



The Story of Ridgeway Education Trust

Vision

Ridgeway Education Trust (RET) is rooted in its community. Our shared values of integrity, ambition and leading for legacy are at the heart of our work and our mission is to provide outstanding all-through education for children and young people from 4 to 19. We will do this through powerful collaboration and distributed leadership characterised by high levels of professional trust and ambition. Our culture is optimistic and outward-facing; we embrace challenge, celebrate success and we are proud of our children and young people and all that they achieve.

Our Schools

Didcot Girls' School – Ofsted Outstanding, Nov 2015, 1,554 students

St Birinus Boys' School – Ofsted Good, February 2020, 950 students

Didcot Sixth Form – Ofsted Good, February 2020

Sutton Courtenay CofE (VC) Primary School with nursery – Ofsted RI, January 2018, 151 students

Total = 2,655

Didcot Girls' School is also a lead Teaching School in the Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Alliance and has DfE sponsor status. From September 2021, we will become a key delivery partner in the Oxfordshire Teaching School Hub.

Trust Growth

We believe that measured growth is essential to ensure the ongoing development, future sustainability and independence of our Trust. We believe that growth will help us to deliver our vision of excellent education to 4-19 year olds within their communities. This growth will allow us to develop the economies of scale to create primary and secondary school improvement teams which provide expert, timely and impactful support whilst also sharing expertise and best practice between primary and secondary phases. We believe this will also help us to recruit and retain the best staff. Working with schools outside our immediate community will bring welcome externality to our work and enable excellence to thrive in other communities. However, we also believe that it is important that schools in the Trust are close enough to enable ready access to one another alongside the benefits of working together remotely.

Our commitment is to expand in our locality, hence our name change from 'Didcot Academy of Schools' to 'Ridgeway Education Trust' in September 2018. Growth would enable us to continue serving our community whilst also creating school improvement and business models which would benefit from the economies of scale realised through growth and enable other communities to thrive. Over time, a hub-based model could grow from this foundation.

Governance Strategy

We believe that the individual identity of a school community is unique and precious. This is what creates loyalty from generations of families and staff and forms the legacy from one headteacher to the next. At its best, this forensic understanding of what makes a school uniquely distinctive is what creates great, not just good, schools. We have no interest in changing school names, uniforms or time-honoured traditions.



St Birinus School



Sutton Courtenay C of E Primary School

Ridgeway Education Trust is an exempt charity and a company limited by guarantee Registered Office: Didcot Girls' School, Manor Crescent, Didcot, Oxon OX11 7AJ
Registered in England and Wales Company No. 8104201

Didcot Girls' School



VAT No. 138 005 37

Whilst the Trust Board operates the strategic overview, we believe in the principle of subsidiarity and decisions are delegated wherever possible so they are taken as close as possible to those affected by them. This means that local governing bodies have significant autonomy through the scheme of delegation. Our Trust Board comprises eleven people selected in response to a skills and experience audit. We do not operate a representative model: our shared destiny means that all trustees make decisions in the best interests of the trust and not on a parochial school-by-school basis. In line with the latest academies financial handbook, our headteachers are not Trustees and our CEO/EHT stepped down from her role as Trustee in June 2021 in line with best practice and to avoid any conflict of interests.

The Trust adopted mixed articles when Sutton Courtenay CofE (VC) Primary School joined RET in April 2019. We welcome the plurality that working in different contexts brings and which reflects the diversity of our community. The distinctive focus on character education at both secondary schools and their values-driven ethos creates a strong fit with the Christian values of church schools.

School Improvement Strategy

We believe there is a blueprint for school improvement which transcends context. Governance and leadership come first. Behaviour and the climate for learning are the next priority. This creates the conditions where teaching and learning can flourish and paves the way for exciting staff collaboration on curriculum design, pedagogical development and student leadership programmes.

It is strategically intelligent to systematise the aspects of school leadership which create consistency and transparency: for example, performance management and safeguarding systems and templates for school development plans. We share what works best: sharing a MAT-wide Pupil Premium strategy based on a risk register approach; streamlining assessment windows to support cross-site moderation; and creating cross-phase curriculum development groups have all created real impact. The latter has been especially useful to support primary colleagues with curriculum development in foundation subjects and for secondary colleagues to learn more about the high expectations in place at KS2.

Trust growth creates huge potential for innovation. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) plan operates across the Trust, as does our RET Leadership DNA framework, developing the leadership potential of all our staff. The potential to share best practice through a strategic trust professional learning programme is very exciting. Designing a quality assurance programme based on peer school-to-school review brings healthy externality to school improvement. Viewing schools as both capacity-givers and capacity-takers enables a reciprocal strategy for moving staff around the trust which is a key benefit of trust working and has had demonstrable impact on student outcomes in RET as well as supporting our recruitment and retention strategy. A RET Associate Director of Education works one day each week leading on this work and the Trust-wide implementation of the Early Career Framework (ECF).

We share the best that is available across the trust for the benefit of all our students by creating MAT-wide leadership roles in, for example, digital pedagogy, careers, ethos, maths mastery, music and computer science. Chinese is now taught across both secondary schools. We run student leadership conferences across the trust, and we open up our supra-curricular offer and careers events to students from all three schools. Students come together for music concerts, dance shows and drama productions.

We have a strong record of school improvement in our trust. Our CEO, Rachael Warwick, is a National Leader in Education who has taken Didcot Girls' School from RI on her arrival as



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headteacher in 2010 to Outstanding in 2015. The school has been placed in the top 3% of schools nationally for progress over the last five years. School improvement work at St Birinus School placed the school in the top 5% nationally for boys' progress in 2018 and secured similarly strong attainment in 2019 albeit likely in the top 25% for boys' progress. Sutton Courtenay CofE Primary School was placed 'well below' average for reading and writing and 'below average' for maths at KS2 in 2017. Since working with RET, results have improved to national average progress across all three areas in 2018 and 2019.

Business Model

The merger of our two secondary schools in 2015 acted as a catalyst for delivering improved value for money by enabling combined finance, IT and premises teams, sharing expertise, combining contracts and purchasing power and improving financial planning. We would wish to continue this work as the Trust grows. We are not wedded to an ideology that everything must be delivered in a uniform manner, for example, contracts. We look for economies of scale and can give good examples of having delivered savings and moving swiftly to restructure or put in place single contracts. However, we also appreciate that schools have different needs and so we do not impose change if it is clearly not in the best interests of the school concerned.

Currently, our schools receive their GAG allocation directly: we do not 'pool'. We have had discussion on that but are in no rush to adopt such a model. We construct detailed budgets for each school and the central trust and are transparent about the costs that are incurred by the Central Trust as a part of the budget setting and monitoring processes. We have common financial systems and reporting across our three schools. Each school has its own reserves which are kept separate in our accounts, but the trust takes a holistic view on its overall minimum prudent level of reserves to manage risks. We appreciate that a trust of over 3,000 students and five schools would give access to an annual capital fund to be deployed strategically across the trust schools instead of relying on the vagaries of the CIF process.

Executive Leadership

Currently, our CEO is also Executive Headteacher and line manages the Heads of each school. She is seconded to ASCL (Association of School and College Leaders) for one day each week as Immediate Past President, and also works as a Support & Challenge Partner for River Learning Trust half a day each week.

The RET Executive Leadership Group includes the CEO/EHT, Heads of each school plus other senior staff as per agenda and meets termly. The Heads and senior teams are given access to an external leadership coach with whom they meet termly. The RET Management group focuses on the delivery of support staff services and implementation of budget decisions agreed by governors.

Summary

At the heart of any successful collaboration is shared purpose expressed through professional trust, effective communication and personal connection. This has been relatively simple to achieve at trustee, governor and executive level. However, we have found that bringing all trust staff together for Inset Days and social events has had a significant impact in creating the lived experience of 'one trust' for all of our staff. Similarly, bringing students together has had a similarly positive impact. There is always more that connects us than that which separates us and making this a reality has been the key to successful integration and a sense of 'one trust' across RET.



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