

PIONEER LEARNING TRUST

Pursuing Excellence and Equity

Growth Strategy 2026-29



Our Vision

At Pioneer we have a common vision, to pursue excellence and equity in a values-based context.

- Our schools maintain their unique character, integrity and independence within our Trust family
- Through collaboration, our school communities are empowered as a united family of learners
- In a culture of transparency and fairness, everyone is respected for the diversity they bring
- Our ethos of aspiration extends to all – pupils, staff and our community
- Pioneer schools aim to achieve excellence and exceptionality through high quality provision
- Pioneer Learning Trust is a Values-driven organisation with each of our schools having Values-based Education programmes

Our Values

Aspiration – In our pursuit of excellence and equity we focus on aspiration at all levels. We want children to have high aspirations for themselves in a context where staff believe that 'every child can' and support them to do so. Staff also have high aspirations for themselves accessing CPD to develop exceptional careers within and beyond our Trust.

Respect – We have a strong focus on respect as a key value in all of our work. Children and adults show mutual respect within our schools and communities with regular opportunities to work with others from a range of different backgrounds, building understanding and deepening respect for others.

Unity – Our schools are each at the centre of their communities and work hard to engage with as many organisations and partners as possible in order to fulfil our civic responsibility as a Trust. Making a positive contribution to their wider community builds sense of agency and belonging.

Independence – Within our Trust we are striving to develop children, families, staff and schools to achieve self-efficacy. Independence is about making good decisions based on solid information. Our School Improvement Strategy builds independence of schools alongside the unity of being in a Trust.

Quality – In our Trust we believe it is important that we work to the highest possible quality. Children are provided with opportunities to represent their schools and communities, demonstrating the quality of thier work. As a Trust high quality governance secures high quality educational provision in our schools.

Enjoyment – We believe that learning and should be fun and work should be rewarding. Children and staff are supported to secure enjoyment and fulfilment in their daily lives within our Trust schools.

Integrity – At Pioneer we do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. This integrity extends from our work on sustainability to our commitment to improving our communities as civic leaders.



The Pioneer Promise

The Pioneer Promise is the way in which we ensure that our pupils have the opportunity to 'live' the values of our Trust. Schools in Pioneer Learning Trust will ensure that the core curriculum offer for all pupils includes each of the elements of the Pioneer Promise across the years a child attends a Pioneer Learning Trust school.



What sets us apart?

- Our CEO - Cori Bateman - is a highly experienced, values-based school leader and National Leader in Education who facilitates NPQEL for Best Practice and provides training and audit expertise to the Values-based Education Trust
- As a National Leader in Education, the CEO has extensive experience and expertise in school to school support work and continues to work with schools within and beyond our locality. This proven track record of improving schools is recognised by schools, local Trust and the Local Autority who broker our improvement services directly.
- The CEO and central team have specific expertise in use of Pupil Premium, curriculum design and strategies to secure rapid improvement, schools working with Pioneer have access to this significant knowledge and skill, e.g. our Director of Maths is also the Deputy Director for our local Maths Hub.
- Pioneer teams work with key partners in the provision of CPD in our schools, our locality and beyond, including the devlivery of the Early Careers Framework to Primary Schools across Luton.
- Through the 'Pioneer Promise', our Trust has an exceptional commitment to securing opportunities and experiences, making memories and building cultural capital to prepare children for the future.
- We make a clear commitment to improving the wellbeing of pupils, staff and our school communities.
- Our Trust works extensively with the Teaching School Hub and other ITT and CPD partners to develop strong recruitment and retention for our schools.



Who are we?

Pioneer Learning Trust was established 2019 and has grown to a family of seven schools:

Chantry Primary Academy is a three-form entry school in Luton offering nursery provision from age 2 and accommodating over 700 pupils. The school holds the Enhanced Values-based Education quality mark and has a strong values-based culture. Chantry achieves consistently high standards and is highly inclusive, with special provision for children with visual impairment.

Southfield Primary Academy is a two-form entry primary school, with nursery provision, in Luton. Southfield aims to bring learning to life for pupils through a creative curriculum. Staff are committed to ensuring that all pupils develop a love of learning and reflect strong values in all aspects of school life. Southfield has high expectations for all, with outstanding provision for personal development.

Whitefield Primary Academy is a highly inclusive and welcoming two-form entry school in Luton, with a growing nursery provision. At Whitefield children are supported to achieve excellent outcomes at all stages of their primary education. As a values-based school, Whitefield is at the centre of its community, working hard to ensure that everyone feels belonging, as part of the school family.

Ferrars Junior School is a three-form entry junior school in Luton. Ferrars prides itself on having an inclusive, family feel, where everyone is valued for their individuality whilst working together towards a common goal - a love of learning. With high expectations Ferrars aims to cultivate children's intellectual, emotional, social, moral and spiritual development to achieve their full potential.

Lakeview School is a two-form entry primary school, with a nursery, in Wixams, Bedford. Serving over 450 children aged 3-11, the school embodies their motto: ‘Our children are at the heart of our school; Our school is at the heart of our community.' Lakeview is a values-based school, providing enriching learning experiences to foster success and valuing strong partnerships with parents.

Warden Hill Infant Academy is a four-form entry infant school in Luton, educating children from Reception to Year 2. Warden Hill is a friendly, welcoming school where all children are supported to ‘be the best they can be’ through the school's values-based approach. At the heart of the community, the school works closely with Warden Hill Junior School, ensuring a consistent educational journey.

The Ferrars Academy is a multicultural infant and nursery school for 3–7 year olds in Luton, providing excellence in early education, celebrating diversity and nurturing every child’s potential. An inclusive environment and rich curriculum inspires curiosity, confidence, and a love of learning. With a values led 'family' approach, the school builds strong foundations for lifelong success and happiness.



Our Ambition

In our pursuit of excellence and equity, our Trust is ambitious to engage in wider collaboration and partnerships in order to contribute further to the education community and to learn from others. As a values-led Trust, we are keen to work with values-based primary schools from all types of communities and would like to engage with schools with a single form of entry, two-forms of entry or larger. We would also be very keen to consider the opportunities which may be achieved through merger with other small, values-based Trusts. In addition, we are keen to work closely with the DfE and Local Authorities to support schools requiring additional support with School Improvement.

Pioneer has been through a phase of rapid growth with the addition of Ferrars Junior School in September 2024 followed by growth outside of Luton, welcoming Lakeview School in Wixams, Bedford, to the Trust in April 2025. Warden Hill Infant Academy, Luton joined in June 2025 and The Ferrars Academy, Luton - a former Single Academy Trust - joined our Trust family in November 2025. We are currently in the process of Warden Hill Junior School, Luton, joining the Trust, with a planned conversion of January 2027.

Through the growth of our Trust we are in a position to impact more children positively through high quality education. We have also strengthened our Central Team, School Improvement Offer, our CPD offer and are achieving greater organisational efficiency and economies of scale, making more funds available to schools and providing access to additional resources across the Trust.

We plan to continue growing, to become a medium sized Trust of 3000-5000 pupils, big enough to make an impact locally and regionally whilst small enough to have meaningful relationships with and between our schools. We believe that this will ensure effective collaboration where schools has an equal voice with their individual strengths seen and shared within our family of schools.

We believe firmly that effective collaboration will be best achieved within a close geographical proximity which allows staff to move easily between schools. In order to achieve this, we aim to work with schools and Trusts locally and in surrounding regions, broadly within a 20 mile radius. With 6 schools in Luton and just 1 school in Bedford Borough, our ambition is to expand within Bedford Borough in order to establish a Bedford Hub. In addition, we are currently working with Central Bedfordshire Council and RISE to support a school in Central Bedfordshire and are keen to continue this support work through a formal relationship with this school joining Pioneer and beginning to establish a Central Bedfordshire Hub.

At Pioneer we understand the Luton context well and work closely with the Local Authority, schools in the maintained sector and local Trusts in Luton. The Trust has a strong working relationship with Bedford Borough Council, leading School Improvement programmes across the Borough and supporting schools with a bespoke offer via the School Improvement Team in Bedford. We also work with schools nationally through the Values-based Education network.

Within our family of schools we intend to retain our valued staff by providing opportunities for them to grow and develop as professionals; to harness talent and to provide career progression within the Trust and beyond. Our work with key partners is important to us and means that Pioneer has a positive impact on the profession far and beyond our own schools and we wish to develop this further.



Comprehensive School Improvement Offer

Our school improvement strategy is rooted in a set of clear values and principles:

- Children come first, all school improvement work is conducted through this lens
- Transparency, openness and honesty are fundamental to our schools' improvement journeys
- A collaborative approach is the best way to share good practice and learn from each other's successes
- Partnerships with schools outside of our Trust ensure that we look outward as well as inward
- Peer led school reviews led by experienced school leaders support schools to identify their strengths and areas for development
- External reviews secure an objective perspective on our schools' successes and improvement areas
- Both peer led and external reviews are carried out in partnership with school leaders – all school improvement work is 'done **with**' rather than 'done **to**' our schools
- Challenge is balanced with support to ensure that schools have the capacity to make improvement
- We believe in people; coaching and support is provided wherever underachievement is identified
- We harness talent; we are ambitious for our teams and will develop people as far as they want to go

In the context of these values and principles, our School Improvement Team provide robust challenge of school leaders to secure high quality provision in all schools. The team advocate for schools, brokering resources and support to empower schools to make the improvements necessary.

Our School Improvement Team have developed robust and comprehensive programmes to support subject leaders and school leaders at all levels. In conjunction with Headteachers, the team develop comprehensive and bespoke CPD for all school staff, tailored to schools' needs alongside bespoke mentoring, coaching and support for groups of staff and individual staff, as required.

How do we intend to Grow?

Our schools currently work in close partnership with a number of schools outside of the Trust, through our School Improvement Boards - based in Luton and in Bedford. These groups act as School Improvement partnerships, affording participating schools the opportunity to work closely with the Trust's School Improvement systems and ensuring that our Trust schools have an external peer perspective on their practice. We welcome schools considering academisation to join this group in order to gain insight into the way we work as a Trust.

We are committed to working closely with schools across Luton and Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire - these are the locations we are most keen to expand into so that our schools can collaborate effectively and benefit from sharing staffing and resources. With this in mind, when considering growth, geographical proximity is a key consideration. We are keen to expand in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire, where we already have strong links with the Local Authorities and their schools. If we are moving to an area outside of a reasonable travelling distance we will only consider this if there is a group of at least three schools with an existing relationship, including partnership working.



Capacity

Utilising the contribution from schools' GAG funding, Pioneer has invested significantly in a central services team which serves our schools in the areas of: School Improvement, Finance, HR, Estates, Catering and IT. Each service has been designed to allow for scaling up with new schools joining. We have an established governance model, which works within a clear Scheme of Delegation. This ensures that individual schools retain a large degree of independence and autonomy within a wider governance context. The Trust is in a secure financial position.

Our CEO has significant school improvement experience, leading and supporting schools in a rapid improvement journey. This has led to the Trust being asked to work with the RISE Team and the School Improvement Team at Central Bedfordshire Council to support a school in Leighton Buzzard experiencing difficulties. In such instances the CEO evaluates the school's needs and co-ordinates a package of support from within the Trust's School Improvement capacity.

Supporting the CEO in improving schools are our Director of Education, Director of Mathematics and our Children's Champion (Leading Practitioner for Pupil Opportunity and Community). This team are focused on building capacity in the Trust to support the scaling up of School Improvement services whilst also supporting and developing schools beyond our Trust. Examples of this are our strong partnerships with Chiltern Teaching School Hub and Best Practice; and the partnership with the Enigma Maths Hub - our Director of Maths is the Deputy Director for Primary within the Hub.

The Trust has an extensive team of Specialist Leaders in a range of strategic areas. This team is continuously under review, utilising our schools' strengths in order to support both our own schools and partner schools. With three special provisions hosted within the Trust, we have expertise in working with pupils with SEND, particularly Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and Visual Impairment.

With this strong capacity and effective leadership, the Trust is in a position to sponsor a school requiring rapid improvement. In addition, through existing effective models of collaborative working we have the capacity to welcome schools wishing to join the Trust or to work within a Trust Partnership arrangement.

The Next Three Years

In realising our ambition to positively impact more pupils, over the next three years we would like to:

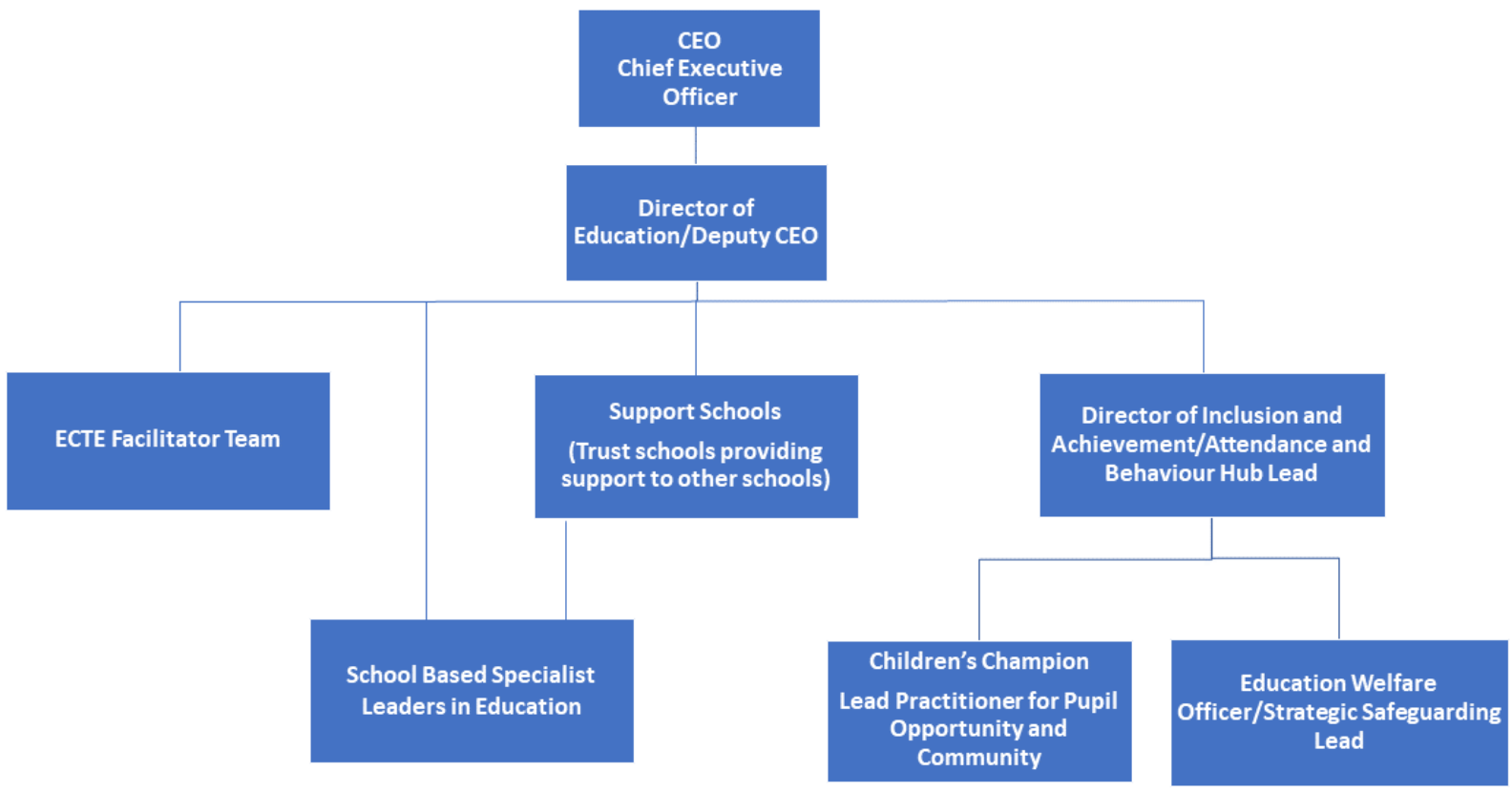
- Have a further opportunity to utilise our capacity to support a school, in partnership with RISE and/or a Local Authority
- Explore merger with other MATS/SATs which share our values
- Formalise partnerships with maintained schools who would be converter academies

Our vision is for a strong local Trust of primary schools which are 1 or 2 forms of entry and larger, with a local footprint, working to achieve our overall strategic ambition of 3000-5000 pupils. Any growth subject to rigorous due diligence to ensure capacity for effective support and improvement services.

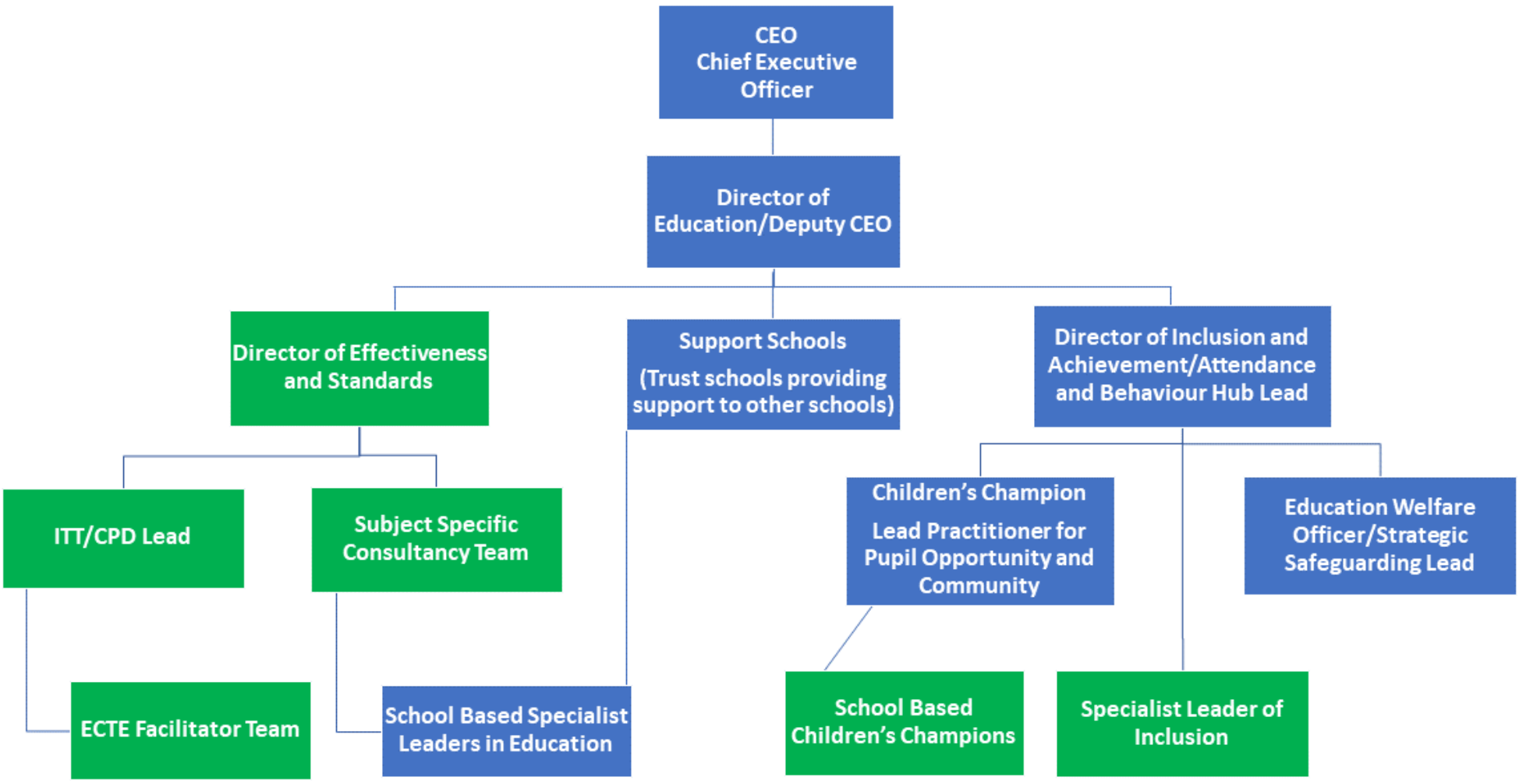


Scaling Up for Growth

Our current structure of central support for School Improvement is overseen by the CEO and co-ordinated by the Director of Education.



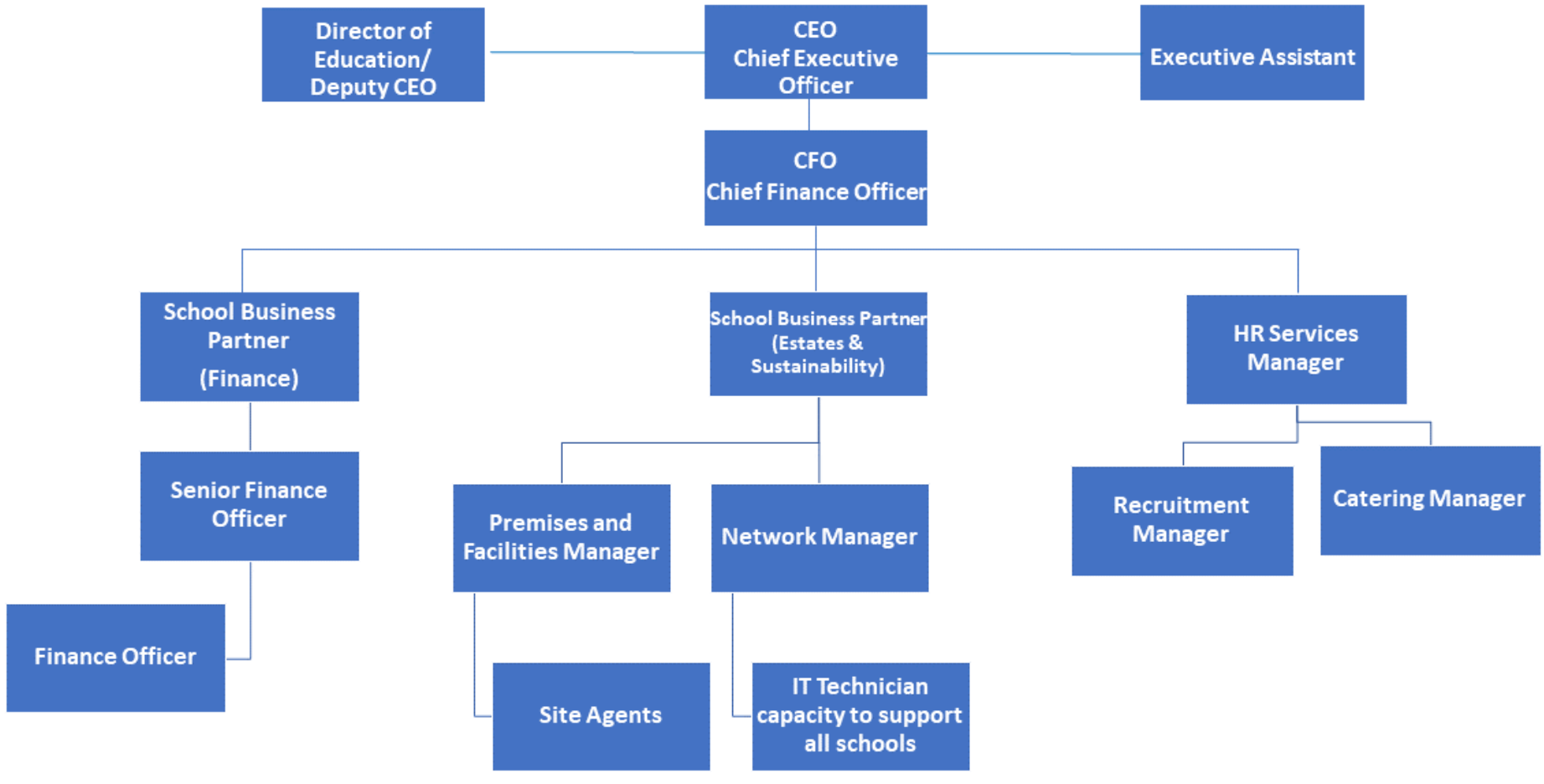
In scaling up to meet the needs of schools joining the Trust, our 3000-5000 pupil Trust will require a number of additional leadership roles to support schools. All scaled up posts are subject to the needs of schools at different points in our growth along with affordability.





Scaling Up for Growth

Our current central operations structure provides a comprehensive central business function which allows school leaders to focus on the core business of schools – education.



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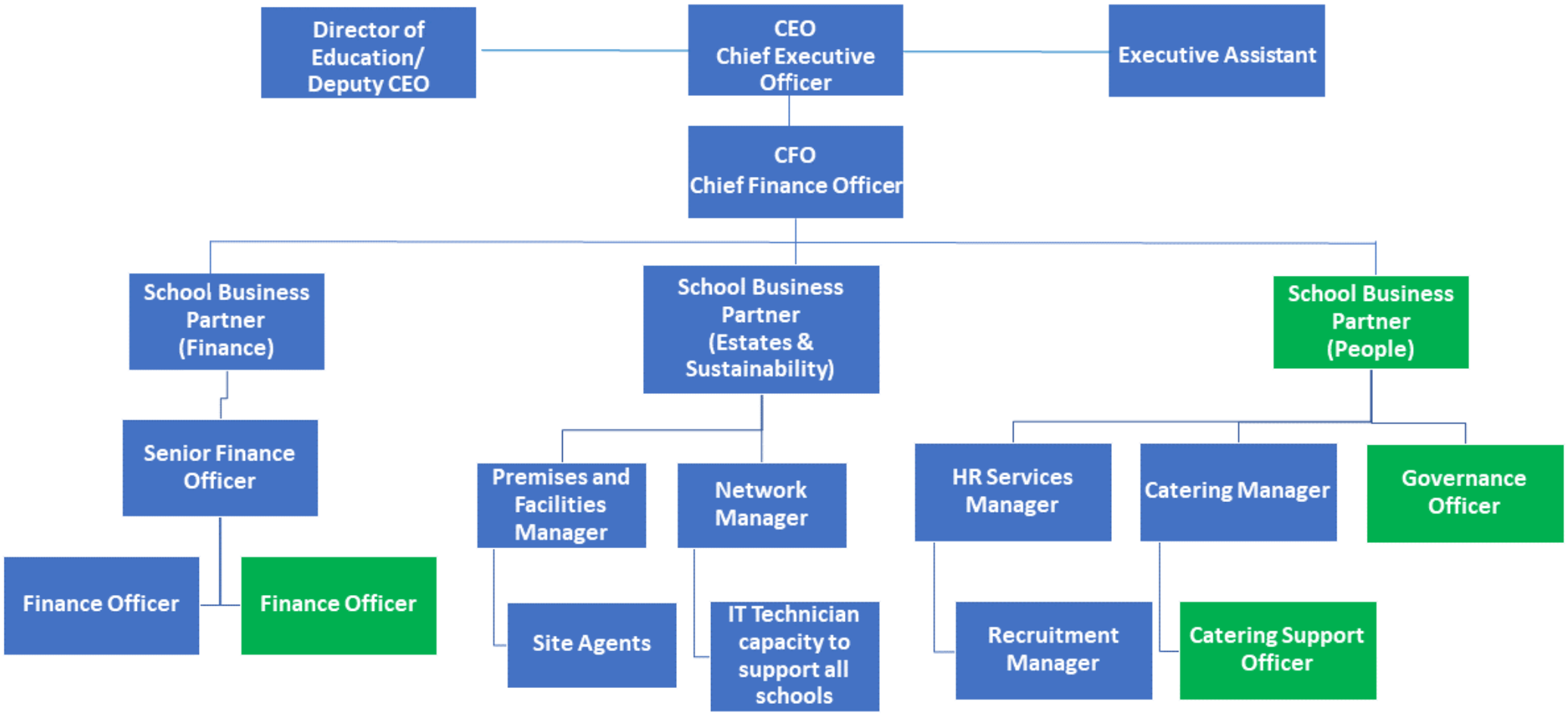



Governance Structures

The Board is governed by its Articles of Association. It supports these with a comprehensive Governance Structure and Scheme of Delegation which clarifies the roles and accountabilities of all levels of governance of the Trust.

The Structure of the Trust

The Trust has 5 Members and up to 11 Trustees/Directors, the composition of both groups balances educational expertise, business experience and professional skills.

Members

The Members are the guardians of the Academy Trust, with the ability to appoint some of the Trustees and the right to amend the Trust's Articles of Association. Members play a limited but crucial role in safeguarding Academy Trust governance. Members should assure themselves that the governance of the Trust is effective, that Academy Trustees are acting in accordance with the trust’ s charitable objectives and use their powers to step in if governance is failing.

Trust Board

The Trust Board is made up of Non-Executive Directors (Trustees). In Pioneer, the Trust Board includes representation from some of our schools' Local Governing Bodies along with additional Trustees, as appointed by the Members. The Trustees are responsible for setting the direction of the Trust, holding schools to account and ensuring financial probity. Academy Trusts are charitable companies. The Trustees are company directors and must comply with company law requirements.

Finance Audit and Risk Committee

The Finance Committee work with the Chief Finance and Operations Officer to ensure that the finances and risks across the Trust are managed effectively and responsibly so that schools within the Trust have the resources and provision necessary to provide high quality learning to all pupils. The committee is made up of Trustees with financial expertise, seeking advice and information from the Internal Scrutiny Provider and, where appropriate, the Trust's appointed auditors.

The Education Committee

The Education Committee's remit is to ensure that all schools provide a High Quality and Inclusive Education to all pupils in every school through an effective School Improvement Strategy and approach. Working directly with the Director of Education, the committee seeks to understand schools and their contexts in evaluating and provides challenge to Trust Leaders to improve schools further.

School Improvement Boards

School Improvement Boards are made up of the Headteachers of all schools within the Trust along with Headteachers of schools within the Luton Hub and in Bedford Borough - both maintained schools and local schools in other Trusts. The School Improvement Boards provide feedback to the Trust Board on matters relating to High Quality and Inclusive Education and School Improvement.

Local Governing Bodies

Each school within the Trust retains a Local Governing body made up of Community Governors, Parent Governors and Staff Governors. Working within a Scheme of Delegation, Local Governing Bodies retain strategic accountability for the school they represent, including finance, curriculum and staffing.



Managing Risk

The Trust takes seriously the anticipation and management of risk and has undertaken a SWOT analysis in relation to our growth strategy. To address these risk the Trust:

- Has a well-developed risk register responding to the Trust's and schools' current and future identified risks
- Has an effective monitoring, reporting and control of risks
- The Trust's audit plan has internal risk assurance and scrutiny in place

Strengths

- Strong School Improvement expertise
- Strong and established partnerships
- Well-developed central business team
- Financially secure
- EYFS provision for pupils as young as 2yrs
- Significant evidence of impact
- Schools' outcomes largely good and improving with some exceptionality
- Most schools Ofsted 'good'
- Attendance and Behaviour Hub
- Extensive extra-curricular/holistic offer

Weaknesses

- Currently most Trust schools are in Luton; could be viewed as a 'Luton-centric' Trust
- Rapid growth on a 'school by school' basis presents a challenge in re-calibrating on a repeated basis
- Appetite for academy conversion is not currently strong in Luton, Bedford Borough or Central Bedfordshire
- Cost of conversion to met by joining schools and the Trust

Opportunities

- Already working with maintained schools and other MATs within 20 miles
- Strong partnerships present potential opportunities for growth through new joining schools or merger
- Still a large number of maintained schools in focal areas yet to convert
- Strong local reputation and growing school partnerships create possibility of informal 'try before you buy' opportunities for schools

Threats

- All schools must maintain a positive trajectory and continue to improve
- Taking on schools with financial challenge
- Balancing growth with maintaining quality and capacity in existing schools
- Reputation of the MAT could be adversely impacted through difficulties joining schools might be experiencing
- School funding is under pressure, balancing centralisation with schools' localised needs presents challenge



Next Steps for Growth

We have experienced a recent phase of rapid growth, expanding our Trust family from three schools to seven. This has required expanding offer to schools through appointment to strategic roles in the education and operations teams, and continuing to invest in the professional development of our leaders and education experts. Our systems have developed to a position of strength and have been developed to build in additional capacity ready for growth. We now are in a strong position to move into the next phase of growth. With this in mind, we plan to take the following steps:

- Complete conversion of Warden Hill Junior School in January 2027
- Continue developing relationships - with schools, Trusts, DfE and the wider community
- Consider how the central team (business and education) scale up in structure as the Trust grows in size, reflecting the needs of schools
- Where merger is being explored, Trust boards begin working together, as per the 'try before you buy model' and as part of due diligence
- Continue to build capacity within our current schools to support anticipated growth
- Continually review and revise our model for school improvement which is structured through the values of the Pioneer Promise
- Continue to develop and communicate our school improvement offer to schools beyond our Trust
- Develop and finalise Due Diligence and Onboarding pocesses

Joining Process

Governors formally agree to join Pioneer and submits minutes of the decision and a formal letter of application to the Pioneer Trust Board

Trust Board considers the application with a view to approving further discussions with the applicant school and the due diligence process

Due diligence undertaken and clarifications sought

Trust Board formally approve the school' s application

Application made to the Regional Schools Commissioner to join Pioneer

Regional Schools Commissioner issues approval

Information gathering undertaken to instruct solicitors

School consults with stakeholders for 6 weeks with Pioneer support alongside a 4 week TUPE consultation with staff and unions led by school's HR

Legal agreements completed including land transfer, leases, funding agreements and commercial transfers

DFE approval of transfer of the school to the Trust