

A **BEST** Success Story

#5 – Investing in our School Estates and Buildings



WARM

BEST Success Stories is a series of case studies looking at the advantages of being part of the Bedfordshire Schools Trust.

Fitting new boilers, replacing flooring and upgrading roof lights.

These aren't necessarily the most 'exciting' things to be spending money on in schools, but they are absolutely vital to ensure our buildings are secure, inviting and fit for purpose.

As a multi-academy trust, the Bedfordshire Schools Trust has access to exclusive sources of government funding to spend on capital projects.

This has allowed BEST to invest nearly £3 million over the last four years on the upkeep of our schools.

And for our family of 10 schools it's a win-win situation, for they can spend their budgets on other priority areas – educating young people, improving their outcomes and enabling them to go on and succeed in life.

It makes a "significant difference", as one of our Principals put it, and is a major advantage of being part of a large, thriving trust.

This is the story of BEST Investing in our School Estates and Buildings.



SAFE



DRY

CAPITAL SPENDING AT A GLANCE

- SCA (School Conditions Allocations) and DFC (Devolved Formula Capital) funding
- Spending is decided centrally through evidence-based need
- All schools in BEST benefit

‘ Having access to this capital funding is one of the **major advantages of joining a larger multi-academy trust like BEST** – Craig Smith, BEST COO

£2.7m

Total capital spend by BEST on our schools in last four years

plus what schools spend on capital projects from their own budgets

Warm, safe and dry: Giving our schools peace of mind

All schools in BEST are warm, safe and dry thanks to our multi-million pound capital spending programme over the last four years.

Every year, the Department for Education allocates funding to help maintain and improve the condition of school buildings and grounds.

As a multi-academy trust, BEST can access SCA – which stands for School Condition Allocations – capital funding.

On top of this, the trust is also eligible for DFC – Devolved Formula Capital – money to spend on capital projects that meet our priorities.

BEST Chief Operating Officer Craig Smith said: "Having access to this capital funding is one of the major advantages of joining a larger multi-academy trust such as BEST.

"It's a huge benefit to our schools as they would have to rely solely on their own budgets without this. For schools that are not part of trusts, any support from the local authority would only be available for serious or exceptional issues.

"We're in an extremely fortunate position to have received over £2.7 million over the course of the last four years, which has been of benefit to all 10 of our schools.

"While this doesn't cover the cost of everything we'd like to improve or fix, we prioritise on an evidence-based needs basis – and ensure that all our schools remain warm, safe and dry."

Mr Smith added: "This peace of mind BEST provides over the condition of our estates means school budgets can instead be utilised for what they should be being spent on – such as staffing costs, technology and classroom resources."

Chief Executive Officer Dr Alan Lee said: "Our children and staff deserve the very best. We work extremely hard to both provide the very best learning environment possible and empower staff to focus on teaching and learning.

"Together, we are driving standards up and nurturing wellbeing."

How our SCA spending is determined

While SCA money is granted on a per pupil basis, BEST prioritises how the money gets spent across the trust via evidence-based need.

BEST Operations Manager Alison Austin said: "The majority of the spend goes on conditions work, which is based on surveys that are carried out every three years.

"We have worked through these surveys and addressed all areas that had been flagged as high risk – now we don't have any.

"The rest is shaped by our trustees, who each year agree a strategy to guide how the money is spent.

"For example, this year money has been earmarked for wellbeing and energy saving projects."

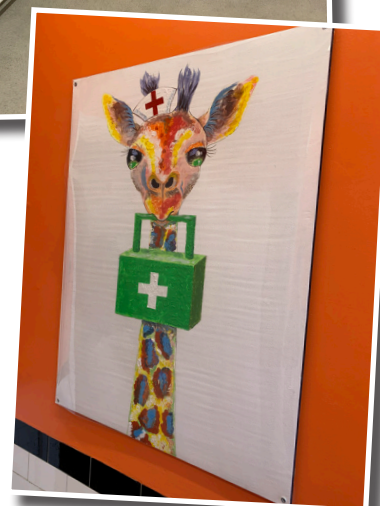
She added: "Principals put in their suggestions for what they would like BEST to consider, and then we go through these and decide what is possible each year."

A crane delivers a mobile unit to St Christophers Academy. The unit – bought from a school in Nottinghamshire through SCA money – will provide needed classroom space when the project completes in September 2022





Pupil and staff toilets at Lawnside Academy have both been refurbished through SCA money



Upgrading the first aid office at Robert Bloomfield Academy was also funded by SCA

SCA funding is not there as a local authority school so it's a real positive and a benefit to pupils and staff

– Cheryl Johnson,
Principal, Lawnside Academy

Having access to the SCA funding makes a "significant" difference to schools, allowing Principals to focus their own resources on pupil education.

Projects that BEST has funded at Lawnside Academy include the refurbishment of pupil and staff toilets, and external doors from the school's KS1 classrooms to an outdoor learning space.

Principal Cheryl Johnson said: "SCA funding is not there as a local authority school so the opportunity to have it is a real positive and a benefit to the school, the pupils and the staff.

"It makes a significant difference because we don't have the kind of money within the school budget to be able to do these 'nice to have' things.

"The toilets in school were in desperate need. They had not been done since I don't know when and just looked tired and unappealing.

"But the staff ones now look really nice, and the kids love the pupil ones – they're always in there!"

Robert Bloomfield Academy Principal Sam Farmer said: "It's not the exciting 'wow, look at our brand new interactive screens or look at our new tech', but it's coming to school and having hot water, it's having toilets that are clean and sanitary and flush, it's having the pipework that means we are compliant.

"Bloomfield is a building that pre-dates World War Two, so there are huge sections of the school that have had, or continue to need, serious work.

"Without the SCA funding, we would have ploughed money that we need to spend on our students into other areas."

Mr Farmer added: "The process is clear and transparent in BEST. There's an array of buildings across the trust, from Pix Brook's new shiny building to ours, which is probably one of the older buildings.

"We all get a fair share of priority spending and because of that all BEST schools manage to open every day with heaters that work, running water, alarm systems and everything behind the scenes that mean we can focus on the front of house services."

WHY THIS IS A SUCCESS STORY...

- Schools that join BEST get access to a source of funding that takes pressure off their own budgets
- All our schools are warm, safe and dry
- Schools benefit from experience and expertise of BEST central team and external consultants
- All BEST schools found to be good or better in Government's Conditions Data Collection (CDC) programme

