

# The Best of **BEST**

2024/25 academic year



# WELCOME

# THE FUTURE OF BEST

## Welcome to the Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST)

This brochure is designed to give you the inside story of life in our trust, as well as celebrate some of the achievements of the past academic year.

We deliver learning opportunities across our growing community of 11 schools and five nurseries, educating 8,000 young people across the county, from nursery age to advanced level study.

This is a truly exciting time for BEST and we have much to celebrate. I hope you enjoy reading about us.

**Ilona Bond** | Chair of Trustees



★ The BEST Eye has built on our mission, vision and values



2016-2020
Phase One – Delivering Clarity
BEMAT to BEST: Mission
Vision
Values
2020-2024
Phase Two – Delivering Connection
Three to two tier: Uniting BEST
Deepening values
Defining Culture
Belonging
2024-2028
Phase Three – Delivering Excellence
Being the BEST: Growth beyond CBC
Outstanding Provision
Financial Sustainability

### Delivering excellence to more young people is the next phase in BEST's development.

This builds on the solid foundation of the first two phases: delivering clarity and delivering connection, see *left*.

Since our inception in 2016, we have anchored our strategy in the needs of our schools, the communities they serve and the wider educational system.

Phase One (2016-2020) began with an extensive consultation process to agree our shared mission, vision and values.

Our mission 'to grow the BEST in everyone' has defined our approach

since. We believe that safe, secure and happy students and staff learn and teach better.

We continue to work extremely hard to provide the very best opportunities to ensure all in our community flourish.

Throughout Phase Two (2020-2024) we nurtured a culture of collaboration, ambition and support. Building on our mission, vision and values, we developed the BEST Eye.

This school improvement model focuses on supporting, sharing and securing the very highest standards, within a context of belonging.

With all our schools graded Good/ Outstanding by Ofsted, student

numbers more than doubling and financial sustainability securely established, we are in a strong position to enter Phase Three (2024-28).

This phase will see larger numbers of young people benefitting from the exceptional opportunities and high standards offered by BEST schools.

We now aim to grow beyond Central Bedfordshire. In fact, this has already begun as we welcomed Castle Newnham in Bedford to BEST in September 2024.

**Exciting times lie ahead...**

**Dr Alan Lee** | Chief Executive Officer and National Leader of Education



# GROWTH OF BEST



## Castle Newnham joined **BEST** in September 2024



**For school leaders, an alignment in values was a major factor in choosing to join us.**

Ruth Wilkes, who retired as Federation Principal at the end of the 2023/24 academic year, was determined to leave the school in safe hands.

Now, with the all-through school proudly the newest member of the BEST family and under the leadership of Primary Headteacher Kat Edwards and Secondary Headteacher Sara Levesley, those hopes have been achieved.

# 3683 ▶ 8160

Growth of BEST learner numbers from 2016 to 2024

Ruth, *pictured*, said: "A new era was on the horizon and we wanted to make sure the school was as well placed as possible to embrace its next phase of development."

"We had been through 10 years of quite significant change, firstly through federation [Castle Lower and Newnham Middle Schools came together as one all-through community in 2016] and then the pandemic."

"Having steadied for two or three years it was time to look forward to the next exciting changes, and my strong motivation was to place the school in the hands of people I trusted."

She said: "We talked to a number of trusts and what really came out for us and for BEST as well was the really strong alignment of values."

"How we see and treat people is very much in harmony. That was really important for us and our governors."



Ruth added: "The joining process and the relationship between ourselves and BEST has been seamless. We've got great access to central team colleagues and we immediately felt a great sense of warmth and welcome."

Chair of Governors Tom Barwood said: "It was very clear to us BEST was definitely the trust that aligned most clearly with our values."

"We look forward to having colleagues who think like we do and know where we want to go, and we have lots to offer back to BEST, too."

“ Being in BEST will **bring many benefits** for our pupils and staff

Castle Newnham Headteachers Kat Edwards and Sara Levesley



# WELLBEING AT BEST

## The wellbeing of everyone really does matter at BEST – and always has.

In 2022 an extensive internal scrutiny report by Juniper Education stated we are leading the way for wellbeing in the educational trust sector.

And we've never looked back.

Our BEST Wellbeing Charter ensures we are fully focused on embedding health and wellbeing in all aspects of trust life – helping staff to maintain a healthy work-life balance and feel supported.

Wellbeing gardens offer staff at our schools a peaceful retreat where they can go and take some time out for themselves during the busy working day.

We offer staff free access to Education Support's Employee Assistance Programme, offering them help when they might need it most.

We also fund Mental Health First Aid champions in our schools and nurseries and have wellbeing leads who work with colleagues across all sites.

Our aim of making BEST a mindful and compassionate community continues with pace, too – see *more details, right*.

Tough on issues – kind on people. It's the BEST way.



**BEST is leading the way** for wellbeing in the educational trust sector

Mindfulness and compassion are at the heart of everything we do at BEST.

All staff have an entitlement to discover mindfulness, with over 150 having trained in foundation courses and leadership programmes.

A growing number of staff are teaching mindfulness to students, while six BEST schools have so far embedded the practice into the curriculum.

Our CEO Dr Alan Lee has spoken at regional, national and international conferences about how his own personal journey has helped shaped our approach.

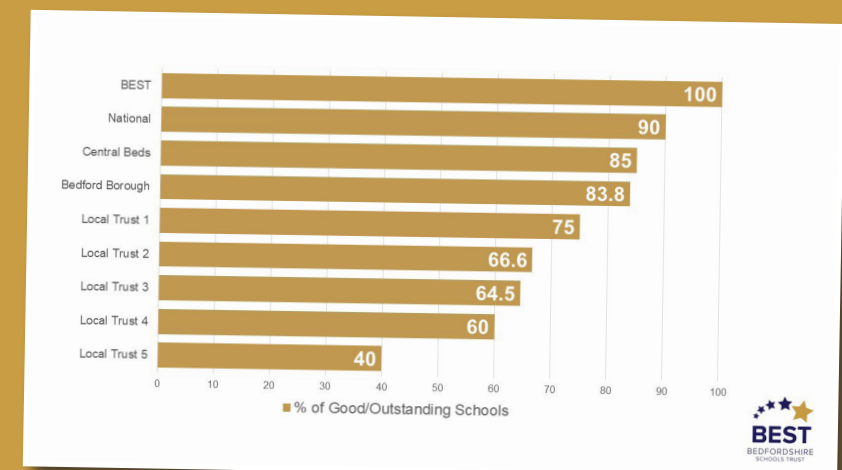
And on 12 September – Mindfulness Day – we launched a short film to showcase this growing legacy. Watch it online at [bestacademies.org.uk/mindfulness](https://bestacademies.org.uk/mindfulness)



★ Dr Alan Lee gave delegates at the HFL HR Conference in June 2024 insight into our mindfulness journey

★ Our schools are the 'BEST' around, according to Ofsted outcomes.

All of our schools are rated **Good** or **Outstanding** – putting us on top of national, local authority and other local trusts.





# BEST PEOPLE

What is it like to be part of BEST? We asked some of the newest people who are connected to our trust...

## Trustee



★ Maggie's work with BEST staff on mindfulness features prominently in her 2022 leadership development book, *Leading With Presence: It's An Inside Job*

Maggie Farrar joined the BEST Board of Trustees in 2024 – but is no stranger.

For she has worked closely with us for a number of years, helping to embed our culture of mindfulness across the trust.

She said: "I've had three or four years' involvement with BEST and I was really impressed with the way Alan was building his personal commitment to a mindfulness practice into what helps schools and trusts to thrive.

"That gave me a real insight into the kind of chief executive Alan was and the kind of trust he wanted to lead.

"I'm also impressed by the relationship the Central Team has with schools, and the Principals I've worked with, so when the opportunity came up to be a trustee

I was really excited to get involved.

"I am a trustee of another large MAT, and a large museum in Oxford, so for me this was a way of giving back to both the system and particularly to BEST, who have given me and taught me so much."

Maggie added: "My role on the Board of Trustees is to both support what BEST is planning to do, and to scrutinise and to ask strategic questions.

"I feel I've got a real eye to equity, disadvantage and staff wellbeing, and with my experience at the National College of School Leadership [Maggie is a former director and interim Chief Executive] I am also particularly interested in how leadership capacity is built across the trust."



## Principal

The many benefits of joining BEST were quickly realised by John Linehan, who has just completed his first year as Principal of Robert Bloomfield Academy.

"I joined knowing BEST was a very supportive trust, with a compassionate element, and the reasons I joined all came to fruition," he said.

"The autonomy that was promised has certainly been realised and I'm very much trusted as a professional to get on and do my job and make all decisions.

"However, as and when I would like support with those decisions it is always available to me from the BEST Central Team – and I've had lots of good support

"Financially, I've been allowed to direct the resources in the way I would like. My priority has always been the quality of education the children receive and I've been trusted to manage my finances effectively, again with support as and when required.

"From a financial perspective there is that freedom and as a head it is really refreshing as that can be a little restricted in some trusts and a bit more centrally controlled."

Mr Linehan added: "I feel completely empowered. You feel like a standalone Principal at certain points, but in the best possible way because you have the safety net of the trust if you need it."

BEST believes Principals should **lead their schools** and fully reap trust freedoms and benefits



# BEST PEOPLE

## Senior Leader



Kim Rowe became Chief Financial Officer of BEST in May 2023.

She brought with her over 20 years' experience of working in financial roles, most latterly in a senior capacity at Bedford Borough Council.

And she immediately saw the freedom that working in a multi-academy trust environment such as BEST brings.

Kim said: "The organisation itself is more agile – you have the autonomy to make decisions and move ideas along much faster than you do in a local authority.

"It's very positive being in a trust because if you want to change or improve on something you can go ahead quickly.

Collaboration across the trust has also been great to be involved with and is a

real benefit.

"We are dealing with public funds so we have to ensure money is spent appropriately, but with the trust our schools have more flexibility to direct funds to their own priorities – we are there centrally to provide that financial expertise and technical support."

She added: "It's been a really enjoyable first year in the role.

"There have been challenges along the way as you would expect, but the team comes together to meet those challenges.

"It's definitely a team effort and that's something that's really striking about being at BEST – you never feel like it's your problem alone."

## Mindfulness Coach



## New role to be a **springboard to embed further** mindfulness

One of the newest additions to the BEST Central Team is Will George.

Will has been our external mindfulness coach for the last three years, but his role has now been officially incorporated into our School Improvement Team.

He said: "Alan invited me initially to help with the introduction of mindfulness training programmes for all staff.

"Since then, it's really grown. We've seen many staff and students discovering, learning and practising mindfulness, and a considerable number of schools embedding it into their curriculum and into school life."

Will said becoming a permanent staff

member would be "a springboard" for embedding further mindfulness within the trust in many different ways.

Plans already in place this year include establishing mindfulness as part of the citizenship curriculum at Pix Brook Academy, and introductory sessions for parents at Langford Village Academy.

"I'm really pleased to be working within the School Improvement Team, as I think it's important positioning of what mindfulness is for in education," he said.

"We know it's very beneficial to wellbeing and mental health, but it's equally about effectiveness and the capacity to perform well."



# 23/24 REVIEW

★ Six BEST schools and nurseries were inspected by Ofsted in the 2023/24 academic year.

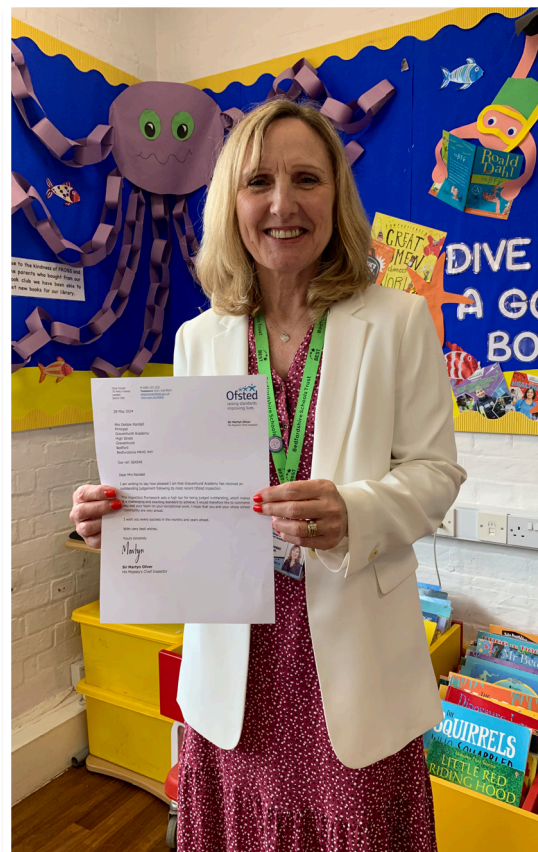
Gravenhurst Academy was rated Outstanding again at its inspection visit in March.

Principal Debbie Randall, *pictured*, later received a letter of praise from Ofsted Chief Inspector Sir Martyn Oliver.

"The inspection framework sets a high bar for being judged outstanding, which makes it a challenging and exacting standard to achieve," he wrote. "I would therefore like to commend you and your team on your exceptional work."

Pix Brook Academy received its first Ofsted inspection since we opened the school in 2019 – and was rated Good overall, with Outstanding features.

Also receiving Good judgements by Ofsted were Campton Academy and Langford Village Academy, and the BEST Nurseries at Arlesey and Langford.



★ We welcomed a number of special visitors to BEST schools over the year.

The High Sheriff of Bedfordshire Russell Beard, DfE Regional Director for the East of England Jonathan Duff, and the Lord-Lieutenant of Bedfordshire Susan Lousada were our VIP guests.

They toured a number of our schools to find out more about their successes, as well as learn more about BEST.



★ There were sporting highs on a national stage for two BEST schools.

Samuel Whitbread's U18 boys' football team reached the final of the ESFA National Schools' Cup, held at Stoke City's bet365 Stadium.

And Etonbury Academy's golf team finished runners-up at the English Schools Team Championship at Woodhall Spa.



★ Local dignitaries and representatives of key partners in the million-pound plus project joined us for the official opening of Etonbury Academy's new Sixth Form.



★ Former England netball captain Pamela Cookey visited Gothic Mede and Etonbury Academies to run a day of coaching workshops.



Now retired, she was there in her role as an ambassador for charity The Mintridge Foundation.



★ There was a trip down memory lane for Robert Bloomfield Academy's 'Class of 1964' during a special tour of the school they left 60 years ago.



# OUR STORY



## We have grown significantly since forming in 2016.

We started with six founding schools – Etonbury, Gothic Mede, Gravenhurst, Langford Village, Robert Bloomfield and Samuel Whitbread Academies – along with nurseries at Arlesey and Shefford.

St Christophers Academy in Dunstable was the first school to join the BEST family, in 2017.

Lawnside Academy in Biggleswade followed in 2019 and Campton Academy in 2020 – a period that also saw us open Pix Brook Academy in Stotfold.

Further growth came in the form of BEST Nursery (Langford) in 2021 and a new Sixth Form at Etonbury in 2023.

And Castle Newnham became our 11th academy in September 2024.

2016

BEST forms with 6 founding schools and 2 nurseries

2017

St Christophers Academy joins

2019

Lawnside joins, Pix Brook opens

2020

Campton is our 10th academy

2021

BEST Nursery (Langford) opens

2023

Sixth Form at Etonbury opens

2024

Castle Newnham joins BEST family

# MISSION & VALUES

## Our mission and values shape who we are and what we do.

It is our aim to grow the BEST in everyone.

We believe in the importance of high expectations, hard work and the development of a community of schools and nurseries where each of us strive to 'be the best that we can be'.

We operate under four core values. We will:

- ★ Always put children first
- ★ Collaborate to support and compete to challenge
- ★ Provide community-based provision
- ★ Have the courage to be compassionate

We are also guided by a number of beliefs and principles: to deliver the best outcomes, to provide an extensive range of opportunities both inside and beyond the classroom, and to nurture talent by investing in our people.

We believe Principals should lead their schools and fully reap trust freedoms and benefits. This high autonomy, high accountability culture empowers our school leaders to make their own decisions in their own settings.

Our culture and ethos define us and we are proud of our approach.

Our schools **work together** to add value and improve





# CENTRAL SERVICES

## We offer an expert level of centralised support to our schools and nurseries.

This invaluable specialist assistance includes operational and financial services, and school improvement work.

Our Central Team is based at BEST House – located at the entrance of the Samuel Whitbread Academy site – and supports the day-to-day running of our schools and nurseries.

Areas covered include capital and estates, policies and compliance, HR, communications and finance.

Meanwhile, our BEST Education Services and School Improvement Team (BESSI) is based out of Pix Brook Academy.

This team of education specialists is committed to improving student outcomes and driving up standards.

In all our schools, subject leads are supported to create an ambitious and engaging curriculum, tailored to the

**5%**

We fund our central services through a top slice percentage of 5% – great **value for money** for our schools compared to the sector average of 6.3%

specific needs of each setting.

BESSI also has a thriving CPD offer, and is the lead delivery partner for NPQ and ECF training across Central Bedfordshire.

Our highly effective central staff share a common goal – supporting our schools and nurseries in educating our children.

“ All central staff are **approachable and professional**. I am confident in the advice they provide

BEST Central Services Annual Survey 2024

## 2024 summer works programme



★ Refurbished changing room facilities at Robert Bloomfield



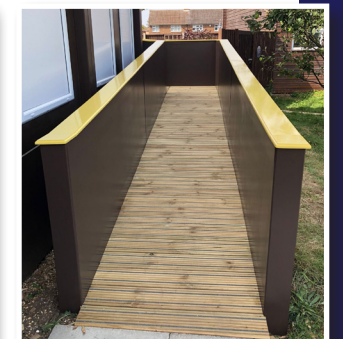
★ This summer we invested nearly £1 million of capital funding into improvements across our school sites.

As a multi-academy trust, the money is available to us through the Department for Education's School Condition Allocations fund.

Our two biggest projects in this year's summer works programme saw an upgrade of changing room facilities at Etonbury and Robert Bloomfield.

There was lots more work carried out too as, year after year, we help to ensure pupils at BEST schools are warm, safe and dry.

Other projects included a new boiler at Lawnside, fire doors at Langford, toilets refurbishment at Campton and a DDA compliant ramp at St Christophers.





# OUR SCHOOLS & NURSERIES

## CAMPTON ACADEMY

- ★ Campton
- ★ Reception - Year 4
- ★ Ofsted – Good (2023)
- ★ [camptonacademy.org.uk](http://camptonacademy.org.uk)



## CASTLE NEWNHAM

- ★ Bedford
- ★ Reception - Year 11
- ★ Ofsted – Secondary Good (2024)
- + Primary Outstanding (2013)
- ★ [castlenewnham.school](http://castlenewnham.school)



## ETONBURY ACADEMY

- ★ Arlesey
- ★ Year 5 - 13
- ★ Ofsted – Good (2020)
- ★ [etonbury.org.uk](http://etonbury.org.uk)



## GOTHIC MEDE ACADEMY

- ★ Arlesey
- ★ Preschool - Year 4
- ★ Ofsted – Good (2023)
- ★ [gothicmede.org.uk](http://gothicmede.org.uk)



## GRAVENHURST ACADEMY

- ★ Upper Gravenhurst
- ★ Reception - Year 4
- ★ Ofsted – Outstanding (2024)
- ★ [gravenhurstacademy.org.uk](http://gravenhurstacademy.org.uk)



## LANGFORD VILLAGE ACADEMY

- ★ Langford
- ★ Reception - Year 6
- ★ Ofsted – Good (2024)
- ★ [langfordvillageacademy.org.uk](http://langfordvillageacademy.org.uk)





# OUR SCHOOLS & NURSERIES

## LAWNSIDE ACADEMY

- ★ Biggleswade
- ★ Reception - Year 6  
(currently up to Year 5)
- ★ Ofsted – Good (2023)
- ★ lawnsideacademy.org.uk



## PIX BROOK ACADEMY

- ★ Stotfold
- ★ Year 5 - 11  
(currently up to Year 10)
- ★ Ofsted – Good (2024)
- ★ pixbrookacademy.org.uk



## ROBERT BLOOMFIELD ACADEMY

- ★ Shefford
- ★ Year 5 - 8
- ★ Ofsted – Outstanding (2014)
- ★ robertbloomfield.beds.sch.uk



## SAMUEL WHITBREAD ACADEMY

- ★ Clifton
- ★ Year 9 - 13
- ★ Ofsted – Good (2023)
- ★ samuelwhitbread.org.uk



## ST CHRISTOPHERS ACADEMY

- ★ Dunstable
- ★ Nursery - Year 6
- ★ Ofsted – Good (2019)
- ★ stchristophersacademy.org



## BEST NURSERIES

- ★ Arlesey/Shefford/Langford
- ★ Year 5 - 13
- ★ Ofsted – all rated Good
- ★ bestnurseries.co.uk

*\* School-based provision at Gothic Mede and St Christophers brings our total number of nurseries to 5*





# JOIN BEST



## Come and be part of the BEST family!



**Are you a school exploring the possibility of joining a trust, or a potential recruit looking for a new challenge?**

We would love to hear from you!

**For schools** – This brochure has given details of the many benefits of being part of BEST – from the high autonomy provided to Principals backed by our high-performing central team, to the economies of scale we can command, relieving ever-growing pressures on school budgets.

There is no set criteria for joining, although we will always ensure any partnership is

in the greater interests of both the school and BEST, leading to improved outcomes for young people.

If you would like to explore further the possibility of joining BEST, please get in touch with us!

We will happily arrange introductory meetings with our senior executive team to explore your options. We will also invite you in to see our schools and to talk to our Principals for a firsthand view on what it's like to be a leader within BEST.

**For staff** – Our overall vision – to grow the BEST in everyone – extends to those who work for us. We can only provide an exceptional education to our children if we recruit, retain and develop high-quality staff.

As a single employer, we are able to offer staff across our schools and nurseries a fantastic range of benefits, support and career development opportunities.

**BEST has a bright and exciting future – come and be a part of our journey!**

**mynewterm**



**SCAN ME**

★ If you work in education, you've undoubtedly come across the education recruitment website MyNewTerm.

Did you know we were the very first multi-academy trust to partner with MNT to advertise all vacancies across our schools and nurseries?

Scan the QR code to see our latest vacancies or visit [www.mynewterm.com](http://www.mynewterm.com) and search for the Bedfordshire Schools Trust to find our careers page.

Don't see any suitable roles? You can also join our Talent Pool to express an interest in future opportunities at BEST.





# BEST

BEDFORDSHIRE  
SCHOOLS TRUST

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