

10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION



BEST SUCCESS STORY

Big Community Listen

Nearly 1,000 voices

One shared conversation

Shaping the next ten years



Celebrating our values, people and journey

What is the **BEST** Big Community Listen



Nearly 1,000 people helped **shape this story**

As BEST celebrates its 10-year anniversary, the Big Community Listen (BCL) brought together trustees and governors, senior leaders, staff, parents and carers, and pupils. The aim was simple: to understand what people value about BEST, reflect on the journey so far, and listen to ideas for what comes next.

Why listening matters

The Big Community Listen connects directly to BEST's commitment to **"Provide community-based provision"** – making space for the people who experience BEST every day to help shape its future.

The listening took place through focus groups, questionnaires, briefings, Google Forms and conferences. The strong response across different groups means the findings provide a meaningful picture of how the BEST community sees its first 10 years.

Autumn 2025
Listening begins

2025 - 2026
Focus groups
& questionnaires

Spring 2026
Briefings &
Conferences

Nearly 1,000
Voices heard

Next 10
Learning shapes
direction

≈ **1,000**
Responses received

92%
of parent responses
are positive

90%
of 1,000+ staff aware
of Wellbeing offer



Six messages came through clearly

Across the different conversations, six themes stood out. Together they describe what people believe makes BEST distinctive – and what they want protected as the Trust moves into its next decade.

These are not six separate stories. They reinforce one another: children first, strong people, confident schools, connected communities and a shared sense of belonging.

1

Always putting children first

The strongest shared message: the existing value remains fundamental, with unequivocal support

2

Autonomy is valued

Schools keeping their own identity while benefiting from genuine support and collaboration is understood and appreciated.

3

Community before growth

Growth should have sense and logic – for schools, communities and BEST – rather than being an end in itself.

4

An employer of choice

Wellbeing, mindfulness and career development are valued features of the BEST experience for staff.

5

Parents are strongly positive

92% of parent responses were positive, with many praising schools and individual staff for going above and beyond.

6

Pupils are proud to be BEST

Pupils recognised their school's place in the wider Trust and valued opportunities to connect, learn and contribute across BEST.

Our BEST journey 2016-2026



6 schools to 11
+ 2 nurseries to 5

8000+
children

120% increase in
numbers since 2016



398 in 2016



1007 in 2026

a **growing** workforce

A **shared identity** without losing individuality

Senior leaders described BEST in a way that captures a central feature of the Trust: schools retain their identity, while collaboration and support mean they never have to stand alone.

“BEST is where schools keep their own identity but never stand alone.”

Support is genuine, trust is earned, and values guide every choice. Children come first, people are seen, and collaboration lifts whole communities.

The Big Community Listen found **strong support for all four existing values.**

They were described as having “steered the ship” through BEST’s first decade. One opportunity emerging from the listening is to consider how families can be incorporated more visibly into this values-led approach.

A change in emphasis

Structural change and growth were much less prominent in community responses than they were in BEST’s early years. The message was to protect a community-led approach and consider growth only where there is clear sense and logic.



GOOD

All schools rated
Good or better
by Ofsted



Performance consistently
above national averages
in all key stages



**Strong
financial
health**
+ 2 nurseries to 5
6 schools to 11

People are at the **heart of the BEST story**

The Big Community Listen showed strong appreciation for the people who make BEST what it is – staff, leaders, governors, parents, carers and pupils.

90%

of 1,000+ staff were aware
of the wellbeing offer

Mindfulness • wellbeing
• career development

Staff told us

There is clear recognition of BEST's wellbeing and CPD offer, with a strong desire to take up further opportunities for developing careers within BEST.

Nearly a third of all staff engaged with the BCL, creating a rich body of feedback for the Trust to take forward.

Parents and pupils see the difference

PARENTS

92%

of responses were positive, with schools and individual staff repeatedly praised for going above and beyond.

PUPILS

100%

of pupils involved had heard of BEST and recognised their school as part of a wider organisation.

“I have two children attending two different BEST schools and I have to say they are happy, thriving and achieving highly... it's important to me that my children are in amazing schools and that's exactly what they are.”

One parent told us



The listening also identified an opportunity: a significant proportion of parents would like to know more about BEST generally and/or the school their child attends. Pupils highlighted the power of being part of something bigger, including shared opportunities across BEST.

Build on what **our community values**

As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST) The Big Community Listen provides us with a strong endorsement of BEST's first decade.

It also gives a clear starting point for the next ten years: protect what people value, respond to what they have asked for, and keep children and communities at the centre.”

(Craig Smith, Big Community Listen Lead)

GRATITUDE

Recognise the journey

Celebrate the people, schools, governors, families and pupils who have helped shape BEST.

SUCCESS

Protect what works

Keep children first, support school autonomy, invest in people and make growth purposeful.

OPTIMISM

Create the next chapter

Use the learning from the BCL to strengthen community connections and develop new opportunities.

“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





BEST

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