

# Symphony Learning Trust



# Governance Strategy 2025/2026



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## Introduction from Tim Sutcliffe, CEO

Welcome to Symphony Learning Trust's Governance Plan. This document has been established to communicate our governance arrangements and to facilitate the opening of new schools within the Trust, either those choosing to join our family or schools, or presumptive/free schools that the trust is successful in bidding to open.

We are proud of our schools and we are proud of our trust. Symphony stands for providing excellent education to our children, in a supportive environment, where we tailor the provision to the children that see before us. We are not, and never will be, a trust where every school looks identical, - we cherish the individuality of our communities, our children, our colleagues, and environments. What we are though is unashamedly consistent in relentlessly pursuing excellence, to learning from every opportunity, and being bold in developing ourselves.

The Governance Plan sets out:

- The vision for Symphony Learning Trust
- The structure and operational procedures of the Members' and Trustees
- The structure and organisation of the Trust Board
- Processes for strategic planning for developing the schools within the Trust
- Processes for securing accountability

The Trust's constitution and framework for governance arrangements are set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association for Symphony, as recommended for academies.

With my very best wishes



**Tim  
Sutcliffe  
CEO**



## About Symphony

### The vision for Symphony

Symphony Learning Trust is based upon our three core values of Aspiration, Innovation, and Excellence. We achieve this through running schools which are child centred, empowered to support their local communities and the specific needs of their pupils, but also nurtured and strengthened by being part of a collaborative, collegiate, trust, where there is shared responsibility for all of our pupils.

We know that education in the 21st Century is a key to securing economic growth and the social fabric of society. In our ever-changing world today's learners will need to be confident, adaptable citizens who are able to take advantage of the many employment opportunities in the ever-increasing digital and creative industries.

Our future growth is determined by a resolute focus on working with schools where we can add value to the experience of the children, but also, where those schools can support the further development of the other schools within Symphony too.

We will guarantee a commitment to children's learning and well-being, set in a culture of relentless determination to make a difference to young people's lives. However, we also strongly believe that every school should have its own identity in terms of curriculum, timetable, uniform etc. Each of the eight schools present in the Trust serve very different communities and we do not want to impose a 'one-size-fits –all' brand in our Trust. The Trust will provide the 'Trunk' in terms of business, HR, school support, monitoring and improvement. School leaders and local governors are given the room to retain and grow the 'branches and leaves' to provide their own bespoke educational offer for the children at their school. Our Symphony Offer is available for schools who require intervention support and development.

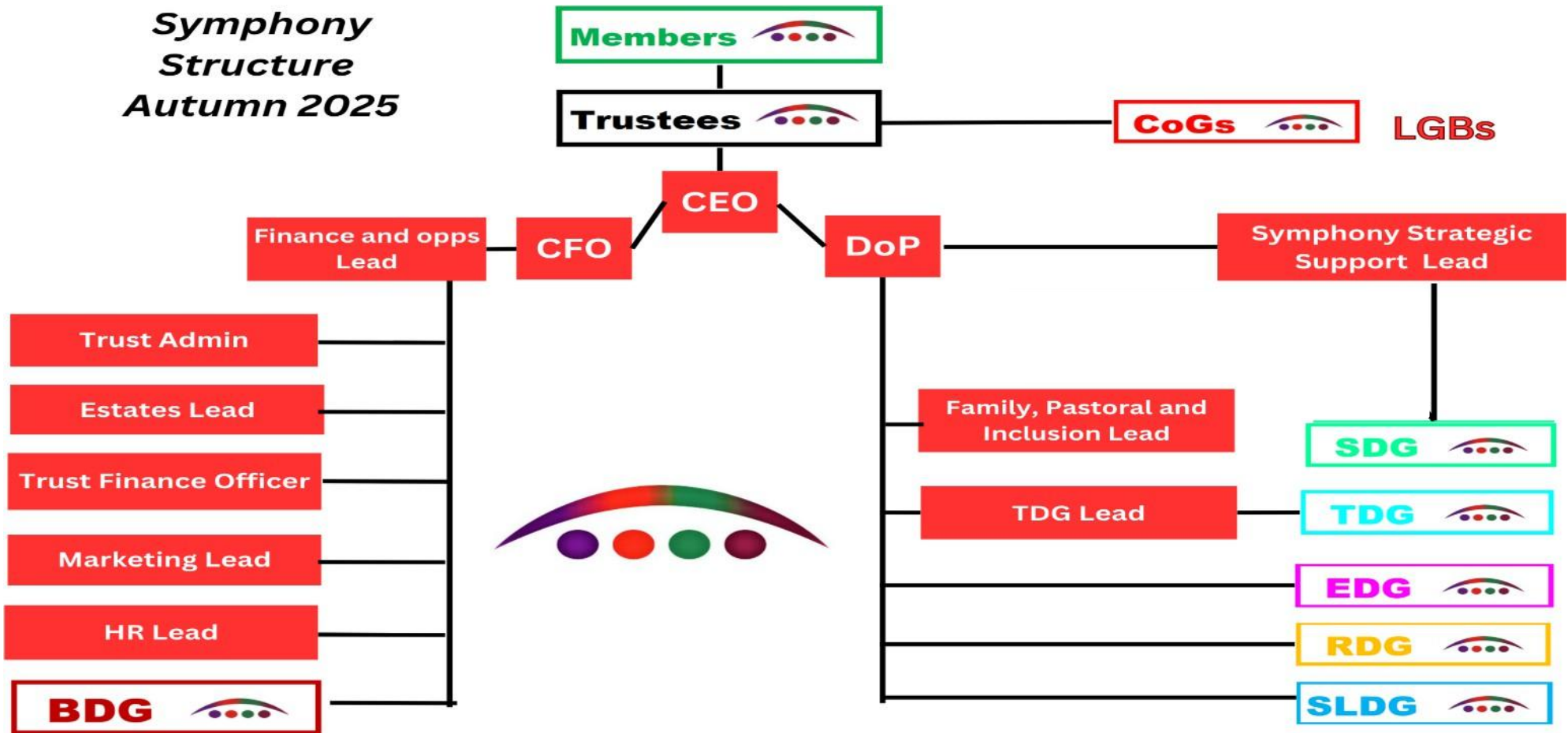
Our current plans to grow the Trust are focused on finding schools which have similar values and principles to us, regardless of Ofsted category. We believe that schools joining would reap many benefits from the shared collaboration, which will provide many cost savings to a school, and would also enhance the capacity of Symphony. The Trust has no ambitions to become a large, national chain, but wants to continue to offer a personal and bespoke service for schools in the East Midlands region. We also want every school's views to be heard in terms of how we run the Trust; our aim of increasing the size of the Trust to sixteen schools, in the next two to four years, will ensure we maximize cost efficiencies but retain a local context where each school has a voice in the Trust.

Trustees and the Education team are committed to improve systems and performance so that all the schools within the MAT are on a journey to 'Outstanding', not only in terms of their Ofsted judgement, but in the eyes of the learners and the community they serve. We want to add real value to the education of pupils and your community by constantly working to become even more effective, achieving the very best for all young people. We believe in true collaboration, working in partnership, investing in people and building capacity for long term, sustainable success.

# Trust Structure

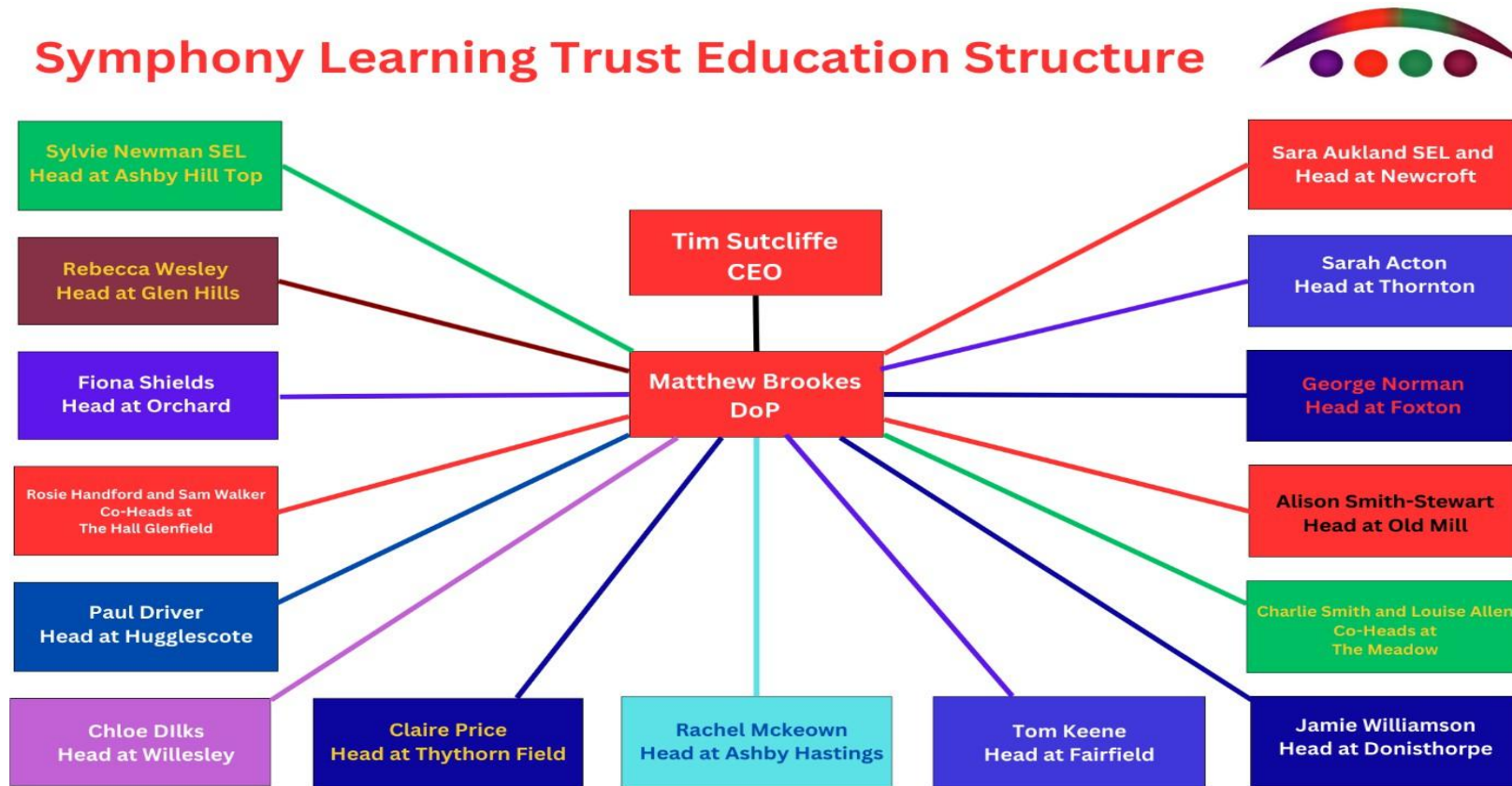
Our Trust is structured as per this diagram, which allows clear governance to be held by Trustees and Members, with accountability flows being direct.

## Symphony Structure Autumn 2025



## Education Structure

The management of schools on a daily basis is through the Director of Primaries, and this is supported by the Educational Development Group, which brings our Headteachers together on a regular basis to collectively drive school improvement initiatives.



## Governance Structure

### Articles of Association

Symphony Learning Trust is adopting the current Model Articles of Association as per May 2021

### Members

The Trust currently has 5 Members, and this Board is chaired by Bill Gilmour.

This group of Members have a diverse range of experience, but a shared passion for education. Their biographies can be found [here](#).



The members meet once per term in line with AH requirements for Members to be regularly appraised of trust performance and issues. They will hold an Annual General Meeting in the spring term. Other meetings may be held in addition if deemed necessary.

They will consider the needs of the trust and the skills and expertise that are required by the Trust Board to fulfil its functions effectively based on a skills audit of the Trustees. The outcomes of the annual Trustee self-evaluation process will be reported to the Members each year.

The Members will oversee the financial management of the trust, being responsible to the Secretary of State for Education for the school's effectiveness in providing value for money. Members will receive a finance report three times a year, will agree the final accounts and will appoint the auditors annually.

## Trustees

Our Trustee Board is active, visionary, and focussed on enabling and empowering Symphony to be a leading trust, and provider of outstanding education. We currently have 6 Trustees, as set out below. More details about trustees can be found [here](#).



Nigel  
Harrison (Chair)



Lauren  
Charlton (Vice-Chair)



Tina  
Hayton-Banks



Andrew  
Warneken



Bill  
Gilmour



Mark  
Tuckwell

Trustees will carry out an annual skills audit as part of their self-evaluation and incorporate their own development objectives into the trust's Business and School Improvement Plans. The aim of the self evaluation process is to identify how Trustee skills, expertise and experience are having a positive impact on the development of the trust and holding it to account for its performance.

The Trustees receive ongoing training to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities as Trustees. Training includes the following:

- Safeguarding Training
- Duties and Responsibilities of a Trustee

The Trust Board will focus on three core strategic functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding the CEO to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils;
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent

The Trust Board needs to be strategic in function, providing overall leadership for the schools without being involved in the day today management. Trustees are expected to hold the trust leadership to account for its performance.

### **Developing the new schools**

Trustees will work with the CEO, the financial plans and development plans developed by the trust to determine the key priorities for establishing and developing the schools, with a focus on ensuring sustainability and performance over the first three years. These will be based on the strategic objectives in the Education Brief all which were agreed with the DfE prior to opening.

Key performance indicators and targets will be set for the first year of operation, and longer term targets relating to pupil progress and attainment will be determined.

### **Performance Management of the CEO**

The performance management of the CEO is the process whereby the CEO is held to account for school progress. Two Trustees will be nominated to carry out the performance appraisal of the CEO each year. This will take place in the Autumn Term of each academic year. The purpose of this process is to appraise the performance of the CEO during the past year, assessing performance against the responsibilities of their role and against relevant standards. Objectives will be set for the coming year to support the improvement and development of the school and the CEO's own professional development. Progress against objectives will be reviewed in March each year, and finally in September.

A clear Pay and Appraisal Policy will set out the rewards, sanctions and processes so that this is a transparent process.

### **Accountability for financial processes**

The CEO will be the Accounting Officer and has overall responsibility for the trust's financial affairs, including ensuring value for money. Specifically, the accounting officer will be personally responsible to the Trust Board for:

- Ensuring regularity and propriety
- Prudent and economic administration
- Avoidance of waste and extravagance
- Efficient and effective use of available resources; and
- The day to day organisation, staffing and management of the Trust

The Accounting Officer has the duty to take action if the Trust Board or chairperson is contemplating a course of action, which he or she considers an infringement of propriety or regularity. Objections should be put in writing to the Trust Board details sent to the ESFA and the Trust's external auditors.

Along with the Finance and Audit Committee, the CEO will be responsible for ensuring compliance with the Academies Handbook and this will be reviewed each year. Similarly, this committee will check that all requirements of the Funding Agreement are being adhered to. All members of the committee are required to

have read and be familiar with the Academies Handbook, Articles of Association, legal framework for the Charities Commission and company law as affecting the school, the school's finance policy and procedures manual, procurement policy and Scheme of Financial Delegation.

The Finance and Audit Committee will meet regularly to enable rigorous monitoring of the budget and ensure the trust continues to provide value for money. This will include monitoring the cost-effective deployment of staff to ensure best outcomes for pupils.

Reports on financial monitoring by the Finance and Audit Committee will be submitted to the Trust.

Full information on how financial transactions will be carried out and monitored is detailed in the Finance Policy. The policy includes:

- Organisation and responsibilities: the structure for reporting Financial planning and budget management
- Management of bank accounts and cash management Financial accounting systems
- Keeping and maintaining full and accurate accounting records Process for carrying out financial transactions
- Value for money procedures, how the trust will use resources and ensure value for money
- Tendering, purchasing and payment procedures.
- Measures to prevent losses or misuse of funds Scheme of Delegation
- Reporting to the DfE

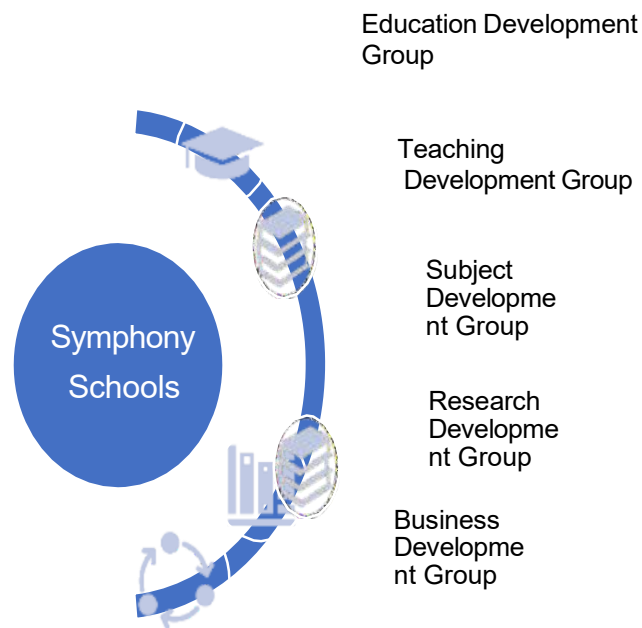
### **Committees and Terms of Reference**

The structure of the Board's committees and Terms of Reference are found [here](#)

The Board has the following committees:

- Finance and Audit
- Remuneration / HR
- Appeals
- A Local Governing Body for each school (shared LGB in the case of new schools in pre-opening and first year

of operation) Timings and frequency of meetings is set out in the above linked document.



### Clerking

Symphony recognises and supports the requirements of the Academies Handbook in respect of clerking, and ensures that each committee is serviced by an appropriately qualified Clerk, to ensure professional support. A Governance Professional supports our Clerks and LGBs.

### Board Skills

The Trustees regularly review the skills of the Trustees and recruit or train as required. A copy of the latest skills matrix is can be found [here](#).

## Scheme of Delegation

The trust’s Scheme of Delegation can be accessed [here](#). The delegation philosophy is around providing a commitment to children’s learning and well-being, set in a culture of relentless determination to make a difference to young people’s lives. However, we also strongly believe that every school should have its own identify in terms of curriculum, timetable, uniform etc. Each of the schools present in the Trust serve very different communities and we do not want to impose a ‘one-size-fits –all’ brand in our Trust. The Trust provides the ‘Trunk’ in terms of business, HR, school support, monitoring and improvement. School leaders and local governors are given the room to retain and grow the ‘branches and leaves’ to provide their own bespoke educational offer for the children at their school.

The Trust has a ‘top slice’ of 5% of GAG which funds the core central activities, calculated through 2.5% for central salaries, and 2.5% for shared services

## Networking Forums and collaboration

Symphony takes peer development incredibly seriously – it underpins the whole ethos of the way that we work. The Trust operates an Educational Development Group, a Teaching Development Group, a Research Development Group, Subject Development Group, and a Business Development Group, which brings colleagues from across the schools together to meet, discuss, plan, and collaborate on improving the way that we work. This rapidly shares best practice, allows agility in innovation, and is welcomed by colleagues as a really powerful way of building empowerment and capacity across the Trust.

## Financial Governance

Symphony have accepted the new Master Funding Agreement for new schools joining the trust. The Trust has also adopted the latest model Articles of Association. Our Scheme of Delegation is referred to above. The Trustees recognise their obligations to the Charity Commission, and under the requirements of the Companies Act, as well as the regulations and requirements set out in the Academies Financial Handbook. All Trustees receive a copy of the AFH annually, with commentary around the annual changes, and they approve the Trust's operating procedures for finance and governance arrangements, including adherence to the Nolan Principles.

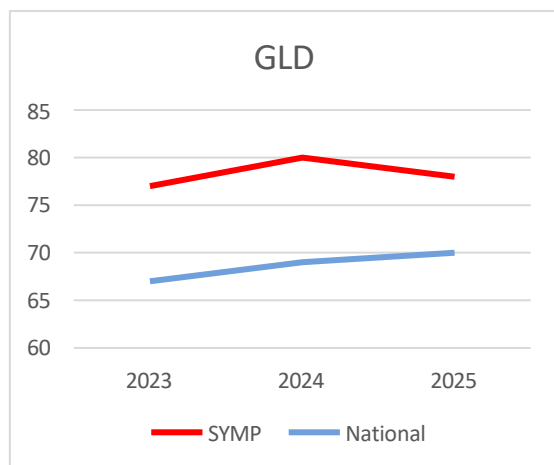
The Finance and Audit Committee is a sub committee of the Board, and the terms of reference are set out in the documents referred to above. Statutory policies can be found [here](#). The Risk Register is maintained on a regular basis and presented to the Board and Finance / Audit committee at every meeting.

## Trust Standards / Improvement Framework

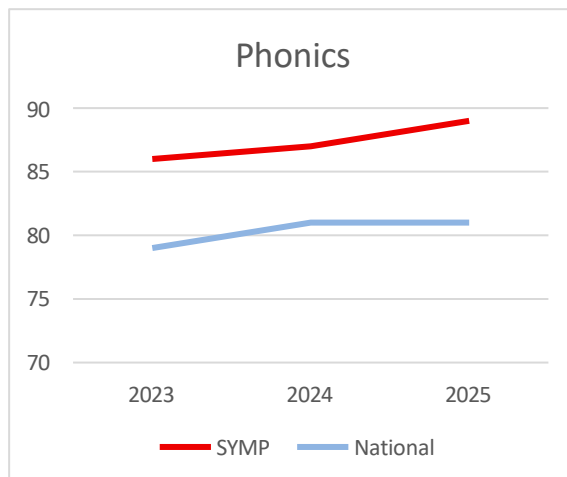
The trust collects performance data from schools on a consistent and regular basis, ensuring that performance is monitored in a timely manner, and compared to other schools in the trust, as well as external benchmarks available.

Our most recent KPIs set against national averages relate to 205 National data and show the following trends over the past three years (all %);

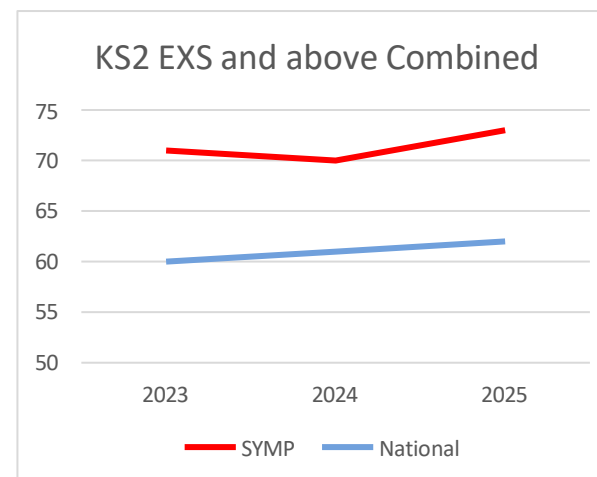
**EYFS – Good Level of Development**



**Year 1 Phonics Screening**



**KS2 Combined R, W, M**



## Quality Assurance

Symphony is committed to ensuring that our governance arrangements are of the highest standard, and have an annual review of governance with the results being made available to Trustees and Members

## Managing Conflicts of interest / Connected party transactions

The trust is aware of the requirements in the Academies Handbook in relation to transactions of this nature, and confirms its compliance with it. Declarations of interest are captured from all governors, trustees and senior leaders, which are checked against supplier lists annually. Further, the trust has an operational policy of not engaging connected parties for any transactions over £1,000 per annum, irrespective of the 'at cost' principles allowed in the AH.

A conflict of interests register is in place to ensure no conflict of interests between Members and Trustees and the school. The Clerk to Trustees provides administrative support to both Members and Trustees and is responsible for setting up the register. The register will be maintained by the clerk and will be published on the trust website (a local version is on the school site for the LGB). An item on the Trust Board agenda will always be to ask for any conflict of interests relating to the matters to be discussed at the meeting. The person concerned would then be asked to leave the meeting while that item is discussed.

## Risk Management

The trust maintains a risk register at each level of governance – i.e. Trustees and LGB level. Ownership of risks is identified, along with impact, likelihood and mitigating actions to be taken. These risks are regularly reviewed and presented to LGB and Trustee committee meetings.

The Risk Management Strategy aims to ensure that Symphony Learning Trust complies with risk management best practice as adopted by academies. It forms the start point for Corporate Governance with the requirements of the Turnbull guidance and sets out the current processes and responsibilities for risk management in Symphony.

The Turnbull guidelines for Corporate Governance were published in 1999, updated in 2005 and can be summarised as:

- The Trust Board acknowledges responsibility for the system of internal control
- An ongoing process is in place for identifying, evaluating and managing all significant risks
- An annual process is in place for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control
- There is a system in place to deal with internal control aspects of any significant issues disclosed in the annual report and accounts.

In assessing what constitutes a sound system of internal control regarding risk management, the Turnbull report states that consideration should be given to:

- The nature and extent of the risks facing the organisation

- The extent and categories of risk which it regards as acceptable
- The likelihood of the risks concerned materialising
- The organisation's ability to reduce the incidence and impact of the risks that do materialise.

## **Objectives for Managing Risks**

The objectives for managing risk across the Trust are:

- To comply with risk management best practice
- To ensure risks facing the Trust are identified and appropriately documented
- To provide assurance to the Trust Board that risks are being adequately controlled, or identify areas for improvement
- To ensure action is taken appropriately in relation to accepting, mitigating, avoiding and transferring risks.

## **Risk Management Strategy**

This strategy aims to:

- Outline the roles and responsibilities for risk management.
- Identify risk management processes to ensure that all risks are appropriately identified, controlled and monitored
- Ensure appropriate levels of awareness throughout Symphony Roles and Responsibilities. The Trust Board has overall responsibility for risk management.

The Risk Management Plan is monitored by the CEO and senior leadership regularly.

## **Identification of risks**

Identification should be approached in a methodical way to ensure that all significant activities have been identified and all the risks flowing from these activities have been defined. Our approach to risk management is linked to Symphony's strategic aims and objectives. This approach has been set and encompass 5 key aims:

- Control risk to create capacity for sustainable and managed growth
- Engender a culture of acute awareness of financial risks throughout the trust
- Create clear lines of sight of accountability
- Ensure clarity with all use of public funds
- Provide efficient central support for the trust

The structure and organisation of Symphony Learning Trust's risk register follows the above structure to ensure that all significant objectives and activities have been identified and the risks associated with each area have been identified. Through the register, accountabilities and the use of public funds can be both identified and protected.

## **Addressing risks**

When responding to risks, the trust will seek to ensure that it is anticipated and managed early so risk does not develop into an issue where the potential threat materialises.

## **Risk Reporting and Communication**

The aim of reporting risk is to provide assurance to the Trust Board, Senior Management and Internal Auditors that the trust is effectively managing its risks and has a robust system of internal controls.

## **Risk register**

The reporting mechanism will be through the Risk Register. This will highlight the key risks facing schools / the trust, as well as a breakdown for each key strategic aim. Any significant changes in risk impact or probability, or the occurrence of an event which raises the profile of a risk will be recorded on the risk register as it occurs. Any new or increased risks identified in committees or LGB meetings or raised by a member of staff will be evaluated and, if appropriate, recorded in the Risk Register.

## **Governance Handbook**

A copy of the staff and trustee handbook is available [here](#).

## **Safeguarding risks**

Trustees have a legal responsibility to ensure that children are kept safe in school. In the event the any of the safeguarding requirements are not being met, the Trust Board will take immediate remedial action. The actions taken will depend on the area of non-compliance. If there is any immediate risk to children, the Safeguarding Trustee and Chair of Trustees in liaison with the CEO will act straightaway to remove this risk. Officers from the LA or DCFP will be called in to advise if this is deemed necessary.

The Chair will be responsible for liaising with the designated officer from the LA or DCFP in the event of an allegation of abuse made against the CEO. If any member of staff poses an alleged risk to the safety of children, he/she will be suspended from her role, until investigations have been carried out. If a parent/carer or volunteer poses an alleged risk to the safety of children on the school premises, he/she will not be allowed to enter school premises until an investigation has been carried out.

If any adult working with children has been removed or dismissed because of safeguarding concerns, this will be reported immediately to the DBS by the CEO or the Chair in the case of the CEO. There is a policy in place for managing allegations against staff.

Full information on keeping children safe is detailed in the Child Protection Policy.

### **Prevent**

The Safeguarding trustee will ensure that the school, in exercise of its functions, will have due regard to the guidance in the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. A training session to raise awareness of the Prevent duty will be set to take place in the Autumn Term. The Safeguarding Trustee will be responsible for ensuring that new staff are familiar with the Prevent strategy, and for checking whether there are any concerns in relation to individual pupils. The Trust Board will take into account the policies and procedures of the DCFP, with reference to the Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021 document (when released). The school's Prevent arrangements with regard to training and policy will be reported to the Trust Board.

### **SEND**

There will be one Trustee designated to take responsibility for the support and progress of SEND pupils. The Trustee will monitor the tracking processes for these pupils, scrutinize the progress data (using the school's online tracking system) and also look at end of year outcomes.