



Members 

Trustees 

EDG 

CoGs 

SLDG 

BDG 

TDG 

SDG 

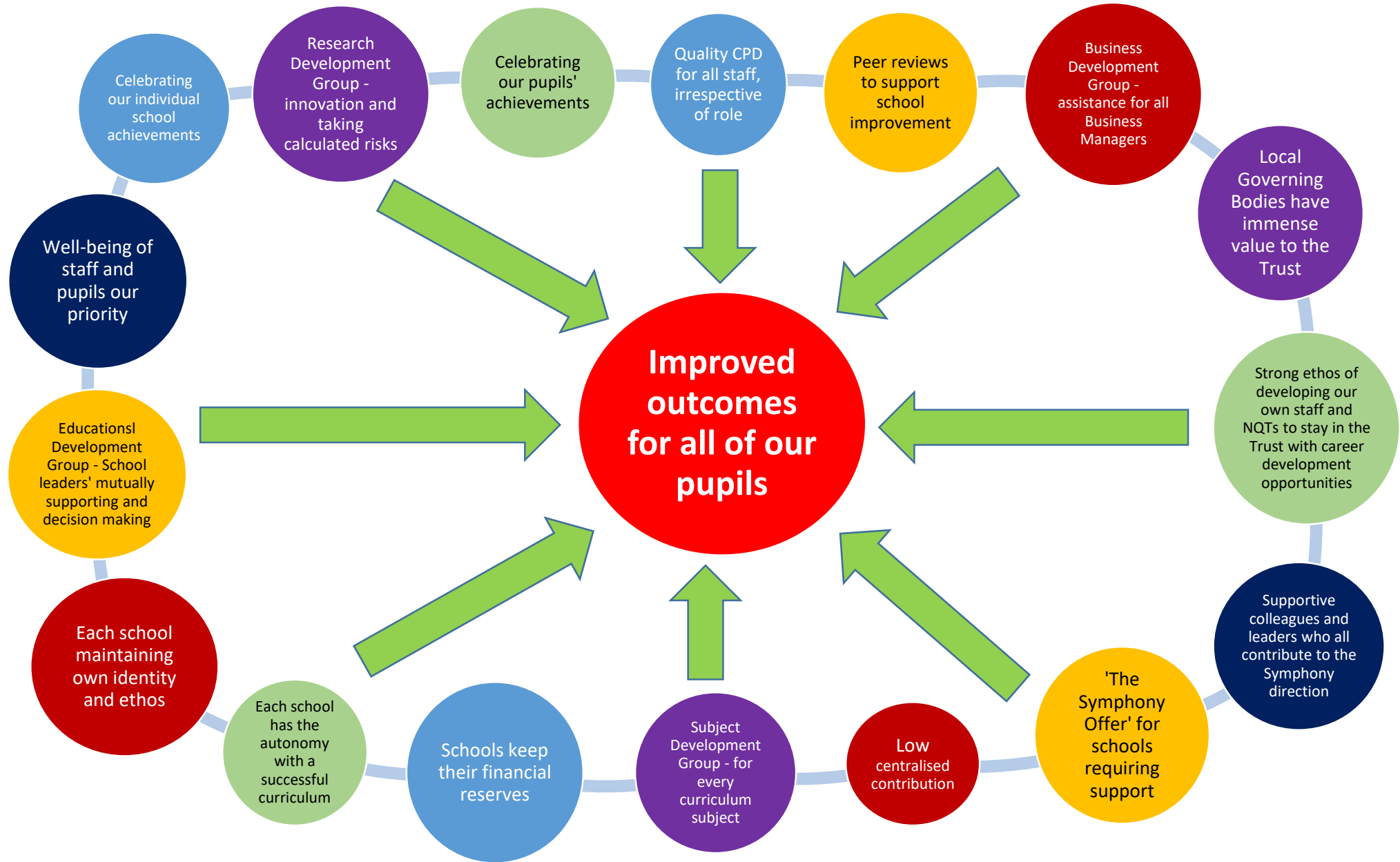
RDG 

Symphony Learning Trust

Frequently asked questions for schools thinking of joining Symphony



The Symphony concept...



Symphony Learning Trust – answers to FAQ for schools looking to join Symphony

Assessment	How will we be measured annually?	<p>Symphony use NTS termly tests which provide a standardised test from y2 upwards. These results are benchmarked across the Trust and shared with the Educational Development Group (EDG) each term. We also use OTrack to record termly teacher assessment data but for both of these approaches, we try to give dedicated staff meeting time for staff to mark/input etc as we are determined not to increase anybody's workload. Schools do not have to use OTrack if they have their own preferred system.</p> <p>National tests and assessments – from GLD through to KS2 SATs are natural measured performance criteria across the Trust.</p> <p>All SLT schools have an annual 'peer review' which is a supportive approach to school improvement, We've tried to move away from a 'one size fits all' approach to this monitoring visit and tried to make it bespoke to the school's aims (for example, if maths was a key issue, that may be the main focus). These visits include a range of Heads from across the Trust (as they find it really beneficial CPD) and are proving to be really useful for all staff. They are not a 'mock-Ofsted' and we are keen to ensure staff know this but it is a valuable task to inform on progress and areas that school leaders can support eachother with.</p>
Curriculum	Would our curriculum be dictated?	<p>No. Schools can have their own curriculums as individuality of schools is a key priority for the Trust. We do have a shared CMH programme called 'Route to Resilience' across the Trust but for individual subjects, we believe school's own approaches are key. Support for subject leaders is a key priority for SLT though and our Subject Development Groups (SDGs) will be in all subject areas for all schools next academic year.</p>
Due-diligence	How will we be measured prior to joining?	<p>Due diligence will be done in a number of areas. Regarding the curriculum, this will be a discussion with the leadership team at your school. Previous national results will naturally be a measure that will be looked at although we would be far more keen to see what your school have put into place and their predictions for outcomes moving forward. As part of the due diligence, we would undertake a financial position review which would involve the CFO discussing current balances and reserves with the leadership team and finance team (note – your balances would stay with you and would not end up in a central Trust pot)</p> <p>Again, with the leadership team and possibly with external expertise, we would want to access structural and site information to ascertain the building suitability and any works required etc.</p>
Finance	What would we be 'top sliced' for management fees?	<p>Our top slice for management fees is very low compared to most Trusts – approximately 2.6% of the GAG. Currently, this is for CEO, CFO and additional business support.</p>

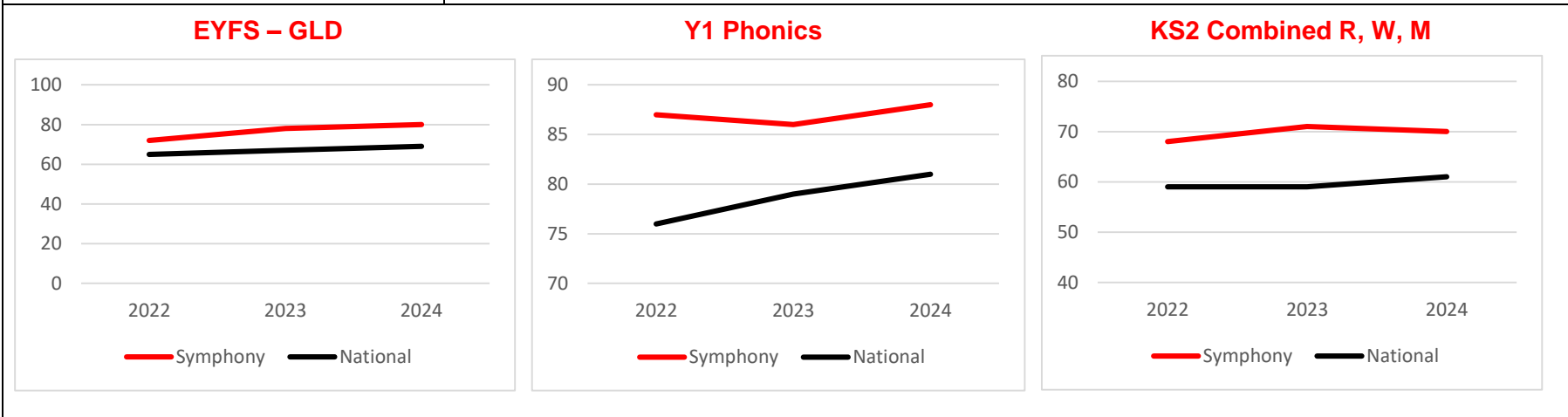
	What is paid for out of the top slicing?	An additional 2.54% of each school's GAG is taken for centralised services, which includes a comprehensive list of what a maintained school already has to pay for and currently includes Audit fees (Accountants, Internal and Pensions Audit), Admissions, National College training for all staff, GDPR, Health & Safety, HR Strategic & Legal Protection, Insurance (LAIS/RPA), LAISIE/O'Track, LEAMIS, SIMS Finance/Personnel and IMP for Budget Forecasting. This list is reviewed annually and as efficiencies are generated more services are paid for centrally and/or locally depending upon the terms and conditions between the Supplier and School. The top slicing/central services % is reviewed annually and agreed by the SLT & Trustees.
Governors	What would our governing body look like?	Very much as it is now. We want LGBs to operate in a very similar way to how they are used to working but the Trustees will take away some of the less-interesting work. By this, we mean that HR policies (always based upon Leicestershire CC policies) are adopted by the Trustees, thus allowing LGBs to concentrate on their own school. Although the Board of Trustees is ultimately the key body, we are keen to have very active LGBs. We also have a Trustee-link with each individual school; the Trustee tries as much as possible to attend LGB meetings to be a link between the Trustees and LGB. We also hold termly Chair of Governor meetings with all schools to have feedback and keep all in the loop.
	Will our existing governors be transferable?	Yes
	Is there a centralised clerk to gov?	We have one clerk who is moving in that direction, should a school require a new clerk, but we are fully aware schools may have their own very effective clerk that they may wish to keep.
	What are the articles of association/terms of reference?	Please see our website for our Articles of Association and Terms of Reference page
Support	Does it have training links?	Through our EDG/SDG/BDG and RDG work, there is ample support and training for all teaching and finance roles. Our Teaching School also offers training for a variety of roles (for example, all our LSAs have had specific Trust reading training in 2023 and Maths and Phonics Training in 2024)
	Could Symphony support if we went into difficulty?	We have a number of experienced leaders who have capacity to support if needs be. Similarly, we have a number of SLEs who we can designate to schools should the need arise. Our Teaching Development Group offer areas of support in all key areas.
	Is there admin support? How much?	Admin support is provided to the SBM/Admin team by the Senior School Business Manager and other SBMs and tailored to the needs of the school. One to one support and training is also provided.
	Teaching School Alliance?	As well as the previous comments re: the TSA, we have SLEs in a number of areas who are very able and have proven track records to lead improvement. Similarly, the mutual support we have with senior leadership is a real plus for Symphony
	Support for behaviour?	This comes through the Teaching School which offers some courses and also through the EDG meetings where we have had certain Symphony staff who have led training and advice.

	Support for SEND?	The Symphony school SEN Leaders meet at least three times a year and work on SEN projects across the Trust.
	What HR support is there?	HR is currently outsourced to the LA, however the CFO, Finance and Operations Lead and School Business Director are able to provide support with complex cases as and when required.
	What other partnerships could we work with?	A full explanation of our working groups and partnerships are detailed on our website.
	How would you support when we get the Ofsted call?	The CEO and DoP would attend the inspection for as much time as required. This would be at the discretion of the CEO, DoP and the Head. We ensure that we get to know all of the Symphony schools so we feel we are 'ready' to support with an inspection.
	What support would there be if the school failed?	Although we would be very surprised if a school in our Trust received an unfavourable Ofsted inspection, we would look at the specifics and there would be options to take which would include additional support for the Head and leadership team from colleagues / myself to produce the action plan and also SLE support with relevant subject areas. By nature of such a situation, monitoring by the CEO would naturally need to be more frequent but effective working relationships would have to be maintained.
	What H&S support is there?	H&S is outsourced to the LA however support and shared services are offered with H&S monitoring of statutory requirements, estates and property development prioritisation and planning.
	What ed psychology support is there?	Currently, we use Leics LA for this but we are investigating the possibility of employing our own Ed Psych/s as we grow.
	What payroll would you use?	Symphony uses DataPlan for Payroll and support for schools joining is provided.
	What SLE support is there?	We have a number of SLEs (please see the website) but we also have a number of professionals who haven't as yet gone through SLE accreditation but who offer fantastic specialist support.
	Do you have a Financial lead? And what support do they give to the school?	Yes the CFO is the financial lead, with regular SBM and termly Admin/Finance meetings taking place. We also have a Finance and Opps Lead to also assist with school budgets and finance. Budgets are prepared in June and revised in October and April. Central budget assumptions are agreed and communicated to all schools. There is a standardised Trust and School Risk Register, which is updated at the Finance and Audit meetings. One to one support/training is provided by the central team to the Admin/Finance team when required. All DFE/ESFA/LA returns are coordinated by the CFO and Finance and Operations Lead.
Trust	Is it local? Maximum one hour from your school	Yes, all schools and all meetings will be well within an hour from your school.
	Could we have an impact on how the Trust is shaped?	All schools help to shape the Trust and involvement for the Head, Business Team and subject leaders into the working groups means they have equal impact on the Trust as any other school.
	How many schools are in the Trust?	Currently 12 primaries (September 2024)

	Who are their schools and what was their latest Ofsted rating?	Glen Hills – Good (2024) - NOR-495 Old Mill – Good (2021) - NOR 390 Newcroft – Outstanding (2014)- NOR 420 Meadow – Good (2021) – NOR 420 Thornton – Good (2023) - NOR 130 Fairfield – Good (2021)- NOR 210 Ashby Willesley – Good (2022)- NOR 420 Orchard – Good (2021)- NOR 320 Ashby Hill Top – Outstanding (2024) – NOR 340 Donisthorpe – Good (2022) – NOR 210 Foxtan – Good (2023) – NOR 85 Ashby Hastings – Good (2024) – NOR 115 (opened Sep 2021)
	Roughly how many children? (Economies of scale)	Approx 3400
	What is their track record as a trust? How many schools have they got as good/outstanding? How many have they moved up a category?	When we began the Trust, Thornton moved from RI to Good and Fairfield, although officially Good from an inspection 4 years before, would have been Inadequate, had they not been given a year by Ofsted following conversion into the Trust. Fairfield got 'Good' and the leaders who led those schools through that are in the Trust still. Meadow had a change of leadership and The Trust moved the school from RI to Good. All other schools who have had Ofsteds have maintained their 'Good' or 'Outstanding' status.
	Who is on the trusts board? What are their roles?	Trustee information can be found on our website.
Conversion	How supportive are you in conversion?	We have considerable experience in conversion. Whilst Head at Glen Hills, I was the first Leics school to convert to be an Academy (purely to get our age phase change sorted rather than any political decision) and our business teams currently in place led their schools through conversion and into the Trust.
	What is the time factor for the process?	If the chosen Trust, we would want to begin our due diligence as soon as possible and would be working with yourselves to get a conversion date within 4 months. We would want the leadership team involved with EDG and BDG meetings as soon as possible so your school feel fully included and ready to go with the Trust.
General	Are systems set in place for improvement etc?	Yes. We have a whole section on School Improvement on our Symphony website.
	Do you move staff about between school? If so how often does this happen?	Not officially. We believe that if a staff member wants to work for (eg) Glen Hills or your school, that's where they want to work and we wouldn't expect to move people to other schools. We do have some shared roles between some schools (for example, a CMH worker across two of our schools) and on occasions, a school may have needed (eg.) SENCo support and this would be offered by another school but only if the relevant person is happy to do this.

What pastoral support is available for staff?	We have taken the workload reduction fully on board at Symphony and we have staff who appreciate the measures we have taken to reduce this (planning, giving staff meeting time for assessment etc) We access the LA counselling support team should any of our staff need any assistance in this area and have also used well-being companies to provide staff training to help.
What is Symphony's approach to nurture?	We use Route to Resilience as a theme throughout the curriculum of all our schools. This provides a nurturing, caring and supportive outlook for all of our pupils and it is proving to be really beneficial (Ofsted commenting for two of our schools that this is the case). We genuinely believe in educating the whole pupil, not just academically. Our CMH counsellor is looking to work in all Trust schools within a year which would be a real positive for the Trust.
How frequent are meetings between school and MAT?	EDG meetings – every three weeks BDG meetings – every month SDG meetings – every term for each subject RDG meetings – 8 meetings a year CoG meetings with CEO/Chair of Trustees – 3 times per year.
Will school uniform have to change (cost to parents)?	No – we want each school to have their own individual uniform of their choice
Will there be any risk of redundancies?	None. All staff will be TUPE'd over
Who is responsible for pensions / Are pensions secured and protected if not government scheme?	Support pensions are with LGPS (Government Scheme) and Teachers Pension Scheme, the EYOC Pensions is audited by the LA/Auditors and are secured and protected.
What is director/trustee turn over rate, Terms of office and ability to stay on?	The Trustees are stable in the Trust with no resignations for two years. The term of office is four years per Trustee
Do we automatically get a director role/governing board seat and if who what are expectations and commitments?	Unfortunately, MATs cannot have a local governor on the board of trustees any longer. We have complete separation with none of our LGB governors being Trustees or vice versa (as per RSC guidelines). What I can say though is that our Trustees are really supportive and very 'trusting' in us as professionals.
What economy of scales benefits does Symphony bring?	Efficiencies through centralisation of services/shared services have been generated, budget monitoring/VAT/etc reports and month end processes are managed centrally. We recognise that one size doesn't always fit and as contracts end central contracts are agreed. We have a contracts finder and utilise, ESPO/ DFE Frameworks. Business support is provided to the Schools Senior Leadership.

<p>How does the individual academies and overall MAT data compare to the national picture?</p>	<p>Overall MAT data – highest performing primary MAT in Leicestershire for the fourth year (2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024).</p> <p>Here is the three-year data for Early Years, Y1 Phonics and KS2 Combined R,W,M compared to National Averages</p>
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<p>How do Symphony ensure their policies for safeguarding at least match and preferably exceed our own and evidence of adherence to those policies?</p>	<p>We take the Leics Safeguarding Policy and extend it with aspects we believe should also be in. We also do an annual Safeguarding Review of each SLT school (together with LGBs) which provides a detailed focus upon safeguarding procedures.</p>
<p>What is staff morale like in the schools?</p>	<p>We believe very high! Questionnaires show that 99% of staff believe they are listened to, 97% of staff believe we have taken on-board workload reduction successfully and 99% of staff feel valued in their workplace. Our high retention figures emphasise these opinions.</p>
<p>Will we retain financial autonomy for decisions within the school, both small purchases and larger staffing?</p>	<p>We aim for individual schools to spend their finances in the best way they can for outcomes for pupils. Staffing and purchases are at the school's discretion unless the school was setting a considerable deficit budget without reserves to alleviate the situation.</p> <p>The Finance Manual details how financial decisions are made either locally by each school or referred to the Trust for be agreed by the Trust. This can be found on our Symphony website.</p>
<p>Will we retain autonomy for always be able to act in the specific and individual ways needed to achieve the best interests of our school and its children?</p>	<p>This underpins Symphony's ethos. Each school has to have their own identity and we want each school to be proud of their identity. We want each school to be successful and our assistance and support in working alongside your school to ensure you continue your path to success would be our aim.</p>