# ACES Academies Trust

*Aspiration   Creativity   Excellence   Success*

# Strategic plan
# 2021—2024

**(Adopted by the Board 7th December 2021)**

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

**Our journey**

ACES Academies Trust was incorporated on 1st January 2018, when Hinchingbrooke School successfully applied to become a sponsoring academy for Cromwell Academy. Godmanchester Bridge Academy and Godmanchester Community Academy joined the trust in September 2020. We are currently in the process of undertaking the necessary work for Spaldwick School to join us from April 2022 and we have a live bid to sponsor a new free school in Sawtry, which will be opening as a 1FE primary school in September 2023 and grow over time to 2FE.

The immediate past has seen a period of preparation for the future growth and expansion of the trust, whilst coping with the global pandemic.

Building successful relationships with and within our existing schools and establishing the working practices of the educational team in support of improving education has been our first priority. In parallel, the setting up of a coherent and efficient 'back office' function has seen the defining of our commitment and service to our schools as published in the Central Services document, becoming largely paperless and establishing a physical base in Hinchingbrooke House with the potential for growth. This is further supported with recent growth in the infrastructure for technological support through new servers, better website functionality, investment in domains and software development and additional equipment for the Estates team. Thus, the scene is set to build a highly successful, larger multi-academy trust.

We have had some unsuccessful talks about a possible merger with a Northamptonshire MAT and two unsuccessful bids to sponsor new free schools. The effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on schools has set back the agenda for growth. We engaged with Premier Advisory Group (PAG) to make a more forensic analysis of growth options and now have a number of avenues to pursue. The agreed strategy is (a) to seek growth for our existing hub by approaching other feeder schools to Hinchingbrooke, (b) to seek opportunities to set up a second hub consisting of a Secondary and its feeder primaries within a radius of c. 1 hour from our present base and (c) to bid for any appropriate Free School opportunities that are available to us.

Governance has been through a period of change, even in the short time of ACES being operational. We have used Academy Ambassadors to help us recruit new trustees and members and believe we now have very strong governance structures and operations to support ACES, with access to a wide range of relevant skills. A recent independent audit of governance has provided reassurance that we are compliant and high performing and given us a few minor areas in which to improve.

In 2021 the DfE published a MAT QA framework which has helped to inform our planning. References to the framework are given for each section. This plan has been authored by the Executive Team with input from the Trust Board.

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

## The contents of this ACES Strategic Plan

**Strategic Intents**
These are the overarching ambitions of our organisation. They remain constant over time.

**Mission**
Our mission reminds us that our work is about improving life chances for our pupils. It also articulates three very important ways that we work – collaboratively, with determination and with integrity. This mission also remains constant over time.

**Values and Vision**
Our name tells us what we value – **A**spiration, **C**reativity, **E**xcellence and **S**uccess. The vision is how we achieve our mission and live out our values. It encapsulates what we wish to achieve in the long run and what success will look like.

**Objectives**
The ACES objectives describe in more detail what we are working towards and how we are setting about making our vision a reality on the ground. The vision and objectives may be reviewed from time to time but are unlikely to change significantly.

**The Framework for Excellence** offers more detail to support the achievement of our mission and vision.

What follows the Framework for Excellence is the core of this strategic plan.

It sets out our agreed priorities over a three-year period in 5 sections: **1. Educational Outcomes 2. Inspection outcomes and Quality assurance 3. Recruiting, developing and retaining staff 4. Finance and infra-structure 5. Governance and growth.**

On the left of the document is a position statement at the time of writing (November 2021) with data relating to 2019, which is the last set of nationally verified and published data. The plan should not act as a straight-jacket or as an obstacle to pursuing opportunities, as they arise. Progress through the plan will be monitored by the Trustees.

**Andrew Goulding**
**CEO ACES Academies**
**November 2021**

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

## Strategic Intents

SI 1. To embed the trust's values in the culture of the whole community for every academy.

SI 2. To enable our students to aim high, be self-motivated, and become independent, life-long learners equipped to contribute positively to society.

SI 3. To create vibrant learning communities by looking outward and being forward thinking in the development of collaborative partnerships.

SI 4. To ensure that consistently high-quality teaching and learning is at the heart of all that we do.

SI 5. To invest in the development and well-being of staff.

SI 6. To provide sustainable resources to deliver our vision.

### The VALUES of ACES Academies Trust are contained in the title of the Trust.

**ASPIRATION:** We value and promote aspiration for all.

**CREATIVITY:** We value creativity as a life skill. It lies at the heart of our educational offer and supports the achievement of excellence and the securing of success.

**EXCELLENCE:** We value excellence because we have high standards and want to provide the very best for our communities.

**SUCCESS:** We value success, in all its guises, because success empowers individuals to become adults who can contribute positively to society.

## Vision Statement

Our vision is to provide the highest-quality education for all our pupils, so that they learn and achieve well, and grow as successful, well-rounded young people equipped to contribute positively to society. We offer a challenging and ambitious curriculum for all our pupils, that provides them with opportunities to fulfil their potential, and we aim for excellence in every classroom.

## Mission

Our academies will work collaboratively with determination and integrity to ensure we are improving the life chances for our pupils by

- Raising aspirations;
- Improving our pedagogical practices;
- Providing appropriately challenging and motivational learning opportunities.
- Celebrating achievement.

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

## Objectives

The objectives of the **ACES Academies Trust** are to:

- promote **aspiration** for all.
- use **creativity** as a vehicle for engagement, enrichment and improvement.
- achieve **excellence** in all areas, leading to better outcomes and **success** for students.
- develop skills for life and employment in our students.
- be flexible, visionary and responsive to emerging needs.
- be outward facing, actively engaging with and accessing external expertise.
- provide more efficient and effective services at a reduced collective cost.

Academies within our trust are expected to promote the objectives of **ACES** by ensuring their curricula offer opportunities to:

and by

- encourage creative and curious minds.
- facilitate independent learning.
- provide opportunities for personal expression and creativity.
- provide each child with the life skills to maximise their chance of success.

- upholding high standards of behaviour and promoting mutual respect.
- focusing on improving progress and achievement for all.
- pursuing excellence in pedagogical practice in every classroom.
- ensuring that every child is actively engaged in learning, has a sense of purpose and develops self-motivation, self-respect, self-regulation and self-worth.

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

| OUR MISSION | THE ACES WAY<br>A FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENCE<br>THIS FRAMEWORK SUPPORTS OUR SCHOOLS IN ACHIEVING OUR MISSION. | | OUR VISION |
|---|---|---|---|
| To work collaboratively with determination and integrity to improve life chances. | **The best from everyone** | We expect the highest standards from everyone all of the time, so we can constantly challenge everyone – pupils and staff – to go the extra mile, to persist, to work hard, to be their best and to do their best for our cause. | **Developing creative minds so pupils can fulfil their potential, achieve excellence and be successful.** |
| | **Education with Character** | We will uphold our pupils' entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum, which emphasises the teaching of literacy, oracy and numeracy.<br>The curriculum must be engaging, provide for creative responses and offer a vibrant range of enrichment activities which enable the development of character. The curriculum must be adapted to suit the needs of all learners. | **Excellence in every classroom.** |
| | **Leadership in every role** | To give all our children – even the very youngest – opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and others. Equally, for every adult – opportunities to take responsibility and show initiative. | **Every pupil is equipped to contribute positively to society.** |
| | **Continuous Improvement** | To seek to improve all aspects of what we do and never become complacent. To implement change by stopping what is not working and finding better ways to have a more positive impact. | **Ensuring the highest quality education for all.** |

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

| Education – Academic outcomes | | |
|---|---|---|
| **MAT QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK SECTIONS 3 & 5** | | |

| Baseline position 2019-20 | What we are working to achieve by 2024 |
|---|---|
| **Primary** | **Primary** |

| 2019 data | Cromwell | GBA | GCA |
|---|---|---|---|
| EYFA GLD % | 69 | 75 | 75 |
| Year 1 Phonics % | 79 | 95.8 | 86 |
| KS1 Reading % | 73 | 80 | 83 |
| KS1 Writing % | 69 | 55 | 78 |
| KS1 Maths % | 77 | 75 | 83 |
| KS2 Reading ARE % | 69 | 66.7 | 83 |
| KS2 Writing ARE % | 72 | 66.7 | 85 |
| KS2 Maths ARE % | 83 | 66.7 | 91 |
| KS2 Spag ARE % | 90 | 66.7 | 78 |

**Primary (right column):**

Attainment in all Trust primary academies is regularly above the national average at the end of Key Stage 2 for Reading, Writing and Mathematics.

Rates of progress across Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in all primary academies will be positive and regularly be above or well above that achieved nationally for Reading, Writing and Mathematics. All academies will achieve a rate of progress that is in the top 25% in at least one subject when compared with similar schools.

Benchmarking outcomes using comparators with similar schools are positive.

| Secondary (2019 figures used as baseline) | Secondary |
|---|---|

| KS4 Progress 8: | 0.15 | | KS4 Progress 8: | 0.5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KS4 Attainment 8: | 50.8 | KS4 % grade 5+ in E & M    47.0 | KS4 Attainment 8:    56 | | KS4 % grade 5+ in E & M    55% |
| KS4 % entering EBacc | 31.0 | KS4 EBacc APS    4.41 | KS4 % entering EBacc    85 | | KS4 EBacc APS    4.6 |
| Pupil absence:  overall | 4.8% | Persistent absence    8.5% | Pupil absence:  overall   3.0% | | Persistent absence    6.0% |

| KS4 % staying in education or entering employment    96.8 | KS4 % staying in education or entering employment    97.5 |
|---|---|

| KS5 Average grade | C+ | A level Progress score    -0.05 | KS5 Average grade    B | A level Progress score    0.2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| KS5 APS | 32.75 | Applied subjects progress score -0.29 | KS5 APS    35 | Applied subjects progress score 0.2 |

| 'ALPs' score:  A levels    5 | 'ALPs' score:  A levels    3 |
|---|---|
| 'ALPs' score:  Applied subjects    7 | 'ALPs' score:  Applied subjects    3 |

| Sixth Form destinations data:  % progressing to education or employment | Sixth Form destinations data:  % progressing to education or employment:    93% |
|---|---|
| -    2017 data:  91% (national figure was 81%) | |

| | GATSBY benchmarks:   Secondary academies achieve 90%+ on each of the 8 Gatsby benchmarks. |
|---|---|

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

| Education – Inspection and Quality Assurance | |
|---|---|
| **MAT QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK SECTIONS 4 & 5** | |
| **Baseline position 2020-21** | **What we are working to achieve by 2024** |
| **Secondary Disadvantaged students:**<br><br>P8 score: -0.34 (national figure -0.36); gap with HBK non-Disadvantaged students was -0.49.<br>A8 score:  4.71 (highest ever for school; in previous years it was between 3 and 4) | **Secondary Disadvantaged students:**<br><br>P8 score: above 0 and a reducing gap compared with non-Disadvantaged students<br><br>A8 score:  5+ |
| Indicators for attendance and exclusions are good but need to be at least sustained and improved where possible. | All academies will establish and sustain a culture of high student expectations which will be measured through high attendance, low persistent absence and low exclusion rates. |
| All schools in the Trust are judged 'good' by Ofsted, though 2 of the primary schools have yet to be inspected under the new framework. | All academies will continue to be judged as Good or better by Ofsted. At least one will be Outstanding. |

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

| Education – Curriculum | |
|---|---|
| **MAT QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK SECTIONS 4** | |
| **Baseline position 2019-20** | **What we are working to achieve by 2024** |
| Each academy has a clear overall curriculum intent and defined principles. In some academies, curriculum intent is implemented with fidelity and is ambitious for most or all students. It is not yet fully embedded across all areas in all academies. | Each academy will have a curriculum with a clearly defined curriculum rationale and intent. Academies will have measured the impact and adjusted accordingly. The planned curriculum will be ambitious and meet the needs of all students. Impact is monitored to ensure the intent is realised across all age groups. |
| The pastoral welfare and support is good in all academies but there is not always a well-defined and documented explanation of how PSHE, SMSC and other areas of the non-academic curriculum contribute to personal development in an holistic way. | Academies will all have established a well understood and documented coherence between the elements of the non-academic curriculum that contribute to personal development and the building of cultural capital. They will be able to relate this to the values and mission of ACES Academies Trust as well as to their own stated school vision statements. All academies will address and respond to emerging national issues, for example the recent Ofsted report on sexual violence in schools and issues around diversity. |
| Different academies are at different stages on this journey. | Senior and Middle Leaders in all of our academies will secure effective implementation through regular reviews, to ensure there is no difference between curriculum intent and the evidence seen in students' work through all subjects. Evidence from pupil voice will support this view. |
| The Trust has undertaken some subject leader training for those new to the role in each primary academy. However, we do not yet track the skills level of different coordinators or ensure a consistency in subject coordinator's approach across the Trust. | All Senior and Middle Leaders in each of our academies will access support and training to secure a consistent and high-quality approach to curriculum leadership. The Trust will be proactive in supporting subject leadership and leadership development at all levels. |
| The Trust has been working on a Digital Strategy which provides a framework for academies to use in developing this work. Remote learning offers have been developed and delivered during the pandemic and the Trust has addressed some issues around digital poverty. | The online shared resources for staff and pupils are extensive, well catalogued, easily accessible and widely used. They support learning and related activities such as planning. Learning is technologically enhanced as a result. Digital poverty continues to be addressed. |
| There are some good examples of creativity and personal expression in some areas. The development of skills for life however is ad hoc. | All academies will provide opportunities for personal expression and creativity in line with the ACES brand and there will be planned and tracked opportunities to develop skills for life in all academies. |
| There is little or no sharing of curriculum planning between key stages, other than in Maths (and Science?) | There will be a clear strategy to ensure curriculum continuity across subjects at each transition point between all Key Stages. |

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

| Recruiting, developing, and retaining staff | |
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| **MAT QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK SECTION 2** | |
| **Baseline position 2019-20** | **What we are working to achieve by 2024** |
| Known by reputation as a large employer in the local area, recruitment processes and onboarding have been reviewed and open to further improvement. Employee experience is monitored through regular survey and review (TES). Exit interviews have been standardised to allow for reflection. | To create, promote and maintain the reputation as an employer of choice. In practice this will be achieved through efficient and further streamlined recruitment, onboarding and employment lifecycle processes; professional and open culture of progression and CPD opportunities, and an inclusive approach to employee wellbeing. |
| Appraisal is mandated for all staff but not yet completed for all. It varies in content and rigour. These appraisals do not yet present a clear single record of the strands of improvement they are working towards or the professional development taking place. These records do not have quality assurance strands for staff built into them. | Every staff member will have an online linked record of professional learning (appraisal) and quality assurance activities in the new MIS 'Arbour'. We will thus have a clearer understanding of strengths and weaknesses and therefore be better able to target CPD and utilise expertise across the Trust. |
| Career progression is seen as ad hoc by staff. QA processes vary in scope and rigour. Career pathways are not always explicitly set out for staff. | All staff, regardless of role or seniority, will be offered the opportunity and encouraged to engage in personal CPD through training made available to all. Opportunities for internal progression will be communicated as standard for all roles. Staff will be encouraged to progress within ACES whenever possible. Records of completed CPD and training will be kept centrally. |
| Other than through joint meetings there is no planned approach to the sharing of staff expertise between schools. | There will be a clear approach to sharing expertise within the Trust. Appropriate high performing staff will be identified for peer-to-peer programmes and encouraged to share successful practice through staff training opportunities. Peer reviews, opportunities for networking and sharing of high performing practices will be encouraged both within the Trust and with partners. |
| Each Academy has its own approach to staff well-being. We have recently introduced the 'Staff Pulse' survey. | There will be a clear Trust wide approach to securing the well-being of staff. Regular survey and action points to address issues raised will encourage staff to be open with concerns and feel supported at all times. Communication of the "You Said, We Responded" to be embedded as standard. |

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

| Finance and Infrastructure | |
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| **MAT QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK SECTIONS 5 & 6** | |
| **Baseline position 2019-20** | **What we are working to achieve by 2024** |
| As at 31 August 2020, collective trusts reserves were 5.94% of total income | Collective trust reserves sit between 2% and 5% of total income by 2024. (This level is deemed appropriate by the EFSA.) |
| There is no Trust wide asset management plan of strategic improvements to the overall estate and is currently completed ad hoc by each academy. | A Trust wide asset management plan is in place which drives planned strategic improvements to the overall estate. |
| In 2019-2020, self-generating income represented 1.7% of total Trust income. | Self-generating income will equate to 2.5% of total Trust income by 31 August 2024 |
| The back-office base is complete and provides ample scope for growth. | Central Teams will grow according to demand and the service will be largely paperless and recognised by those who work in our academies as effective and efficient. |
| The Trust is beginning to establish mechanisms for reporting faults or jobs to be done in IT and Estates. | Feedback from staff recognises the speed of response and effectiveness of the service. |
| The trust currently does not have a sustainability plan to move the schools towards a carbon neutral status. | The Trust will have improved the carbon efficiency ratings in all of its academies commencing with a Carbon Audit which will drive future plans and efficiencies. There will be target dates by which the plans should be complete. |
| The trust recognises that IT is a key enabler to effective teaching. There is currently an emerging Digital Strategy within the Trust. | There is a costed strategy for the development of infrastructure which satisfies the needs of the schools, and which has been drawn up following a needs-led audit of provision. |
| Risk management is embryonic. | The Trust's approach to managing risk will follow the HSE Management Standards and guidelines and be detailed and rigorous. |

# ACES Academies Trust
# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024

| Governance and Growth |
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| MAT QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK SECTION 6 |
|---|

| Baseline position 2019-20 | What we are working to achieve by 2024 |
|---|---|
| The Trust currently educates approximately 2600 children | The Trust will educate in excess of 4000 children and have at least 10 academies. |
| The last growth was September 2020 when the two Godmanchester Academies joined. Spaldwick is due to join in April 2022. At this point there will be 5 academies. | The Trust will have established or be on the way to establishing a second hub around another secondary. |
| There is a good central team both in education and back office. Most of the education specialists' work is focused on primary. | There will be a greater impact on secondary school improvement and transition. The central team offer will be amended according to need to accommodate a new hub. |
| The external Governance audit of July 2021 concluded: "*The ACES Academies Trust complies extremely well with its legislative and constitutional governance obligations and fully meets the main criteria expected of good governance by Ofsted. There are no major areas where any radical change or correction are needed.*" There were however some suggestions for improvements and additions. | All recommendations from the external audit have been completed. Succession planning, skills audits and external review continue to maintain robust and effective governance. In the event of growth through merger, the new governance arrangements are at least as effective as the current ones. |
|  |  |