



# INSPIRES MAT

## Estate Vision and Strategy 2025-2026

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# Introduction

This document introduces the Vision and Estates Strategy for Inspires MAT

## Overview

The purpose of this Estates Strategy is to provide a clear statement of the objectives and methods to be employed by Inspires MAT to ensure its buildings support the schools strategic/service delivery objectives whilst preserving asset value.

The Estates Strategy aims to ensure that, so far as it is reasonably practicable, the estate is fit for the purpose intended, complies with current legislation, and is maintained to provide a safe and secure environment. Maintenance budgets are used for reactive and cyclical maintenance of existing building structure and fabric and electrical services, statutory inspections, equipment, and grounds maintenance.

This Strategy defines the framework on which all building maintenance, new capital works projects and management operations should be based to ensure a consistent approach in the planning, management and reporting of building maintenance.

In addition to supporting the Trust's strategic and visionary aims, the Trust is also committed to a process of risk management including identification and management of key risks, protecting, and making best use of assets, to ensure that the Trust can deliver its educational objectives.

In the context of the Estates Strategy, risk management involves minimising the risk of unforeseen major defects or failures, which may adversely affect the operation of the Schools within the Trust, or cause harm to pupils, staff or visitors. Correspondingly, an effective maintenance strategy mitigates the potential for claims against the Trust associated with negligence and statutory non-compliance matters.

## Historical context of Inspires MAT

The Academies Act 2010 started the political journey that allowed more schools to become academies. The Education Act of 2011 then increased the powers of the Secretary of State for Education to intervene in poorly performing schools and require these to become Academies. It also created the presumption that all new schools will be academies or free schools.

The introduction of the role of Regional Schools Commissioner in September 2014 followed by the National Schools Commissioner in March 2016 has built an additional level of monitoring and scrutiny at a more local level for all academies and multi academy trusts.

### **Geography and communities we serve**

Inspires MAT (formerly Connected Learning) originally formed in Witham on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013, when Powers Hall Academy (now Witham Oaks Academy) formed Connected Learning as a means of supporting underperforming schools within the Witham area and additionally two schools in Colchester. Cherry Tree Academy and Icen Academy (now Kings Ford Academy) both joined the Trust on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015. Templars Academy followed on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 with Silver End Academy the most recent addition on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.

Our schools are proud of the communities they serve, wanting to maintain their local identity within those communities whilst also benefiting from even closer collaboration as part of Inspires MAT. We have close links with Essex County Council with regards to school performance and collaboration as well as SEND through the Speech and Language provision at Cherry Tree and the SEMH provision at Templars (SEMH).

There are pockets of severe deprivation in parts of Witham, and in parts of Colchester. Each school has its unique challenges from high social mobility, through high SEND requirements and onto significant social care caseloads.

Contents

- 1. Strategic estate management.....3
- 2. The trust vision for our Estate.....5
- 3. Estate Strategy.....4
- 4. Asset Management Plans.....8
- 5. Responsibilities.....10

## Strategic estate management

It is often said that our greatest resource is our people. On that basis, our second greatest resource is our estate. Financially the value of our estate assets dwarfs all other assets we hold, but we must always remember that we hold all our assets in trust to further our objectives as a charitable organisation. These can be summarised as the provision of free education, for and with the community in which each of our schools are located and our second legal object which is the provision of recreational and sporting facilities for the community. Our estate must be used to further these objectives, now and into the future as we are guardians of the estate in the same way as we are guardians of educational standards.

Strategic estate management is what we do to make sure that we manage our estate to achieve our charitable objectives. Strategic estate management helps the trust to:

- Make decisions supported by evidence
- Use our resources effectively
- Maximise the estate's value to the trust

To manage the trust estate strategically we must:

- Understand what we need to do with the estate to meet our education goals
- Have good governance arrangements
- Assign clear responsibilities across the trust for managing the estate
- Make and implement plans; and
- Review and track performance

## The trust vision for our Estate

The vision for our estate must be rooted in the values and principles that underpin our trust as a whole. The agreed vision is:

- We aspire for our estate buildings to be safe, warm and dry
- Our estate supports the delivery of our school curriculum and ensures excellent outcomes for learners
- Estate resources are shared for the common good, based on collaboration between our schools, not competition
- We are financially disciplined and spending on our estate is prioritised within the financial constraints we work within
- All our schools are equal partners and available funding is allocated fairly and according to need, not according to size or school success
- The configuration of our estate supports excellent relationships between young people and other members of the community and we consider accessibility in our planning
- We are committed to fulfilling our responsibilities for compliance and to protect the health and safety of pupils, staff and our communities when using our estate
- We understand our estate is a community asset and will make it available for the provision of recreation, sporting or other leisure time activities for our community whenever we can find a way to make this financially viable
- In making decisions about the estate we will always consider the long term, ensuring these assets are available for generations to come.

## Estate Strategy Overview

Designation	Summary strategy
Size of school	<p>The trust has a preference for schools to be of a suitable size to be viable over the longterm. School buildings should ideally be designed to accommodate consistent multiple forms of entry (eg: 1 form entry, 2 form entry). We appreciate this is not always possible and schools can be run in innovative ways to accommodate smaller cohorts with mixed age teaching and shared leadership. However, in respect of estate management we have a preference to work towards buildings that accommodate consistent numbers of forms of entry.</p> <p>We will work closely with the Local Authority, to respond to pressures on pupil places. This includes working to open new schools where there is a proven need for places and expand our existing schools to meet need, with capital support from Local Authorities and the DfE to do so.</p>
Delivery of school curriculum	<p>New building and re-configuration to support the needs of the curriculum is supported on the basis that the curriculum itself is deliverable and financially sustainable over the long term. We will take advice on the DfE recommended school sizes to deliver an acceptable curriculum and acknowledge that at the present time there is no earmarked funding available for expansion or re-configuration to meet curriculum needs alone.</p>
Suitability	<p>We acknowledge that having an attractive and appealing estate results in pupils wishing to attend our schools and our staff having a comfortable and functional place in which to work. We will also consider suitability when planning remodelling or expansion of our estate, choosing to make crucial adjustments to improve the attractiveness and appeal of the estate where this is practical and affordable.</p>
Standard of Work	<p>When carrying out expansion or refurbishment work our aim is to deliver high quality works which are fit for purpose and has a long lifespan, meeting all building and other regulations. Our current strategy is to utilise our MAT Lead Site Manager where feasible or appoint project managers to manage medium to large projects to ensure high quality enhancements are achieved.</p>
Insurance	<p>The trust will hold sufficient insurance from a reputable company to protect us against the risk of serious damage to our buildings. At present our insurance is provided by Zurich through ECC and is considered to meet our needs in this respect.</p>
Compliance	<p>In order to make sure we are compliant with all legal and other requirements; we will carry out the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular compliance checks in schools by site staff which are tailored to the needs of the individual school's estate. These are recorded in 'I Am Compliant'</li> <li>• Regular compliance checks in school are carried out by the MAT Lead Site Manager or a competent contractor, where this is required by legislation or Policy. These are recorded in 'I Am Compliant'</li> <li>• Regular audits of compliance carried out either internally or externally and recorded in 'I Am Compliant'.</li> <li>• Reporting of compliance to be considered by the Board of Trustees and by the COO/Lead Site Manager with the Site Manager of each school. In the event non-compliance is identified, an action plan is put in place to return our estate to full compliance.</li> </ul>
Condition	<p>Funding that the trust receives to tackle condition issues will be spent by prioritising those condition issues that have the greatest risk to prevent us using our estate for the delivery of education. This will be achieved by targeting those with the worst condition (D or C) and the greatest potential impact.</p> <p>In order to prioritise effectively and also to allow us to bid for money when the opportunity arises, the trust relies on the Condition Surveys completed by the DfE on a rolling basis. Surveys will be shared with school leaders and trustees.</p> <p>Where condition issues exist that are not being tackled using the trust grant, the devolved formula capital allocation to each school must be used where practical to resolve the most serious issues. In some cases, condition issues may be so severe and funding so limited that the agreed course of action is either not to use the affected building or to strategically manage the condition until an opportunity arises to replace.</p>
Preventative maintenance	<p>It is acknowledged that the education system sometimes rewards a lack of preventative maintenance. If a problem is left long enough, the cost to solve it becomes so great that it becomes an issue that can be only funded by the trust funding allocation or by funding direct from the DfE for rebuilding. Unfortunately, there is not enough money in the system to be able to afford to allow our estate to deteriorate unnecessarily.</p>

	We will rigorously identify, plan and carry out preventative maintenance (e.g. servicing, repainting) to ensure our estate assets have the longest possible useful life.
Urgent Works	Priority will always be given to statutory and other health and safety requirements and any work relating to emergencies such as major electrical failures; floods; gas escapes etc. An action plan will be put in place to make safe and prevent further damage.
Value for Money	When procuring works to our estate we use the trust procurement policy at all times to achieve value for money. We will grasp opportunities to carry out work efficiently (e.g. to do more than one thing when scaffolding is in place) or tackle a long-held aspiration when a grant becomes available. We will also consider not doing works where they have a limited lifespan or do not fit into the longer-term plans for our estate. We procure collaboratively to achieve economies of scale when buying goods and services required across our estate. This will ensure consistency as well as limiting the cost to individual schools.
Training	All our staff will receive appropriate health and safety training related to the estate. Staff with specific responsibilities for managing the trust estate will receive access to targeted appropriate training.
Accessibility	Our estate should be accessible to pupils, staff and members of the community. We will make reasonable adjustments to our estate to provide for the needs of our pupils and staff as they arise. We will also consider accessibility when planning remodelling or expansion of our estate, choosing to make crucial adjustments to improve accessibility where this is practical and affordable.
Sustainability	When considering any remodelling or expansion to our estate we will consider whether it is sustainable in terms of maintenance and replacement over time, taking into account any potential income generation opportunities or revenue cost (eg: to heat and clean). A challenging option appraisal process is undertaken to ensure that the balance between capital and revenue spend is maintained.
Income generation	We are bold when considering opportunities to invest to both fulfil our objective of the provision of facilities and income generation to support the running of the schools. We take advantage of opportunities to access grants and therefore to be able to carry out projects which impact beneficially on our community. We always put together a business plan to analyse these opportunities and ensure they are sustainable in the longer term.
Tenure	We understand the legal basis on which we hold our estate and receive relevant permissions from our ultimate landlord where applicable.
Disposal of our estate	When there is an opportunity to dispose of our estate (either by sale or by leasing a building to an external organisation), we will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a business case for investing the proceeds of the disposal that achieves our trust objectives over the longer term</li> <li>• Ensure all legal and regulatory conditions are complied with, including obtaining permission from the DfE, ECC, planning, rates, etc</li> <li>• Consider any safeguarding implications</li> <li>• Ensure any lease is drawn up by a legal professional</li> <li>• Consider and determine whether the organisation or purpose which benefits from the disposal is in line with our ethos and values.</li> </ul>
Energy Efficiency	We aspire to improve energy efficiency across our estate, provided the initiatives bring both environmental and financial benefits to the trust. We are prepared to borrow money (in a compliant manner) to carry out these initiatives. The financial benefits of the initiatives would go to overall trust budget, allowing saving to impact the schools. We are aware that energy efficiency is about more than just energy generation (e.g. solar, wind) but about having efficient boilers, roofing, windows, etc and most importantly of all, encouraging energy efficient behaviours. The trust central staff will purchase energy (gas & electricity) on behalf of the trust estate to achieve economies of scale.
Funding and Probity	We will comply with any conditions and reporting requirements imposed on us as a result of receiving grant funding for estate improvement or expansion.
Business Continuity	We will have business continuity plans in place at a trust and individual school level to protect us in the eventuality of not having access to part of our estate.
Impact of works on our estate	We carefully consider the impact of the process of carrying out works on our estate, particularly the impact on the education provision while the works are going on. We prioritise health and safety at all times, ensuring our pupils and staff are not put at risk by the building works. Work is planned logically to minimise disruption to day-to-day operations.
Collaboration	We make use of our estate for the benefit of all pupils and staff in the trust, when the need arises.

# Asset Management Plans

Each school must have an asset management plan, responding to the above estate strategy, but tailored to the circumstances and priorities of the school. The asset management plan determines local priorities and actions.

## Governance Arrangements

The Board of Trustees are responsible for the Trust estate and committed to ensure that this Estates Strategy is fully compliant and meets its statutory obligations.

## Appendix 1 – Trust Estate

The trust estate currently consists of 5 schools; 3 Primary and 2 Junior with a serviced office for the trust central team (Business Centre).

School	Tenure	Leisure/ Nursery/provision Facilities
Cherry Tree	Leasehold	Speech and Language provision Site house letting
Kings Ford	Leasehold	Currently in consultation around opening an 8 place Autism Provision
Witham Oaks	Leasehold	Site house letting Opening a 12 place Autism Provision imminently
Silver End	Leasehold	Swimming pool (currently closed) MUGA Pitch
Templars	Leasehold	Nursery SEMH provision Site house letting
Business Centre	Leasehold	