

# Attenborough Learning Trust

Partnership Due Diligence process for new schools joining the Trust



## Introduction

There are many different reasons why school leaders may decide to explore whether joining a multi academy trust might be right for them. This document is not aimed at the benefits or drawbacks of the academies programme in general, it's about finding out whether joining our particular family of schools is right for you. During this process we would urge you to seek answers to some of the following key questions:

- How will your children, staff and parents benefit from joining Attenborough Learning Trust?
- Do our values and ethos fit with your own?
- What can you bring to the trust to improve the life chances of all our children?

We operate in an open and honest way and will give you full access to our people to help you answer these questions. Speak to our senior leaders, trustees, local governors, teachers and our teaching assistants. Truly understand the journey we are on, the successes we are proud of and the mistakes we might have made along the way. We want to have the opportunity to demonstrate we are open and transparent and to show you that our trust really is about putting the children first.

The really exciting thing for us is trying to understand what a new school might bring to us. All of our existing schools bring a wide variety of attributes but being a small multi academy trust means there are many areas that we need to develop. It would be great for you to show us the things that you excel at and the areas that you might want to lead on, once part of the trust.

Ultimately, throughout the process you're asking a single fundamental question. Is joining the Attenborough family of schools the right decision for us? It was a question that the original schools asked back in 2019 when the trust was first established and one which was difficult to answer definitively as we knew we had to have the faith and commitment to build our own success. However, over the years since we started, we really have lived our strap line of "Strength Through Partnership". We'd like you to understand whether you'd like to be part of the journey too.

## A little more about us

A spirit of collaboration and openness is at the heart of our Trust, working together so that our children can achieve the highest standards of academic progress and personal achievement. Whilst collective accountability underpins how we operate, we also offer schools the autonomy they need to thrive. All of our staff are highly valued and we constantly provide them with opportunities for professional development and growth. The peer networks

that exist across our Trust help us to share best practice whilst allowing access to a greater level of resources.

Our children benefit from the increased learning opportunities created by having access to a wider pool of education specialists. Our families, communities and carers benefit from the shared facilities and expertise and have access to a broader range of community services.

Our schools are outward facing, forward thinking and actively contribute to the wider education landscape of Leicester. We work in partnership with other schools and organisations to improve the life chances of all the children in our city.

Nolan's Seven Principles of Public Life are important to us and these underpin the governance model across the Trust. We would expect any school and governing body that joins us to operate within these well-established guidelines.

## **Understanding what being part of Attenborough feels like**

Now you've heard more about us, it's time for you see whether those values and ways of working fit in with your own. We'd like you to use this stage to check out and test the things we have said. Talk to our schools, our local governors, our Headteachers and staff. Find out about our strong collaborative groups for areas such as SEND, attendance, assessment and safeguarding. Talk to our business managers about improved financial systems and contracting in order to get best value for money. Feedback to your own governing board and have open and honest discussions about whether the vision and values of our Trust match your own. Think about the attributes that your school can bring to the Trust and how you might help develop it further.

You may have a number of questions arising from your discussions and need to seek further clarity and assurance. We will take the time to answer those questions and to demonstrate that what we have said in this document is authentic. We won't rush you into a decision or pressurise the process in any way.

When you have completed the due diligence, your governing board should make a decision about whether you wish to continue the journey. This is only a decision in principle which will need to be ratified at a later date. However, the decision allows us to move forwards to a more formal stage of due diligence, but one that is still rooted in the principles of partnership.

## **The timeline**

We would hope that that the whole process from expressing an interest to eventually becoming part of the trust should take between 6 and 12 months. We understand that some schools may wish to push forwards at a fast pace whilst others may need to spend significantly more time making sure it's right for them. We also know that this timeline will be influenced by the capacity and schedules of our external partners, for example, the Local Authority and the Regional Director.

## Due Diligence process when joining the Attenborough Learning Trust

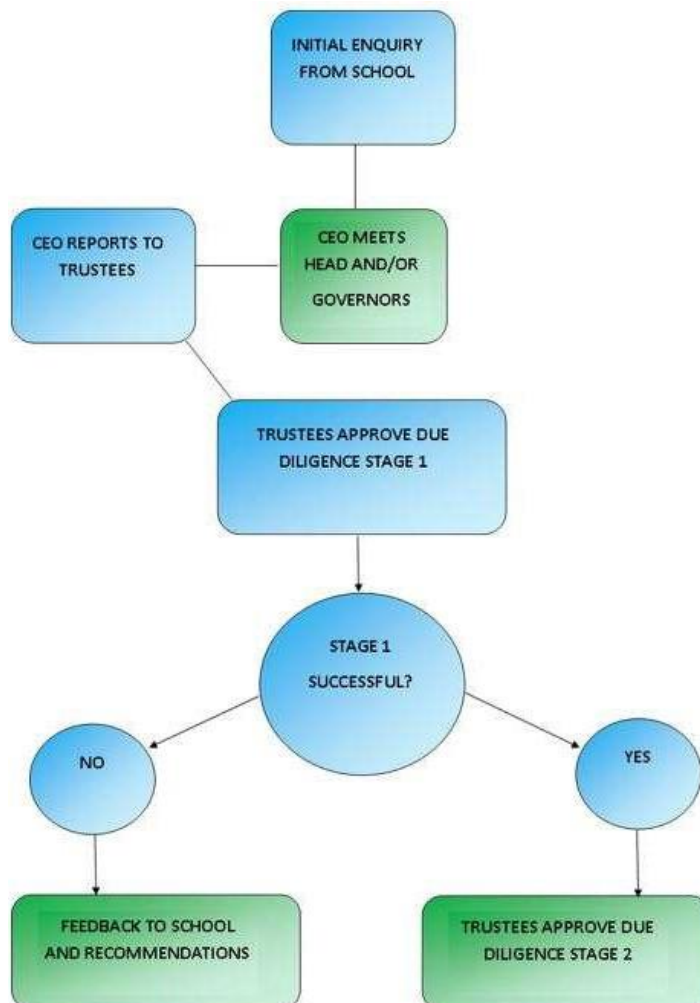
### Stage 1 – Expression of interest

As part of the pre-joining process, we conduct a range of due diligence across your school, as well as asking you to perform your own due diligence on us. Consequently, the process is as much about us finding out how we can work effectively with you, as you finding out how you can work successfully with us.

The purpose of both parties carrying out due diligence is to ensure that you fully understand all of the opportunities, benefits and commitments, in order to make a fully informed decision about whether to enter into partnership with the Attenborough Learning Trust.

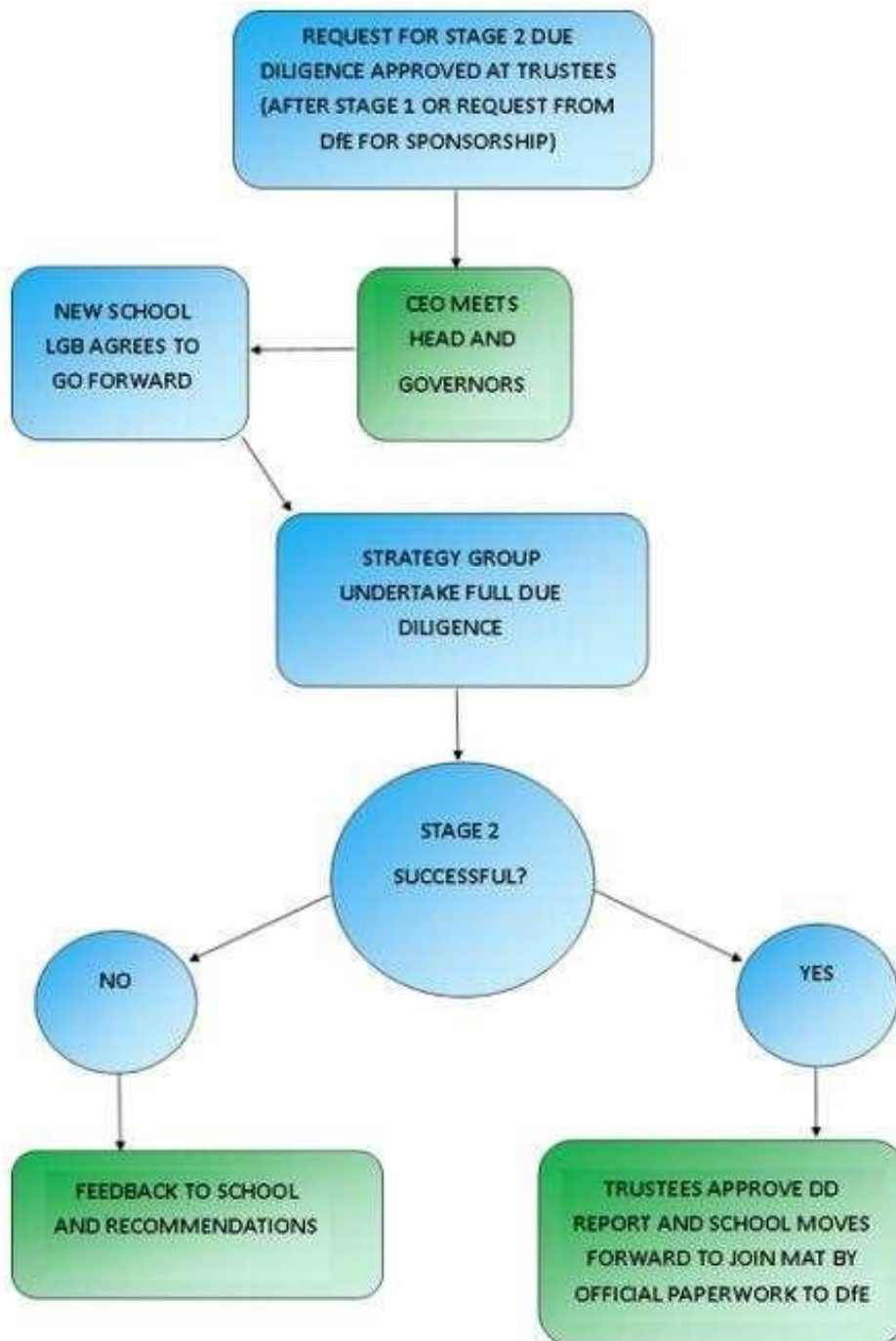
### What to expect during Stage 1 of the Due Diligence Process

This is a brief process for all schools who wish to 'register their interest' in joining the Attenborough Learning Trust. This step allows our trustees to make an informed judgement on whether to move forwards with the next stage of due diligence.



## Stage 2 – The Trust conducts Due Diligence on your school

When trustees have granted approval to move to the next stage of the process the trust's executive team, supported by external professionals (strategy group) where required, will visit your school. This is a more rigorous process which allows the Trust to gain a clear picture of your school and covers a wide range of activities (See table 1 below). During this stage you will also be able to fully understand how joining Attenborough may be of benefit to your school or single academy trust.



## Stage 2/3 – PSIB

To support the process of due diligence at stage 2 and transfer at stage 3, a PSIB (Project Steering Interim Board) will be established, consisting of:

- 2/3 trustees
- 2/3 LGB members of joining school
- Headteacher and business manager of joining school
- CEO and DFO
- Clerking/project management support

The PSIB will lead the development of the partnership. It will have a clear Terms of Reference.

## Stage 3 – Completing legal documentation

Upon successful completion of stage 2, and where a school wishes to move forwards and join our Trust, then we will work closely with the school on the final stage of official paperwork. We will also run through the Trust's non-negotiables and work out a full transition timetable for induction.

## Non-Negotiables and Induction for Governance

As part of the pre-joining process, we conduct due diligence on the school's governance. This allows us to integrate the Local Governing Board within the governance model of the Trust.

**The PSIB will work in close partnership throughout this stage to facilitate a smooth on-boarding process. We will work with the school's governors to achieve the following:**

- Identify the governance skills required by the Local Governing Board (identifying any potential new members, reviewing the skills of current members, understanding governors' strengths and previous work at the school)
- Meet the full governing body to discuss the transition and implementation process.
- Arrange a full induction programme for all current and any new governors.
- Understand the current clerking arrangements and meeting schedules and try to align them with the Trust.

## Support for your School Business Manager / administrative function

We understand that there is a significant administrative burden when a school decides to become part of a trust. Throughout this document we have talked about collaboration and partnership and this is an area where a new school will get to see first-hand, just how that feels. We will make a firm commitment to your people that they will be supported by our DFO and our wider Business Manager network. We will assist with every administrative aspect of

joining the trust, from discussions with the local authority, to helping out with contract novations and in training users on new systems and processes. What may appear daunting at first glance will gradually feel less burdensome once a plan is in place and support is agreed. After the school has joined the trust, Business Managers will actually see a reduction in the amount of work they have to undertake, as they no longer need to submit many of the reports required by the Local Authority.

## Non-Negotiables

All schools within The Attenborough Learning Trust commit to the same principles of working. These principles are covered in our 'Non-Negotiables'.

This shared and agreed set of non-negotiables are important to us and our **“Strength Through Partnership”** can only truly be achieved through working in a spirit of collaboration, openness and trust. It is important that all prospective members of the Trust are clear about these 'non-negotiables' that underpin how we operate.

## Non-Negotiables for New Schools Joining the Trust

All stakeholders are to be clear about, and be able to articulate, the Trust's values and vision. All schools share understanding of what it means to be part of the Attenborough Learning Trust with regards to the following:

- To display, support and embrace the shared vision and values of the Trust.
- Have regard to and action the provisions of the Articles of Association.
- Have regard to and action the provisions of the Scheme of Delegation.
- To agree a full governance post conversion induction process.
- To take on board all of the Trust's systems to ensure a cohesive approach for all schools (Finance, HR, Banking, IT, Payroll, Estates, Legal)
- Share joint responsibility for the improvement of all schools within the Trust.
- A willingness to be open and to share best practice and resources.
- To fully support the work of the Board of Trustees; including attendance at meetings, actions and deadlines.
- To ensure complete transparency on school documentation including SEF & SDP.
- To engage in joint assessment practice across the schools with all staff working collaboratively on moderation and assessment.
- To commit to a financial percentage for implementation of central services (the costs are lower than those of many other Trusts).
- To maintain robust systems of financial control and governance, including three-year budget forecasting.
- Implementation of all Trust policies and procedures set out in the policy schedule matrix.

## Table 1 - Areas covered under the Due Diligence Process

The table below is not an exhaustive list but aims to highlight key areas of focus that will be covered under the due diligence stages

### Due Diligence areas:

**School & Standards** - OFSTED category, School Development Plan and progress, Self-Evaluation Form (SEF), performance of teaching & learning staff and other key educational outcomes and analysis

**Strategic review** - Governance, policies, risk registers, KPI's, legal compliance, School Improvement Board categorisation, RD engagement

**Community engagement** - Parental consideration and consultation, diversity of community and languages, strength of community within school governance

**Human Resources** - Organisation establishment, pay & performance, qualifications, skills audit, HR policies, Integrated Curriculum & Financial Planning (benchmarking) ratios, staff consultation and TUPE consideration, engagement with LA, pension shortfalls & arrangements, absences

**Estates & Capital** - Condition and suitability surveys, Condition Improvement Fund bids, fixed asset register, future or on-going commitments, potential contingent liabilities, inventories, Fire Risk Assessment, lease arrangements, engagement with LA, commercial hire agreements, outstanding retentions on estate improvements or property defects, utility supply points and contracts

**Financial** - Financial statements, audit reports, financial systems, School Resource Management Tool, Schools Financial Value Standard, income & expenditure, cash flow, balance sheet & VAT

**Health & Safety** - H&S register, risk assessments & practice, complaints, claims, insurance review

**Legal** - Records, Data Protection, claims history, HMRC correspondence, contractual liabilities, lease management & liabilities, SALIX, restrictive property covenants, access & boundary checks, wayleave agreements, warrantees, 3<sup>rd</sup> party leases, historic claims & liability transfer



**Table 2- Induction & Transition Overview**

Governance transition	Responsibility
All Governors to agree to the Trust's Scheme of Delegation, Articles, and governance TOR	In collaboration with ALT
All Governors attend the Trust's Induction Programme	Provided by the Trust
All Governors to complete the Register of Interests form and skills audit annually	Provided by the Trust
ALT email accounts distributed plus training and any other Governance sharing sites	Delivered by the Trust
Chairs and Vice-Chairs of LGB to attend Trust's COG meetings (6 per annum)	Delivered by the Trust
Governors to receive Safeguarding Training within the first term of their appointment	Accessed via National College
ALT to provide LGB with membership of NGA and National College to facilitate access to training resources	Delivered by the Trust
One Governor to be nominated as lead governor for; finance, Safeguarding, SEN, H&S and Pupil Premium	CEO, LGB Clerk

**Table 3 - Induction and transition for School Staff**

It is important that once a school joins the Trust training is given in the first few months. This timetable allows staff the ability to understand their roles in the Trust and gain a better understanding of how all the schools function as a whole.

Staff transition arrangements	Responsibility
Head joins the School Improvement Group (HTSIG) during the conversion / induction process	CEO
Staff Induction Presentation from ALT	CEO
Staff Induction handbook (relay new policies) and organisational chart	Head & CEO
External audit of single central record (ensure any actions from DD stage 2 are taken into account plus training for office staff)	MAT Central Services, SBM' s and Office Staff of new school
Curriculum Lead Meetings: ensure that curriculum leads in English, Maths, EYFS and SEND are available for Trust Curriculum Leads Meetings	Curriculum Leads / CEO
Transfer SLAs to trust providers: confirm which agreements have been transferred, contact details etc.	DFO
Induction support for office: including scheme of delegation, academies handbook, financial regulations, and all other MAT policies.	DFO

Staff transition arrangements - continued	Responsibility
Copy of current CPD & training events (including moderation and assessment meetings)	CEO
Induction pack for the Head: ALT Business Plan, Template for Headteacher's Report	CEO
New Head to visit all schools in Trust	Within first 2 months – New Head
New Academy transitions onto Trust's IT platform	New school (6 months) & MAT IT Lead
The Academy confirms completion of each action listed in the new academies welcome pack	New Academy (various dates) and SLT

**Document History**

<b>Last review date:</b>		September 2023	
<b>Next Review date:</b>		September 2025	
<b>Review Cycle:</b>		2 years	
<b>Statutory Policy:</b>		No	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Reason for change</b>	<b>Overview of changes made</b>
24.09.2021	V5	Minor amendments following trust board	Project Steering Interim Board information added
04.09.2023	V6	Minor updates	PSIB to span stages 2+3