Aspire Schools Trust: School Improvement Model

'Every teacher needs to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better.' (Dylan Wiliam)

'Teaching quality … is arguably the greatest lever at our disposal for improving the life chances of the young people in our care (John Hattie, 2015), particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds' (Dylan Wiliam, 2016)
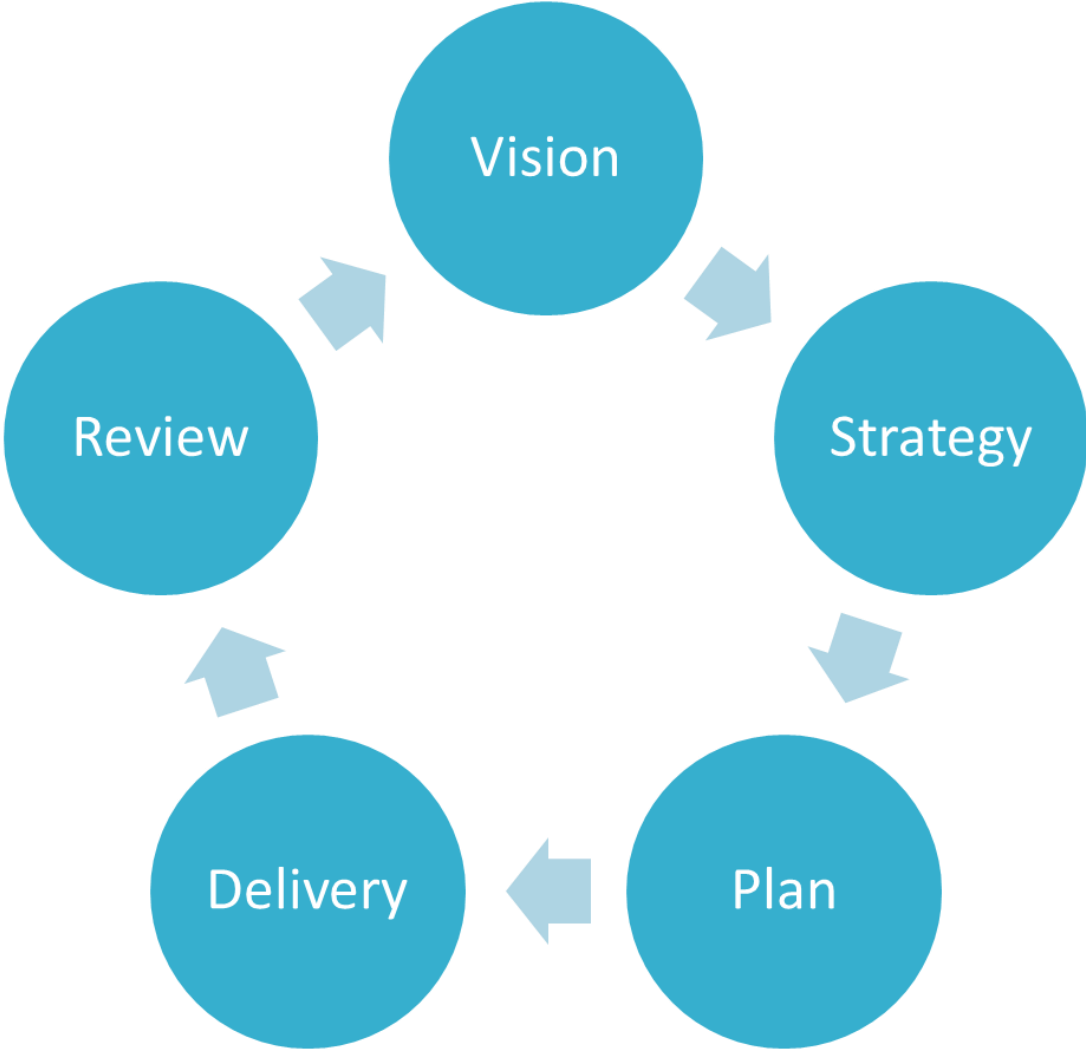
'One of the aims of bringing schools together in Trusts is to provide them with levels of support and collective learning that would not be achievable for any school on its own. These findings show how important this can be to schools' resilience in the most challenging of circumstances, and how being part of a greater whole builds that resilience.' (Mujis and Samson, 2021)

Aspire Schools Trust's School Improvement Model has been heavily influenced by CST's [Knowledge Building – School Improvement at Scale](#) (2021).

We fully support the 4 propositions in the CST document that:

1. **The goal is for every teacher in every classroom to be as good as they can be in what they teach and <u>how</u> they teach**

2. **For this to happen, we need to mobilise for every teacher the best evidence from research**

3. **There is no improvement for pupils without improvement in teaching, and no improvement in teaching without the best professional development for teachers**

4. **Strong structures can enable strong practice to exist in all our schools**

The School Improvement Cycle

	Core Principles	Strategy for Embedding Core Principles
LEADERSHIP	Children come first – this directs all decision-making in each school and the wider Trust	• Schools joining AST must be aligned to our *Aspire* ethos and 'Children come first' principles (explored within our due diligence phase). If they are not, we are the wrong Trust for them • Aligned autonomy is about committing to our ethos and core principles, whilst retaining flexibility to preserve each school's distinct values, structures, uniform, and a whole range of distinctive features unique to every school • Safeguarding has to be robust, with each school implementing clear policies and procedures, while maintaining a strong culture of safeguarding. An annual external review in each school ensures that this is a constant focus • Recruiting and retaining good staff is key to all schools. We spend a lot of time finding the right people, ensuring that their roles are fulfilling, rewarding them well and ensuring they have opportunities for development and promotion • The Trust's financial strategy centres around resource optimisation, where the curriculum should lead the finances and it should not be the finances leading the curriculum. We want all schools to live within their means whilst deploying their resources astutely to maximise benefits for the children. Internal
	Aspire ethos – 'No borders, just horizons' (Amelia Earhart)	
	Safeguarding is fundamental (annual external safeguarding review and action plan for all Trust schools)	
	Principled leadership (moral, ethical and civic leadership)	
	Aligned autonomy for all schools not 'one size fits all'	
	Talent management – from Early Career Teacher to Headteacher or CEO…	
	Financial stability – curriculum-led financial planning	
	Governance at a local school level effectively scrutinises standards and provides challenge and support for school leaders	

	Commitment to local and parental representation in school governance	Scrutiny three times a year and annual external audit. • Governance is subject to annual self-review and three-yearly External Review (ERG) in line with the Academy Trust Handbook. Scheme of Delegation is reviewed annually and is adapted for each school, delegating responsibility to local governors in line with their stage on their development journey towards excellence • Schools need to be rooted in the heart of their communities. Parents and local co-opted Governors are integral to Local Governing Bodies to ensure that each school remains a unique community asset, committed to raising aspiration for children in the local area
TEACHING	Quality first teaching **not** multiple interventions	• Improving the quality and consistency of teaching will have the greatest impact on the learning and outcomes of our children • A review of the quality of teaching and SEND provision are the starting points for every school once they join our Trust • These reviews highlight strengths and areas for development while framing the scope for future professional learning to embed evidence-informed teaching approaches (e.g. cold-calling, say it again better, I do…We do…You do, use of mini whiteboards, etc) • Disadvantaged children are a priority for all teachers to close knowledge and learning gaps
	Effective teaching pedagogy is based on evidence and research – consistent implementation of best practice	
	Teachers' subject knowledge must be secure to deliver high-quality lessons	
	Adaptive teaching **not** three-way differentiation – aim high and scaffold down	

	Evidence and research informs and determines practice – *Walkthrus*, Cognitive Load Theory, Rosenshine's Principles, Metacognition (modelling)	• Teacher subject knowledge enhancement is supported through professional learning activities when required (often a particular challenge in 4-11 Primary Schools and Junior Schools where teachers teach multiple subjects)
	Prior learning is regularly re-visited, with knowledge retention regularly assessed	• Adaptive teaching ensures we never place a ceiling on what our pupils can achieve • Learning Walks are regular, supportive and essential to determine the quality of teaching and to highlight best practice to be shared • UPS3 teachers have a crucial role to play in coaching and mentoring new teachers • Annual QA Review programme in all schools (covering curriculum subjects, Teaching, SEND, Year Groups, etc)
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING	'Growing our own'	• We are committed to attracting, developing and retaining the best people and our Trust HR strategy is focused upon this core aim
	Robust Performance Management (moving beyond a one-year time horizon)	• In many schools, Performance Management just focuses on a single-year and this fosters a culture of short-term, inconsistent plans and targets. We explore colleagues' longer-term career ambitions and try to create a staged pathway (with linked CPD and support with further qualifications) to allow teaching and non-teaching staff to achieve their wider goals to benefit our children
	NPQs, Masters, PhDs	
	Nurturing, supporting and enthusing our Early Career Teachers – opportunities for early responsibility	
	Active engagement with Teaching School Hubs (Redhill and LEAD) and Research Schools (Kyra)	• We want all of our schools to be outward-looking to attract new staff from national adverts. We actively seek applicants from a range of diverse backgrounds to enrich our

	Commitment to developing Initial Teacher Training students with local providers (universities, SCITTs, etc)	pupils' lives and experiences – we seek to bring the world to our children
	Teaching Assistants trained and highly-skilled in leading a range of interventions	• Support staff play a pivotal role in all of our schools and we invest in them in exactly the same way as teachers
	Peer observation/open classrooms	• We build and sustain a Trust culture where we learn from each other and seek to make everything we do incrementally better than it was before
	High frequency, low stakes observation	• Learning and acquiring knowledge never stops for our children, and it should never stop for our staff • Best practice is shared between schools through joint training and school-to-school collaboration
BEHAVIOUR	Outstanding behaviour is the essential foundation on which to build effective teaching and learning	• All Trust schools expect the highest standards of behaviour and this is continually monitored and regularly reviewed by school leaders, the LGB and the Trust
	Relationships are central – warmth, kindness and assertiveness	• As children come first in all of our schools they have a right to feel safe and supported within lessons where their teachers are able to teach
	Engaging teaching - from teachers with great subject knowledge - creates the conditions for good behaviour	• All of our schools have Behaviour Policies agreed at a local level by the LGBs which focus on positive behaviour management and balance Rewards and Sanctions
	Clear expectations within established routines	• Children who struggle to regulate their behaviour or emotions receive highly effective support to overcome their difficulties
	Positive framing	
	Choices and consequences	• School staff receive regular training on behaviour management and in ensuring that

	Rewards and celebrations drive positive behaviour	all lessons are engaging and accessible for all children (inclusivity is central)
	Home-school partnership	• We build a culture of Rewards and celebration in all of our schools • We value the support and partnership of parents as we try to support each pupil's journey on the path from childhood to adulthood
CURRICULUM	Knowledge is carefully selected and sequenced	• A Curriculum Review is undertaken for each school when they join our Trust
	Adapted to each school's context – what knowledge and learning experiences do our pupils need relative to a school within a different social context or population demographic?	• Curriculum in each school is subject to on-going review as part of our QA processes led by the Trust's School Improvement Lead
	The curriculum is the progression model (Christine Counsell)	• Knowledge is built incrementally and allows pupils to think beyond their lived experiences with the ability to imagine alternatives for their lives
	Ambitious for all learners	
	Broader curriculum develops cultural capital	• Breadth of curriculum is key and it should not be narrowed in any school as this creates critical knowledge deficits and breaks chains of knowledge
	'Our curriculum should whisper to our children, "*you belong. You did not come from nowhere. You are one of us. All this came before you, and one day you too might add to it*"' (Newmark, 2019)	• There is no such thing as a 'finished' curriculum – it is subject to constant review and development in all schools
	British Values are central and re-visited regularly	• Teachers (often supported by TAs) meet regularly in our schools to follow a Plan → Do → Review model to develop the curriculum
	Develops a universal understanding and respect for Protected Characteristics within the Equality Act 2010	• The curriculum sets out the journey that each child needs to go on to get better at the subject (Fordham, 2020)
	Encourages a culture of curiosity to foster life-long learning	

	Effectively prepares pupils for the next stage in their learning (EYFS→KS1→ KS2→KS3→KS4→KS5→ University/Apprenticeship/Employment)		• The curriculum – in a carefully planned way – incrementally introduces children to a world beyond their lived experiences • The broader curriculum is important for all pupils, but building cultural capital is vital for our disadvantaged children and this must be strategically planned and implemented in each school
INCLUSION	Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and those who are Looked After (LAC and Post-LAC) or are in receipt of Pupil Premium funding, access the full breadth, challenge and richness of the curriculum		• The Trust is committed to ensuring that curriculum narrowing, gaming and off-rolling never happen in our schools and this is actively monitored • We follow the evidence around what works to make the greatest positive impact on our children • Pupil Premium funding is reviewed for impact and where interventions do not make the desired impact, they are dropped and replaced by new evidence-based approaches • TAs should not be the 'unsung heroes' in our schools as they are critical to the learning of a large number of our children. They have the same status as teachers while fulfilling a narrower but no less vital role in pupils' learning • Improving teaching quality will have the biggest impact on Pupil Premium and all vulnerable children – this is why Quality First Teaching is at the heart of our School Improvement Model
	Strategies are research-informed (EEF Guidance Reports, OFSTED Subject Reviews, peer-reviewed academic research, school-centred action research, etc)		
	Teaching Assistants deliver high-quality one-to-one and small group support using structured, evidence-based interventions (EEF)		
	High quality teaching has a disproportionately positive impact on disadvantaged pupils – great teachers will make the biggest difference for our most vulnerable learners		

STUDENT LEADERSHIP	Multiple opportunities to build confidence and self-belief	• Pupils are listened to and have a voice in all Trust schools
	Student voice is meaningful, actively sought, informs practice and is a catalyst for positive change	• Pupils are involved in the selection process for pupil-facing staff roles in our schools
	Provides positive, aspirational role models for other pupils	• Pupil voice is respected as a key lever for school improvement
	Champions causes and charities selected by each school's students	• Pupil voice helps to teach the values of democracy and responsible leadership in our school communities
	Empowers our students through their ability to facilitate change	
PARENTS AND CARERS	Parental engagement has a positive impact which equates on average to four months' additional progress for children (EEF)	• Schools do not educate children in isolation and each school in the Trust seeks to engage its parents and carers in the learning process
	Partners in learning	• All of our schools seek to be welcoming to parents whether to receive praise or to respond to concerns about our work
	Entitled to regular and meaningful feedback about their child's learning	• Trust schools regularly conduct surveys of parents and carers to ensure that we continue to meet the high expectations which are quite rightly expected
	Provide valuable feedback on the work of the school	• Schools regularly review the information they provide to parents about the activities of the school and the progress of their children. Schools are encouraged to develop their websites and social media platforms to celebrate school events and offer secure portals to provide up-to-date pupil progress information
	Essential and valued members of our Local Governing Bodies	• Parents and carers are encouraged to consider whether they can contribute to the work of each school's LGB

Education Endowment Foundation

Foundations for good implementation

1 Treat implementation as a process, not an event; plan and execute it in stages.

- Allow enough time for effective implementation, particularly in the preparation stage; prioritise appropriately.

2 Create a leadership environment and school climate that is conducive to good implementation.

- Set the stage for implementation through school policies, routines, and practices.
- Identify and cultivate leaders of implementation throughout the school.
- Build leadership capacity through implementation teams.

EXPLORE

3 Define the problem you want to solve and identify appropriate programmes or practices to implement.

- Identify a tight area for improvement using a robust diagnostic process.
- Make evidence-informed decisions on what to implement.
- Examine the fit and feasibility of possible interventions to the school context.
- Make an adoption decision.

PREPARE

4 Create a clear implementation plan, judge the readiness of the school to deliver that plan, then prepare staff and resources.

- Develop a clear, logical, and well-specified implementation plan:
  a. Specify the active ingredients of the intervention clearly: know where to be 'tight' and where to be 'loose'.
  b. Develop a targeted, yet multi-stranded, package of implementation strategies.
  c. Define clear implementation outcomes and monitor them using robust and pragmatic measures.
- Thoroughly assess the degree to which the school is ready to implement the innovation.
- Once ready to implement an intervention, practically prepare for its use:
  a. Create a shared understanding of the implementation process and provide appropriate support and incentives.
  b. Introduce new skills, knowledge, and strategies with explicit up-front training.
  c. Prepare the implementation infrastructure.

DELIVER

5 Support staff, monitor progress, solve problems, and adapt strategies as the approach is used for the first time.

- Adopt a flexible and motivating leadership approach during the initial attempts at implementation.
- Reinforce initial training with expert follow-on support within the school.
- Use highly skilled coaches.
- Complement expert coaching and mentoring with structured peer-to-peer collaboration.
- Use implementation data to actively tailor and improve the approach.
- Make thoughtful adaptations only when the active ingredients are securely understood and implemented.

SUSTAIN

6 Plan for sustaining and scaling an intervention from the outset and continuously acknowledge and nurture its use.

- Plan for sustaining and scaling an innovation from the outset.
- Treat scale-up as a new implementation process.
- Ensure the implementation data remains fit for purpose.
- Continuously acknowledge, support, and reward good implementation practices.