and Attendance Analysis and Guidance

All schools have access to United Analytics allowing leaders to effectively explore trends and patterns in their school information and compare with other schools across the Trust. Behaviour and Attendance data are core elements of this, putting data into leaders' hands to enable rapid response.

Alongside the data, we have a culture-driven Behaviour Framework which sets out how we expect schools to promote positive behaviour and ensure lessons are free from disruption, whilst also encouraging schools to work together locally to explore alternatives to exclusion and give every child the best possible chance to succeed.

Attendance remains a key priority for a number of our schools. Our trust wide Attendance Curriculum provides detailed advice, guidance, and resources for schools. The Hurlingham Academy is a recently designated DFE Attendance Hub and can provide additional support to schools when required.



Section 3: Support beyond the classroom

Our Trust-level support extends beyond the classroom.

Team around the School

Each school is supported by a Team Around the School which includes Trust colleagues from HR, Finance, Estates and Educational Technology. All United Learning schools can also access around-the-clock support for media/PR issues through Justin McLaren and his team at [8hwe](#), and marketing support from the Trust's marketing team.

We also have a corporate arrangement with a legal firm who can provide support to schools on legal issues.

Governance

Effective school governance is critical to school improvement. Direct advice and support are available to all Local Governing Bodies, with termly training sessions to support the capacity and capability of our governors delivered by our Local Governance Officer.

Professional Development

At United Learning we know that, to deliver the best for the children and young people we serve, we need to invest in the adults around them. No school can be better than the staff at its heart. We have a wide range of opportunities for CPD for all staff, including leadership development opportunities via NPQs and Trust developed Leadership CPD provision. Subject Advisers play a key role in developing CPD opportunities for teachers, and we have a range of pathways for support staff. Our [Professional Development Handbooks](#) draw on research into effective professional development for teachers and leaders.

Safeguarding

The Group has full time Safeguarding Leads who provide support, advice, and guidance to schools on all safeguarding matters.



Section 4: Sharing best practice and stealing with pride

We provide a number of opportunities for colleagues to come together to share what's working well for them, and to experience excellence in other settings.

Excellence Visits

Excellence Visits are a way to share excellent practice across the Trust, network with school leaders in similar specialist areas, and generate ideas. Each year schools (within and beyond the Trust) host excellence visits on priority areas. Heads can offer their school's expertise and host an Excellence Visit, and we would strongly encourage schools to put themselves forward to do so, following a discussion with their Regional Director.

Immersion Visits

Immersion visits give school leaders the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the life of one or more of the schools in the Trust. These can be particularly useful for leaders new to Headship, new to United Learning, or for those who want to experience the culture, ethos, systems, and structures in some of our strongest schools.

Senior Leader Webinars and Network Meetings

We run regular webinars for senior leaders in our schools, focussing on specific areas such as Teaching and Learning, Behaviour, Attendance, Raising Standards and Education with Character. These networks bring colleagues together from each school for information sharing, professional development, and collaboration opportunities. These meetings are chaired by Trust leads and support system-led improvement and sharing of approaches.

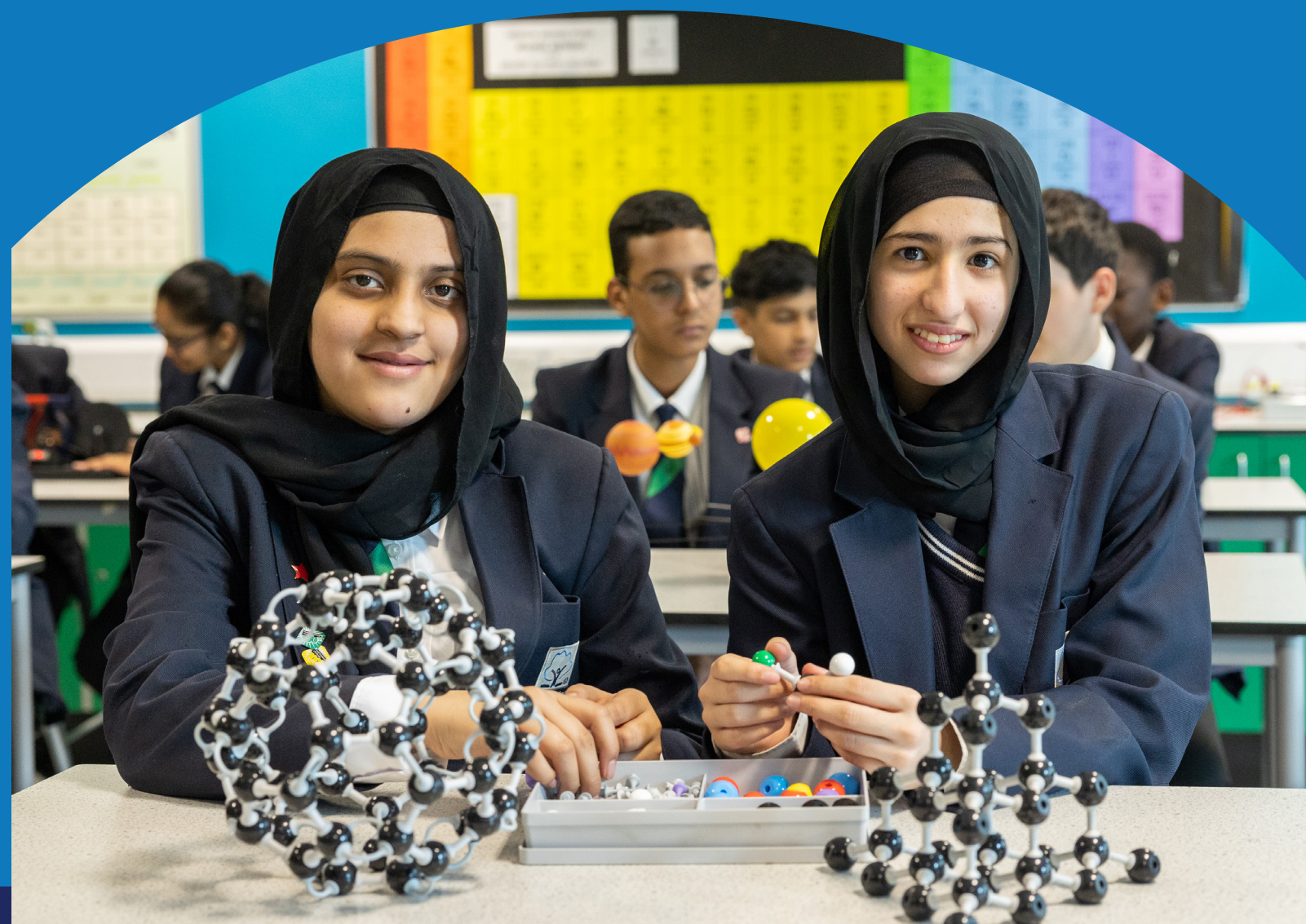
We also have networks for most subjects, bringing together Heads of Department with Subject Advisers (in subjects where we have them) for CPD, key updates and sharing of good practice. Our aim is for all staff in our schools to be connected via a network of colleagues across the Trust.

Group Education Forums

Our Group Education Forums (GEFs) provide key opportunities for Heads to hear from the CEO and other senior leaders from within the Trust, collaborate and share good practice, and work through the implications of key policy developments. These typically take place 5 times throughout the year.

The United Learning Hub (relaunched for 2025-26)

The Hub is our intranet where we share a wealth of resources to support schools. You will find all of our Group policies, including templates and exemplars, on issues such as safeguarding, behaviour, complaints, capability, disciplinary, suspension from work, investigative officer guidelines, grievance, and whistleblowing. Our Education Frameworks can also be found on the Hub, as well as a range of other information about United Learning and its schools. It is a valuable resource, well worth exploring.





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