



BEST

BEDFORDSHIRE
SCHOOLS TRUST

THE BEST OF BEST

10

**YEARS OF
COMMUNITY**

2016 – 2026

Celebrating our values, people and journey



Welcome to The Best of **BEST**

This year is a landmark year for the Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST), as we celebrate our 10-year anniversary. Over the coming pages you will read a little of our journey and what makes BEST a very special place to learn and grow.

Our journey is characterised by unrivalled success. BEST has more than doubled in size, delivered Good or Outstanding Ofsted grades in all our nurseries and schools and secured long-term financial sustainability.

Together, we have nurtured a vibrant community, with compassion at its heart. One judged by external review as: 'leading the way on wellbeing in the educational sector' (Juniper 2022) and described as: 'A special place where schools keep their own identity, but never stand alone. Support is genuine, trust is earned and values guide every choice'. (BEST Executive 2026)

BEST is distinctive in that we encourage all our nurseries and schools to nurture their own identities, where values are lived and community needs are met. All interpret our mission – to grow the BEST in everyone – differently; all treasure difference and prize the unique. We have a high autonomy approach and are nationally acclaimed for placing wellbeing at the core of everything we do.

As part of our 10 year celebrations, we launched a Big Community Listen. Over 1000 community members spoke. We listened and the findings will shape the next 10 years of BEST. Of course, it was pleasing that 92% of parents praised BEST schools. Nonetheless, the goal is always 100%!

On our Mission, Vision and Values Day, as the Founding CEO of BEST I praised and thanked all the heroes past and present whose service has brought us to this point. I also described how leading our community for its first 10 years has been the highlight of my career and an absolute joy.

BEST is in a great position. A proven track record of success and direction from the Big Community Listen; highly talented and dedicated staff and governors; supportive parents/carers and the most wonderful young people ever, all promise that the future for BEST is about to get even better.

Dr Alan Lee, CEO, BEST



Welcome from the **Chair of Trustees**

A very warm welcome to the 10th Anniversary edition of The Best of BEST. I am very proud to be sharing and celebrating with you the many wonderful achievements we have had as the community of BEST over the past ten years.

Through the amazing commitment of our executive team, our principals and all staff in our schools, our governors, parents and, most of all, our young people, we are living out our mission 'to grow the BEST in everyone.'

I believe that we are well into our journey of delivering clarity, connection and

excellence. We have grown as a trust with several schools joining us and bringing with them a true sense of our shared vision and values.

However, we are never complacent and are ambitious to build on the successes achieved so far to ensure that all our young people feel they belong and can thrive in the best ways possible as we prepare them for their lives after they leave us.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition and like me look forward to the exciting times to come. Ilona Bond, Chair of Trustees



*Celebrating 10 Years of BEST at our Mission, Vision and Values Day, May 5th 2026
(from left to right) Paul Walker – Member, Nafia Baust – Vice Chair of Trustees,
Dr Alan Lee – CEO, Ilona Bond – Chair of Trustees, Marie-Claire Bretherton
- Key Note Speaker, Maggie Farrar – Trustee, Akhtar Ahamed - Trustee*



ALWAYS PUT
CHILDREN
FIRST



COLLABORATE TO
SUPPORT & COMPETE
TO CHALLENGE



HAVE THE
COURAGE TO BE
COMPASSIONATE



PROVIDE
COMMUNITY-BASED
PROVISION

2016-2026



2016 - Etonbury Academy
Year 5 - 13 ★ Ofsted – Good

Did you know...?

Etonbury Academy is named after the nearby medieval earthwork known as Etonbury. The site is believed to have been a fortified enclosure dating back over 1,000 years, although its exact origins remain uncertain and have long fascinated archaeologists.



2016 - BEST Nursery Arlesey
Ofsted – Good



2016 - Robert Bloomfield Academy
Year 5 - 8 ★ Ofsted – Outstanding

Did you know...?

Robert Bloomfield Academy honours Robert Bloomfield (1766–1823), the celebrated poet who lived in nearby Shefford. His poem The Farmer's Boy became one of the most successful poems of its era.



2016 - Gothic Mede Academy & Nursery
Nursery - Year 4 ★ Ofsted – Good

Did you know...?

Gothic Mede Academy takes its name from the Gothic Mede estate in Biggleswade. The word mede is an old English word meaning meadow.



2016 - Gravenhurst Academy
Reception - Year 4 ★ Ofsted – Outstanding

Did you know...?

The village of Gravenhurst appears in the Domesday Book. Its name is thought to come from Old English words describing a wooded or tree-covered hill.



2016 - Samuel Whitbread Academy
Year 9 - 13 ★ Ofsted – Good

Did you know...?

Samuel Whitbread Academy is named after the Whitbread family, one of Bedfordshire's most influential families. The Whitbreads were brewers, landowners and Members of Parliament who played an important role in the county's history and supported education and public life.



2016 - Langford Village Academy
Reception - Year 6 ★ Ofsted – Good

Did you know...?

Langford means 'long ford' – a place where people could cross a river. Before bridges, these crossings were vital for travel and trade.



2016 - BEST Nursery Shefford
Ofsted – Good

Across a decade of community and growth, every BEST school name tells a story – from medieval villages and Viking settlements to poets, saints and streams, reflecting the rich heritage of Bedfordshire.



2017 - St Christophers Academy & Nursery
Nursery - Year 6 ★ Ofsted – Good

Did you know...?

St Christopher is traditionally regarded as the patron saint of travellers. According to Christian legend, he carried travellers across a dangerous river, becoming a lasting symbol of protection, service and helping others on life's journey.



2019 - Lawnside Academy
Reception - Year 6 ★ Ofsted – Good

Did you know...?

Lawnside Academy takes its name from the local Lawnside area of Biggleswade. The name reflects the open green spaces that have long characterised this part of the town.



2019 - Pix Brook Academy
Year 5 - 11 ★ Ofsted – Good

Did you know...?

Pix Brook Academy is named after the Pix Brook, a chalk stream that flows through Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire before joining the River Ivel.



2020 - Campton Academy
Reception - Year 4 ★ Ofsted – Outstanding

Did you know...?

Campton Academy takes its name from the village of Campton, recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. The name is thought to combine an ancient Celtic word meaning "crooked" probably referring to the nearby stream, with the Old English word tun, meaning settlement or farm. The school has been educating local children since 1875.



2021 BEST Nursery Langford
Ofsted – Good



2024 Castle Newnham School
Reception to Year 11
Primary - Ofsted Expected across all areas ★ Secondary Ofsted – Good

DID YOU KNOW...

Castle Newnham combines the names of two former schools – Castle Lower School and Newnham Middle School – which merged in 2016. 'Newnham' comes from Newnham Priory, founded in the twelfth century, while 'Castle' reflects Bedford's historic Norman castle.

If you know about the history and heritage of our schools, we always love to learn more – please share it with us!
communications@bestacademies.org.uk





A Decade of **BEST**: 10TH Anniversary Celebrations In Our Schools

As part of our continuing 10th anniversary celebrations, BEST gifted a silver birch tree to each of our schools and nurseries.

Students and staff from each school enjoyed planting the trees during the Summer term. They were joined by governors and members of the BEST leadership team, including the CEO, Dr Alan Lee, and the Chair of Trustees, Ilona Bond.

Our aim is to grow the BEST in everyone. We always put children first and nurture talent through our high and aligned autonomy, high accountability approach. The planting of the same tree reflects the shared symbol of growth, while allowing each setting the space to nurture its own tree.





How our **nurseries** and **schools** came together for a milestone week of **anniversary fun**

The students across all of our nurseries and schools are at the heart of our BEST family, and it was important that they could join in the 10-year anniversary celebrations!

There were festivals, ice lollies, sweet treats, fruit bags, key rings and bouncy castles. A great fun time was had by all. With our many thanks to Mrs Alison Wilshaw, Director of Education, for organising the celebratory events.





Arlesey Nursery



Langford Nursery

We strive to ensure that our children feel safe and happy

We understand and know the interests and needs of our children

Our practitioners role model and lead by example

Our children learn through experiences



Shefford Nursery

BEST Nurseries and Wrap Around Care

We provide term-time care and education from babies to pre-school children, as well as breakfast clubs and after-school clubs for children up to 12 years. We recognise that an appropriate and positive nursery experience will help children feel confident as they begin their educational journey. BEST has nurseries in **Arlesey, Langford** and **Shefford** (along with school-based provision at **Gothic Mede** and **St Christophers Academies**).

Staff create purposeful links with parents, providing them with regular updates about their child's development and learning. Families appreciate newsletters offering activity ideas for home, such as scavenger hunts. This partnership working helps provide consistency of care and learning for children. (Rated Good by Ofsted 2024, BEST Nursery Arlesey)

Children enjoy attending the nursery and form good bonds with their key person and the wider staff team... Staff have adapted the learning environment so that children can follow their own interests and freely access the indoors and outdoors. Parents are happy with the care that staff provide (Rated Good by Ofsted 2024, BEST Nursery Langford).

Children enjoy their time in this positive environment and are settled and secure. They approach new experiences confidently and are eager to explore... Children follow the good example set by staff and show kindness and respect towards one another. (Rated Good by Ofsted 2022, BEST Nursery Shefford)

[Find out more about BEST nursery provision on our website.](#)

Framing the Mission: **Heartwarming Stories** Behind a Single Snapshot

Our team of BEST Principals were invited by Dr Alan Lee to describe their path towards our collective mission 'to grow the BEST in everyone', based on a single school image. It is a wonderful mix of heartwarming memories and storytelling...

CAMPTON ACADEMY

Campton has had a significant focus on providing opportunities for our children outside of the classroom.

These have included trips to the library and local woodlands, visitors to the school, and virtual lessons with the Royal Ballet and Opera. We have also ventured further afield with trips to Shuttleworth, Herrings Green Farm, the Natural History Museum in Tring, a Faith Tour in Bedford, and a theatre trip to London. These experiences were designed not only to develop cultural capital and British values but also to foster personal skills such as teamwork, resilience, curiosity, and confidence.

The attached photo is from our Year 4 residential. Campton has not run a residential since 2019, so this was a major highlight for both our staff and children. The smiles on their faces say it all—they will be talking about this trip for years to come.



The way the staff have worked together to provide these experiences is a testament to their dedication to offering the best opportunities for everyone at our school. A huge thank you to everyone who helped make these opportunities possible for our children.

Principal: Louise Day
www.camptonacademy.org.uk

CASTLE NEWNHAM ACADEMY

Look at these faces. We begin here, in Reception pupils, eyes wide with wonder, where 'growing' simply means learning to tie a shoelace or write a name. But as you scan across this line, you aren't just seeing children getting taller; you're seeing the steady cultivation of character.

Through the primary years, we see the 'BEST' start to take root: bravery in the face of a new challenge, enthusiasm for discovery. By the time we hit the middle years, the spark of a hobby has become the flame of a passion. These images capture the moment a 'student' becomes a musician, an athlete, a scientist, or a leader.

Finally, we reach Year 11. The finish line. Here, the growth isn't just visible - it's purposeful. This isn't just a teenager; it is a young adult equipped with the resilience and integrity we've spent a decade nurturing. They aren't just the 'best' version of a student; they are ready to be the best version of themselves for the world.

This timeline proves that growth isn't a single event - it's a daily commitment. From their first step into our halls to their final walk out of them, we don't just grow students. We grow the BEST in everyone.

Principal: Donna Neely-Hayes
www.castlenewnham.school



ETONBURY ACADEMY

When I look at this rainbow, I see a powerful reflection of what we stand for at Etonbury Academy. A rainbow is made up of many different colours, each unique, yet all equally important. In the same way, every child at Etonbury is valued as an individual. We recognise that one size does not fit all, and we are committed to nurturing the strengths, talents and potential in every student.

The rainbow stretches right across the sky, just as we provide a seamless journey from Year 5 through to Year 13—supporting our students every step of the way as they grow and develop. It appears after the rain, reminding us of the care and support we provide, ensuring that every child feels safe, secure and able to flourish, even through challenges.

Its upward arc reflects our shared ambition—our belief that every student should always aim higher. And as it connects sky to ground, it symbolises our strong sense of community: students, staff and families working together, because together we care.

Ultimately, like this rainbow, our students are encouraged to shine—growing into confident, successful and fulfilled individuals.

Principal: Joanne Young
www.etonbury.org.uk

GOTHIC MEDE ACADEMY

Growing the BEST in everyone starts at the very beginning. From an early age, we inspire curiosity and a love of learning through stories. For our pupils, their story starts at GMA. So why not choose an image which is a celebration of stories?

Schools should have an element of fun, of excitement and build memories.

These are the days the children remember which spark conversation and joy. It allows pupils to explore who they are, what their character is and helps shape who they become. We have staff who, in this moment, demonstrate their devotion to teaching our pupils beyond the confines of the classroom, to give them stories and memories which will last a lifetime.

Principal: Stephanie Smith
www.gothicmede.org.uk



GRAVENHURST ACADEMY

This picture captures the joy felt by all when Gravenhurst Academy achieved an Outstanding rating from Ofsted! It represents many years of hard work developing the school with completely new staff and new criteria since the last inspection and was an amazing achievement.

Principal: Debbie Randall
www.gravenhurstacademy.org.uk





LANGFORD VILLAGE ACADEMY

This picture is significant as it represents the beginning of our Mindfulness journey at Langford Village Academy which was commented upon by Ofsted in 2023

Pupils have an astute understanding of their own feelings and those of others. Mindfulness lessons provide different ways for pupils to practise managing their emotions. This contributes to a calm atmosphere that exists across the school.

Principal: Debbie Randall
www.langfordvillageacademy.org.uk

LAWNSIDE ACADEMY

Welcome to Lawnside Academy, where every child is encouraged to explore, discover and thrive.

We believe learning should be exciting, meaningful and memorable, which is why it extends far beyond the classroom. Our children enjoy a wide range of enrichment opportunities including music, sport, cookery, outdoor learning and celebration days that bring learning to life.

Through clubs, visits and special events, pupils build confidence, develop friendships and discover new interests and talents. We celebrate achievements, encourage curiosity and support every child to feel proud of who they are and what they can achieve.

At Lawnside Academy, we are passionate about creating happy learners and enriching education every single day.

Principal: Cheryl Johnson
www.lawnsideacademy.org.uk





PIX BROOK ACADEMY

Pix Brook's unstaged World Book Day photo captures the authentic joy of our pupils. I chose to move away from posed photography to celebrate the remarkable growth of our Personal Development programme this year, which has seen our wider offer expand to include multiple new international residentials and a diverse array of in-house events. PBA's commitment to creating lasting memories perfectly unites with the BEST mission to "grow the BEST in everyone," ensuring our students' successes extend far beyond the traditional classroom.

Principal: Charlotte Linehan
www.pixbrookacademy.co.uk

ROBERT BLOOMFIELD ACADEMY

This image fulfils two roles:

1. It is taken on a beach in Newquay, where our year 7s go each year for a residential trip that enriches their personal development and represents the importance we place on developing the whole child
2. It spells out the letters of our five VOICE values, which are at the heart of everything we do as we believe successful people demonstrate Vitality, grasp Opportunities, are Independent, value Community and demonstrate Excellence in all their endeavours.

At RBA we are constantly striving to develop our students, to give them opportunities and to grow the BEST in everyone.

Principal: John Linehan
www.robertbloomfield.beds.sch.uk



SAMUEL WHITBREAD ACADEMY

As someone who was here 10 years ago, when BEST was formed, I know how much it has meant to Samuel Whitbread to be part of a family of schools that work together for everyone's benefit.

This was never more evident than during COVID, when new policies would be issued by the DfE almost daily. Having the BEST team and other schools around us to call upon for help and support was crucial during that time and I honestly don't know what we would have done without that support. So, whatever faces us in the future and whatever challenges we will face - I know we will be stronger together than alone. As the African proverb says 'to travel quickly, go alone, to go far, go together'.

Principal: Nick Martin
www.samuelwhitbread.org.uk



ST CHRISTOPHERS ACADEMY

Ten years ago, our trust was built on a simple but powerful belief: that every child deserves the chance to grow, to thrive, and to become the very best version of themselves. Today, as we celebrate a decade of that commitment, we don't just mark time, we celebrate impact.

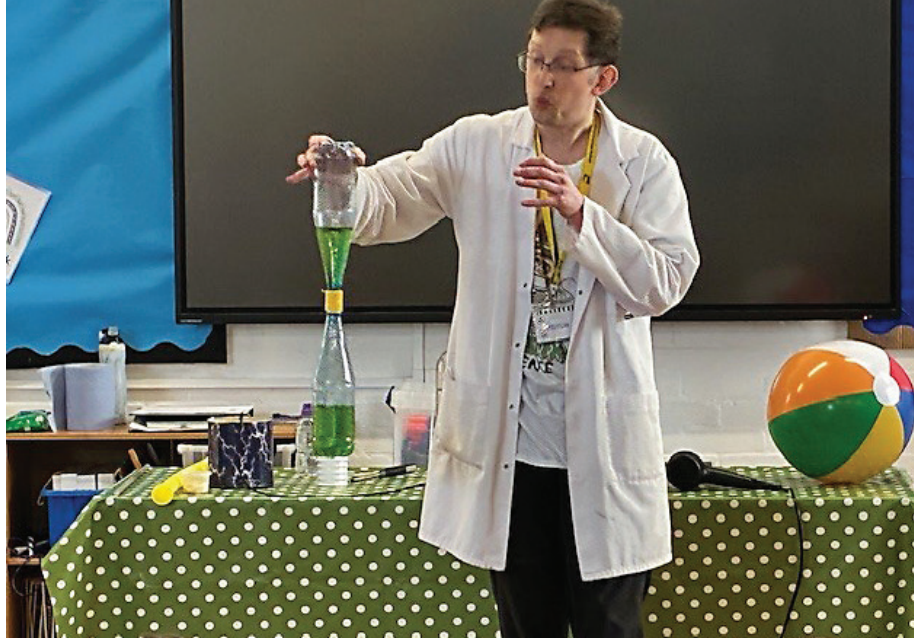
When I look at this community photo, I don't just see smiling faces. I see families, support, love, and partnership. I see the reason behind everything we do, because these children and these families are what it's all about.

Over the past ten years, we've nurtured talent, built confidence and created opportunities. We've worked together as staff, families, and community to shape not just academic success, but character, resilience, and ambition. And while we're proud of how far we've come, what matters most is where we're going next. Every child in our care today represents a future we are still helping to write.

This photo reminds us to keep the focus on who we do this for and what it's about. It's for those who are trusting us, growing with us, and reminding us every single day why this work matters. Here's to the next 10 years and to continuing to bring out the very best in every child.

Principal: Marianne Hayes
www.stchristophersacademy.org

The Magic of Sublime Science



One of the greatest strengths of our Trust is the expertise within our BEST community. By sharing that talent across our schools, we are creating exciting opportunities that educate and ignite a lifelong love of learning.

It was inspiring to see the impact of the Sublime Science roadshow, which was held during the Spring and led by Joanne Boniface, Director of Science.

Children across our lower and primary schools were captivated by the wonder of scientific discovery. They were asking questions, testing ideas and having great fun!

"These workshops didn't just deliver exciting experiments; they ignited curiosity, fostered confidence and reminded us all that a love of science begins with a sense of awe. It has been wonderful to witness such enthusiasm and engagement flourish throughout our trust." Jo Boniface, Director of Science, School Improvement Team

**"That was awesome,
I love doing experiments!"**

Reception pupil

**"There were cool sounds
and vibrations"**

Year 1 pupil

**"This is the best workshop
we've ever had!"**

Year 4 pupil

**"This is
The Best Day Ever"**

Year 3 pupil

**"I liked it because I've never made
slime before and it was a very
good experience. They gave us
lots of activator so the slime
wouldn't stick to our clothes and
our parents wouldn't get mad."**

Year 4 pupil

**"The smoke bubble
was really cool!"**

Year 6 pupil





A Decade of Impact: **Celebrating Our Mission, Vision and Values**

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the fabulous Mission, Vision and Values Day on 5 May 2026, 10 years to the day since our Trust was formed and returning to the same venue where it all began. We were delighted to welcome Members, Governors, Schools, BEST Central Team and Trust partners.

As well as hearing from Principals and Executive Team updates (Alison Wilshaw from School Improvement, and Mark Liddiard from our Trust Operations), we also delved into the responses of our Big Community Listen with Craig Smith.

Our many thanks to Marie-Claire Bretherton, our keynote speaker, who delivered an inspiring and thought-provoking talk. Marie-Claire encouraged us to reflect on self-awareness, stewardship and, crucially, the power of hope. What have we grown that is worth protecting, and what must we now grow intentionally?

“A great day celebrating 10 years of BEST and our wonderful leaders and their academies. Thanks to all who work with such dedication and commitment each day for all our young people.”

Ilona Bond, Chair of Trustees

“A wonderful day and an inspiration. I think BEST really is a unique, lovely trust and I’m honoured to work with my colleagues.”

David Turner, Senior Advisor





Honouring Our **BEST** Heroes and Charting the Next 10 Years

I'd like to tell you a story. I call it the Hero's Journey. And it began in this very room, exactly 10 years ago to this very day.

On that day, a group of people came together, and together they thought we could be more, be better, be kinder. So, they determined a destination, a Mission: this mission was 'to grow the BEST in everyone'. This group knew that all children are different, all staff are different and all school communities are different. So, a high-autonomy model was conceived, with many different paths to this mission and many heroes on this journey, who have made everything possible and improved the life chances of all the young people we serve.

Like most journeys, we end up back where we started. As one 10-year period comes to an end, we come to the start of another. We are now in a really strong position to set a course for the next 10 years - the purpose of today - to move forward and build, with confidence and hope.



"It was terrific to personally say thank you to so many BEST heroes. The sense of community, connectedness and compassion was palpable. It has been the greatest privilege of my career to serve the BEST Community over the last 10 years: thank you."

Dr Alan Lee, CEO, BEST

BEST Big Community Listen



This year, as part of our 10th anniversary celebrations, we launched The Big Community Listen, led by Craig Smith. The aim was to understand how our community experiences and perceives BEST, in order to help shape the future direction of the trust and continue to successfully grow the BEST in everyone.

We engaged, across a mix of settings, with over 1000 community members including trustees, governors, staff, senior leaders, parents and carers, and pupils from BEST schools. It proved to be a very powerful, as well as inclusive, activity and we would like to say a big thank you to everyone who took part.

There was much for BEST to celebrate and be grateful for and the following key areas stood out:

- **Always Putting Children First**
There is full support of this central value.
- **BEST's high autonomy model is valued**
The ethos of each individual school shines through while being supported by a wider trust family.
- **Community over growth**
Trust expansion will continue to be driven within the context of it being the right school at the right time.
- **BEST is a local employer of choice**
The richness of staff feedback will be invaluable moving forward. The focus on wellbeing was highly rated, along with CPD opportunities.
- **92% of parents praised BEST schools**
They shared incredibly positive and moving testimonies of how BEST has supported their child.
- **Pride in being a BEST pupil**
All students we spoke to were aware of BEST.



BEST Governance

Thank you to all of our BEST governors and trustees for so generously donating your time, expertise and perspective.

“What defines us is a simple, shared conviction: that every decision we make, and every pound we spend, must put children first.”

We highly value our governors at BEST, and providing ongoing training and support is a priority. We hold regular and well-attended training sessions throughout the year, covering areas such as analysing performance data and safeguarding.

Supporting new governors

This year, we were delighted to launch a governor mentoring programme. The key aim of the programme, which is free to join, is to support new governors by building confidence in governance roles and responsibilities, improving understanding of school strategy, finance and accountability, and encouraging effective participation in governing board meetings.

The sessions provide a supportive and practical introduction to governance and help to develop the confidence and knowledge needed to make a positive contribution as a governor.

If you are interested in becoming a governor, or would like to join our mentoring programme, please contact [Mark Liddiard](#) to find out more.



“The progress both my children are now making is exceptional and that is down to the wonderful teaching staff who support them each day. We cannot thank them enough for what they have done and are continuing to do for our children.”

BEST Parent



Meet the **School Improvement** team



School Improvement Team (left to right): Alan Stupple, Joanne Boniface, Alison Wilshaw, Thomas Rowell, Cheryl Hargraves and Amy Morris.

The BEST Talking Heads Programme

is a series of events hosted by the School Improvement Team throughout the year, aimed at bringing Headteachers and leaders together to network and hear from keynote speakers. They are focused around specific educational areas, leadership behaviours or motivational elements.

Musharaf Asghar, star of Channel 4's *Educating Yorkshire*, joined us in June

for an incredibly thought-provoking Talking Heads session. Sharing his side of the story, Musharaf spoke to leaders about the impact his teachers had upon his life; from feeling like he would never achieve in the world if he could not find his voice, to now advocating for teachers and the impact they have far beyond the classroom. He even kindly spent some time with one of our students experiencing a similar situation, a moment we are all very grateful to him for.

“Yesterday, I had the privilege of taking part in a keynote session...

Speaking to headteachers, assistant heads, and educators about the power of leadership and the impact it can have on a young person's life.

It was an incredible experience sharing my journey and discussing how inclusive and supportive environments can truly help pupils flourish.”

Musharaf Asghar



Inspiration and Insights at the **BEST Inclusion Conference**

The **BEST Inclusion Conference** held on 10th June at King's House in Bedford, was a resounding success! The event was exceptionally well attended by SENCOs and school leaders from across our region, creating a fantastic buzz of collaboration and shared purpose.

As we all navigate system-wide changes in supporting children with SEND, we were incredibly fortunate to welcome a lineup of highly regarded speakers. Their sessions offered both the inspiration we needed and the practical tools we can take straight back into our classrooms and offices.

- **Malcolm Reeve (National SEND Advisor):** Delivered a clear, powerful keynote on developing fully inclusive schools. His afternoon workshop dived deeper into how we can design robust, whole-school systems to better meet individual needs. (A huge thank you to NASEN for supporting Malcolm's attendance!)
- **Natalie Packer (Independent SEN Consultant & Author):** Drew on her extensive UK and international experience to discuss setting up school-based Inclusion Bases. Natalie provided invaluable guidance on the upcoming SEN reforms and what they mean for us as we shape these new provisions.
- **Heba Al-Jayoosi (Deputy Head, SENCO, and NASEN Advisor):** Brought brilliant on-the-ground energy to the stage, sharing practical advice and pointing our primary school teams toward some exciting new resources.



“Thank you for putting this training together. It’s not often I come away from training buzzing and with lots of great and easy to implement ideas but yesterday was full of good ideas”

- **Dr Stephanie Little and Dr Alice Edmanson (Educational Psychologists):** Representing Central Bedfordshire Council, Stephanie and Alice ran a vital workshop packed with strategies for supporting children facing Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). It was fantastic to see the local authority's excellent EBSA toolkit shared firsthand.

Looking Ahead

Overall, it was a day filled with ideas that both challenged and encouraged everyone who attended. A massive thank you to the organising team, our brilliant speakers, and all the staff who attended and contributed to making the day such a triumph. Let's carry this momentum forward as we continue to champion inclusion across all our schools!

[FOLLOW BEST School Improvement on LinkedIn.](#)

BEST Central Services Empowering Schools to Focus on Education

BEST Central Services is set up to work closely with our schools and nurseries.

“We provide essential, responsive services to support their day-to-day running. By prioritising these, we empower our schools and nurseries to concentrate on what they do best – educate learners.

Our driving ethos is to help schools and nurseries to improve by providing high quality support in key operational areas. We also deliver value for money due to the economies of scale and purchasing power we command as a trust”.
(Mark Liddiard, COO)

The key operational areas we work across include:

- Finance
- HR
- Capital and Estates
- Health and Safety
- GDPR and Data Protection
- Policies and Compliance
- Communications
- ICT
- Governance
- Procurement
- Equality and Diversity



**We are a small team
but the purpose is clear
– listen and understand
and ask, ‘How can we help?’**

Chief Operating Officer Mark Liddiard and Chief Financial Officer Kim Rowe (Stephen Walker from September 2026) lead on these areas and work closely with Principals to ensure all the services provided meet their expectations and function at a high level.

The team oversees capital build projects and our estates strategy to ensure all schools benefit from well-equipped, safe and highly effective learning environments that are well maintained and appropriate for their needs.

Our services are subject to a rigorous quality assurance system and continuous improvement. There is also a clear risk management process for supporting schools by ensuring they are compliant, especially around safeguarding, GDPR, policies and website activity.

CFO Update:

Farewell to Kim Rowe & Welcome to Stephen Walker

We would like to thank Kim Rowe for her three years of outstanding service as BEST's Chief Financial Officer, and wish her all the very best for her retirement at the end of September. Under Kim's leadership, financial sustainability has been secured. She has expertly supported Principals and Nursery Managers to overcome challenges faced and brought great understanding to financial procedures and reporting across BEST's schools, subsidiaries and charity.

Dr Alan Lee, CEO, shared that: "Kim deeply cares about our BEST community and has offered an inspirational model of leadership rooted in service. It has been a privilege to work alongside Kim. She is both a colleague and friend, who will always have my utmost respect and gratitude".

Reflecting on her time at BEST, Kim said, "It has been the most rewarding of my career. It has been a genuine privilege to work with such an amazing and committed team. There is something very special about the culture at BEST.

Stephen Walker joins BEST as our new CFO from September, bringing with him extensive experience in financial leadership. He will play a key role in helping to ensure we continue to improve outcomes for all children at BEST; "I am looking forward to joining BEST as the Chief Financial Officer, I already have a real appreciation of its values, ambitions and the positive difference it makes to children, young people and our local communities. I am excited by the opportunity to use my experience and understanding to support schools within my own community".



As a member of the Central Services Team, Stephen will be based at BEST House in Shefford, leading the finance function.

"It has been the most rewarding of my career. It has been a genuine privilege to work with such an amazing and committed team. There is something very special about the culture at BEST."

Kim Rowe



Mindfulness at the Heart of **BEST**

Senior leaders, staff, students and parents have discovered the benefits to their wellbeing, resilience and performance through a range of learning opportunities with BEST. Of the 200+ staff and leaders who completed foundation programmes, 20 were inspired to train to teach mindfulness curricula in classrooms in seven schools, reaching over 2,000 students.

**“It promotes better focus,
communication and
resilience and helps enhance
empathy for others ...
something the world could
do with more and more.”**

Mindfulness Staff Tutor



Wellbeing Week June 2026

Our full trust community came together in June for a week of wellbeing activities for staff, students and families. From wishing trees to art workshops, yoga, shared meals, acts of kindness and gratitude. Thank you to Will George and the Wellbeing Leads for organising and to everyone who took part, it was a great success!

Alongside the annual Wellbeing Week celebrations, the Wellbeing Gardens in each BEST school also contribute to BEST's deep commitment to supporting the health and happiness of its community.



We offer FREE online Parent Mindfulness programmes throughout the year, run by Will George, which have proved to be a great success: “These sessions have supported me to stay calmer and more present in my role as a mum. I respond to challenges with more patience and understanding... truly listen and connect with my daughter.”

Pictured: Will George, Mark Liddiard, Nick Martin (SWA), Alan Lee, Joya Brahmachari-Limb (ETA), Kelly Fleming (LVA), Hannah Quittenton (CNS)

More Than Recruitment: **MyNewTerm** Championing Talent Across **BEST**

Last summer, following an appeal for sponsors to support the Samuel Whitbread Academy football teams, MyNewTerm founder and CEO Wayne Cartmel came forward and met with Jason Goldman, Director of Football at Samuel Whitbread Academy, and committed to sponsoring the football teams' kit for the season.

Wayne Cartmel, CEO of MyNewTerm, said: "I am delighted to have been able to support Samuel Whitbread, a school we are proud to have partnered with in the very early days. I was aware the U18s had just missed out on the National Cup last season, so I was thrilled to hear how their resilience and determination led to them being crowned U18 National Champions. These are memories and experiences I have no doubt will last a lifetime. It is a privilege to support the school in this way."

Dr Alan Lee, CEO of BEST, shared his gratitude: "We have always received excellent service and tremendous support throughout our time working together. Being one of MyNewTerm's earliest customers makes our partnership even more special. I still remember trying to guess Wayne's football team when we first met, no chance! Many thanks to MyNewTerm and huge congratulations to SWA on becoming Champions."



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and huge congratulations to
SWA on becoming Champions.



MyNewTerm is a jobs board
and recruitment software utilised
by many schools and trusts
nationally, including all of the BEST
Trust's schools and nurseries.

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