Exceed Academies Trust

People Strategy 2026–2029

Empowering People. Driving Excellence. Transforming Lives.


Exceed
Academies Trust
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People Strategy
Empowering People. Driving Excellence. Transforming Lives.
OUR VALUES
BE EXCELLENT
We give our best in everything we do
BE COLLABORATIVE
We achieve more together
BE RESPECTFUL
We value and celebrate everyone
BE AMBITIOUS
We aim high and keep getting better
BE INQUISITIVE
We are curious, reflective and open
OUR PEOPLE
970+
Colleagues across the Trust
14
Schools/Settings across the Trust
5,000+
Children and young people
1
Shared purpose: transforming lives
People at the heart of everything we do
STAFF WELLBEING & WORK–LIFE BALANCE
We prioritise the wellbeing of our colleagues and encourage a healthy work–life balance. Through a range of wellbeing initiatives, flexible working opportunities and mental health support, we help our staff thrive – in and out of work.
Your wellbeing matters.
Supported today, thriving tomorrow.
EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND BELONGING
We are committed to equality of opportunity, embracing diversity and fostering a culture of belonging for all.
Our Equity, Diversity and Belonging Strategy guides everything we do.
OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU
GROW
We invest in you
High-quality training, clear career pathways and development opportunities.
SUPPORT
We look after you
Your wellbeing matters. We create healthy, inclusive and supportive workplaces.
BELONG
We value you
A culture of respect, inclusion and collaboration where everyone can thrive and be themselves.
MAKE AN IMPACT
You make the difference
Empowering you to lead, innovate and transform lives every day.
HOW WE WORK
People first in every decision
Trust, transparency and accountability
Evidence informed and future focused
Strong leadership at every level
Celebrating success and learning together
OUR IMPACT
Stronger schools and outstanding experiences
Better outcomes for children and young people
Our staff feel happy, valued and well supported
Thriving communities and brighter futures
Together, we Exceed

1. Executive Summary

The People Strategy 2026–2029 sets out how Exceed Academies Trust will attract, develop, support and retain a high-quality workforce capable of delivering outstanding experiences and outcomes for children and young people. With over 970 colleagues working across 14 schools and settings, supporting more than 5,000 children and young people, the strategy places people at the heart of the Trust's shared purpose of transforming lives.

The strategy is built around the Trust's existing values, which we believe translates to the following People specific values — **Be Excellent**, **Be Collaborative**, **Be Respectful**, **Be Ambitious** **and** **Be Inquisitive** — and further translates into four clear commitments to colleagues: **Grow**, **Support**, **Belong** **and** **Make an Impact**. The intention is to move from an internally focused People action plan to a visible, meaningful and Trust-wide People Strategy that staff, leaders and stakeholders can understand, own and deliver.

The attached analysis identifies strategic issues across recruitment, retention, leadership, wellbeing, equity, diversity and belonging, culture, learning and development, workforce planning and employee relations. This paper sets out how the People Strategy will respond to those issues through targeted action, stronger workforce intelligence, and a clear KPI and governance framework.

2. Strategy at a Glance

Shared Purpose	Transforming lives through stronger schools, better outcomes for children and young people, well-supported staff and thriving communities.
Our people	970+ colleagues across 14 schools/settings, supporting 5,000+ children and young people.
Values	**Be Excellent**, **Be Collaborative**, **Be Respectful**, **Be Ambitious** and **Be Inquisitive**.
Colleague Commitments	***Grow:*** invest in development. ***Support:*** prioritise wellbeing. ***Belong:*** create an inclusive culture. ***Make an Impact:*** empower colleagues to lead and innovate.
How we work	People-first decisions, trust and transparency, evidence-informed and future-focused practice, strong leadership and learning together.

3. Strategic Priorities, Issues and Actions

3.1 Attraction and Recruitment

The Trust faces competition for high-quality teaching and support staff, challenges in hard-to-fill roles, inconsistent candidate experience and workforce diversity gaps. The response will be to strengthen the employer brand around ***Grow***, ***Support***, ***Belong*** and ***Make an Impact***; establish talent pipelines to enable succession planning, actively promote and implement apprenticeship routes and partnerships; introduce a standard recruitment framework and candidate journey; and monitor recruitment data to support targeted attraction strategies.

3.2 Retention and Employee Experience

The analysis identifies risks around loss of experienced staff, retention challenges in specific schools or roles, limited understanding of the employee value proposition, and perceived limits to career progression. The response will include annual exit interview analysis, review and analysis of retention data, targeted action plans, clearer communication of the People Strategy, and published career pathways for teaching, leadership and professional services staff.

3.3 Leadership Capability and Succession

Variability in leadership practice, inconsistent people management capability, succession risks and limited future leadership pipeline are key issues. The strategy will define leadership expectations aligned to Trust values, deliver mandatory management development, introduce succession planning and 'Future Pathways' conversations, and support aspiring leaders through focused development programmes.

3.4 Staff Wellbeing and Work–Life Balance

Workload pressures, employee burnout, increasing well-being concerns, stress-related absence and inconsistent well-being support are identified as strategic risks. The Trust will establish workload reviews and reduction plans, develop a comprehensive wellbeing strategy with measurable outcomes, monitor absence trends and provide targeted interventions, and create a consistent minimum wellbeing offer across the Trust.

3.5 Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB)

The strategy recognises the need to address underrepresentation, variations in employee experience, limited understanding of inclusive practice and risks relating to discrimination, bullying or exclusion. Trust wide actions will include establishing workforce diversity baselines and targets, undertaking inclusion surveys and listening exercises, consistently delivering EDB training and strengthening reporting, investigation and monitoring processes.

3.6 Culture, Engagement and Employee Voice

Variable engagement, inconsistent use of values, limited employee voice mechanisms and inconsistent recognition all affect culture. The Trust will implement regular staff engagement surveys, develop behavioural frameworks linked to values, strengthen staff forums, networks and consultation groups, and introduce Trust-wide recognition and celebration activity.

3.7 Learning, Development and Workforce Planning

The strategy addresses unequal access to development, workforce skills gaps, limited CPD impact evaluation, limited development for support staff, demographic risks, skills shortages, limited workforce intelligence and financial pressures affecting staffing models. The response will include a central learning and development framework, skills audits, CPD evaluation, specific career pathways, workforce forecasts, identification of critical roles, strategic dashboards and long-term workforce scenarios.

3.8 Employee Relations and Trust

High levels of formal casework, inconsistent policy application, employee confidence in processes and recurring grievance and disciplinary themes require a more preventative and transparent approach. The response will include reviewing root causes, auditing practice, providing guidance for managers, increasing transparency and communication around People services, and monitoring ER data to identify themes.

4. Delivery, Governance and Measures of Success

Successful delivery of the People Strategy will require a clear implementation framework, strategic oversight and measurable indicators. The KPI framework will cover people, wellbeing, inclusion, development and engagement measures, including turnover, retention of new starters, vacancy rates, recruitment timescales, internal promotion rates, sickness absence, stress-related absence, staff wellbeing survey results, workforce diversity profile, inclusion survey scores, CPD participation, leadership programme completion, succession readiness, career progression rates, staff engagement scores, and values and culture measures.

Strategic ownership will sit with the Chief People Officer/Deputy People Officer, with oversight from the Chief Executive Officer and Trust Board. The operational delivery of the strategy will be led by the People Team in partnership with senior leaders/Headteachers.

Termly reporting, regular engagement with trade unions and staff voice mechanisms, and an annual review of the strategy will ensure the approach remains evidence-informed, outcome-focused and responsive to Trust priorities.

5. Risks and Year 1–3 Priorities

Key Risks	Recommended Strategic Priorities
Difficulty recruiting and retaining talented staff	• Build a data-led workforce planning model • Strengthen career pathways through targeted learning programmes • Create a consistent candidate and new starter experience • 'Candidate Information Pack' to be included with all new vacancies and published on Trust recruitment webpage • Regular internal promotion of all Trust vacancies • Increased social media presence (LinkedIn) • Enhanced succession planning, via Future Pathways conversations • Pro-active identification of hard-to-fill roles • Identify exit interview themes and turnover patterns • Strengthen flexible workload
Increased absence and wellbeing concerns	• Strengthen leadership and management capability • Ongoing proactive management of absence data, with early intervention • Regular promotion of the Trust Employee Assistance Programme • Introduce wellbeing check-in points at key stages of the employee lifecycle e.g. induction, role changes, significant workload periods, maternity/family leave and leadership transition • Review Staff Attendance Management policy and procedure to ensure process is clear and consistent in all settings/schools
Inconsistent leadership across schools	• Leadership development/succession planning • Mandatory People Management training • Introduction of People KPIs – staff engagement, values and culture measures, succession readiness, sickness absence, retention/turnover • Increased employee voice opportunities – highlight leadership inconsistencies
Reduced employee engagement and trust	• Increase Trust-wide employee voice – surveys, forums • Introduce a 'You Said, We Did' feedback cycle • Deliver a comprehensive wellbeing strategy • Create consistent recognition • Celebrate successes • Regular review of People policies and processes – use employee voice to involve and empower staff • Visibility of the People Team in all schools/settings
EDB objectives not achieved	• Consistently help to promote and embed the Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB) strategy across the Trust • Regularly review People policies and processes, in line with and embedding EDB • Review recruitment practices through EDB lens - attraction, advertising, selection and onboarding • Introduction of a 'candidate experience' questionnaire • People Team represented at EDB working groups/future Trust strategy
Reduced ability to sustain school improvement and pupil outcomes	• Create clear talent and succession pathways • Closely link the People Strategy to school improvement priorities, where relevant • Support senior leaders/Headteachers to manage performance effectively, ensuring a Trust-wide Performance Management process/toolkit • Build Leadership through cross-school collaboration

	• Evaluate the impact of People Strategy actions on school improvement outcomes
Failure to realise the ambition of becoming an employer of choice	• Establish meaningful People KPIs linked directly to Trust outcomes • Strengthen the employer brand across recruitment and communications • Ensure a consistent Trust-wide onboarding experience, to support the Trust's reputation • Career development a visible part of the employer offer, i.e. learning programmes, apprenticeships etc. • Use employee voice to identify ways of strengthening their experience • Position wellbeing as part of the employment offer • Create and monitor People KPI's – e.g. turnover/retention, vacancy rates, recruitment timescales, sickness absence, wellbeing surveys, workforce diversity profile, CPD offer, and succession planning/Future Pathways conversations

6. Looking Ahead

The Exceed Academies Trust People Strategy provides a coherent Trust-wide framework connecting values, workforce priorities and organisational outcomes. It sets a clear direction for how the Trust will attract, develop, support and retain colleagues, while ensuring that People activity remains directly connected to school improvement, organisational growth and the Trust's shared purpose of transforming lives.

Looking ahead, the strategy should be understood as a live framework rather than a static document. Over the next three years, it will guide evidence-informed decision making across workforce planning, leadership development, wellbeing, Equity, Diversity and Belonging (EDB), employee voice and the wider colleague experience. This will enable the Trust to respond proactively to workforce challenges while maintaining a consistent and values-led approach across all schools and settings.

In the first year, the focus will be on establishing strong foundations. This will include strengthening workforce intelligence and People KPIs, embedding consistent recruitment and onboarding practice, developing clearer career pathways, launching' Future Pathways' conversations, and shaping a visible and consistent wellbeing offer. These actions will provide the baseline from which progress can be measured, risks can be identified early, and targeted support can be delivered where it is needed most.

As implementation progresses, the Trust will move from activity to impact. Regular reporting to senior leaders and the Trust Board, alongside staff voice, trade union engagement and annual review, will help to test what is working, identify emerging themes and adjust priorities in a transparent and proportionate way. This approach will ensure the strategy remains responsive, credible and firmly focused on outcomes for employees, our schools/settings, and all of our children and young people.

Ultimately, successful delivery will be seen not only through improved workforce measures, but through the everyday experience of colleagues across the Trust. By creating the conditions for staff to **Grow**, feel **Supported**, **Belong** and **Make an Impact**, Exceed Academies Trust will continue to strengthen schools, improve outcomes for children and young people, and build a workforce that feels happy, valued and well supported.