



School Improvement Strategy

Version	Date	Detail
11	10.07.23	Updated the strategy with the trust anchors
12	24.06.24	Updated the strategy, including to add the 'embed' phase
13	Jan 2026	Updated the strategy with changes to key personnel Changed the presentation of the strategy overview

Connect Academy Trust

School Improvement Strategy 2025 v13

1 DEFINITION

- 1.1 For the purposes of this document and to avoid uncertainty, school improvement is defined as the processes through which Connect Academy Trust supports schools in driving forward improvement; the changes schools can make and the strategies they can use to improve pupil outcomes and experiences, so that, by schools being part of the Trust, they can make a difference to each and every child in the Trust.
- 1.2 There is a need for Connect Academy Trust to have an explicit strategy for ensuring that it secures the goal of excellent outcomes for every child, as stated in the Connect Academy Trust Curriculum documentation.
- 1.3 Connect Academy Trust promotes the collective duty that every child is the responsibility of every member of staff and leader within the Trust.

2 FUNDAMENTAL VALUES, PURPOSE & APPROACH

- 2.1 The Connect Academy Trust approach to school improvement is underpinned by the 4 Trust anchors, which are our values and the foundations of everything we stand for at Connect Academy Trust. We strive to be:

Empowering: We don't believe schools should become clones of others in a Trust. Our unique schools are given autonomy and encouragement to embrace differences, share ideas, and succeed together. In this way, the leadership of each school has autonomy to determine the improvement strategy and plan for their school and the Trust support the leadership in this plan.

Principled: For the world, for our people, and for your pupils, we're committed to taking a stand to uphold strong moral values – holding each other accountable and acting with integrity. We believe that school improvement should be fit for purpose and not monitoring for monitoring's sake. We ensure that the school improvement approaches in each school are right for that community.

Nurturing: Real community comes from being part of a group that looks after each other – encouraging children and adults alike and supporting them with kindness and compassion. Relationships are at the heart of everybody's ability to learn and Connect Academy Trust is committed to ensuring that relationships are key. If a child or member of staff feels nurtured and supported to develop and do well, they will thrive.

Trail Blazing: Connect prides ourselves on being a forward-thinking and dynamic Trust. We, and our schools, bravely look ahead for ways to expand horizons, learn more effectively, to create a better future. Our leaders are empowered to carry out research, explore new approaches to school improvement, and think 'outside the box' to create environments in their classrooms where children can excel.

- 2.2 Connect Academy Trust understands and recognises this set of fundamental principles which underpin effective school improvement:

- School improvement is cyclical.
All schools within the Trust can be ‘Capacity Givers’; and ‘Capacity Takers’ over a period of time and there is a commitment and willingness from all schools to both offer and receive support.
- Every school, regardless of their situation, has practice to share.
- Secure, sustainable improvement takes time and change needs to be prioritised by both school and Trust leaders.
- Effective school improvement involves building capacity and high-quality leadership across the school.

2.3 To promote effective school improvement, Connect has a deep knowledge of each school and their current context in order to:

- Sustain and grow success where it already exists, as well as evaluate and share this success more widely where appropriate.
- Quickly address areas for development with a range of strategies.
- Understand the complexity of how one area of school life impacts on another.
- Implement rapid improvement strategies where performance and/or leadership is weak.
- Share strengths through mutual support and challenge.

2.4 Connect Academy Trust will promote school improvement by:

- Committing a School Improvement Lead across the Trust to focus solely on school improvement.
- Carrying out Due Diligence on new schools.
- Providing a core offer for all Trust schools.
- Providing additional personalised support appropriate to individual school needs.
- Maintaining a balance between school defined processes, aligned policies across the Trust and standardisation of systems where appropriate (see Section 9).

3 ACCOUNTABILITY & RESPONSIBILITY

3.1 The Trust’s standards monitoring procedures set out how Trustees will monitor individual school performance through an annual cycle of accountability, including a Trust-wide risk assessment process, including the Health Check meetings, that leads to a clear understanding by all leaders of the phase in which each school is working. The phases are defined as the **Sustain** phase, **Embed** phase, **Improve** phase, **Repair** phase and the **Stabilise** phase. These are based on the nationally recognised model from Sir David Carter about School Improvement Trajectories (see Appendix 1).

3.2 The Trust’s Curriculum and Standards Committee will take the lead in managing these procedures (as set out in the Scheme of Delegation) by monitoring the school summaries and actions from the Health Checks. They will examine the work done by individual Headteachers, the Trust School Improvement Lead, the Trust CEO or appointed leaders to implement agreed school improvement plans and any additional action plans, as appropriate.

3.3 Each Headteacher is held accountable by the CEO for the overall effectiveness of the school and their own Governing Body. Each Governing Body provides support and constructive challenge for the Headteacher directly through the consideration and debate around school policies, data and reports, as well as conducting their own visits according to the needs of the school, the school priorities and their

own annual calendar. In addition, Headteacher appraisal is carried out by the Trust CEO, supported by Governors.

- 3.4 Each Headteacher will take the lead on their own school improvement processes, but there are a number of elements that the Trust expects to be in place and to be shared with the School Improvement Lead, the Trust CEO and/or the Senior Leadership Team:

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EXPECTATIONS	RATIONALE
A School Improvement Plan (school led) updated annually, including current school context	To enable leaders to outline the goals, success criteria and monitoring mileposts for improvement over the next 2/3 years, and to share the school's current performance, goals and aspirations with all staff, governors and Trustees.
School Improvement Visits	These will focus on agreed areas, mostly based on outcomes and any visits external to Connect. The SI lead will provide a Visit Note with successes, actions and timescales. Visit Notes are to be shared with the school SLT and Governors, ELT and Trustees.
School Self Evaluation (SSE- School Summary)	An up-to-date reflective summary of the school's performance based on its own self-evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement including current School Improvement phase and actions to improve.
Termly Health Check Meetings using School Summary	To enable school leaders, Trust School Improvement Lead, Trust CEO, Trust COO and School Ops Leads to evaluate all aspects of school provision, including Operations, Quality of Education and Culture in each school. This is to include headline news reports from Shared Services.
Effective in-house monitoring processes	To enable leaders to understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the quality of teaching, learning, curriculum and outcomes, the quality of leadership, the quality of safeguarding and the school's overall effectiveness in order to effectively plan for further school improvement.

- 3.5 The appraisal of the Trust School Improvement Lead is carried out by the Trust CEO.

- 3.6 The appraisal of the Trust CEO is carried out by a sub-committee of Trustees, including the Trust Chair, with the specific goals and overall outcomes being shared with Trustees.

4 DUE DILIGENCE

- 4.1 Prior to any school joining Connect Academy Trust, the Trust ELT will carry out a Due Diligence process (see separate document for full details).
- 4.2 At the end of this process, a report will be compiled and shared both with the applicant school and with the Trust Board, prior to Trustees deciding on whether to approve the school's application to join.

5 FUNDING FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

- 5.1 The Trust central recharge, paid by all schools, will be used to the Shared Services Team, including the Trust School Improvement Lead, and the Trust COO, CFO & CEO, who all play key leadership roles in School Improvement for the Trust.
- 5.2 Schools may be able to apply for packages of support from the Trust, when the funding is fully in place, according to the needs of the school.

6 THE CORE PROVISION FOR ALL CONNECT SCHOOLS

- 6.1 There are a range of School Improvement monitoring and evaluation tasks that take place in all Connect Schools, which provide information. All actions feed into the school improvement cycle.

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	INVOLVING
Trust Senior Leadership Meetings	Fortnightly senior leadership meetings attended by the ELT and all Headteachers, along with any other relevant leaders from the Trust.	ELT and HTs
Health Checks	Termly 360 reviews, covering all aspects of the school, under the headings of Culture, Quality of Education and Operations. SI Phase agreed at the end of each meeting.	CEO, ELT, HT/SLT, Link Trustee, Governors
Governance	Termly online meetings with all Chairs of Governors, CEO, Chair of Trustees and Governance Professionals to explore current themes and share school updates. Trust-led training for all Governors is arranged as needed.	CEO, Chair of Trustees, Chairs, Governance Professionals
Connect Assistants and Deputies (CAD) group	Termly meetings Deputy Headteacher and Assistant Headteacher group to develop current themes across Connect, build relationships in the group and share good practice.	SI Lead, DHTs, AHTs
Headteacher Appraisal	Annual Performance Management review with the CEO, supported by school governors.	HT, CEO and Governors
Single Central Record	Annual audit of single central record, including employee checks.	Trust HR Lead, School staff
Safeguarding Meetings	Termly online meetings with all DSLs to explore current themes, concerns and share good practice. Safeguarding is also covered at Termly Health Checks and reported termly to Trustees.	CEO, DSLs, EA
Attendance Meetings	Termly online meetings with all Attendance Leads to explore current themes, concerns/patterns and share good practice/successes.	CEO, Attendance Leads, EA
Annual Health & Safety Review	Health & Safety audit of practice and procedures carried out by external Health and Safety Company, alongside the Facilities team	Facilities Team, Site Managers, COO
Sustainability Meetings	Termly online meetings with all Sustainability Leads to explore current themes and share good practice/successes.	CEO, Sustainability Leads, EA

Bespoke toolkits and support materials (CAD group)	A toolkit with a range of options available for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, according to the context and needs of each individual practitioner.	School leaders
Support Programmes from in-house specialists	The Trust has key individuals who are specialists in their field. They can provide support programmes to individual staff members, in their own schools and beyond.	SI Lead, CEO, key staff members
SEND Group Meetings	Termly meetings to explore current themes and share good practice	School Leaders
Early Years Group Meetings	Termly meetings to carry out cross-school moderation; explore current themes; and share good practice	
Subject Leader Group Meetings	Termly meetings to sustain a strong network of support for leaders of each subject, share subject-specific knowledge, understanding and best practice and discuss resources.	School leaders
ECT and ECT+1 training programme	A programme across the year which focuses on individual school challenges; current themes in education; and effective support in the classroom	SI lead, ECTs
<i>Leading at the Heart</i> middle leaders training programme	Termly modular programme focusing on: developing insightful, resilient leaders, the power of culture and ethos, creating a shared vision, leadership styles; how to design and implement improvement strategies within a team; effective self-evaluation through a range of mechanisms; managing people effectively and holding others to account	SI Lead, delegates
Practice study visits	Opportunities for practice study visits to other schools.	Release time

7 SI PHASES AND SUPPORT PACKAGES FOR SCHOOLS

- 7.1 Connect Academy Trust's School Improvement Processes are planned on an annual basis in liaison with the Trust School Improvement Lead and the Trust CEO, depending on the phase within which each school is working (see 3.1).
- 7.2 A profile of each aspect of the school will be identified, using these phases, as part of the Annual Standards Health Check in September and support will be provided, according to a 'best fit profile' (see Descriptors below) and the current needs of the school.

CONNECT ACADEMY TRUST SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PHASE DESCRIPTORS

PHASE	Stabilise	Repair	Improve	Embed	Sustain
DESCRIPTOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school has been identified by the Trust as requiring urgent support to stabilise leadership and provision OR The school has been designated by Ofsted as needing Urgent Improvement or Needs attention in some areas OR The Trust has been asked to support the school (not part of Connect) due to serious concerns over the performance/stability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools that are currently judged by the Trust (or Ofsted) as Needing Attention but are making rapid progress OR The school has been identified by the Trust as requiring support but is also at risk of declining to Ofsted's Urgent Improvement, due to slow or limited progress NOR is stable or declining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools that are currently judged by the Trust as being at the Expected Standard overall, but which have key identified areas for improvement OR Schools where there are context issues which may make the school vulnerable OR judged as needing RISE support (DfE) OR Needing Attention (Ofsted) NOR is stable or declining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools that are currently judged by the Trust as being securely at the Expected Standard overall, and improvements made need time to embed. Impact needs to be seen in outcomes for all learners. NOR is stable or improving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools that are currently judged by the Trust to be securely at the Strong Standard overall, or better. Governance is strong and sustainable. Outcomes for learners are at the Strong standard NOR is stable or improving
EXPECTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This school will be supported by a Trust appointed Executive Leader or Headteacher, who will lead on the implementation of an approved and costed Action Plan. The Action Plan will be co-created with leaders and submitted to the Trust Board for approval. This school will be likely to require a staffing re-structure in order to implement rapid improvement. Staff and leaders must be receptive to the challenge of increased expectations, in order to improve outcomes for children and/or stabilise the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These schools require significant support and will work closely with the CEO and SI Lead These schools must submit an annual School Improvement Plan for approval by the Trust ELT and provide a termly update through the Health Check process. The SI lead will provide a termly update to Curriculum and Standards Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These schools will be expected to have the capacity to bring about improvement in their own organisations and <i>may</i> also have the capacity to support other schools within the Trust These schools must submit an annual School Improvement Plan for approval by the Trust ELT and provide a termly update through the Health Check process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These schools will be expected to embed the improvements in their own organisations and are likely to have the capacity to support others within the Trust All schools submit an annual School Improvement Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These schools will be expected to share best practice and actively promote school-to-school support within the Trust All schools submit an annual School Improvement Plan
SUPPORT PROVIDED BEYOND THE CORE OFFER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive Leadership provided by Connect as needed At least 4 days SI support per term SI Lead to support the implementation of the Trust agreed Action Plan Weekly support from the Trust ELT/SLT Progress against Action Plan monitored termly by the Curriculum & Standards Committee Termly updates to the Trust Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least three days SI support per term Relevant key specialists within the Trust to support with the agreed action plan Progress against SIP monitored by the Trust ELT and the Curriculum Standards Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least two days SI Support per term Relevant key specialists within the Trust to support with the agreed action plan Support from the SI Lead and other expertise from across the Trust, as agreed through Health Checks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one day SI Support per term Support from the SI Lead and other expertise from across the Trust, as agreed through Health Checks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one day SI Support per term Support from the SI Lead and other expertise from across the Trust, as agreed through Health Checks

8 ALIGNMENT ACROSS THE TRUST

8.1 Trust policies and procedures are outlined in the tables below:

AUTONOMOUS PROCEDURES	ALIGNED PROCEDURES	STANDARDISED PROCEDURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour Management Curriculum Design Day to day leadership, culture and management* Internal data analysis and evaluation Parent Communication Pupil Premium Strategy* Safeguarding processes* Sports Premium Strategy Agreed Staffing structure* Subject policies Teaching and Learning policies and approaches* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governance Health and Safety IT Ocean Curriculum Reporting of Assessment Safeguarding Recording School Improvement Planning Self-Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appraisal policy Data Protection Digital Strategy Financial Management including budget setting HR & Recruitment Child Protection policy Scheme of Delegation School Improvement Strategy, including high aspirations for all children and schools

(*These procedures may be Trust-led for schools in the Stabilise or Repair SI phase – see above)

Appendix 1: Sir David Carter's School Improvement Trajectories

