



Department
for Education

Greenwood Dale Foundation

In-depth sponsor profile

April 2014

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Introduction

Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust sponsors a chain of 24 academies in the East Midlands. The Trust was started in 2009 by an outstanding grant maintained secondary school in a highly deprived area of Nottingham.

From the outset, the long term aim has been to develop the most successful and innovative group of Academies in the country delivering outstanding progress and above average results in socially disadvantaged communities. Their success is demonstrated by 77% of schools who have been with the Trust for over a year (joining prior to April 2013) having results at least 5 points higher than prior to joining (ranging up to 38 points higher) and 85% gaining results above the floor target.

The aim of this profile is to illustrate the journey of Greenwood Dale to April 2014, detailing the challenges they have faced and the unique approaches taken to tackle these. The profile is intended for existing, new and potential sponsors to use in defining and refining their own infrastructure and approaches to sponsorship.

Key Themes

- School based sponsor
- Managed growth
- Tackling failing schools in areas of social and economic deprivation
- Centrally driven ethos and school improvement model
- Centrally manage Academy governance
- Leadership development

Founding and ethos

The Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust was founded in 2009 from the highly successful Greenwood Dale School which was a grant maintained secondary school in a very deprived area of Nottingham. Over the course of seventeen years the head teacher, Barry Day, transformed Greenwood Dale School from performing poorly on virtually every Ofsted criteria into a nationally recognised institution with the highest contextual value added scores in the country. Ofsted drew attention to them in their report *Twelve Outstanding Secondary Schools Excelling Against the Odds*:

“Over the years the school has been utterly transformed. At the root of this change lies certainty of vision, consistency of purpose and a belief that everyone, students and staff alike, can achieve more than they thought possible, given the right conditions and encouragement. The result is an organisation that is secure in what it does. It takes on ambitious commitments but leaves nothing to chance. It innovates and experiments but at little risk.”

Eager to build on this success and improve the education and life chances of a greater number of children in their community, Barry and his team had started to support local schools which were facing difficulties. This work included in two instances sending senior teachers out to lead local schools and turning them around with Barry’s support and oversight. But these were relatively short-term interventions. The founding of the Trust in 2009 gave them the opportunity to lead the schools on a long-term basis, building highly skilled teams of teachers and replicating the calm, well-disciplined and purposeful culture of success of the original school

“The approach is that every pupil will make the progress that they are capable of – it’s that simple, that’s our vision.” Kelvin Hornsby, Education Director

The team

The Trust is led by CEO Barry Day, the former headteacher of Greenwood Dale school. Barry has spent a career focussing on the needs of inner city pupils in areas of significant deprivation. He believes that deprivation must not be a barrier to success and has demonstrated, year after year, that these pupils can be more successful than other groups in the progress they make when given the opportunities and support required. Barry is responsible for the overall functioning of the organisation, new opportunities and the success of the open academies. He is supported in this by Deputy CEO Graham Feek. Graham is a former local authority director who got involved with the Trust at the outset when he was a director at Nottingham City council and was involved in setting up the Nottingham Academy.

Barry also directly line manages the education director, Kelvin Hornsby. Kelvin has come up through the organisation having previously been the executive principal of The Nottingham Academy and the principal of the Skegness Academy. Graham manages the operation side of the organisation and Kelvin manages the education side including the executive principals. The organisation structures are shown at Annex A.

The main Board comprises of Barry, Graham and nine trustees/non-executive directors. The Board is chaired by David Shelton who was a governor at Greenwood Dale School for twenty one years, becoming Chairman during that time. Six of the other non-executive directors also have long-term links to Greenwood Dale and the Nottingham area. The other non-executive directors, John Dunstan, Nigel Hastings and Alistair Scullion, bring additional business and commercial expertise to the Board.

Developing a chain

Getting established

Barry has always had an aspiration to take on other schools in order to raise attainment and opportunities across the East Midlands. In the first few years of the Trust the number of schools grew steadily with four sponsored academies joining between 2009 and 2011. During this time Barry and his team focused on developing a core central services offer and setting out a very clear ethos which could be embedded into any school.

They made it a top priority to recruit a team to deliver central services, believing this would reduce burdens on academy principals instantly giving them more capacity to be visible leaders and drive their academy's improvement. Initially this was funded through grant money from the new schools they took on with some subsidy for salaries from the Greenwood Dale School, but by the time the Trust had grown to 4 schools it was covered by the top-slice paid by schools.

Expanding beyond 5 academies

Having spent much of their first three years planning their approach and building the necessary infrastructure, it was agreed with trustees in 2012 that the Trust was ready for significant expansion. They took on seven schools that year and, following sustained performance across their schools, has continued to grow at a significant rate. They expect to have 28 academies by September 2014. All schools (bar one) are within the East Midlands area, in economically and socially deprived communities. They include: 15 primaries (including an infant school), 7 secondaries, 1 all through academy and 1 special school academy. Two of these were Free School projects and one a brand new local authority procured school.

In order to ensure that growth is managed in a way that fits organisational capacity, in 2012 they introduced an annual process where a growth plan is agreed with the trustees setting out the maximum number of schools which can join in any one year. In 2014 this is self-capped at 8 primaries and up to 3 secondaries giving a total maximum growth of 11 schools. Greenwood Dale does not currently have a cap on the number of academies they will take on in the long term.

Along with the yearly maximums, schools which they take on must also be in communities which are either economically and socially deprived or in an area of educational underachievement. Nearly all schools the Trust take on are in special measures. This is in line with their vision of enhancing achievement for deprived children. Schools are also prioritised if they are feeder primaries for current Greenwood Dale secondaries or secondary schools which serve current primaries.

Highly professional centralised services

The Trust takes 5.1% as a top slice from schools to pay for: educational support and challenge, governance, HR, finance, audit, health and safety, catering, insurance, procurement for school level purchases costing over £25,000, estates management and central team salaries. They think this offers very good value for money particularly compared to the money that would have been held back from the schools by local authorities prior to academisation.

A fully managed ICT service is also available and is charged on a cost per pupil basis.

Executive Principals

Since growing beyond the initial group of schools, the Trust has introduced 'Executive Principals' who each oversee a group of academies. The number of academies each is allocated depends on the level of need. They believe this design gives an additional level of quality assurance and enables the provision of mentoring and leadership for the school level principals

All of the executive principals have been outstanding school principals and are highly experienced. Some have been recruited from within the organisation and others have been recruited through links with excellent schools and leaders. They support the school principals by setting consistently challenging targets and ensuring compliance with core values. Executive principals line-manage their allocated school principals and report to Education Director, Kelvin Hornsby.

This approach also means that they can bring leaders up through the organisation and give them jobs as school principals sooner because the new leaders can do a degree of learning on the job whilst being supported by their executive principal.

Investing in future Trust leaders

“The best way to effect succession planning is to identify talented staff within schools and support them to realise their potential. These people with home-grown talent also give stability because they are local people who are already invested in their communities.” Kelvin Hornsby, Director of Education

Emma Hadley is a good example of the Trust’s ability to identify the capabilities of strong individuals in struggling schools. Emma was the principal of a very small (120 pupil) primary school (now The Ingoldmells Academy) which joined Greenwood Dale in September 2012. Barry and his team recognised her potential and worked with her to develop her skills and aptitudes. As a result she is now one of the executive principals and oversees five academies (soon to be six) in the Skegness region.

Turning around failing schools

“We’ve taken on schools where head teachers haven’t even been able to give us a timetable and we don’t know when break is because the youngsters are coming out of their classes at different times.” Kelvin Hornsby, Education Director

Joining the Trust

Following the consultation process, the Trust puts a lot of resource from the central team into schools prior to them formally joining. This includes school improvement support as well as work to get structures and processes in place. The aim of this investment is to kick start improvements and ensure that from the moment the school opens as an academy it feels different and can clearly be seen to be a Greenwood Dale academy.

As a first step in the due diligence process, Graham and his team ensure that they have assessed the school’s finance, HR and procurement for risks and have come to an agreement with the school, local authority and/or the Department for Education about any liabilities which the school carries (such as any funding deficits).

“We not only focus on what needs to be improved, we also want to find areas of good and outstanding practice to build upon. This is motivational and allows staff to show their real potential.” Barry Day, CEO.

Following the risk assessment, and prior to signing the funding agreement, the Trust carries out a due diligence process. This explores all areas of the school from pupil achievement to funding deficits and whether staff have the necessary vetting and barring checks in place. This is used to create a plan for the initial improvement and development activity in the new Academy.

An Ofsted style review will happen three times during the first year that the school is an academy with the final review being quality assured and provided with external validation by other principals from within the chain. This informs future planning and ensures that a focus is kept on the necessary improvements that need to be made.

“Our Principals run their academies. They have clear targets, but are encouraged to achieve them in their own way, with our support if needed. Each of our Academies develops in a unique way, depending on the leadership style of the Principal and the particular challenges the academy has. There are givens, such as high standards of behaviour, uniforms for all pupils, high quality teaching and learning and high value added. However, each Principal has the freedom to achieve these in their own way.”
Barry Day, CEO

Barry and his team are very clear that good behaviour is vital if a school is to have the right conditions for learning so discipline is always an initial focus. Barry and his team have found that by emphasising discipline and good behaviour, along with strict enforcement of uniform, the atmosphere and culture of a school can change within one term. They make no apology for the fact there might be an initial rise in fixed term exclusions as they have found that a focus on discipline leads to lower exclusion rates and better behaviour in the long term.

During the first term the Trust also ensure that pupil level data is developed. To do this they put in place accurately assessed starting points, working with teacher assessments and previous performance in tests and exams, and use this as a baseline against which to monitor progress. As new data on pupils becomes available it is added to the cross-Trust data system. This means that anyone in the organisation can access up to date information which can be selected by pupil, school, year group or many other categories. This allows the main Board to easily interrogate trends in the data at Board meetings.

School leadership

The Trust consistently finds that leadership is a core problem in failing schools and there is always a change in leadership, either through recruiting new leaders or through changing the incumbent leaders' approach, when schools join them. Barry believes that school senior leadership teams should be visible to staff, pupils and parents and during the school day they should be in the school working with the staff and teaching pupils. In order to remain in post, incumbent leaders must buy-in to this vision. The emphasis on visible leadership and active involvement in teaching is reinforced by their central services which are designed to take as much of the bureaucracy and burdens away from the principal as possible.

Barry and his team take a case-by-case approach to retaining school principals. If the school principal was not previously getting the support they needed but has the potential and willingness to work with the academy and be part of the solution then they are supported to stay. However, the Trust is clear that the success of any school is down to the quality of leadership and the Trust does not tolerate poor leadership as this damages the education of pupils. In some schools, they find that prior to becoming an academy the school has started the improvement process by bringing in a new principal. In these cases it's more likely that there will not be a physical change in leadership and the focus will be on the approach and visibility of the leadership team.

In schools which join without a school principal, Barry will often deploy Geoff Wilson, their principal without portfolio, to be the principal until the school is stable. Geoff is a former secondary principal with a wealth of experience across the 3-19 age range.

His expertise and ability to be a “safe pair of hands” mean he quickly gets control of schools. He ensures the necessary structures (timetabling, curriculum, and policies) are in place and also puts in place discipline and visible leadership so that the environment quickly becomes one where learning can occur in line with the Trust’s vision of the standards agenda. In one primary, Geoff took the school from being in special measures to being above the floor standard in all areas in less than two terms. When not running schools Geoff provides the other executive principals with support and trouble shoots across the organisation.

Innovating local governance

“We are not interested in the principals responding to layers of governance which are adding no value to the organisation what so ever.” Graham Feek, Deputy CEO

When a school joins the Trust their governing body will be disbanded and an Academy Advisory Council (AAC) will be put in place. This is designed to make local governance light touch and focused. Each school’s AAC meets at least once a year but they do not have any legal governance responsibilities – these fall to the main board. They comprise of ten members: six nominated by the Trust, two parent representatives, the principal and a member of the teaching staff.

The AAC performs functions including: advising the main board about local issues, representing community interests and undertaking procedures that are essential to the life of the Academy, including disciplinary and complaint procedures. The Chair of the AAC, in consultation with the principal, does have the discretion to meet more often but only if they can demonstrate that more meetings would have a direct impact on improving standards.

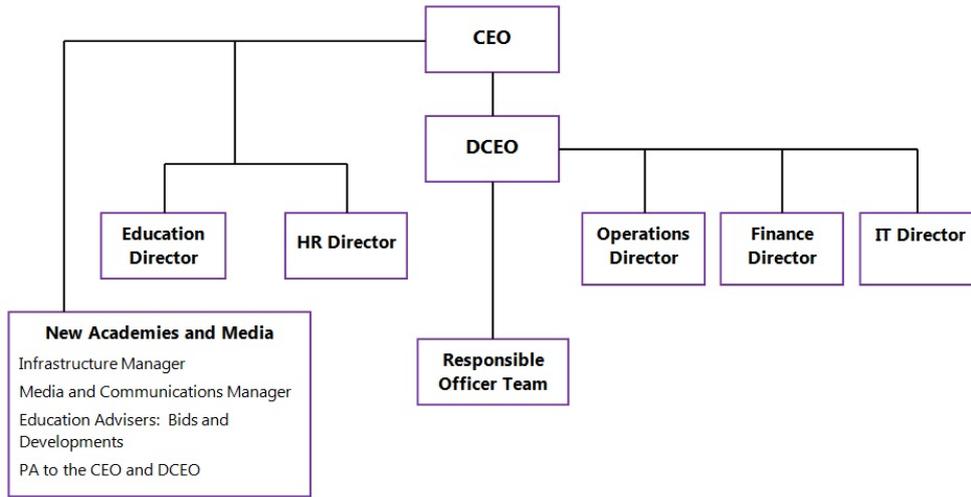
Academy Council members are encouraged to spend time in their academy during the working day to see for themselves what is actually happening, rather than in evening meetings that often add no value.

Summary of Key Learning Points

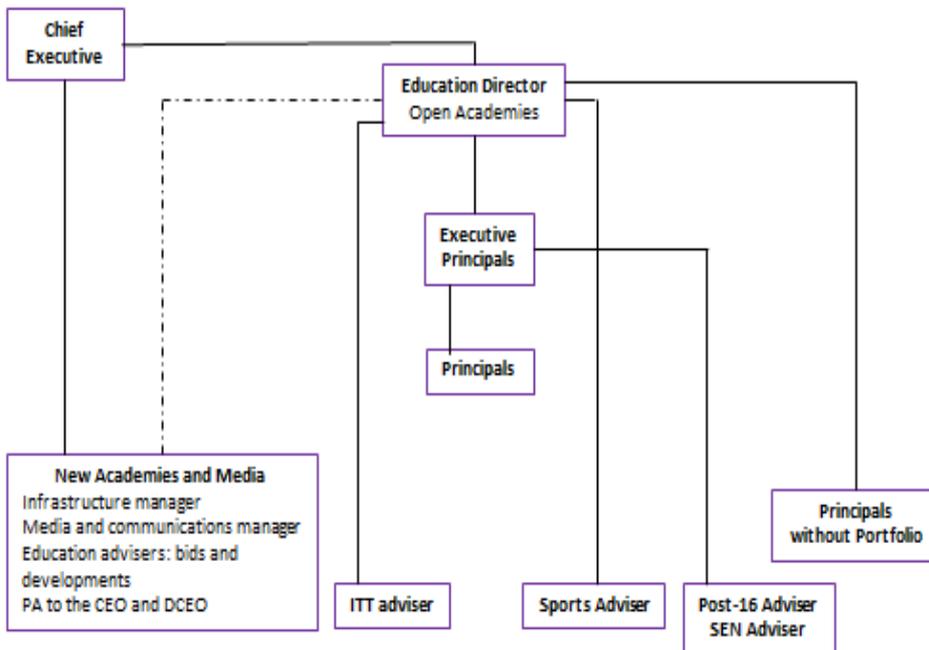
- Use visible leadership to ensure that everyone in the school knows what is expected of them; all principals teach the most challenging pupils and model outstanding practice.
- Expand slowly to begin with to allow you to put in place the necessary infrastructure.
- Ensure you have commercial and educational expertise on your board who take a robust view of governance.
- Executive principals give a robust challenge and support structure.
- Look for future leaders from within your chain, develop their skills and give opportunities for training and promotion.
- Always review local governance! Many local governing bodies waste school leader's time and effort for little, if any, gain.

Annex A: Structure diagrams

1. Central team structure



2. Education directorate structure





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Reference: DFE-00417-2014