**THE BCAT WAY**

***Why was BCAT created?***

BCAT was created to support the aim of Bedford College to be seen as an educational leader (not just a leader in further education) and also to help improve the attainment of young people in the area at age 16 and 18 by improving performance locally below those ages.

***The BCAT community***

In support of the above BCAT currently serves the same communities as The Bedford College Group; Bedfordshire and Luton; Northamptonshire; Milton Keynes and parts of Cambridgeshire.

BCAT believes parents should be able to choose their school and be able to exercise choice between a variety of schools. To that end BCAT will not seek to monopolise provision in any geographic area, and expects its schools to see themselves as part of a local family of schools. BCAT does believe parents should be able to get their children into their most local school and will therefore strive to ensure it has capacity in its schools to achieve this.

As part of a local family BCAT will ensure its pupils are given access to impartial advice and guidance; it will allow other providers (including competitors) access to pupils and parents to provide information to aid future choices.

BCAT itself will see itself as part of a local family of educational providers and develop strong relationships with central and local government.

***The BCAT Vision and Mission***

*Vision*

Delivering world class education to the communities we serve

*Mission*

Our primary mission is to support and enrich our community through the promotion, development and delivery of excellent education. In addition we seek to promote social inclusion and personal advancement within that community

***How does BCAT define success?***

BCAT wants its pupils to be described when they leave our schools as expert and skilled (for their age); resilient; reliable; caring; well mannered; articulate, and rounded individuals. We want our pupils when they leave formal education to be good citizens able to take control of their destiny and able to navigate the world confidently.

We therefore have very high expectations and believe all young people can mature in this way.

BCAT ensures all its academies are set stretching targets that underpin this philosophy. Success is measured in personal terms – is the academy improving its absolute performance? – but also in comparative terms – is the academy doing well in comparison with other institutions?

***How is this reflected in the BCAT curriculum?***

BCAT believes in providing a broad educational experience and a balanced curriculum. Particular attention is given to those subjects that are proven to aid future success, often the traditional academic disciplines, but the experience of our pupils will embrace technical subjects, arts, languages and humanities in line with our aim of producing rounded individuals.

***Commitment to our staff***

BCAT aims to be an exemplary employer. We also believe the quality of the education we provide is directly related to the quality of our staff. While responsibility for the appraisal and development of staff rests with the Heads of each academy BCAT will seek to provide additional cross-trust staff development where appropriate to help maintain an expert, highly professional workforce. We regard the development of all staff, not just teaching staff, as a priority.

***We serve the whole community***

BCAT is an inclusive organisation. Our academies will try to accept everyone who wishes to enrol with us and will not adopt any entry criteria below the age of 16 that seeks to ration entry based on ability. BCAT has prioritised recruitment within catchment area however.

BCAT will provide high quality specialist support including language support and support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

***Does BCAT have a view on school size?***

BCAT schools are designed to deliver for the communities they serve. Where the community needs a large school we will seek to provide one that allows local parents to choose that school. However, we also believe schools should be communities where all the staff know all the pupils, and may organise large schools in such a way to facilitate this. We think this creates a high-respect and safe environment.

***Governance and accountability***

BCAT Limited is a company limited by guarantee with exempt charity status. The Trust organises its governance to avoid conflicts of interest, ensure it brings into the organisation a wide range of voices and expertise, and provide clear accountability. Directors are carefully appointed in line with our values. We believe outstanding governance is fundamental to creating great academies.

BCAT members are appointed by the Bedford College Corporation as the Foundation/Sponsor body. The Corporation does not appoint College governors to the BCAT Board. Each school will have a local advisory board with a membership that does not overlap with the BCAT Board. The local advisory board appoints its own chair and contains parent and staff members.

BCAT appoints a Head or Principal to each academy who is fully accountable for the performance of the institution. BCAT are looking to appoint a CEO to take forward the growth and development of the Trust, directly manage central Trust employees and oversee the performance of its academies. The CEO will report into the BCAT Board.

BCAT will designate Heads/Principals and a few other senior staff as “senior postholders” and these appointments will be made by the Trust (in conjunction with the Head/Principal for those other designated posts). All other appointments will be made by the Head/Principal in accordance with BCAT HR policies. The appointment process will not normally involve BCAT or LAB members unless the Head/Principal requests otherwise. If involved they will only be used in an advisory capacity not a decision-making capacity.

The boundary between governance and management is not always easy to define. However, BCAT and LAB members will not visit any of our schools without the prior agreement of the Head/Principal and such visits should be rare outside the normal BCAT and LAB meetings.

In line with our value of openness we aim to make all our decision making, results, performance, spending and future plans as publicly available as possible.

***Financial policy***

As a new Trust BCAT needs to establish a strong financial platform so that it becomes educationally and financially sustainable, and needs to do this quickly in a fast-moving environment. A strong financial platform will mean BCAT is able to provide high quality intervention and support in the event that any of its institutions performs poorly.

BCAT must be financially independent and not require subsidy or support from the Bedford College Group.

BCAT aims to put as much of the funding allocated to its academies and keep to a minimum the services it provides centrally. If BCAT is to be seen as an educational leader it needs to have a strong research and marketing function, a strong HR function, strong governance and a strong finance function, to complement the strong educational performance expected from the appointed Heads/Principals. These form the core of the central services.

In addition to maintaining low central services costs BCAT uses external benchmarking to ensure it uses its money very effectively. In particular it will keep management overheads low and will not spend money on activity or roles which research suggests are ineffective. The expectation is that a very high proportion of the staff will be teachers.

***BCAT values***

BCAT shares the same values as its founding body Bedford College namely:

*Pupil focus*

We will seek to achieve a high quality learning experience for every pupil

*High Performance*

We will strive for consistently high levels of performance and continuous improvement in all aspects of our work

*Respect, Openness and Honesty*

We will treat everyone with respect, encourage openness and honesty, and recognise each other’s contribution and achievements

Every member of staff we appoint, and every BCAT Board member must demonstrate they adhere to these values before they are appointed.

***Consistency***

BCAT recognises that each community we serve will be different and this needs to be reflected in the services we provide. However we also believe that high quality outcomes are best achieved through a consistent approach to the curriculum, teaching and support services.

Version 2021

***Towards a Strategic Plan***

The above spells out a vision and mission, and we have agreed our values, this document allows us to develop a short Strategic Plan.

We rely on the DfE permitting us to run more academies which impacts on our ability to control our destiny. We have three simple objectives therefore:

* to expand the Trust so that it has academies throughout its defined patch (without dominating any particular area) whether by creation or acquisition of academies, alternatively by merger with another trust
* to ensure our academies are regarded as outstanding by their communities
* to ensure the Trust is seen as an excellent employer, well governed, well managed, and financially secure.

The first of these can be turned into a strategic target from which we can develop a set of strategies and actions to achieve it.

The second is within our gift and can be converted into a similar set of strategies and actions at Board and Head level.

The third is in our gift and easily converts to clear strategies and actions at Board and Head level.

**Summary of distinctive features of BCAT schools**

* No Executive Principal (dilutes accountability and adds overhead in small trust)
* Heads given very significant financial autonomy (work to a high level budget and agreed employment framework)
* Tight, small management teams (clear accountability)
* Better teaching scales particularly for good new teachers (scales above the national scales especially at bottom end)
* Fewer teaching hours (staff currently teach 20 hours per week)
* High group size (we want to pay staff well and accept this means slightly higher average group sizes, given no research evidence these affect achievement)
* Stability (commitment to a specific patch, strong financial model, strong forward planning and market research, means a stable environment for staff and pupils)
* Use of teaching upper scale to allow fast-track progress for best teachers by linking upper scale to extra responsibilities
* Access to very high level and specialist financial, HR, governance, IT and marketing support
* Strong local advisory bodies (often ditched by other Trusts but very important to BCAT)
* Excellent links with local authorities