

Value for Money Statement
Academy Trust Name: Altrincham College of Arts
Academy Trust Company Number: 8137701
Year Ended 31 August 2014

I accept that as accounting officer of Altrincham College of Arts I am responsible and accountable for ensuring that the Academy Trust delivers good value in the use of public resources. I am aware of the guide to academy value for money statements published by the Education Funding Agency and understand that value for money refers to the educational and wider societal outcomes achieved in return for the taxpayer resources received.

I set out below how I have ensured that the Academy Trust's use of its resources has provided good value for money during the academic year.

Improving Educational Results:

We ensure resources are directed where they are most needed and most effective in meeting the educational requirements of all our students. We are proud of our staff and students' achievements and we continue to make year on year improvements in every aspect of our work.

The School Leaders have applied the principles of *best value* when making decisions about:

- the allocation of resources to best promote the aims and values of the school;
- the targeting of resources to best improve standards and the quality of provision;
- the use of resources to best support the various educational needs of all pupils.

The Academy has fully embedded student tracking systems for monitoring progress from Key Stage 2 through to Post 16. Fisher Family Trust is the adopted performance measure and target monitoring tool. Over the past 8 years, performance at KS4, measured using the key benchmark of 5+A*-C inc. En and Ma against FFT estimates, has been very impressive. With the exception of one year between 2006 and 2014, performance has consistently exceeded FFT estimates.

More students have accessed higher education at ACA and all year 12 and 13 students are set target grades using the Advance Level Performance System (ALPS). This is a recognised system for Post 16 students and takes into account the GCSE performance of each student using their average point score, creating appropriate, challenging targets for KS5.

The Sixth Form PANDA (Performance and Assessment) report and the L3 value added progress measure is the key source of evidence used for evaluating sixth form performance. Sixth form performance in 2013/14 for students on academic courses was slightly below the national average and for students on vocational courses, slightly above the national average.

The Academy places importance on staff retention and development in order to maintain the highest standards of teaching and learning. School Leaders have considered the allocation and use of teaching areas, support areas and communal areas and provided a rich learning environment for teaching and learning. The quality of children's learning has been reviewed by cohort, class and individually which has provided teaching that enabled children to progress and achieve.

School Leaders reviewed the quality of curriculum provision and quality of teaching, and provided parents and students with:

- a curriculum which met the requirements of the National Curriculum, the LA Agreed RE Syllabus, and the individual needs of pupils;
- teaching which built on previous learning and had high expectations of children's achievement.

The Academy tracks attendance and behaviour of all students; whole school attendance for 2013/14 was at 95.1%, against a national average of 94.1%.

Examples of good practice demonstrating good value for money include;

- 62% of the Year 11 cohort achieved 5 or more A* – C grades including English and Maths, exceeding both the national average and FFT estimates;
- the percentage of A level grades at A* – B has increased from 11% to 27%;
- the percentage of students accessing higher education has increased significantly;
- the percentage of Year 11 leavers classed as NEET (not in education, employment or training) is 0%;
- a Summer School for Pupil Premium students, Saturday Gifted and Talented workshops and holiday revision classes all support the improved achievement.

•

Financial Governance and Oversight:

Our governance arrangements included regular monitoring by the Accounting Officer, Governing Body and its committees; including the Finance, Premises and Audit Committee. They received regular financial reports, discussed the information and asked relevant questions as evidenced in the minutes. The work of the Finance, Premises and Audit Committee was further informed by the work of the Responsible Officer, External Auditors and on-going monthly support from the accountants.

The Academy Trust's system of internal financial control was based on a framework of regular management information and administrative procedures including the segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability. In particular it included:

- regular financial reviews of income and expenditure against planned budgets;
- comprehensive budgeting and monitoring systems with an annual budget and periodic financial reports;
- regular reviews by the finance and buildings committee of reports which indicated financial performance against the forecasts and of major purchase plans, capital works and expenditure programmes;
- setting targets to measure financial and other performance;
- clearly defined purchasing (asset purchase or capital investment);
- delegation of authority and segregation of duties;
- identification and management of risks.

The Accounting Officer, School Leaders and Governors:

- made comparisons with other/similar schools and the Government, e.g. RAISE online, FFT, Ofsted, quality of teaching & learning, levels of expenditure;
- challenged proposals, examining them for effectiveness, efficiency, and cost, e.g. setting of annual pupil achievement targets, budget setting;
- required suppliers to compete on grounds of cost, and quality/suitability of services/products/backup, e.g. expansion of the fitness suite, refurbishment of the English centre;
- consulted individuals and organisations on quality/suitability of service we provided to parents and pupils, and services we receive from providers, e.g. Sex and Relationships Education, pupil reports, assigned inspector, Ofsted, energy, maintenance consultant.

This applied in particular to:

- staffing
- use of premises
- use of resources
- quality of teaching
- quality of learning
- purchasing
- pupils' welfare
- health and safety

Better Purchasing

The Academy benchmarked financial performance against similar organisations to demonstrate that the Trust provided good value for money and maintained a database of approved regular suppliers and contractors. Consortia were used where they provided value for money. The Trust took opportunities to work collaboratively with others to reduce and share administration and procurement costs e.g. National Leader in Education supporting schools with difficulties.

All services and contracts were appraised or renegotiated in a timely manner to get the best mix of quality and effectiveness and ensure they were fit for purpose and best value. Multiple year contracts with the clause to be able to cancel the contract, were entered in to ensure reduced costs where it was felt that it would benefit the trust e.g. HR and payroll contracts

Examples of steps taken to ensure value for money when purchasing included:

- suppliers selected on the basis of their capacity to provide quality, service, timely delivery and value for money
- viewing alternative purchasing options online and direct through suppliers in order to find the best value
- consulting other local schools to know about issues with products / services before making purchases
- considering whether the purchase is really necessary, assessing the costs and benefits
- three written quotes for goods or services in excess of £5,000
- competitive tendering procedures for major purchases and contracts
- procedures for accepting *best value* quotes, which are not necessarily the cheapest (e.g suitability for purpose and quality of workmanship)

The School Business Manager has been influential in driving down costs through better procurement and negotiation throughout the year including the; catering contract, cleaning

contract, grounds maintenance contract, ICT contracts and property management. The catering contract has been renegotiated and now includes the provision of in-house school meals using more fresh ingredients to provide improved nutritional meals at better value and take up of meals has significantly increased.

The School Business Manager does not waste time and resources on investigating minor areas where few improvements and savings can be achieved as the pursuit of minor improvements or savings is not cost effective if the administration involves substantial time or costs. Time wasted on minor improvements or savings can also distract management from more important or valuable areas.

Better Income Generation:

Opportunities have been taken to explore and generate additional and reliable revenue streams. The Trust is fully committed to providing an excellent resource to its local community and has hired the school facilities in the evenings and weekends which has generated an additional and regular income source, as well as been a benefit to the local community. Additional income was sourced from hiring the facilities for two weeks during the school holidays for an art exhibition which did not attract any additional expenditure costs as the site staff were already contracted to work the hours.

Academy staff delivered PE lessons and school sport, sharing good practice and providing continued professional development for staff in three primary schools. The Academy invested funds in risk free and immediately accessible deposit accounts to maximise bank interest where cash flow allowed.

Reviewing Controls and Managing Risks:

The Accounting Officer, School Leaders and Governors assessed the major risks to which the Academy was exposed, in particular those relating to the specific teaching, provision of facilities and other operational areas of the Academy. The School Leaders implemented a number of systems to assess risks that the Academy faced, especially in the operational areas (e.g. in relation to teaching, health and safety, bullying and school trips) and in relation to the control of finance. They introduced systems, including operational procedures (e.g. vetting of new staff and visitors, supervision of school grounds) and internal financial controls (see below) in order to minimise risk. Adequate insurance cover was arranged for areas where significant financial risk may still have applied e.g. Governor Liability Insurance.

The Academy appointed a Responsible Officer and provided the Accounting Officer and the Governing Body with on-going independent assurance that:

- the financial responsibilities of the Governing Body are being properly discharged
- resources are being managed in an efficient, economical and effective manner
- sound systems of internal financial control are being maintained
- financial considerations are fully taken into account in reaching decisions

Haines Watts were appointed as external auditors as agreed with the Governing Body.

The Accounting Officer, Budget Holders, School Leaders and Governors received regular budget reports which were scrutinised and challenged to ensure the most effective use of resources were used to meet the objectives of the Trust.

Insurance levels were reviewed and used cost-effectively to manage risks. Professional strategic advice has also been sought from the HR provider to assist with managing risk.

The Trust has an investment policy and moved balances to a high interest deposit account to ensure maximum returns on surplus balances. The Governors reviewed the reserve levels of the Academy, which encompassed the nature of income and expenditure streams, the need to match income with commitments and the nature of reserves.

The Accounting Officer and Governors determined that an appropriate level of free reserves be maintained, equivalent to one month of the GAG, approximately £400k. The reason for this was to provide sufficient working capital to cover delays between spending and receipt of grants and to provide a cushion to deal with unexpected emergencies such as urgent maintenance and to plan for future capital projects.

Reviewing Operations to Maximise Use of Resources

The Accounting Officer, School Leaders and Governors reviewed expenditure within each budget heading and made adjustments based on the effectiveness of strategies introduced in previous years, curriculum offer and strategies identified in the Academy Development Plan.

Signed:

Name: Mr Peter Brooks

Altrincham College of Arts Academy Trust Accounting Officer

Date: