

THE FOUR STONES

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY



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*One Vision.
One set of Values.
One Team.
One Trust.*

Achieving Together



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INTRODUCTION



The Four Stones Multi Academy Trust (MAT) is constantly refining and improving the way it supports, challenges and improves its schools.

A key strategic aim of the MAT is to ensure that all students make outstanding progress regardless of their starting point and students achieve more highly in this MAT than they would elsewhere.

The School Improvement Strategy is co-ordinated by the Deputy Chief Executive Officer and monitored by the MAT's Education Improvement Team (EIT):

- Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Deputy Chief Executive Officer
- Lead School Improvement Partner



The School Improvement Team (SIT) consists of:

- Deputy Chief Executive Officer
- MAT wide Deputy Headteachers
- Director of SCITT and Teaching School Hub
- Directors of Subjects (English, maths, science and MFL)
- Lead Teachers (computing, geography, history and PSHRE)
- Trust Data Manager
- Trust Leads-eg Attendance, SEND, Safeguarding, Pupil Premium, Teaching and Learning etc
- School Improvement Adviser
- School Improvement Partner-one for each school



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School Improvement Strategy

Our School Improvement Strategy has five strands:

- School Improvement Model;
- Subject/Curriculum Support;
- Institute of Education;
- Intensive support for designated schools; and
- Use of School Improvement Partners (SIPs).

STRAND 1: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODEL

The guiding principle for school improvement is to make the biggest difference to the life chances of the students in schools.

This model is used to drive continual improvement accepting that school improvement is the responsibility of us all. Each school in the MAT will have their identity but will work for the 'greater good' of all the students we serve. This means resources need to be flexible and deployed across all schools where necessary.

This model will clarify what 'makes the difference' and act as a benchmark to measure progress. It will provide 'guidance' for the SIT and as a result will direct school improvement. It is to be used intelligently and not as a checklist of minimum operating standards.

We have identified seven elements for school improvement and detailed guidance is available to support our schools in each of these elements. The model will secure high quality practice in all the features of a successful school.



1. Leadership and vision

Schools that improve emphasise the importance of focused leadership. A clear vision should underpin leadership decisions and as a part of the MAT, this vision should also reflect the wider vision of the MAT. The EIT will drive the changes needed and work with all staff to ensure that they know what to do and are equipped to make it happen. Schools that improve emphasise a vision that has support from trustees, governors, leaders, teachers, students, parents/carers and the wider community. A vision that is underpinned by a set of values and a strong ethos provides a good basis for making changes that take you forward.





Schools need to consider the following:

- The vision needs to focus on the most important role of the school, to help students to learn and make progress in all aspects of their development.
- A strong vision supports the decision-making process. All decisions should be clearly linked to the vision and those that directly support more effective learning and progress should be prioritised.
- The vision and culture can provide a good benchmark against which to reflect on practice.
- The vision needs to be both ambitious and achievable, taking account of the school's current position and articulating what the school will look like in three to five years' time and the MAT's Strategic Plan.
- Accountability is crucial. Every member of staff needs to understand their role in helping students to make the maximum progress during their time at the school.
- The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will need to be able to provide clear direction and set clear expectations, as well as providing the support and development that middle leaders need to do their jobs effectively.
- Trustees, governors and governance more generally needs to evidence the skills and capacity to support the vision, values and ethos of the school and wider MAT.



2. Curriculum

Schools within the MAT share the same principles for the curriculum. It

- supports students' academic success by promoting knowledge based learning;
- is academically challenging and rigorous; and
- is broad and balanced offering both breadth and depth.

We believe the elements covered in our 'Curriculum, Assessment and Teaching Policy' provide students with the best opportunities to master content and increase their likelihood of success, whilst supporting teaching workload. Schools are encouraged to adapt these principles when implementing them to suit the needs of their students, school ethos and their environment.



3. Behaviour and attendance

Students need to attend school and behave well if they are to learn and make progress. Staff must communicate clear expectations of behaviour and attendance, reflective of the school's vision, culture and ethos.

Consistency is key to improving behaviour, and in line with the school's behaviour and attendance policy, this requires the school to have a clear, unwavering and known position on what is acceptable and what is not, allowing for reasonable adjustments to be made for students with SEND. This should be evident in the way staff guide and respond to their students at all times of the school day.

Schools need to consider the following:

- Behaviour as factors that have an impact on learning. Differentiate between poor behaviour and readiness for learning, as different methods will be required to address these.
- Be systematic in the implementation of the behaviour and attendance policy.
 - Train all staff.
 - Inform students.
 - Inform parents/carers.
 - Be consistent.
 - Be relentless.
 - Not accept excuses.
- SLT need to step up and lead in this area. They need to be highly visible (eg-welcoming students at the start of the school day, during lesson change overs, in lessons and during the lunch period etc). Potential risk areas and 'hot spots' need to be identified and well-staffed.

- As behaviour improves, students should be encouraged to 'self-regulate' and take a proactive role in maintaining and developing standards of excellence.
- Middle leaders must take responsibility for their areas and not pass on responsibility to others.
- Class teachers also need to take responsibility for their lessons and not pass on responsibility to others.
- All staff must know and implement any reasonable adjustments to the behaviour policy that are necessary for students with SEND.
- Attending school and reducing persistent absence for all groups is a key driver of school improvement. Schools need to be relentless in their approach especially the most vulnerable.
- Any form of unofficial exclusions, off rolling or encouraging elective home education are unacceptable and have no place in schools in the MAT.



4. Teaching

Schools improve when teaching is consistently strong and effective. The work on vision, leadership and behaviour are all about setting a context in which teaching is effective and students learn and achieve.

'Good' teaching is not one particular approach or another, it is a craft with a variety of tools to 'educate' the person. It should be stimulating, motivating, interesting and impart knowledge and attributes to equip students for the next chapter of their life journey. Techniques and style will change depending on context and the needs of learners.



It is much more than 'teaching to the test' as this can limit the level students reach.



Schools needs to consider the following:

- The school will need to be confident that it knows how to identify and develop effective teaching and how it will know that students are learning and making progress.
- There needs to be open and honest dialogue between teachers about recognising strengths and areas for development.
- Evaluations of teaching quality need to take account of the progress that students are making.
- A wide range of sources at teacher and class level including learning walks, peer assessment, student voice and assessment outcomes. These should all contribute to a wider discussion between teachers and their line managers about their strengths and development needs.
- A clear and open approach to improving teaching will help ensure that improvements made in one area can be developed elsewhere.

The quality of teaching makes the biggest difference to outcomes.



5. Professional Development

Effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD) should be at the heart of our work to engage, develop and retain talented staff in the schools within our region. Our CPD should adhere to the following key principles:

- Built around participants' needs.
- Subject specific content.
- A clear, logical thread.
- Involves explicit discussion, reflection and active research.
- External input from areas of expertise.
- Collaborative learning.
- Powerful leadership.

Within each school, CPD programmes will vary according to the needs of a particular context. We offer an extensive CPD programme across our schools, which would be open to all. The MAT's Institute of Education has a remit for support and training from initial teacher training to executive leadership. The MAT will 'train its own' but continue to be outward looking to get the best from the wider system.



6. Intervention strategies

The quality of teaching across all years and all groups is the key to quality outcomes and improving life chances. Resources should be targeted to the classroom. However, at points it is necessary to intervene to accelerate progress.

This may be to support early reading difficulties, Year 7 catch up, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 intervention to ensure students reach their potential, or at any point in the learning journey when support is needed. Specific interventions may be needed to support students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Schools need to consider the following:

- Interventions should be evidence based and retained only if evaluation shows a clear and positive impact.
- Interventions target the right group of students.

- Establish clear accountability for intervention strategies.
- Facilitate departments working together to coordinate student support.
- Create a clear monitoring, evaluation and review cycle to check progress.
- Research suggests promising strategies include:
 - Rigorous monitoring and use of data.
 - Raising student aspirations using engagement/aspiration programmes.
 - Engaging parents/carers (particularly hard-to-reach parents/carers) and raising their aspirations.
 - Developing social and emotional competencies.
 - Supporting school transitions.
 - Providing strong and visionary leadership.
 - Small group or 1:1 teaching.
 - Peer tutoring.
- There are a number of interventions that do not work-eg large groups returning after school being re-taught undifferentiated work that is not focused on the precise skills/knowledge that students lack.
- Do not routinely rely on last minute interventions.



7. Self-evaluation and action planning

The MAT recognises the importance of self-evaluation as a crucial part of our schools' ongoing cycle of review and improvement planning. A self-evaluation summary is an important tool in this process, which enables schools to draw together an evaluation of different aspects of their work leading to an evaluation of the quality of education provided overall.

The MAT requires schools to produce a school development plan at least every academic year. These documents directly reflect the work that will need to be done in order to achieve targets set and serve as a live and ongoing record of progress towards achieving targets and other school improvement priorities. Although the plan is frequently considered and evaluated over the course of an academic year by middle and senior leaders in the schools, it is also a document that is well-organised, succinct, unambiguous, data-driven and well presented, such that it can be presented to and understood by all stakeholders at any given moment throughout the course of the academic year.

Schools needs to consider the following:

- Is there a systematic cycle of self-evaluation and development planning?
- Is the development plan really focussing on improvements rather than a list of jobs that need to be completed?
- Is it clear what success looks like and who is responsible for actions?

STRAND 2: SUBJECT/ CURRICULUM SUPPORT



Schools need additional capacity to maintain their standards and improve where necessary.

The SIT and our Subject Leaders of Education (SLEs) support classroom practice focussing on raising standards and supporting colleagues.



Activities include:

- In lessons-teaching students.
- Team teaching to develop practice.
- Splitting 'priority groups' to maximise achievement and enable catch up where necessary.
- Small group intervention across the ability range, in line with the MAT's priorities.
- Joint planning with teachers at all levels.
- Moderating assessment-setting the standard.
- Quality Assurance-as subject experts making sure standards are high.
- Contributing to the development of MAT-wide curricular and subject specific CPD.
- Leadership development.





SECTION 4

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STRAND 3: INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

The MAT is committed to training new entrants to the profession and developing its existing staff, 'grow our own' and do this at several levels. From providing experience for teaching assistants and ITT applicants, to professional development for Headteachers and members of the Executive and Central Teams.

- Secondary subject networks: These events focus on subject specific training, briefings on current pedagogical and curricula thinking in the subject as well as a forum to share ideas and best practice.
- Professional development: Schools have the autonomy to deliver their own CPD packages to their staff dependent on local need. They are able to draw on materials for subject specific CPD, leadership training and curriculum development.

The Institute of Education brings this together in a cohesive manner so that all staff have access and the quality and the principles of MAT are central to the training.

School Centred Initial Teaching Training (SCITT) and Teaching School Hub: Teachers are our biggest asset. The key to success is high quality teachers in our schools. The MAT's approach to teacher development is led by its SCITT and Teaching School Hub. We are committed to basing our work on evidence and work with different partners to develop best practice. This is through the networks and also through national organisations.

STRAND 4: INTENSIVE SUPPORT FOR DESIGNATED SCHOOLS

One of the key elements that leads to sustained improvement is reducing in school variation. As a MAT, we also need to reduce inter-school variation. As a result, we have differing degrees of support we give to schools which is based on need and not entitlement.

A termly assessment of the schools in the MAT, and those potentially joining the MAT, is made against the following quality indicators and criteria:

- Ofsted categorisation
- Outcomes and current progress measures
- Leadership capability and capacity
- Curriculum and staffing
- Teaching, learning and assessment
- Climate for learning-eg attendance and behaviour
- Governance

Schools are risk assessed and designated as:

- Stabilise-classified as 'High Risk'
- Repair-classified as 'High Risk'
- Improve-classified as 'Some Risk'
- Sustain-classified as 'Low Risk'

Based on the designation, the EIT will identify additional support to be allocated. The vast majority of the support will come from the SIT but, if appropriate and budget permitting, the EIT can approve support from external providers.

'High risk' schools:

- Deputy CEO to produce a tailored plan and report actions and impact to the CEO monthly and to the Progress Board, Executive Team and committee of the Trust Board each half-term.



- Deputy CEO works with the school intensively for a number of days a week for an extended period of time to provide capacity and capability to help rapidly improve the school and address specific issues.
- One or two of the Deputy Headteachers-MAT wide work with the school intensively for 5 days a week for at least a term to provide capacity and capability to help rapidly improve the school and address specific issues.
- Deployment of one or more of the Directors of Subject (including secondment).
- Support from the Institute of Education-eg we have large numbers of SLEs to be deployed in all subject areas.
- Support from the School Improvement Partner for 10 days a year.
- Support from the School Improvement Adviser for up to 20 days a term.
- Additional support and resource as required.

The interventions are swift in order to generate rapid improvement that enables the school improvement planning process to be delegated back to the school at the earliest opportunity (once confidence can be assured that the school is securely and sustainably no longer at 'High risk').

'Some risk' schools:

- Deputy CEO to produce a tailored plan and report actions and impact to the CEO monthly and to the Progress Board, Executive Team and committee of the Trust Board each term.
- Support from the EIT based on the specific departmental or leadership needs of the school.
- Support from the Institute of Education-eg we have large numbers of SLEs to be deployed in all subject areas.
- Support from the School Improvement Partner for up to 10 days a year.
- Support from the School Improvement Adviser for up to 10 days a year.
- Additional support and resource as required.

'Low risk' schools:

- Deputy CEO to produce a tailored plan and report actions and impact to the CEO monthly and to the Progress Board, Executive Team and committee of the Trust Board each term.
- Support from the EIT based on the specific departmental or leadership needs of the school.
- Support from the Institute of Education-eg we have large numbers of SLEs to be deployed in all subject areas.
- Support from the School Improvement Partner for 5 days a year.
- Additional support and resource as required.

The Trust Board will also consider the interventions outlined in the Scheme of Delegation (see the 'Intervention in schools causing concern' section).

STRAND 5: USE OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNERS (SIPS)



School Improvement Partners

The MAT employs SIPS to provide professional challenge and support to one or a number of schools by:

- Acting as a critical professional friend to the schools, helping their senior leadership teams to evaluate the schools' performance, identify priorities for improvement and plan effective change;
- helping build the schools' capacity to improve students' achievement and to realise other key outcomes for students that bear on achievement;
- contributing to whole-school improvement in the schools, including effective contribution to outcomes;
- providing challenge and support for the senior leadership team in the schools;
- guiding governors in the efficient undertaking of their role including supporting any training to address gaps in skills and experience; and
- providing summary information to the Lead School Improvement Partner (LSIP), who oversees the work of all SIPS in the MAT and reports to a committee of the Trust Board on strengths and risks, including recommendation of investment.



SIPs

- provide an objective assessment the school's self-evaluation and school improvement plans against available evidence including the Ofsted reports and readiness and comment on their effectiveness;
- provide an objective review of the school's performance data;



- provide an annual objective review of the identified areas for scrutiny;
- challenge the school where necessary, particularly on its capacity to improve and whether it is focusing on the most important priorities for improvement and development;
- support the LSIP in setting the school's targets and priorities for the academic year, based on the analysis of the data, to ensure that they are ambitious but realistic/achievable and focused on all students progressing and fulfilling their potential;
- advise the school on resources and strategies which fit priorities;
- support the LSIP by recommending the designation of individual schools and consequently the necessary package of support and challenge and ensure that this is appropriately managed;
- report the outcomes of the dialogue with the school to the Deputy CEO and LSIP;
- provide advice and guidance as part of the appraisal committee for the Headteacher; and
- contribute to the effective development of the MAT's School Improvement Strategy.



School Visits

The standard allocation is 5 days per academic year (see the guidelines in the 'Strand 4: Intensive support for designated schools') but requests for extra visits can be made by the relevant Headteacher through the Deputy CEO.



Lead School Improvement Partner

The MAT also employs a LSIP to provide professional challenge and support to all schools by overseeing the work of the SIPs and developing the MAT's School Improvement Strategy as a member of the Education Improvement Team.

The LSIP will lead the training of the individual SIPs and the two training sessions will take place in October and June.



Each visit by the SIP to the school will be scheduled and agenda items will be steered and agreed by the EIT during their penultimate meeting of the academic year. There will also be flexibility for agreed items between the SIP and Headteacher (for 'Low risk' and 'Some risk' schools) or between the SIP and Deputy CEO (for 'High risk' schools).

SIPs will make professional judgement on which elements of the time allocation will be made on site and which can take place through Microsoft Teams.

The minimum, for all schools, irrespective of designation, is outlined below. Each of these on-site visits must include a one-hour learning walk.

- Day visit in September
- Day visit in November (to include the appraisal of the Headteacher)
- Day visit in January
- Day visit in March
- Day visit in June

Where learning walks, work scrutiny, student voice exercises take place, these will be determined in dialogue with the school, although the SIP has licence to choose which lessons, books and students to include.

However, SIPs will listen to school requests to avoid a member of staff with a specific issue, not involve a student with a specific issue etc.

The agendas for the visits will be issued to the SIPs and Headteachers during the half term before the visits and any necessary paperwork must be emailed to the SIP at least 5 working days in advance of the visit.



SECTION 7

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MONITORING

- The School Improvement Strategy is co-ordinated by the Deputy Chief Executive Officer and monitored by the MAT's Education Improvement Team (EIT).
- Headteachers are line managed by the CEO or Deputy CEO and are key in the monitoring and evaluation of the schools' progress.
- Progress Board meetings.
 - Progress Board meetings are a systematic way to monitor the progress of schools against their targets and lines of enquiry. They sit frequently to evaluate the position and request further support from the EIT where it is needed.
 - Progress Board meetings for all schools will be held in September, January and May. Progress Board meetings for 'High risk' schools will also be held in November, March and June.
 - In the first meeting of the academic year, the annual scrutiny of the KS2, GCSE and A-Level outcomes will be considered.
 - The minutes of the meetings will be shared with the EIT, Local Governing Bodies and Standards Committee.
- Education Improvement Team meetings.
 - These meetings will evaluate the progress across the MAT and take any necessary action.
 - Education Improvement Team meetings for all schools will be held one week after the Progress Board meetings so that the minutes can be scrutinised.
 - In the penultimate Education Improvement Team meeting of the academic year, the schools' targets for the following academic year are considered as are the key lines of enquiry that the Progress Board will monitor.

It is at this point the relevant support package is drafted bearing in mind the schools' risk assessments and designations (see the guidelines in the 'Strand 4: Intensive support for designated schools').

- In the first Education Improvement Team meeting of the academic year, the annual scrutiny of the KS2, GCSE and A-Level outcomes will be considered before finalising the schools' risk assessments, designations, targets for the academic year and support package.
- Standards Committee (a committee of the Trust Board): these meetings will be held one week after the Education Improvement Team meetings so that the outcomes of the Progress Board and Education Improvement Team meetings can be scrutinised.
- There will be several reviews/audits across all schools during each year. For example:
 - Pupil premium reviews;
 - Safeguarding audits; and
 - Termly governor reviews with an external adviser who guides governors in the efficient undertaking of their role.

SECTION 8

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REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION

- The School Improvement Adviser should complete a report after each visit. This should be emailed to the Deputy CEO within 3 working days of the conclusion of the visit. The report should be shared with the relevant Headteacher and the groups at their subsequent meeting: Progress Board and Education Improvement Team.





- The School Improvement Partner should complete a report after each visit. This should be emailed to the Deputy CEO and Lead School Improvement Partner within 3 working days of the conclusion of the visit. The report should be shared with the relevant Headteacher and Progress Board at their subsequent meeting. The Lead School Improvement Partner will summarise the reports from the individual School Improvement Partners for the subsequent meeting of the Education Improvement Team.
- The Lead School Improvement Partner should complete a report after each visit. This should be emailed to the CEO and Deputy CEO within 3 working days of the conclusion of the visit. The report should be discussed at the subsequent Education Improvement Team meeting.
- SLEs should complete a report after each visit. This should be emailed to the Deputy CEO within 3 working days of the conclusion of the visit. The report should be shared with the relevant Headteacher and the following groups at their next meeting: Progress Board and Education Improvement Team.
- All other members of the SIT who are deployed to work in any of the schools in the MAT should complete a report on a half-termly basis and email it to the Deputy CEO by the appropriate deadline. The reports should be shared with the relevant Headteacher and the following groups at their subsequent meeting: Progress Board and Education Improvement Team. The Deputy CEO will chair a monthly, remote meeting of the SIT team to review and evaluate their work in each school in the MAT.



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