

MODERN SLAVERY STATEMENT 2026

The Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST) is an academy trust in Bedfordshire comprising 11 schools, 5 nurseries, 1100 employees and 8000 plus pupils. BEST is passionate about tackling the growing problem of modern slavery. We are committed to preventing slavery and human trafficking within our activities and to ensuring that supply chains are free from slavery and human trafficking (consistent with disclosure obligations under the Modern Slavery Act 2015). BEST expects the same high standards from all its contractors, suppliers and other business partners.

This statement, which applies to all academies and nurseries within the Trust, sets out BEST's actions to understand all potential modern slavery risks related to its business and to put in place steps that are aimed at ensuring that there is no slavery or human trafficking in its business and supply chains.

BEST strongly values:

- The ethical treatment of all individuals.
- The safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults.
- The responsible, accountable and compliant spending of public and charitable funds.

1.0 IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING RISKS

- 1.1 BEST pursues the above values in all aspects of its operations, meaning we are committed to ensuring that business operations are completely free from modern slavery and human trafficking.
- 1.2 Whilst we believe that there is a low risk of slavery or human trafficking having a connection with our activities, BEST is committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct in everything we do and we will continue to undertake improvements in this area, whenever we identify opportunities to do so.
- 1.3 We recognise that there are two main avenues of risk through which modern slavery could impact the organisation. The first is our supply chain and the vendors we contract. The second is through matters of a safeguarding nature which covers child exploitation or human trafficking which can directly impact our pupils and our staff.

1.3.1 Business and supply chains

- 1.3.1.1 We work to the highest professional standards and comply with all laws, regulations, and rules relevant to our business. We expect all suppliers working with the Trust to ensure that they are compliant with the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and with all local and national laws and regulations in their operations and are committed to ensuring that there is no modern slavery or human trafficking in our supply chains or in any part of our business. This includes paying their staff the minimum wage, and any on-site staff passing a DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) check. Should suppliers fail to meet our minimum requirements, or be unwilling to make any changes, we may cease to work with them.

1.3.1.2 The majority of our suppliers are UK based and employees are protected under UK employment legislation and working time directives. Whilst the Trust does not conduct business in countries where there is a documented problem with human trafficking and / or modern slavery, we remain acutely aware of the need to ensure that companies within our supply chain share our commitment to treating employees fairly and ethically.

1.3.1.3 Key supply chains include (but are not limited to):

- Facilities management maintenance and services
- Education equipment, textbooks, and resources suppliers
- Food and drink suppliers
- ICT equipment and services
- Teaching supply/agency staff

1.3.1.4 We have identified that some of our procurement takes place within sectors where modern slavery offences could occur, such as within our cleaning and catering supply chains and within the construction industry.

1.3.1.5 We have carried out a risk assessment of our supply chain against the likelihood of the following three traits of slavery and human trafficking occurring:

- Forced labour
- Work and life under duress
- Impossibility of leaving an employer

1.3.1.6 We have assessed the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking as follows:

High risk activities:

- We do not believe there to be any high-risk operations within the Trust or within their supply chain with regards to modern slavery and human trafficking.

Medium risk activities:

- Supply chains linked to the catering and cleaning provisions because of the Trust's use of external contractors.
- Supply chains linked to the manufacture of ICT equipment and school uniforms, because of the Trust's use of external suppliers to provide items and the likelihood that supplies are manufactured overseas.

Low risk activities:

- Provision of agency staff, predominantly in teaching and support staff.

These areas of risk remain under continual review.

1.3.1.7 Procurement is subject to internal audit review, as well as assessed by our external auditors (annually). A range of Public Contracts Regulations (PCR) compliant frameworks via public sector buying organisations including those endorsed by the Department of Education are considered for all tenders and these meet the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 by default. In the event that we do not use an existing framework when procuring goods or services, modern slavery risk is considered as part of the process.

1.3.1.8 We act ethically and with integrity in all of our charitable and business relations.

1.3.2 Safeguarding & Recruitment

- 1.3.2.1 We take safeguarding incredibly seriously, upholding our statutory duties and striving to safeguard staff and pupils through a culture of safeguarding in everything we do.
- 1.3.2.2 The Trust conducts all its recruitment processes in line with its Recruitment policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education which lay out stringent processes for recruiting staff, and thoroughly checking that they are legally entitled to work in the UK. All employees who join the Trust are subject to rigorous pre-employment checks to ensure they are genuine applicants operating as free agents with the required level of propriety. These will include verification of identity, references, evidence of qualifications, criminal record disclosure and right to work checks. All employees are provided with information about their statutory rights, including sick pay, holiday entitlements, parental leave, flexible working and any other benefits to which they may be entitled.
- 1.3.2.3 Agency staff are subject to the same checks, which are completed by their agency, with confirmation being provided to appropriate BEST academy. The agency checks are recorded on the single central register at academy level.
- 1.3.2.4 BEST is committed to ensuring that all directly employed and contracted staff receive fair remuneration for the job they perform. All BEST staff are employed on national terms and conditions (Teachers Pay and Conditions for teaching staff and NJC terms and conditions for support staff) and we ensure that our recruitment agencies comply with all legal requirements.
- 1.3.2.5 We pay due regard to advice issued by recognised trade unions and other national bodies as appropriate, along with relevant statutory legislation, when considering remuneration.

2.0 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- 2.1 The policies we have in place and this anti-slavery statement reflect our commitment to:
- paying people fairly and properly for their work.
 - acting ethically and with integrity in all our business relationships
 - enforcing effective systems and controls to ensure slavery and human trafficking is not taking place anywhere within the Trust or within our supply chains.
- 2.2 The Trust has implemented a Safeguarding Policy which references modern slavery, and maintains due regard for the Modern Slavery Act 2015 in all policies, procedures and regulations relating to its financial management and procurement. Our policies are regularly monitored, are officially reviewed in line with our policy review schedule, and are updated in response to any changes to government regulations or guidelines.
- 2.3 Linked policies -
- Complaints Policy;
 - Whistleblowing Policy;
 - Recruitment Policy;
 - Safeguarding Policy;
 - Code of Conduct;
 - Equal Opportunities Policy

3.0 PROGRESS AND IMPACT

3.1 BEST is committed to continually reviewing and improving its practices to ensure modern slavery is in no way a part of its operations.

3.2 Progress to date:

- BEST ensures that staff are paid in line or above National Minimum Wage (including Apprentice staff) ensuring that pay is reviewed annually. Whenever there is an uplift to the National Minimum Wage, National Living Wage and apprentice rates, the Trust checks to ensure that all staff are being paid correctly.
- The Trust Safeguarding policy is reviewed on an annual basis and adopted by all settings. Staff, governors and Trustees receive annual safeguarding training and any necessary updates throughout the year. Additional online training is available to support safer recruitment and child protection.
- The Trust commitment to high quality CPD means that designated safeguarding roles receive relevant learning and development support.

3.3 Over the next 12 months, we are looking to implement the following measures to increase our oversight of ethical practices:

Planned activities for 2026-27:

- Raise awareness amongst our academy-based teams involved in employment, procurement and management, of the risks of modern slavery occurring within our supply chains.
- Review the tender procedures in place to include compliance with the Modern Slavery Act as a condition or criterion in specification.
- Review the procedures in place to approve new suppliers and look to incorporate a statement requiring all suppliers adhere to the Modern Slavery Act.

DECLARATION

This statement has been approved in full by the Bedfordshire Schools Trust Board of Trustees, pursuant to the fulfilment of its obligations under section 54(1) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.



Signed _____

Date _____ 30 June 2026 _____

Alan Lee

Chief Executive Officer