JOIN OUR TRUST

Girls' Learning Trust

The decision to join a Trust is a significant one for any school community. Working as part of a group of schools to improve and maintain high educational standards over a sustained period can be very rewarding, and can bring substantial benefits, including formal collaboration to develop teaching and learning, sharing best practice to enhance the experience of young people, and increased efficiencies to better enable frontline delivery. But joining a Trust can also seem daunting, and it can be difficult to know where to begin. Based on sector guidance, we've produced this simple FAQ document to help any school interested in joining our Trust.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE TRUST?

Our purpose: transforming lives through girls' education.

For **students**, we help them achieve their full potential by creating an inclusive, supportive and aspirational learning environment. We equip them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to thrive in school and in life, preparing them for their future.

For **staff**, we create a positive working environment where they are valued, supported, and motivated. We offer opportunities for development and career growth, encouraging collaboration and enabling everyone to contribute to the success of our students and the whole Trust.

For **schools**, we support and assure their education development with the freedom and autonomy to define their own values and priorities, respecting their individual character and unique identities. We promote collaboration across the Trust, enabling sharing of resources, exchanging ideas, and driving continuous improvement.

For **society**, we forge strong partnerships with parents, local groups, and other stakeholders to enrich our schools and students' educational experiences. We actively engage with the community to create a positive impact and foster a sense of civic responsibility in our students, staff and volunteers.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF JOINING THE TRUST?

Joining a MAT offers substantial long-term benefits for schools. Whilst there is always a temptation to focus on the immediate challenges facing the sector, it is the security, stability and sustainability of the support model that will ultimately deliver significant positive impact for students and staff.

Schools within our Trust regularly share best practice, collaborate on innovative curriculum development, and engage in ongoing specialised professional development for staff. This collaborative environment ensures enduring improvements in teaching and learning. Additionally, we provide long-term financial stability and can achieve economies of scale, providing better value for money through our shared service, thereby allowing more funds to be allocated towards improving outcomes for students. Being part of a MAT with a clear sense of purpose – in our case the education and empowerment of girls and young women - cultivates a lasting sense of community and shared mission, promoting an environment where schools can innovate and improve together over the years.

WHAT IF WE'RE ALREADY A 'GOOD' OR 'OUTSTANDING' SCHOOL?

Much of the initial discourse around MATs was focussed on 'turnaround of failing schools'. But the sector has moved on, and we're now at the point where successful schools can also see the benefits

of the model. It's more important than ever that leaders and governors consider the long-term future of the sector and make decisions now that will ultimately safeguard the future success of their school.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE GIRLS' LEARNING TRUST?

The Girls' Learning Trust (the GLT) was established in 2015 when Nonsuch High School for Girls and Wallington High School for Girls came together to form the Nonsuch & Wallington Education Trust. In 2018, the Trust welcomed Carshalton High School for Girls and adopted its current name, reflecting its growing family of schools. The Trust has continued to develop and expand, with Weald of Kent Grammar School becoming its fourth school in November 2026. The GLT brings together high-performing selective and non-selective schools, each with its own distinctive identity, ethos and traditions, united by a shared commitment to providing an exceptional education for girls. Our schools offer broad, balanced and challenging curricula, supported by high expectations, excellent teaching and a strong emphasis on personal development. Collaboration across the Trust enables schools to share expertise, learn from one another and improve the opportunities available to students.

Our schools are supported by a shared team of professional specialists providing expertise in Finance, Estates, IT, Procurement, Capital Projects, HR, Governance and Risk Management. These shared services strengthen school leadership, promote consistency and quality, and ensure resources are used effectively to support education. Across our four schools, the GLT educates approximately 6,500 students, employs around 700 colleagues and has an annual financial turnover exceeding £45 million.

WHAT VISION DO YOU HAVE FOR EDUCATION AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT?

While we work across the Trust to support school performance and ensure value for public money, we believe in allowing our schools autonomy in developing approaches to pedagogy and the curriculum that will deliver the very best outcomes for their students. Nevertheless, our shared values and the many opportunities we have for collaboration across our schools mean that we learn lots from each other and that we remain outward-focussed.

Our Education Mission: to empower girls to thrive through a holistic, rigorous and transformative education that nurtures their intellectual, emotional, and personal growth.

We believe in the limitless potential of our students. All our schools are empowered to develop their own education vision that reflects their local context and needs of their students. But this is underpinned by a shared belief in:

1. The transformative power of girls-only education
2. The holistic measurement of success based on the whole student
3. The prioritisation of student wellbeing and character development
4. The promotion of girls' leadership rooted in strong values
5. The value of equity, diversity and inclusion

1. <u>The transformative power of girls-only education</u>

We are committed to girls'-only education, understanding and addressing the unique needs that foster their growth and success in an environment dedicated exclusively to them. Our schools are dedicated to nurturing a supportive and empowering learning atmosphere that enables girls to develop confidence, resilience, and independence. We champion evidence informed teaching methods that amplify girls' voices, encourage them to challenge norms, think critically, and embrace leadership opportunities. Our expertise lies in creating an educational space where girls are free to explore their potential fully.

2. The holistic measurement of success based on the whole student

We are committed to providing an inspiring and academically challenging curriculum that goes beyond traditional subject boundaries instilling a lifelong passion for learning. Our school curricula are designed to cultivate curiosity and critical thinking skills, encouraging students to take risks, to analyse, evaluate, and innovate. We aim to foster an environment where students are empowered to explore all their interests, preparing them not only to succeed in examinations, but to thrive as lifelong learners capable of making meaningful contributions to their communities.

3. The prioritisation of student wellbeing and character development

Student wellbeing is at the heart of everything we do, recognising that a healthy, well-rounded individual is best equipped for success and fulfilment. We focus on creating a nurturing environment where emotional, social, and mental health are prioritised alongside academic learning. Through a range of support systems, character-building activities, and a culture that values empathy and respect, we ensure students develop resilience, integrity, and a sense of purpose. Our schools are spaces where students are encouraged to grow not just academically but as compassionate, self-aware individuals ready to contribute positively to society.

4. The promotion of girls' leadership rooted in strong values

We are dedicated to cultivating girls' leadership that is grounded in integrity, empathy, and a strong sense of responsibility. Our approach nurtures students' ability to lead with confidence and moral clarity, preparing them to make thoughtful decisions and inspire those around them. Through structured programmes, mentorship opportunities, and real-world experiences, we equip students with the skills to take initiative, collaborate effectively, and face challenges with courage. Our commitment to leadership based on school values ensures that students carry forward these principles to shape a future that is both ambitious and just.

5. The value of equity, diversity and inclusion

Our schools are committed to fostering an environment where every student is valued, respected, and belongs, recognising that true educational excellence is rooted in inclusivity. We actively promote equity and inclusion by celebrating differences and ensuring equal access to opportunities for all, regardless of background. Through inclusive curricula, diverse role models, and proactive measures to address disparities, we strive to create a culture where every student has the confidence and support to thrive. This commitment empowers our community to challenge biases, build empathy, and foster a sense of belonging that enriches everyone's learning experience.

HOW MANY SCHOOLS WOULD YOU WISH TO SEE JOIN THE TRUST?

When our third school joined the Trust in 2018, we took the deliberate decision to pause future growth to consolidate our organisation and allow our schools to make the most of the benefits of trust membership. During this period (which was also significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic) we've continued to develop and refine our operating model, the most recent element of which has been the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer and a re alignment of our Executive Leadership Team. We believe our operating model can comfortably grow to five schools (an additional two secondary schools) without any major changes, and that is where our focus currently lies.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT A SCHOOL WILL BE A GOOD FIT FOR YOUR TRUST?

The decision of whether the Trust should grow should always come down to our core purpose – the education of students. Whilst we have a duty to staff and students already within the organisation, the premise of the trust model is one of continuous improvement and system development. We will never 'pull up the drawbridge', and we will regularly consider the question of whether our Trust could help improve the education outcomes, progress and experience of other students. Starting from this position, our growth strategy is therefore grounded in the answer to a simple but powerful question:

- *Key Growth Question*: on a long-term and sustained basis, are students in a school better off in our Trust?

The first two tests relate directly to the impact we are seeking – in this case providing an outstanding education that promotes wellbeing and personal development for everyone in our schools:

- *Test One:* how can our Trust add educational value to a potential school?
- *Test Two:* how can a potential school add educational value to our Trust?

The third question takes a different view, looking inwards at the organisation and, in particular, at our shared infrastructure model. It relates directly to how we think our Trust can leverage power through collaboration and sharing services:

- *Test Three:* how can a potential school help our Trust better support schools on a long-term and sustained basis by:

1. Solving common problems more efficiently together
2. Delivering more specialised strategic support for schools
3. Securing better value for money from our services and activities
4. Creating more autonomy through internalisation
5. Guaranteeing greater resilience in high-risk areas
6. Reducing the management burden on education-focussed staff.
7. Monitoring and securing compliance with our legal duties.

1. <u>Solving common problems more efficiently together:</u>

Pooling expertise and resources allows for shared challenges to be addressed effectively. By harnessing diverse perspectives and collective wisdom, we can develop innovative solutions more efficiently, benefiting all schools involved. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose, streamlining problem-solving processes and reducing duplication of efforts.

2. Delivering more specialised strategic support for schools:

Acting at the Trust level enables strategic support to be tailored specifically to the unique needs of each school. This approach ensures that educational interventions and resource allocations are closely aligned with the individual goals of each institution, enhancing overall performance. By centralising specialist knowledge and guidance, schools can access targeted support that may not be feasible individually.

3. Securing better value for money from our services and activities:

By consolidating services and leveraging collaborative procurement, we can achieve better value for money. Economies of scale allow for more effective allocation of resources, ensuring that funds are best spent, and high standards of service delivery are maintained across all schools. This strategic use of resources contributes to our overall financial sustainability and consistent quality.

4. Creating more autonomy through internalisation:

Internalising key functions reduces reliance on external providers and enhances control over the quality and delivery of services. This move supports greater operational autonomy, enabling the Trust to adapt quickly to the evolving needs of our schools and ensure consistent service standards. In-house capabilities strengthen our overall resilience of operations and foster independence from external market fluctuations.

5. Guaranteeing greater resilience in high-risk areas:

By pooling the management of high-risk areas, we can mitigate potential risks more effectively and reduce single points of failure within individual schools. This approach ensures a more robust operational structure that supports the continuity of critical services and safeguards the Trust's educational mission. Enhanced risk management at the Trust level builds confidence and security across all schools.

6. Reducing the management burden on education-focused staff:

Streamlining administrative processes and employing specialist senior staff within the Trust can significantly reduce the management burden on school leaders and education-focused staff. This allows school-based teams to concentrate on their core mission—teaching and learning—while the Trust handles complex or time-intensive operational tasks, ultimately improving educational outcomes and staff wellbeing.

7. Monitoring and securing compliance with our legal duties:

Unified oversight of compliance ensures that all schools within the Trust meet their legal obligations effectively. This proactive approach reduces the risk of non-compliance, simplifies regulatory management, and provides a clear framework for schools to follow. By acting at the Trust level, compliance is consistently maintained, contributing to a stable and secure educational environment for both staff and students.

WHAT TYPE OF SCHOOLS MIGHT JOIN THE TRUST?

We believe that the most significant benefits of the Trust-model can be delivered when our member schools share some important key features. We've therefore made a decision to retain our current model, and are looking for schools who are:

- In broad alignment with our vision for education

- All-girls schools (with some flexibility for some mixed provision at KS5)
- Secondary phase
- State-funded (including schools already with academy status)
- Selective or comprehensive.

WHAT GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS WILL BE CONSIDERED?

Whilst we have embraced the changes to working patterns that technology provides – including the lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic – we also think it's important that staff within the Trust can move easily between schools. Physical proximity is therefore reasonably important when we look towards our next member school. We're looking for a school within an hour of our current footprint.

HOW IS THE TRUST GOVERNED?

In common with all other multi academy trusts, the ultimate accountability for all activities that take place within the organisation rests between our Trust Board (a committee of volunteers), our Trust Members (responsible for appointing Trustees), and our Accounting Officer (Chief Executive Officer). The Trust Board has established a range of subcommittees that are responsible for in-depth consideration of key areas – for example, Finance and HR. These are continually reviewed to make sure they remain fit for purpose.

In addition to this, each school has its own Local Governing Body (which reports to the Trust Board) that has a significant amount of delegated responsibility for the performance of the school. More specifically, these LGBs:

- Support and challenge the Headteacher and the school leadership to secure strong outcomes for students
- Provide oversight and monitoring of the school's activities to ensure an excellent standard of education is delivered
- Ensure that the School KPIs set by the Trust Board are delivered as part of the school development plan
- Contribute to the wider work of the Trust through membership of Trust subcommittees.

We are committed to the highest standards of governance and publish an annual Governance Handbook on the Trust website that clearly sets out how we operate, and who is accountable for what in a formal Scheme of Delegation.

HOW IS THE TRUST LED?

Alongside our governance structure, on a day-to-day basis the Trust is led by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). The ELT consists of the following roles:

- Chief Executive (Chair)
- All Headteachers
- Chief Financial Officer
- Chief Infrastructure Officer
- Chief People Officer
- Head of Governance

The purpose of the ELT is defined as:

- Strategic Development: responsible for developing the strategy of the Trust for approval by the Trust Board
- Strategic Delivery: responsible for delivering the strategic objectives of the Trust and developing transformation and large-scale improvement initiatives
- Operational Oversight and Delivery: responsible for oversight and guidance on the day-to-day operations of the Trust, ensuring that all schools within the trust operate efficiently and effectively
- Resource Management: responsible for leading the financial management and allocation of resources for the Trust, including budgeting, financial reporting, and ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements
- Stakeholder Engagement: responsible for leading and managing the stakeholder engagement strategy for the Trust, working together to ensure a coherent and targeted plan is in place.

HOW ARE HEADTEACHERS APPOINTED AND SUPPORTED?

We firmly believe that every school should be led by a high-performing and well-supported Headteacher. The Chief Executive Officer (as Accounting Officer) of the Trust is responsible for managing the recruitment and line management of the Headteachers in the Trust, working alongside members of Trust Board and the relevant Local Governing Body on school review and objective setting.

HOW ARE FINANCES MANAGED WITHIN THE TRUST?

As a relatively small Trust, we adopt a collaborative approach to financial management, ensuring transparency and equity across our schools. We do not apply a fixed 'top slice' from school budgets to fund our shared professional services. Instead, we operate an integrated budgeting model. This approach is built on shared decision-making and engagement with all members of the Executive Leadership Team (which includes all Headteachers) during the annual budgeting process.

Shared costs are apportioned among schools based on a straightforward ratio tied to their government funding levels. We do not GAG pool. This ensures fairness while enabling a consistent approach to shared expenses based on the national agreed funding framework.

Each school is set a clear target to deliver an annual 3% surplus, which funds essential capital expenditure, including IT infrastructure and major estate projects. While we pool reserves—excluding those donations or restricted income specifically earmarked for individual schools—to support large-scale initiatives, prioritisation is a collective decision. Headteachers play a central role in these discussions, ensuring that Trust-wide projects reflect the most pressing needs and deliver maximum impact where it matters most.

This model exemplifies our commitment to financial autonomy with alignment, fostering trust and collaboration while maintaining a robust and sustainable financial foundation for the entire Trust.

HOW DOES THE PROCESS OF JOINING A TRUST WORK?

There are broadly four key stages that need to take place. The amount of time the process takes will depend on the specific features of any potential school – however we envisage any school joining fully approximately 3-6 months after 'in principle' agreement is reached.

1. <u>Initial Engagement / Discussions</u>

The initial engagement stage begins with discussions between senior staff within the Trust and the potential school. Trust staff will also visit the school site to gain a better understanding of its environment and operations. These initial discussions expand to include key governors and trustees, fostering a collaborative dialogue. An informal approval is then sought from our Trust Board to continue discussions, followed by presentations at the potential school's Governing Body and other stakeholder meetings. This stage aims to build a mutual understanding and interest in moving forward.

2. <u>In Principle Agreement</u>

At this stage, a Strategic Business Case is developed collaboratively by the GLT CEO and the potential school's Headteacher. This case is then agreed upon by both the Trust Board and the School Governing Body and subsequently sent to the Department for Education (DfE) for consideration. Essential agreements, such as a Memorandum of Understanding, Non-Disclosure Agreement, and Data Sharing Agreement, are signed between the two organisations in preparation. A formal stakeholder engagement plan is also developed, and a public statement is issued regarding the school's intention to join the Trust, initiating the consultation process.

3. <u>Detailed Mutual Due Diligence</u>

During this stage, a Joint Steering Group with representatives from the Trust and the school is established to consider consultation responses and approve a due diligence framework and plan of action. A Joint Working Group of staff is then formed to carry out due diligence activities and develop

an integration plan – focussed on six key areas: education vision & strategy, finance, governance, legal & compliance, staffing, estates & facilities and IT.

4. Approval and Integration

The final stage involves securing formal resolutions from both the Trust Board and the School Governing Body, followed by obtaining formal approval from the DfE Regional Director. A formal project manager is appointed, and detailed action plans and a Gantt chart are developed to map key tasks. Communication and stakeholder engagement activities are initiated to ensure a smooth transition. Post-integration, regular review meetings are conducted at 3, 6, and 12-month intervals to monitor progress, with ongoing oversight provided by the Trust Board. This stage ensures the successful integration of the new school into the Trust and continuous evaluation to address any arising issues.