

### WELCOME



### Welcome to the Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST)

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

We deliver learning opportunities across our community of 10 schools and five nurseries, educating more than 5,500 children across Central Bedfordshire, from nursery age to advanced level study.

Our aim is a simple one – to grow the BEST in everyone. We always put our children first, and are committed to embedding wellbeing across all aspects of trust life.

Over the coming pages you will learn more about our vision and values, and the ethos that connects all who are educated at or work for the BEST family. If you would like to know more, we would be delighted to hear from you.

**Dr Alan Lee** Chief Executive Officer and National Leader of Education **Ilona Bond** Chair of Trustees

## THE STORY OF BEST

#### BEST formed in the summer of 2016, succeeding BEMAT – the Bedfordshire East Multi-Academy Trust.

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.

Growth since then has been significant, with a near 50% increase in pupil numbers.

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

Lawnside Academy in Biggleswade followed in January 2019, while we also opened Pix Brook Academy – a new free school in Stotfold – in the September of that year.

Campton Academy became our 10th school in November 2020, and in April 2021 we added to provision under the BEST Nurseries banner with the opening of facilities at Langford.

School-based provision at Gothic Mede and St Christophers brings our total number of nurseries to five.

We continue to grow in size, and our latest development saw a new Sixth Form open its doors at Etonbury in September 2023.

We are proud of our first seven years, which have been a real success story.



### **OUR MISSION**

### To grow the BEST in everyone.

Our mission statement may only be six small words long, but it carries a big meaning.

We passionately 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, namely 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.

Our high autonomy, high accountability culture empowers our Principals to make their own decisions and determine practice in their own environments.

We are proud of our approach. It shapes who we are and what we do.

#### Our reference point question:

'How will this improve outcomes for children and enable them to go on and succeed in life?'



#### We are invested in looking after the wellbeing of everyone in the BEST family.

This has never been more crucial, in a year in which record numbers of staff across the entire education sector have considered quitting due to pressures on their mental health.

We are bucking that trend – indeed, a recent internal scrutiny report by Juniper Education proclaimed we are leading the way for wellbeing in the trust sector.

Our BEST Wellbeing Charter ensures we are fully focused on embedding health and wellbeing in all aspects of trust life.

We have continued our programme of creating staff wellbeing gardens at all of

4

### WELLBEING AT BEST

our sites – in the last academic year alone we officially opened areas at six of our schools.

We don't just stop there. All BEST staff have free access to Education Support's Employee Assistance Programme, offering them help when they might need it most.

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

We are immersed, too, in making BEST a mindful and compassionate community, with our CEO sharing our journey at the 2023 Inspiring Leadership Conference.

The wellbeing of everyone really does matter at BEST.

#### **CAMPTON** ACADEMY

Campton | Reception - Year 4 | Ofsted – Outstanding (2010) www.camptonacademy.org.uk



Campton Academy is the newest member of BEST, having joined in November 2020.

As a small lower school. the benefits of joining a large multi-academy trust were apparent from the start.

Principal Sarah Fraher said: "From a leadership point of view, it's the opportunities to meet with other staff for CPD and for support.

"Being a single form lower school, we don't have another teacher who teaches that year group, so all of our teachers are on their own.

"Having a network of schools around us that we can contact easily to say 'what are you doing with this aspect?' is really helpful. We didn't have that support as readily available before.

"As a small school our leadership team is minimal. I find it reassuring and

supportive that I can contact someone on the central team and say 'I've got a problem with this' or 'I need some support with that'."

The school is also leading the way in establishing mindfulness in all aspects of school life, with four members of staff now qualified to deliver sessions.

Mrs Fraher said: "Our mindfulness journey started when we joined BEST - none of this would have been possible without the support of the trust."

It is reassuring and supportive to contact the BEST central team

#### **ETONBURY** ACADEMY

Arlesey | Year 5 - 13 (currently up to Year 12) Ofsted – Good (2020) www.etonbury.org.uk



The start of the 2023/24 academic year marked a milestone moment both for Etonbury Academy and for BEST.

A new Sixth Form opened, honouring a commitment to offer post-16 provision to the local community.

Central support from BEST was crucial in turning the idea into a reality. As well as joint school/trust funding, our Operations Manager Alison Austin was a key influence in keeping the building project on track amid tight timescales.

Principal Joanne Young said: "The opening of our Sixth Form represents an exciting next chapter in our journey at Etonbury, and we are very grateful to BEST for their support in making it happen."

Last year's Year 11 students, who have become Etonbury's very first Sixth Form cohort, helped to shape the offering, including course choices, facilities and even setting the dress code.

6



Head of Sixth Form Chloe Dowden said: "We've had regular meetings with our students and a focus group asking what they'd like to see.

"They are guiding everything we've chosen.

"To be able to have this provision in our community is so important, it's not been fair for students to have had to travel for miles to further their education."

Trust-wide support has also come by way of collaboration with BEST's other Sixth Form, at Samuel Whitbread Academy.

Mrs Dowden said: "I've been working

really closely with Lee [Huckle, SWA Head of Sixth *Form*], which has been great – he's been really kind and supportive."

7

#### **BEST** facts

Over 20 A Level and vocational courses were on offer to the first cohort

#### GOTHIC MEDE ACADEMY

Arlesey | Nursery - Year 4 | Ofsted – Good (2023) | www.gothicmede.org.uk





Gothic Mede Academy SENCo Alison Sugden is at the forefront of our pledge to look after the wellbeing of all in BEST.

She said: "I am the wellbeing lead for the trust, so I lead on this for all the schools, and as part of this I am Mental Health First Aid-trained.

"Wellbeing and mental health are intertwined – looking after your wellbeing is going to mean that your mental health is more positive.

"We have the vision that every school in BEST will have Mental Health First Aiders for adults in the school.

"It's the same idea as having designated safeguarding leads, in that it's visible to all who the Mental Health First Aiders are and people can use one should they need to. "We're not diagnosing, our job is to point people in the right direction for professional help or support.

"We quite often direct people to the Employee Assistance Programme, which is something available to us in BEST that isn't available everywhere."

As part of her lead role Mrs Sugden also helped co-ordinate activities to mark 2023 World

Wellbeing Week. At Gothic Mede, this included yoga, *pictured*, and nature walks.

**BEST** facts

Gothic Mede now offers Forest School sessions to promote wellbeing of pupils

#### **GRAVENHURST** ACADEMY

Upper Gravenhurst | Reception - Year 4 | Ofsted – Outstanding (2011) | www.gravenhurstacademy.org.uk



With 50 pupils on roll, Gravenhurst Academy is the smallest school within BEST.

66

But size really doesn't matter as the school consistently proves even the tiniest of institutions can thrive in a multi-academy trust setting.

Debbie Randall is Principal of Gravenhurst and sister school Langford Village Academy – allowing her a double whammy of additional assistance.

This has included leadership support, development opportunties for young and old alike and financial backing for essential capital works.

Mrs Randall said: "Gravenhurst is a very unique little school and being part of BEST is a real benefit.

"I've had additional leadership support



### Being in BEST is a real benefit for a unique little school

this year. It's been a challenge running two schools part-time not having a deputy, so I've had the BEST curriculum directors supporting me on that.

"In terms of funding, it's really difficult to actually have much of a contingency. As a small school we do have a very small budget, but sometimes we have to have expensive things happen.

"Being part of BEST, money gets allocated for doing some of the work that needs doing and it is useful to have that support in terms of the actual building."

#### LANGFORD VILLAGE ACADEMY

Langford | Reception - Year 6 | Ofsted – Good (2022) www.langfordvillageacademy.org.uk



Being part of BEST has enabled Langford Village Academy to utilise resources that otherwise would not have been available.

Principal Debbie Randall said she had been able to bring in students from BEST upper school Samuel Whitbread Academy to help.

This has included filming virtual tours for the school website, organising

PE sessions for her pupils, and taking part in classroom activities as part of a work shadowing day, pictured.

"It's been good for their development and benefits our school, too," she said.

Mrs Randall added BEST expertise had been a big advantage during the school's transition from lower to primary.

She said: "We'd been a lower school for a long time, but having the BEST curriculum directors come in with expertise in terms of older children has been hugely supportive to the school.

For our primary move Alan Stupple [BEST Director of Maths] did a presentation



for our Year 4s moving into Year 5, so our parents could have more of an understanding of what happens when they move up to Key Stage 2, because it is different.

"That was amazing. "You just feel you have got someone there to support you – you certainly

**BEST** facts

Langford became a primary in September 2021 as part of CBC's two-tier programme

feel the benefit of being in a trust in those sort of situations."

LAWNSIDE ACADEMY

Biggleswade | Reception - Year 4 | Ofsted – Good (2023) www.lawnsideacademy.org.uk



### The support from BEST during Ofsted really was invaluable

Lawnside Academy was rated Good by Ofsted in March 2023 – the school's first inspection since joining BEST in 2019.

Trust support both before and during the visit was an important factor in helping the school achieve its positive report.

Principal Cheryl Johnson, *pictured with* pupils, said: "The support we received from BEST during Ofsted really was invaluable.

"Beforehand, we had website reviews, a safeguarding audit, school improvement visits and governance support – ensuring Lawnside was in the best place for when we got the call.

During the actual visit, the BESSI team

10



– Director of Education Alison Wilshaw and the curriculum directors for English, Maths and Science – were all on hand to support staff in deep dive conversations."

Central support Lawnside has benefited from this past year also included funded workshops for Science Week, curriculum meetings to assist the school's upcoming transition to primary, Year 2 writing moderation sessions, and marketing help in the wider community.

Miss Johnson added: "There are many benefits for Lawnside in being part of BEST, all of which supported our Good Ofsted in March and our improved end-of-year pupil outcomes in July."

#### PIX BROOK ACADEMY

Stotfold | Year 5 - 11 (currently up to Year 9) | Ofsted – n/a | www.pixbrookacademy.org.uk





Good governance is crucial for ensuring BEST schools thrive.

As committees of our Board of Trustees, LGBs seek to uphold the vision and values of BEST, as well as support and hold Principals to account.

Sue Howley MBE, who stepped down as Pix Brook Academy's first Chair of Governors in the summer of 2023, said: "It's very important for a school and a trust to have strong and effective governance.

66

"Because we're part of a MAT there's an umbrella protection so we don't as

Strong governance is very important for schools and for BEST

> a board have to invent the wheel on everything, such as external auditing, because it's in place from BEST."

Mrs Howley added the BEST Chairs Forum – set up during her time in post – was useful to allow peers to share ideas, resources and experiences from each LGB.

"It was good to get that going, we just felt there was a way to develop our chairs."

#### ROBERT BLOOMFIELD ACADEMY

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

John Linehan, *pictured*, became the new Principal of Robert Bloomfield Academy in June 2023

He said the community links and values of both school and trust were integral to him applying to work for BEST.

He said: "I live in the locality, my daughter comes to the school and my younger two daughters will also attend.

"So one of the first draws to Bloomfield and to BEST was my links with the local community and my desire to ensure the school is as successful and as high performing as possible for that community.

"There is an alignment

between the values of the trust and the VOICE values of the school (Vitality, Opportunity, Independence, Community, Excellence).

"An institution's values are fundamental to the direction it moves in, particularly in education where there's a moral purpose to improve the next generation.

"By being values-driven, you are able to thread through into every part of your school the expectations of what makes a high-functioning British citizen who is happy, healthy, successful and respectful."

Mr Linehan said spending time with BEST CEO Dr Alan Lee during his induction also underlined the importance of values within the trust.





"You can read about values and look on the website, but hearing Alan talk about his ethos, I really liked what he says about wanting the best outcomes for all, but not at the expense of the wellbeing and workload of staff.

- "I got the sense from him people are the most important thing."
- He added: "I have certainly hit the ground

#### running at BEST."

#### **BEST** facts

The school is set to become a secondary as part of two-tier transition in the area

#### SAMUEL WHITBREAD ACADEMY

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



Senior staff at Samuel Whitbread Academy are leading by example when it comes to sharing expertise.

Thomas Rowell is the school's Assistant Principal as well as SEND Lead Practitioner for the whole of BEST.

He said: "Across BEST we have an excellent reputation amongst our communities for our work with children with SEND.

"Our SENCos are all highly skilled professionals who provide amazing, compassionate support and guidance for staff in schools so all of our children can be the best that they can be.

"It is a privilege to work across the schools providing advice and guidance in my role.

"Over the last few years I have continued to provide a space for the SENCos to meet regularly and share best practice, developing the role further.

"I've been able to visit schools and conduct SEND audits, both in BEST schools and beyond, and continue to work with them to support the development of their work with SEND.

"More recently I've been able to conduct SEN screening and assessments, as well as working with local authorities and other agencies to build expertise. Equality and Diversity is another area in which Samuel Whitbread is blazing a trail. Vishalie Yadav, who was BEST's first EDI Lead Practitioner, said: "Equality and Diversity is going from strength to strength at the school.

"We're changing logos, signage, things on the website – everything we'd had on our action plan we've really tried to fulfil.

"Some other schools are really adopting it too and I've supported them when

they've reached out. Etonbury, for example, have done really, really well with new wall displays and curriculum changes."

**BEST** facts

Samuel Whitbread Academy is the largest BEST school with 1,700 students

#### ST CHRISTOPHERS ACADEMY

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



# Expertise comes from the BEST central team in a project like this

St Christophers Academy now has much-needed new classroom space, courtesy of being in BEST.

The two classroom block was paid for through School Condition Allocations funding, money available to BEST as a multi-academy trust.

Alison Austin, BEST Operations Manager, said: "The school didn't have sufficient classroom space for a two form entry primary, and it got to the point where they really needed more accommodation.

"I started off by speaking to our property consultants about a potential new build extension. Unfortunately it was totally out of budget so I looked at alternatives –

14



one of which was getting a second-hand mobile unit and refurbishing it.

"I found the unit and went to see it in August one year, and it needed to be moved, installed, refurbished and be ready for September of the following year.

"The unit was brought down from Nottingham in pieces and reassembled on the school grounds. We had to have quite a lot of groundworks done, put in mains electricity, a DDA compliant ramp, air con, heating and new windows.

"The school wouldn't have had the money for this so benefits from belonging to the trust, and also gets the expertise from the BEST central team in a project like this."

### **NURSERIES**



#### Our nurseries provide first class, family-orientated care which is accessible to all.

We have three facilities which come under the BEST Nurseries banner:

- ★ BEST Nursery (Arlesey)
- ★ BEST Nursery (Langford)
- ★ BEST Nursery (Shefford)

We also have school-based provision at Gothic Mede and St Christophers Academies, complementing the BEST offer to families in Arlesey and Dunstable.

Together, they provide nursery sessions, wraparound care and holiday clubs for children from the age of four months to 12 years, all year round.

Our structures fully support the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework, placing each individual child and their familiy at the centre of learning and development.

We created a new hub manager role for BEST Nurseries this year, appointing Rachel Howarth in January 2023.

She said: "There's been lots of changes and improvements and things are really positive at the moment.

"We have devised a new structure of professional development, are prioritising staff wellbeing and boosting our profile in the community."

Nurseries work in partnership with their local BEST academies, too, to ensure children are ready to step up when their time comes to start school.

"We also work closely with the academies within BEST to ensure school readiness, as our leavers, particularly at Arlesey and Langford, mostly go on to a BEST school."

## CENTRAL SERVICES

#### **Our Central Services team** offers an expert level of specialist support to our schools and nurseries.

We work closely with school/nursery leaders to understand their needs, which helps us to provide high-quality assistance.

We also deliver value for money due to the economies of scale and purchasing power we have as a multi-academy trust.

We support the day-to-day running of our schools and nurseries over a range of key operational areas, including:

#### \* Finance

- **★** HR
- ★ Capital and Estates
- ★ Health and Safety
- ★ Equality and Diversity

Chief Operating Officer Craig Smith and Chief Financial Officer Kim Rowe lead on these areas and oversee teams that, while small, are switched on and effective. Don't just take our word for it - the feedback we receive in our Central Services Annual Survey speaks for itself, year after year.

This invaluable centralised support enables our schools and nurseries to concentrate on what they do best - educating young people.

**\*** ICT



## 100% SATISFACTION

School/nursery leaders who answered 'Highly Satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with internal services in BEST Central Services Annual Survey 2023

★ Policies and Compliance ★ Communications ★ Governance

★ GDPR and Data Protection

easy to access. Any questions or actions are resolved quickly and

BEST Central Services Annual Survey 2023

#### NPO TRAINING SNAPSHOT

#### Improving pupil outcomes and driving up standards is one of our core priorities.

The BEST Education Services and School Improvement Team (BESSI) lies at the heart of this ambition.

Led by Director of Education Alison Wilshaw, the team consists of highly-gualified and dedicated professionals who are specialists in their areas.

In all our schools, subject leads are supported to create an ambitious and engaging curriculum, appropriate to their individual context.

No 'one size fits all' approach is taken, and autonomy to be flexible is held by each school/nursery.

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

All teaching and support staff in BEST have access to an extensive range of quality courses, either for free or available to our schools and nurseries at generously discounted rates.

Further development opportunties exist in the form of a staff shadowing scheme, while BESSI also supports parent information sessions in our schools, covering areas from English and Maths to SATs and internet safety.

We seek a 'Gold Standard' in curriculums. The BESSI team works together with all our schools to achieve this.

Number of people who took part in 5 different NPQ courses in 2022/23 Days of NPQ training run by BESSI, mainly from their Pix Brook base Senior leaders from BEST (and beyond) who helped to deliver these NPO sessions... ... and the number of our senior leaders who are currently being trained to join them 24 

Date we will be delivering the new NPQ in SENDCo Leadership watch this space!



BESSI's expertise stretches beyond our trust, too...

We deliver services to 150 schools across Central Bedfordshire and the wider area

18

### **EDUCATION SERVICES**

schools at the end of the 2022/23 academic year to give them an insight into life in the classroom.

These paid internships saw STEM and MFL university students gain valuable experience within Samuel Whitbread, **Etonbury, Robert Bloomfield and** Langford Village Academies.

The internship programme was led by our Directors of Maths and Science, Alan Stupple and Joanne Boniface.

Mr Stupple said: "Despite the programme only lasting three weeks, there were some amazing achievements and reflections from our interns.

"It has allowed them to see the profession and hopefully inspire some to come into teaching."

### **22/23 REVIEW**



\* Chief Financial Officer Nafia Baust retired after 22 years working for our schools/trust.

Nafia originally joined what was then **Robert Bloomfield Middle School in 2001** as business manager, before assuming the CFO role in 2014, originally for BEMAT before it was succeeded by BEST.

Her successor in the role, Kim Rowe, joined BEST in May.

★ Ian Evason, Executive Principal of Etonbury and Robert Bloomfield Academies, left BEST at the end of the academic year for a headship in Qatar.

John Linehan was appointed Principal of Robert Bloomfield, starting in June, while at Etonbury Joanne Young – who had been Head of School - took over as Principal.

**\*** Other senior trust appointments saw Joanne Boniface join BEST as our new Director of Science, while Rachel Howarth became Nursery Hub Manager, based at BEST Nursery (Langford).



**\*** We held our first BEST curriculum events for Science and Maths.

The inaugural BEST Big Bang Science Fair saw pupils from schools across the trust gather at Pix Brook Academy for a day of experiments and interactive fun.

Meanwhile, the BEST Maths Conference attracted over 60 primary and secondary teaching delegates from 30 schools in the area.

★ Celebrations took place across the BEST family to mark the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

A host of events and activities were organised - including a rose planting at Langford Village Academy, *pictured* right, and a crown parade at Gothic Mede Academy, below - as children and adults in our communities came together to commemorate the special occasion.





★ Campton Academy **Principal Sarah Fraher** completed the 100km Lake District Ultra Challenge on a hot and sunny June weekend.

Her efforts raised over £500 for the school PTA.



**\*** Four BEST schools – Gothic Mede, Langford, Lawnside and Samuel Whitbread Academies all received Good Ofsted reports.

★ National Governance Association Chief Executive Emma Knights was the keynote speaker at the fourth annual BEST governor conference.

**\*** Central Bedfordshire Council gave the go-ahead in October for a £14.1m expansion and relocation of Campton Academy.

The school is set to move to a site on the edge of Shefford, ahead of its transition to primary as part of the council's Schools for the Future programme.

★ Also as part of the two-tier transition programme, capital funding by CBC was agreed and approval given by the Department for Education for Lawnside Academy to convert to a primary.

This transition is set to take place in September 2024.

**\*** Samuel Whitbread Academy hit a sporting high – making national cup finals in three different sports this academic year.

The unique sporting hat-trick was achieved by the school's U18 boys' rugby, U16 boys' football and U15 girls' netball teams.

★ Keeping young people safe online was the theme of the first Shefford & Stotfold Student Conference.

Pupils from 14 schools across the cluster attended the event, which we hosted at BEST House.

### **JOIN BEST**



#### We welcome interest from schools who wish to join our BEST family

We have given you a flavour of the huge benefits of being part of our trust - from the high autonomy provided to Principals backed by a high-performing central team to the economies of scale we can command, relieving 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!

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 first-hand view on what it's like to be a leader within BEST.

For a confidential, informal discussion or an expression of interest, please email our CEO Dr Alan Lee on alee@bestacademies.org.uk

### With almost 800 employees across Central Bedfordshire, **BEST** is one of the biggest

We are united by a special ethos regardless of where in our family of schools, nurseries and central team we work.

employers in the area.

Our overall vision – to grow the BEST in everyone - extends to our staff.

We can only provide an outstanding education to our children if we recruit, retain and develop high-quality staff.

As a single employer, we are able to offer a fantastic range of staff benefits, including development opportunites and money-saving discounts.

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

★ 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, right, to see our latest vacancies or visit 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.

### WORKING FOR US



mynewterm





BEST House, Shefford Road, Clifton, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5QS

01462 811519 info@bestacademies.org.uk www.bestacademies.org.uk



