



SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY

(Aligned to the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework 2025)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Greater Manchester Academies Trust ('GMAT' or 'the Trust') Academy Improvement Model outlines the framework through which the Trust supports, challenges, and assures the quality of education across all academies. This policy aligns with the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF) 2025, ensuring our practices meet the highest national standards while reflecting our values of heart, happiness and hope. The model is designed to:

- Secure consistently high-quality education for all children, pupils and students.
- Identify and rapidly arrest any decline in standards.
- Build on schools as partners in the trust – brokering peer to peer collaboration and support.
- Promote excellence through collaboration, professional growth, and accountability.
- Build sustainable capacity for continuous improvement across the Trust.

2. THE VISION FOR GMAT'S TRUST-LED ACADEMY IMPROVEMENT

To cultivate thriving schools at the heart of thriving communities—where every young person is empowered to succeed, and where education and a wider community focus drives real, lasting social change.

We exist to transform lives through inclusive, values-led education. We serve the young people of Our Community by fostering ambition, nurturing character, and championing equity.

This vision drives everything we do. We are dedicated to creating an educational environment where pupils are not only equipped academically but are also empowered to become agents of positive change in their communities. Our vision acknowledges the challenges faced by our pupils and commits to transforming these into pathways for success and social impact.

We seek to be the place of first choice for children to learn and staff to work. Through an extensive challenging curriculum and best practice in teaching and learning, informed by research and the experiences of our staff, we will enhance children's life chances by maximising their educational outcomes. The Trust's ability to look and work cross phase will enable us to become a centre of excellence in transition. We will invest in families, develop strong curriculum and pedagogy to ensure enhanced progression in children's learning from the early years to school learning age.

We embrace the opportunity to take responsibility for a child's education throughout their whole school life, providing them with the best opportunity for a successful future.

Through a Trust-facilitated improvement system, we will:

- Champion and embed excellence in teaching, learning, and leadership.
- Prioritise inclusion and equality of opportunity.
- Build staff expertise through evidence-based and research informed professional development.
- Foster collaboration and innovation across academies.
- Secure long-term sustainability and resilience within each setting.
- Facilitate cross academy collaboration and subject networks.

Across our Trust, our children will:

- Be physically, socially, emotionally safe and healthy
- Be asset rich and resilient to the effects of area and personal disadvantage
- Make good or better academic progress at each key stage of their education
- Be able to secure the employment opportunities of their choice
- Be able to contribute positively to the community
- Be able to communicate effectively through technology and innovation

3. ACADEMY IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The following strategic priorities underpin our improvement work:

1. **Excellence in Education:** Deliver high-quality, ambitious, and inclusive teaching and learning across all academies.
2. **Curriculum Quality:** Ensure each academy provides a coherent, sequenced curriculum built on strong subject knowledge and adapted teaching for all learners, including those with SEND and disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. **Leadership and Governance:** Strengthen leadership at every level, underpinned by clear accountability and transparent governance.
4. **Safeguarding and Culture:** Embed a strong safeguarding culture that protects and nurtures all pupils and students.
5. **Workforce Development:** Invest in recruitment, retention, and professional growth, prioritising wellbeing and workload balance.
6. **Collaboration and System Leadership:** Share best practice across the Trust and contribute to wider system improvement.

4. THE TRUST APPROACH TO IMPROVEMENT

We believe that schools should be masters of their own destiny. Headteachers are responsible for school improvement in their own settings. This is supported by the trust with clear frameworks and schedules for quality assurance and the brokerage of appropriate support (central, external and peer to peer) as needed. All schools in the trust are expected to contribute to the development of others in pursuit of our common goals. Effective improvement requires an accurate understanding of each academy's context, strengths, and areas for development. The academy's headteacher, leaders and governors undertake their self-evaluation, supported, moderated and quality assured by trust leaders.

Subsequent improvement planning remains the responsibility of the academy headteachers, supported and by Trust Leaders (CEO, Education Director) and the central team.

Core functions of the Executive and central team:

- Provide professional support and challenge to academy leaders.
- Facilitate high-quality self-assessment and improvement planning.
- Broker appropriate peer-to-peer support
- Monitor and evaluate standards of education, safeguarding, and leadership.
- Ensure all academies provide an ambitious curriculum accessible to all learners.
- Build leadership capacity through mentoring, coaching, and CPD.
- Secure external support when necessary.
- Organise Trust-wide training and sharing best practice.
- Empower academy leaders to make a contribution across the trust.
- Provide reports to trustees, presenting progress against key priorities.

Principles:

- Evidence-led and context-sensitive improvement.
- A listening approach, valuing the role of academy leaders.
- Collaboration as a lever for sustained change.
- Capacity building through professional empowerment.
- Accountability for outcomes and impact.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Trust Board

- Approves the Academy Improvement Model and monitors its impact.
- Holds the CEO and senior leaders accountable for outcomes and safeguarding.
- Ensures effective governance and resource deployment to support improvement.

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/Trust Leader

- Provides strategic leadership for academy improvement.
- Oversees performance, standards, and safeguarding across all academies.
- Ensures alignment with the Trust's vision and Ofsted framework.

Education Director

- Lead on quality assurance, curriculum evaluation, and support strategies.
- Coordinate school to school and trust-wide support offer.
- Provide analysis and reports to the CEO and Trust Board.

Local Governing Boards (LGBs)

- Monitor individual academy performance and improvement priorities.
- Hold academy headteachers to account, alongside the trust leadership.
- Ensure safeguarding culture and statutory duties are upheld.

Headteachers

- Lead the delivery of high-quality education in line with Trust and academy priorities.
- Implement academy development plans (ADPs) informed by accurate self-assessment.
- Engage in trust-wide collaboration

6. GOVERNANCE, DELEGATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY: THE SCHEME OF DELEGATION

The Academy Improvement Model operates within the Trust's Scheme of Delegation, which provides clarity about roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority at each level of the organisation. This ensures that improvement activity is both appropriately supported and properly accountable.

In line with the Scheme of Delegation:

- The Trust Board retains strategic oversight of standards, safeguarding, and performance of all academies.
- The CEO and Education Director hold authority for Trust-wide improvement strategy, intervention, and escalation.
- Local Governing Boards provide local monitoring and challenge to academy headteachers and leaders within the Trust's agreed framework.
- Headteachers and Principals retain delegated responsibility for self-evaluation, leadership of their academies and implementation of plans.

Delegation is dynamic rather than static. Where academies demonstrate strength and capacity, autonomy is protected and extended. Where there is risk or underperformance, the Trust increases oversight and support.

7. VALUES IN ACTION

GMAT's work is grounded in the Seven Principles of Public Life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership together with our shared Trust values of inclusion, excellence, and collaboration.

We demonstrate these through:

- **Commitment to Improvement:** Relentless pursuit of excellence in provision and outcomes.
- **Transparency:** Open and honest relationships that foster trust.
- **Accountability:** Rigorous performance review and challenge.
- **Inclusion:** Commitment to equality, diversity, and accessibility in all aspects of education.
- **Collective Responsibility:** Shared accountability for the success of all learners.

8. THE ACADEMY IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

The GMAT Improvement Framework has **four interconnected strands:**

1. Trust-Led Improvement – a core and consistent programme of support and challenge for all academies.
2. System-Led Improvement – collaboration across academies and external partners to drive innovation.
3. Peer-to-Peer Improvement – professional partnerships for mutual review and shared practice.
4. High-Quality Professional Development – structured learning to build leadership and teaching excellence.

Strand 1: Trust-Led Improvement

- Annual Outcomes Conversation with academy leaders.
- Quality assurance of the Academy Self-Assessment (SEF) and Academy Development Plan (ADP).
- Termly performance monitoring against Academy Improvement Priorities.
- Annual safeguarding culture audit.
- Monitoring and Evaluation Reviews.
- Academy thematic reviews.
- External reviews.

Strand 2: System-Led Improvement

- Development of cross-academy networks.
- Partnership with local and national education networks.
- Development and deployment of standards leads and expertise across the Trust.
- Engagement with subject and leadership networks.
- Trust wide coaching and mentoring models.

Strand 3: Peer-to-Peer Improvement

- Collaborative inquiry, peer review.
- Sharing of expertise and reflection on practice.
- Facilitation of joint improvement projects.

Strand 4: Professional Development and Workforce Growth

- Structured CPD pathways for all staff.
- Leadership development programmes.
- Early Career Teacher (ECT) and Middle Leader frameworks.
- Focus on wellbeing, workload management, and career progression.

9. ANNUAL ASSESSMENT AND TIERED SUPPORT

Each academy will undergo a joint annual assessment 'Annual Performance Review' (APR), led by Trust Leaders, the Academy Headteacher and the chair of the LGB. The purpose of this assessment is to determine the level of support required and to monitor progress through time-bound improvement activity.

10.1 Inspection Framework – Evaluation Areas & Grades

Under the 2025 inspection framework, academies are assessed according to multiple evaluation areas (rather than a single overall grade). The core evaluation areas include:

- Safeguarding, assessed on a binary 'met'/'not met' basis.
- Inclusion.
- Curriculum and teaching.
- Achievement.
- Attendance and behaviour.
- Personal development and wellbeing.
- Early Years (if relevant)
- Post-16 provision (if relevant)
- Leadership and governance.

For each evaluation area (excluding safeguarding), the grading scale is:

- Exceptional – the highest level, reserved for practice that is sustained, deeply embedded and consistently transformational.
- Strong standard – when all expected standards and strong standards are met, and the provision has consistent, high impact- outcomes.
- Expected standard – when all the statutory, professional and non-statutory guidance is met; this grade represents- the standard that most providers should achieve.
- Needs attention – when the expected standard is not met, due to inconsistent, limited or weak provision, or failure to meet legal requirements.
- Urgent improvement – when the provision is failing significantly; urgent action is required to rectify serious or systemic weaknesses.

10. TRUST TIERED SUPPORT MODEL

The Trust Tiered Support Model is informed by the Ofsted framework and the Carter four-stage improvement model: Stabilise, Repair, Improve and Sustain. Together, these frameworks provide a single, coherent approach to academy improvement: the tiered model determines the level of Trust oversight and support, while the Carter stages describe the nature and purpose of improvement activity at each point in an academy's development. For the Carter model, please see [Multi-academy trusts](#).

This integrated approach ensures that Trust intervention is purposeful, proportionate, and time-limited, and that academies are supported in ways that build capacity rather than dependency.

Based on evidence from annual assessment, self-evaluation, and ongoing monitoring, academies will be placed into one of the following tiers. Movement between tiers is expected over time and reflects progress against clearly defined criteria.

Tier 1: Core Support (Improve / Sustain)

(Ofsted Exceptional, Strong or Expected Standard in most evaluation areas)

Schools operating at exceptional standard will be expected to share their learning and best practice to support system-wide improvement

For academies striving to achieve exceptional standard additional guidance/advice in line with their development plan will be provided.

Academies operating at expected or strong standard receive the core Trust improvement offer, with autonomy protected and enhanced.

- Improvement activity aligns primarily with the Improve and Sustain stages of the Carter model – this is likely to be either school-led or collaborative school to school projects.
- Leadership is stable, systems are embedded or embedding, and provision is broadly consistent.
- Academies may request bespoke support where needed.
- Academies operating at strong standard in one or more areas are expected to act as capacity givers, sharing effective practice across the Trust and wider system.

Trust role: assurance, strategic challenge, facilitation of sharing of good practice, and deployment of expertise.

Tier 2: At Risk of Decline (Repair)

Academies showing early signs of weaker provision in one or more key evaluation areas are identified as at risk of decline.

- Improvement activity aligns with the Repair stage of the Carter model.
- Leadership is stable, but systems or practice are inconsistent.
- Trust support increases through targeted visits, enhanced monitoring, leadership coaching, support from other trust schools and focused professional support.

Trust role: targeted intervention to address emerging issues, strengthen systems, and prevent further decline.

Tier 3: Needs Attention (Stabilise/Repair)

Academies not yet achieving the expected standard across multiple evaluation areas are placed in the Needs Attention tier.

- Improvement activity initially aligns with Stabilise, moving into Repair as education improves.
- Leadership capacity, systems, or consistency of provision may be fragile.
- The academy receives structured and intensive intervention under Trust-led oversight, with clearly defined milestones and success criteria.

Trust role: close oversight, direct support, and system-building to establish the conditions for sustainable improvement.

Tier 4: Urgent Improvement (Stabilise)

Academies graded as urgent improvement in one or more major evaluation areas, or failing to meet safeguarding requirements, require immediate and decisive action.

- Improvement activity aligns with the Stabilise stage of the Carter model.
- The priority is to secure safeguarding, establish stability, and prevent further deterioration.
- Support plans provided for individuals in key roles where improvement is needed.
- A comprehensive Trust-led intervention plan is implemented, with rigorous monitoring and potential escalation to the Trust Board.

Trust role: intensive intervention, potentially facilitated through the adjustment of the scheme of delegation, clear direction, and rapid action to secure strong provision.

Principles of Tiered Support

Across all tiers:

- Support plans are evidence-based, time-bound, and outcome-focused.
- Progress is monitored regularly, with movement between tiers based on impact rather than intent.
- The aim of all intervention is to move academies progressively towards Improve and Sustain, where autonomy is strongest and contribution to the wider system is expected.

If placed in a category of concern

- Using the Ofsted criteria bespoke support will be provided to develop a statement of action.
- Support to design a bespoke leadership model for improvement .
- Half termly executive review against action plan/KPIs.
- Prioritisation across all services, including in capital spend and people strategy for recruitment and retention.

School Improvement Tiered Support Framework

	Tier 1: Core Support (Improve / Sustain)	Tier 2: At Risk of Decline (Repair)	Tier 3: Needs Attention (Stabilise/Repair)	Tier 4: Urgent Improvement (Stabilise)
ANNUAL OUTCOMES CONVERSATION	✓	✓	✓	✓
QA OF ACADEMY IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND SELF- ASSESSMENT	✓	✓	✓	✓
TERMLY REVIEW OF ACADEMY PRIORITIES/KPIs	✓	✓	✓	✓
QA OF CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND ACHIEVEMENT	✓	✓	✓	✓
QA OF INCLUSION	✓	✓	✓	✓
QA OF BEHAVIOUR, ATTENDANCE AND PD	✓	✓	✓	✓
ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REVIEW AND AUDIT	✓	✓	✓	✓
TERMLY ECT MONITORING AND REVIEW	✓	✓	✓	✓

MONITORING AND EVALUATION REVIEWS	OPTIONAL	✓	✓	✓
EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW	OPTIONAL	✓	✓	✓
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	OPTIONAL	✓	✓	✓
SUPPORTED THEMATIC QA/REVIEW	OPTIONAL	✓	✓	✓
SUPPORT AND REVIEW OF STAFF WELLBEING	✓	✓	✓	✓
SUBJECT LEAD SUPPORT	OPTIONAL	✓	✓	✓
OFSTED INSPECTION SUPPORT AND PREPARATION	✓	✓	✓	✓

11. LINK TO IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

The outcome of the assessment and external review will inform each Academy Development Plan (ADP). Specifically:

- the self-assessment of the academy will be tested at the Annual Performance Review Day to confirm or revise judgements.
- the improvement priorities will align directly with the evaluation areas and grades identified.
- clear success criteria will reference the toolkit's standards for strong and exceptional practice.
- monitoring of impact will reference the grading scale definitions and ensure movement towards strong or exceptional standard.

Examples of thematic reviews

- Attendance.
- Behaviour & attitudes.
- Staff development.
- SEND.
- Prior attainment groups.
- PP.
- Children known to social care and previously known.

