

## Grace Schools Strategic plan 2025–2035

### Introduction

Welcome to the Grace Schools strategy which was refreshed in 2025 to look ahead to 2030 and beyond. 2025 was a pivotal point for Grace Schools as it transitioned from a period of consolidation which enabled rapid improvements to a period of developing what was on offer further and looking beyond our boundaries in order to extend our education offer and influence across more schools and children who would benefit.

As a Trust founded with a Christian ethos, we believe we have an important role in the continued success and sustainability of church schools and through our operating models have proven that we can do this successfully. We are firm supporters of the benefits of a church school network, driven by the CofE's vision for education and our role in that. We harbour ambitions to become a national church based Trust which can contribute to the building of successful futures for children across the country.

The 2025–35 strategy sets out our ambitions in more detail and why these ambitions are so important for the children in our care.

### Part 1 – Why do we exist?

#### Our context

We exist to **build the foundations to create successful futures** for our pupils, our staff, and our communities. As of September 2025, we are responsible for providing an excellent education for nearly 7000 children across 38 schools in four local authorities. As a church-based Trust, founded in the Diocese of Ely, we are proud of our Christian roots and work closely with the Boards of Education for each diocese where we operate ensuring that our schools not just maintain a Christian ethos but rather that it strengthens our education offer. Philippians 4:13, *We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us*, guides us in our work

across the Trust particularly in the face of the many challenges currently facing our children and the education sector. For us, this means that we can find the resilience and courage to make brave decisions in the interests of our children so that they all, regardless of background, leave us with the foundations upon which they can build a successful future. For our children, it means that they as individuals can step out with faith and confidence to embrace that future, rather than be defined by their context.

The majority of our schools are small and a significant number are in rural locations, although we have a broad set of contexts in which we operate including urban conurbations and market towns. Small and rural schools are a combination of contextual factors which, nationally, is an indicator of below average Ofsted outcomes and below average pupil attainment. Small schools do create additional complexity in our education work but we have achieved success reversing the national trend of declining Ofsted outcomes in small schools.

We know that our schools are an important part of their communities and the lives of the children enrolled in them. We want to anchor our schools within their localities alongside their churches to provide a network for children, parents, and carers to succeed. Our children are entitled to the very best start in the education journey and it is our responsibility to provide it to them.

### **Our achievements**

As of September 2025, Grace Schools has existed for twelve years with the first half of its life focused on growth and establishing basic structures. In the most recent six years, our priority has been on improving standards in our schools and this work has led to some considerable successes. As a Trust, we are proud of how our schools are aligned in many aspects of school life as this allows us to work together as a Trust family, in Hub groups, or in smaller partnerships through common reference points and language.

Our recent achievements include

- MAT of the Year 2024 (National Schools Awards)
- Highest ever Grace Schools KS2 outcomes in 2025 (65% KS2 combined)
- Alignment around our Principles of Education
- Establishment of the Grace Schools programme of Trust-wide enrichment opportunities
- 100% of schools rated as Good in Ofsted terms
- 100% of schools judged as meeting the expected standards of church schools by SIAMS

### **What's next?**

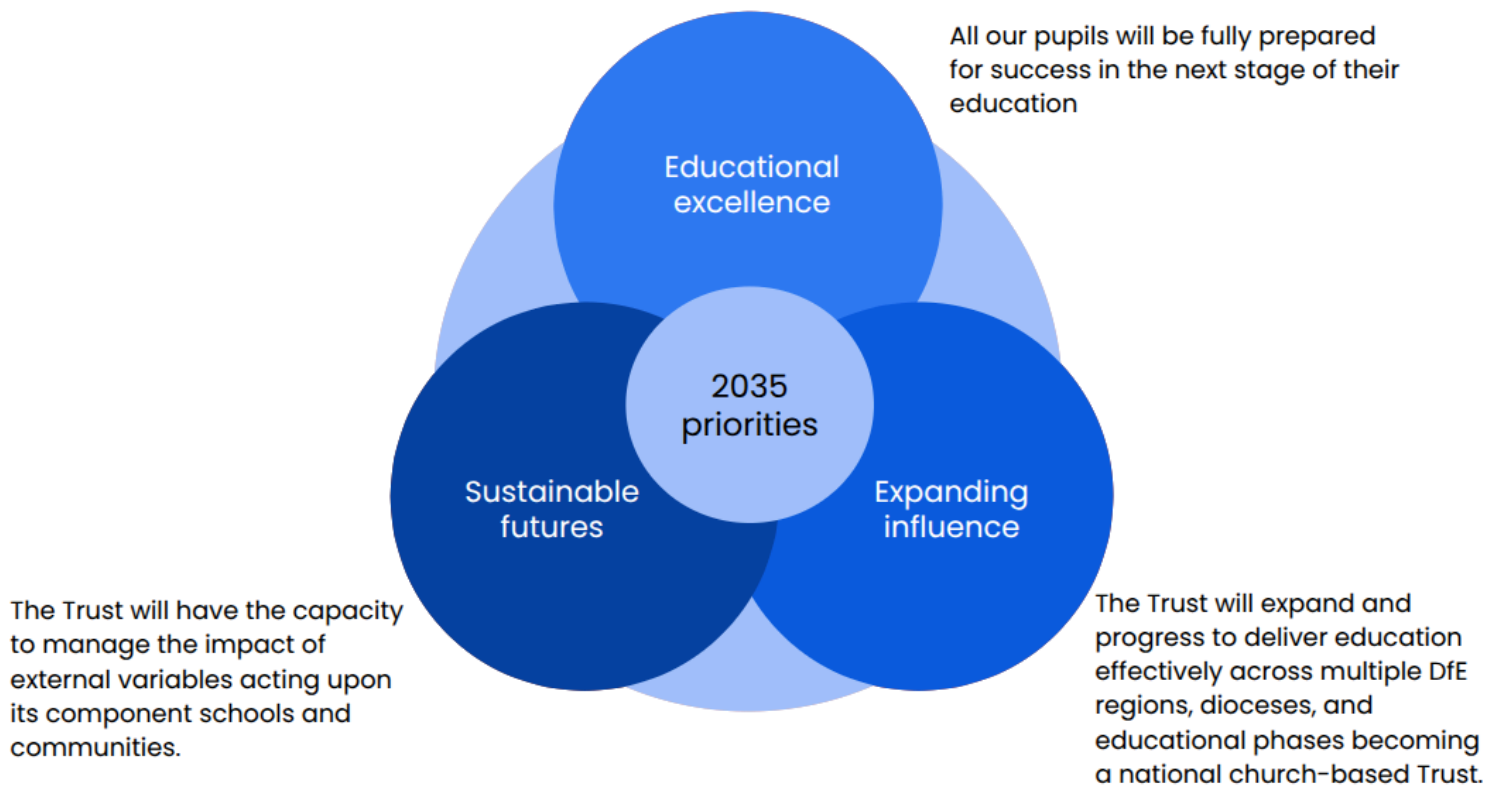
The Trust is in a much better position in terms of our educational provision and financial stability than at the start of our previous strategic plan. More of our children achieve well, we are not seeing the same levels of financial discomfort elsewhere in the sector, and we are building a common culture across our schools through our aligned approach. Much of our work in the past five years has been building the foundations that the Trust needs to achieve greater success and we have started to see the impact of this work. Does this mean we are finished?

We are clear that we are still a long way from achieving our vision but we are starting this strategic period from a much stronger position. We have the necessary foundations in place so we can be confident in asking more of ourselves in our pursuit of excellence. The following pages set out our objections and ambitions for the future of our Trust and our local communities. Achieving these ambition objectives will require a combination of refining and improving the delivery of our existing strategies and developing new strategies to achieve success in the ever-changing world we live in.

We exist to create the foundations to build successful futures. Too many children continue to leave school without the education they need to make informed

decisions about the opportunities ahead of them. This plan sets out how we will aim to change this situation.

## Part 2 – Our 2035 objectives



### **Part 3 – Biggest barriers to our future success**

- Declining pupil numbers and school size
  - The continued demographic trend of falling pupil numbers reduces available funding and as a consequence reduces the size of the school increasing complications and risks around the quality of provision and sustainable operations.
- Quality of teaching
  - Teaching staff is the biggest single expenditure in the Trust, we must ensure that this provides value for money through recruiting and retaining excellent teachers. The impact of a weak teacher is felt by the class for many years after.
- Central education policy
  - As highlighted by the National Society for Education, the current Government's agnosticism towards school structures and softening of intervention criteria has removed the momentum of academisation which in turn exposes a number of schools to the lack of school improvement support from the Local Authorities.
- Skills and structure of the central team
  - As we grow and expand into other regions we must be careful to recruit well and into the right positions/structures. The Trust has overexposed itself before by growing beyond its means and we must learn from our past if we are to succeed in becoming a national church based MAT.

## **Part 4 – How will we achieve this?**

### **Objective 1: Educational excellence**

#### **By 2035...**

All our pupils will be fully prepared for success in the next stage of their education

#### **Why is this important?**

Grace Schools exists to build the foundations to create successful futures. The most important thing we can do for the children in our schools is to ensure that they are fully prepared for the next stage of their education so they can continue to strengthen the foundations created with us and have, and be aware of, the maximum number of opportunities available to them. This is even more important for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND who are under-represented amongst children who reach the expected standards at every stage of their education and require us to meet their specific needs to help secure success.

If our children leave us not in this position, then we will have failed them over their first years of education. We are trusted by parents and carers to educate their children; we must fulfil this expectation in line with the CofE's vision for education.

#### **By 2035...**

- Grace Schools will be in the top 5 large Trusts in England for pupil attainment
- All Grace schools have a clear vision and strategy for removing barriers for vulnerable pupils
- All Grace schools and nurseries will be externally evaluated as strong for the quality of their education provision
- All Grace schools will effectively implement the Principles of Education within 2 years of joining the Trust
- All Grace schools will have excellent behaviour

**Grace Schools Office Address**

Grace Building, 8 High Street, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 4JU

**Creating the foundations to build successful futures**

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)*

- All Grace schools participate in 100% of the Grace Schools Together activities
- All Grace pupils will participate in at least one extracurricular activity

### **2030 KPIs**

- % of pupils achieving expected or higher in RWM at KS2 is at least 80%
- % of disadvantaged pupils achieving expected or higher in RWM at KS2 is at least 65%
- % of pupils achieving the phonics screening check is at least 95%
- % of disadvantaged pupils achieving the phonics screening check is at least 90%
- % of pupils achieving GLD in EYFS is at least 75%
- % of disadvantaged pupils achieving GLD in EYFS is at least 75%
- Overall pupil absence in Grace Schools will be in the best 10% nationally
- % of pupils persistently absent in all Grace schools will be in the best 10% nationally
- All schools use suspension and exclusion proportionately as a tool within their behaviour management strategy
- The 2029/30 AWCA intake will be at PAN

### **We will do this by...**

- a) Developing our school leaders through high quality CPD offer designed to meet the needs of Grace Schools leaders and those with leadership potential to support our ambition, vision, and strategy for removing barriers for vulnerable children.
- b) Supporting school leaders to become drivers of their own schools' improvements and quality assurance through the lens of the Principles of Education and engagement within their community.
- c) Investing in high-quality, targeted professional development and appraisal for all staff through our People Strategy and aligned with embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion across the Trust.

#### **Grace Schools Office Address**

Grace Building, 8 High Street, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 4JU

**Creating the foundations to build successful futures**

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13)*



- d) Implementing a comprehensive early intervention and support strategy in every school to prioritise the needs of our pupils ensuring that they receive the foundations to achieve success by the time they leave our care.
- e) Improving the consistency of teaching across all year groups and schools to secure the highest standards of teaching and assessment in every school.
- f) Develop a strategy to raise the quality and consistency of PE and sport across the Trust
- g) Implementing strategies to improve attendance, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds by identifying and responding to individual pupils' needs.

## **Objective 2: Expanding influence**

### **By 2035...**

Grace Schools will expand and progress to deliver education effectively across multiple DfE regions, dioceses, and educational phases becoming a national church-based Trust.

### **Why is this important?**

All schools in Grace Schools are now rated Good by Ofsted, up from 48% since the pandemic and our KS2 outcomes in 2025 exceeded the national average. Our reason for existing is to create the foundations to build successful futures through the provision of a good church school education, and our Articles allow us to go beyond our diocesan boundaries and current primary specialism to achieve this. We have a successful model and an obligation to support schools who share our ambition and vision for education for their pupils and communities.

The CofE's National Society for Education highlights in their response to the 2025 DfE accountability consultation how the current 'structural agnosticism within the education landscape' has exposed smaller rural schools in relation to accessing a coherent school improvement offer. Our successes and sustainable model show that we can create clarity in this area and support the many schools not able to access strong school improvement support in their current situation.

Expanding our influence also supports our third priority, *Sustainable Futures*, as the growth of our trust will increase opportunities for further economies of scale both financially and operationally. In turn this will enable the funding of additional provision that we can utilize to support all children to achieve the highest outcomes possible.

### **By 2035..**

- We will have established an expanded range of excellent nursery and pre-school provision across England

- AWCA will be excellent and full
- We will offer an education provision in several dioceses and phases of education
- All Grace schools will be deemed as meeting or exceeding acceptable standards by both Ofsted and SIAMs within four years of joining the Trust
- We will exert influence, as a system leader, on sector policy and strategic direction

### **2030 KPIs**

- Number of pupils in Grace Schools will exceed 10,000
- Average size of school will be >200
- % of unfilled pupil places will be <15%
- At least 5 discreet pre-school or nursery provisions established
- At least two secondary schools join AWCA in the secondary wing of Grace Schools

### **We will do this by...**

- a) Develop and utilise a clear Trust identity to raise the profile of the Trust and remove ambiguity over what we stand for through a rebranding exercise setting out our vision and ambitions for the future.
- b) Developing a clear, proactive growth strategy: This includes identifying potential schools (considering geographical clusters, educational phase, and existing strengths), conducting thorough due diligence, and building strong relationships with potential joining schools and relevant stakeholders (e.g., National Society, DfE, LAs, dioceses, schools).
- c) Implement the Grace Schools Nurseries Project, which will expand our pre-school and nursery provision across multiple geographical areas.
- d) Leveraging our proven school improvement model and Ofsted success: Systematically sharing our Principles of Education and improvement model, showcasing the benefits of joining Grace Schools (e.g., central services, professional development, stability), and addressing past perceptions through clear communication and a revised narrative.

#### **Grace Schools Office Address**

Grace Building, 8 High Street, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 4JU

**Creating the foundations to build successful futures**

- e) Providing educational and operational support to new schools joining Grace Schools to ensure they are on a firm trajectory to meet the Grace Schools educational expectations, the inspection expectations of Ofsted and SIAMS, and are financially robust.
- f) Ensure that the Grace Schools central team, operational infrastructure, policies and procedures meet the needs of the growing Grace Schools family of schools.
- g) Engaging with and contributing to educational discourse at a local and national level, challenging and collaborating to ensure that our school improvement model is always the best that it can be, in the light of current research and our own experience.

### **Objective 3: Sustainable futures**

#### **By 2035...**

The Trust will have the capacity to manage the impact of external variables acting upon its component schools and communities.

#### **Why is this important?**

The most important focus for a Headteacher is to ensure the quality of teaching in their school is high enough. This becomes harder when external variables create distractions and uncertainty. The Trust provides stability, consistency, and structures to enable Headteachers and school leaders to focus on their primary goal whilst being aware of but not distracted by variables in the wider sector.

We know that many of our children and families face difficulties in their lives outside of the school environment and whilst we are not in a position to replace the support they receive from third party agencies we can seek to explore partnerships, and work closely with the church communities in each locality to remove some of the barriers that face our families and communities in accessing these services.

#### **By 2035...**

- Our programme for talent development will be embedded across the Trust
- Our efficient and effective operating model enables retention of at least 8% of income as free reserves
- Free reserves will be available to establish additional hubs in new geographical locations without comprising revenue funding
- Strategic partnerships with external agencies will exist which will support our children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds to access and succeed in school.
- We will be recognised as a positive contributor and influence in local communities, leveraging the support we receive from other organisations to remove barriers and create the foundations to build successful futures.

**Grace Schools Office Address**

Grace Building, 8 High Street, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 4JU

**Creating the foundations to build successful futures**

- All Grace Schools schools will operate a sustainable staffing model within 2 years of joining the Trust
- All schools will deliver the Sustainability policy effectively
- >90% of staff participate in the annual staff engagement survey

### **2030 KPIs**

- 60% of all senior leadership posts are appointed from internal candidates
- 85% of staff providing a positive response to the annual staff survey
- Annual surplus as a percentage of turnover is at least 1%
- % of positive feedback regarding Trust central provision exceeds 80%
- Carbon output across the Trust places us in the best 10% of large Trusts nationally

### **We will do this by**

- a) Implementing a comprehensive focus on talent development, retention, and wellbeing: This includes structured leadership development pathways, intelligent appraisal process, and proactive wellbeing initiatives to ensure a thriving workforce.
- b) Optimising central services and financial management to offer efficiency and value for money across our schools: This involves continuous review of procurement, central services (e.g., HR, finance, IT, estates), robust financial planning, rigorous budgeting, and exploring diversified income streams beyond core funding.
- c) Developing and implementing a Trust-wide environmental sustainability plan: This includes energy efficiency audits, investment in renewable energy where feasible, sustainable procurement policies, waste reduction strategies, and promoting active travel, with a clear focus on measurable reductions in carbon output per pupil.
- d) Clearly communicating the 'why' and 'how' behind each strategy
- e) Exploring diverse partnership models and funding opportunities to support the capacity to learn amongst our communities and accelerate each child's potential through removing barriers to their success.

