



Connecting



**CST Annual
Conference 26**

15 & 16 October, ICC, Birmingham

#CSTConf26

Curriculum Design at Trust Scale: The Power of Belonging, Culture & Community



Don Wry

CEO & Accounting Officer
HEARTS Academy Trust

d.wry@heartsacademy.uk



Danny Wagstaff

Director of Education
HEARTS Academy Trust

d.wagstaff@heartsacademy.uk

Please join the conversation. Scan the QR code to:

- Tell us where you are from and your role
- Share your thoughts on curriculum coherence
- Submit questions throughout the session



HEARTS ACADEMY TRUST



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What trust are you from and what is your role?



At HEARTS, we use a shared Trust-wide curriculum. Which statement best reflects your context?

Marginal gains

Small changes. Big difference.



Marginal Gains

So what do we mean by this?

Marginal gains are those small, purposeful improvements to the conditions in which pupils learn and our Trust operates:

They are:

- connected to a clearly defined pupil entitlement
- focused on an identified barrier or weakness
- translated into specific adult practice
- repeated consistently
- evaluated through their impact on pupils
- sustained until they become normal practice.

A **system gain** occurs when effective practice no longer depends upon an individual, classroom or school, but becomes increasingly reliable across the organisation.

And it's about making things happen reliably.



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No Silver Bullet

No single intervention changed outcomes across HEARTS.

Progress came through a series of deliberate, aligned decisions:

- defining a common pupil entitlement
- strengthening curriculum and teaching
- investing in professional expertise
- building relationships and belonging
- removing barriers to participation
- widening opportunity and aspiration

Our central argument:

Sustainable improvement comes from **aligning purposeful changes, making effective practice increasingly reliable, and sustaining it long enough** for the gains to accumulate.



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Across HEARTS, our schools serve communities with:

- different histories, identities and starting points
- significant levels of disadvantage and additional need
- increasing complexity in SEND and pastoral support
- varying levels of curriculum and leadership capacity
- considerable strengths, expertise and community knowledge.

Our responsibility is not to make every school the same.

Our responsibility is to ensure that every pupil benefits from the collective strength, expertise and ambition of the Trust.

The ‘goldilocks Trust size’ - small enough to be agile and adaptable to the ever-changing needs of the sector, pupils, families and wider societal challenges; big enough to use the Trust itself as a lever for improvement.



HEARTS ACADEMY TRUST



THE WICKFORD
CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL



HILLTOP
INFANT SCHOOL



HILLTOP
JUNIOR SCHOOL



BRISCOE
PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY



WATERMAN
PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY



STAMBRIDGE
PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY



THE ATRIUM
SEMH PARTNERSHIP PROVISION



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Briscoe Primary School

Our Case Study:

- *Starting point of entry to HEARTS = sig. underperforming school*
- Top 10% most deprived communities nationally (IDACI)
- Over 75% White British working-class intake
- Significant social, economic and safeguarding challenges
- Historic barriers around aspiration, attainment and social mobility
- A powerful test of implementation: ***if it works here, it can work anywhere***



BRISCOE
PRIMARY SCHOOL & NURSERY



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Briscoe: Combined Reading, Writing & Mathematics

Pupils meeting the expected standard | Briscoe compared with national

+22pp since 2017/18

80% in 2025/26

● Briscoe - - - National



Improvement has been inclusive

Disadvantaged pupils have improved at a similar rate and now achieve significantly above national comparator groups.

The Friction Hunt



Where does the pupil experience become less reliable than we intend?

Look for recurring friction in:

- **lost learning time and inefficient transitions**
- **gaps in vocabulary or prior knowledge**
- **inconsistent routines or curriculum sequencing**
- **resources or adaptations not being ready**
- **interventions that remove pupils from important learning**
- **adult support that creates dependency rather than access**
- **barriers to trips, clubs and wider opportunities**
- **weak communication or connection with families**
- **attendance, punctuality or readiness to learn**

Before adding something new, identify what is getting in the way of what already matters.

Example

A pupil may experience:

- a late start
- an unclear transition
- missing equipment/resources, poor scaffolding
- unexplained vocabulary
- withdrawal from curriculum content – interventions at wrong time?
- no access to the enrichment activity – clubs? Going home early? Home lunches?

None of these may look decisive in isolation. Together, they substantially weaken the pupil's entitlement.

Ensuring the Right Curriculum

Our curriculum principles

Knowledge-rich

Pupils build secure knowledge that enables them to understand increasingly complex ideas.

Language-rich

Vocabulary, reading and purposeful talk give pupils the language to access, connect and express that knowledge.

Sequenced

Content is deliberately ordered. What pupils learn today prepares them for what comes next.

Connected

Knowledge is revisited and connected across lessons, units, subjects and years, building increasingly rich mental models.

Rich in context

Stories, examples, places, people and experiences give core knowledge meaning and provide the wider frame in which it sits.



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Curriculum Quality – A strategic choice

We chose greater curriculum coherence across the Trust.

Opening Worlds gave us:

A stronger entitlement

Ambitious subject content and breadth for every pupil, regardless of school or starting point.

Greater coherence

A carefully sequenced curriculum in which knowledge, vocabulary and concepts deliberately build over time.

Stronger foundations for teachers

High-quality curriculum materials reduce the need for every teacher and subject leader to design curriculum from scratch.

A shared professional language

Teachers and leaders can focus together on explanation, vocabulary, retrieval, questioning and adaptation.

A platform for improvement

Common curriculum makes it easier to identify variation, share expertise and improve implementation across six schools.



Curriculum Coherence In Practice



Sequence

- Teach the agreed curriculum in the intended order
- Activate and connect prior knowledge
- Revisit important knowledge and vocabulary
- Protect the sequence rather than allowing content to drift

Teaching

- Explain and model new content explicitly
- Expect pupils to think, speak and write with precision
- Check understanding throughout
- Identify and address misconceptions

Access

- Maintain the same curricular ambition for all pupils
- Use scaffolds and adaptations to enable participation
- Deploy adults to build independence
- Avoid routinely removing pupils from the curriculum

Culture

- Protect curriculum time
- Establish calm, predictable routines
- Make high expectations visible in talk and work
- Leaders check the enacted curriculum, not simply plans and paperwork

Coherence is not everybody teaching identically. It is the important things happening reliably.

Opening Worlds

Coherence in Practice



H E A R T S
A C A D E M Y
T R U S T

As you watch, look for:

- *retrieval*
- *vocabulary*
- *modelling*
- *checking understanding*
- *pupil participation*

Have a chat with the person next to you post video.

The 5 Minute Test

Small losses accumulate too.

Five minutes lost each day becomes:

- 25 minutes each week
- Approx. 16 hours across a 39-week school year
- A significant loss of learning when repeated across several years

“Small losses” are often:

- Delayed lesson start
- Inefficient transitions (break, lunch, between lesson, etc.)
- Resources not being ready
- Unclear routines
- Avoidable low-level disruption
- Vocabulary being left unexplained; other small misconceptions
- Pupils waiting for adult support or intervention arrangements removing pupils from essential learning.

At scale, repeated ‘friction’ becomes lost entitlement.

Repeated precision becomes a system gain.



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Staff Deployment

More support does not automatically mean greater impact.

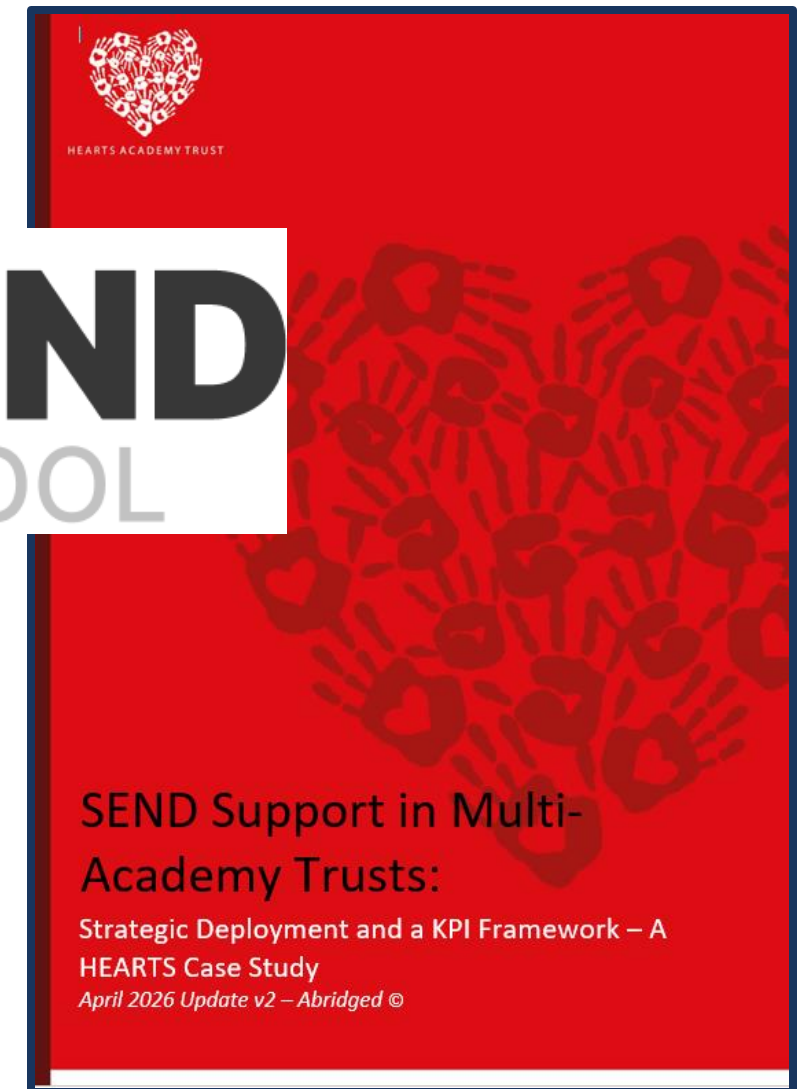
- Deploy from assessed need, not historical habit
- Place expertise where it removes the greatest barrier
- Protect curriculum access and high-quality teaching
- Build pupil independence, not adult dependency
- Measure impact, not simply hours or activity
- Make effective practice reliable across the Trust

From marginal gain to system gain:

A better deployment decision for one pupil, repeated across every classroom.



SEND
SCHOOL



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Trust / Hilltop Infant School / Deployment

Deployment

★ Default deployment ...

☆ Scenario 2 ...

+

Delivered: 299.00h

● 177.25h

● 57.25h

● 64.50h

Pupil	Claire	Dani								
19 rows	LSA	LSA								
● D	10	16.25	2.5	1.25	2.5	1.25				33.75h / 33.5h £30,498
● Fi	10	1.25	8.25	10.25	2.5	12				44.25h / 32.5h £46,152
● Ol	10	16.25	2.5	1.25	2.5	1.25				33.75h / 32.5h £30,498
● Fa		1.25		3.5	2.5	1.25	15			23.50h / 16.5h £19,295
● Ti				2.25	2.5	1.25	15			21.00h / 12h £17,276
● Ma				2.25	2.5	1.25	15			21.00h / 10h £17,276
● Al						3	2.5			5.50h / 3.5h £4,486
● H				2.25	2.5	1.25	15			21.00h / 3h £17,276
● J			1.25		6	3				10.25h / 3h £10,182
● Ch			1.25		6	3				10.25h / 2h
Delivered / Paid ASH Cost	45.0h / 21.25h paid ASH 2.12 £36,898	35.0h / 16.25h paid ASH 2.15 £28,084	19.5h / 9.5h paid ASH 2.05 £39,422	23.0h / 10.5h paid ASH 2.19 £18,686	53.5h / 15.25h paid ASH 3.51 £46,478	55.5h / 26.5h paid ASH 2.09 £45,192	67.5h / 12h paid ASH 5.63 £55,164	0.0h / 0h paid ASH – £0	0.0h / 0h paid ASH – £0	299.00h ASH 2.69 £269,924

HEARTS Academy Trust / Hilltop Infant School

Hilltop Infant School

2025/26

19 pupils

6 / 5 / 8 / 0

URN 144834

NOR 223

Phase Primary

Overview

Provision

Staff

Readiness

Settings

Staffing: Main

Deployment: Default deployment

Performance

Deltas vs 2024-25. Dashed line marks the target.

SEND efficiency index

1.94

Approaching target

Target ≥ 3.00

Efficiency is below the 3.00 target. Hours are being contracted but are not yet translating into effective pupil support at the expected level.

257h

Contracted / wk

111h

SEND-allocated

299h

Delivered

169h

Assessed need

Finance KPI

1.15

Target ≤ 0.75

Not enough years for a trend yet

Average support hours

2.69

Target 2.00 – 3.00

Not enough years for a trend yet

% SEND need met

177%

Target ≥ 95%

Not enough years for a trend yet

Deployment quality

0.59

Target ≥ 0.85

Not enough years for a trend yet

Progress integration

0.79

Target ≥ 0.90

Not enough years for a trend yet

Trust / Hilltop Infant School / Pupils / Leanne Chennells

Amber

Year group

Class

Hours of need

Last assessed

Assessment

One Plan

Year 1

1KW

3.5h / wk

5 Oct 2026 · 3 days ago

8/8 answered · 0 / 6 / 2

None recorded

Support hours

Main · Default deployment

Need

Delivered

Gap

Coverage

3.5h

5.5h

+2.0h

157%

No planned hours set on One Plan outcomes. Add them below to compare plan vs delivery.

Lauren Johnson

SENCo Assistant

3.00h

Leanne Chennells

LSA

2.50h

HEARTS Life Ready

From enrichment by chance to entitlement by design

Planned

30 weeks of deliberately sequenced content from Reception to Year 6.

Protected

Taught every week, to every pupil. It does not depend on opting in or what happens outside school.

Knowledge-led

Practical knowledge and vocabulary are explicitly taught before pupils are expected to apply them.

Progressive

Communication, collaboration, independence, leadership, problem-solving and citizenship develop in sophistication over time.

Applied

Pupils use what they know through purposeful tasks, experiences and increasingly independent application.

BELONG & ENGAGE | ACHIEVE & ASPIRE | THRIVE & LIVE WELL



An entitlement for every child.

Opportunity should never be left to chance.

Every child participates, regardless of background, confidence, need or the opportunities available to them beyond school.

We know that children experience different barriers to participation and arrive at school with very different experiences of the wider world. For some, particularly our most disadvantaged pupils, opportunities to develop confidence, independence, cultural knowledge and wider life skills may be more limited.

At HEARTS, we believe schools have a responsibility to reduce these barriers. By deliberately planning these opportunities into the curriculum, we make sure access does not depend on circumstance, family income or confidence.

"Not an optional extra. Not dependent on circumstance. An entitlement for all."

Ambitious for childhood. Ambitious for life.

At HEARTS, we want children to achieve highly academically while also developing the confidence, character and capabilities they will need beyond the classroom.

Life Ready connects knowledge with experience and gives children meaningful opportunities to apply what they learn.

It is part of our wider commitment to providing an ambitious, inclusive and distinctive education across every HEARTS school.

We want children to leave us ready to succeed, contribute and make the most of the opportunities ahead.

Every HEARTS child will leave primary school having accessed a rich entitlement of experiences which develop their confidence, independence, leadership, communication, problem-solving abilities and understanding of the wider world.

Through a carefully planned progression of knowledge, experiences and competencies, pupils are equipped not only for success in secondary education, but for active participation in their communities and modern society.

Our aim is that every child leaves a HEARTS school LIFE READY.

Preparation for life.

To discuss our strategic work and explore collaboration:
T 01268 572 672 | admin@heartsacademy.uk
heartsacademytrust.co.uk

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**HEARTS
LIFE READY**

Culture & Community

Curriculum implementation depends upon the culture surrounding it.

High expectations:

- Context shapes implementation, but it must not lower ambition.
- We should all have a shared belief that background or additional need should not determine ambition.
- A collective responsibility is key - how do we embed accountability?

Visible leadership

- Leaders are present, accessible and consistent in the messages they communicate. “Be on the gates”

Belonging

- Pupils feeling known and able to participate – how are they represented in school life? And the curriculum?
- Staff feeling part of a professional community
- Families seeing the school as a trusted partner

Community knowledge

- Schools understand the barriers, strengths and experiences within the communities they serve.

Trust built over time

- Relationships grow through presence, consistency and follow-through, not through one event or initiative.
- “You said, we did...”

The marginal gain may begin with five families attending a coffee morning...

The system gain is a school increasingly trusted by the community, with stronger communication, earlier support and greater family participation.



Achieve Thrive Flourish



Wider Curriculum Entitlement

Knowledge opens doors. Experiences help pupils walk through them.

The HEARTS entitlement extends beyond subject curriculum plans through:

- the HEARTS Promise
- HEARTS Life Ready Curriculum
- personal development (including extra-curricular)
- pupil voice and leadership
- sport, creativity and culture; educational visits
- encounters with places, people and professions
- community participation & community action projects
- preparation for future education and life

Individual experiences may appear modest. Over time, they accumulate into:

- broader knowledge
- stronger confidence
- increased participation
- a wider frame of reference
- greater aspiration



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When the Data Doesn't Tell the Whole Story

On paper, this pupil looks highly engaged:

98.3% attendance

- ✓ Regular club participation
- ✓ High participation in trips and experiences
- ✓ Pupil leadership responsibility
- ✓ Highly engaged family

Pupil name	SEN	Punctuality	School clubs/activities	External clubs/activities	Trips/events participation	Responsibility/leadership	Behaviour/learning engagement concern	Belonging average	Belonging signal
Pupil E	No	98.3	No	Regular	None	High	Yes	No concern	2.5 Support

98.3% attendance → apparently highly engaged → pupil voice says otherwise → SUPPORT

But when we asked the pupil...

Their pupil voice indicated that they did not feel a strong sense of belonging.

Tracker status: SUPPORT

Impact



BRISCOE
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So What?

Stronger foundations, leading to our best outcomes:

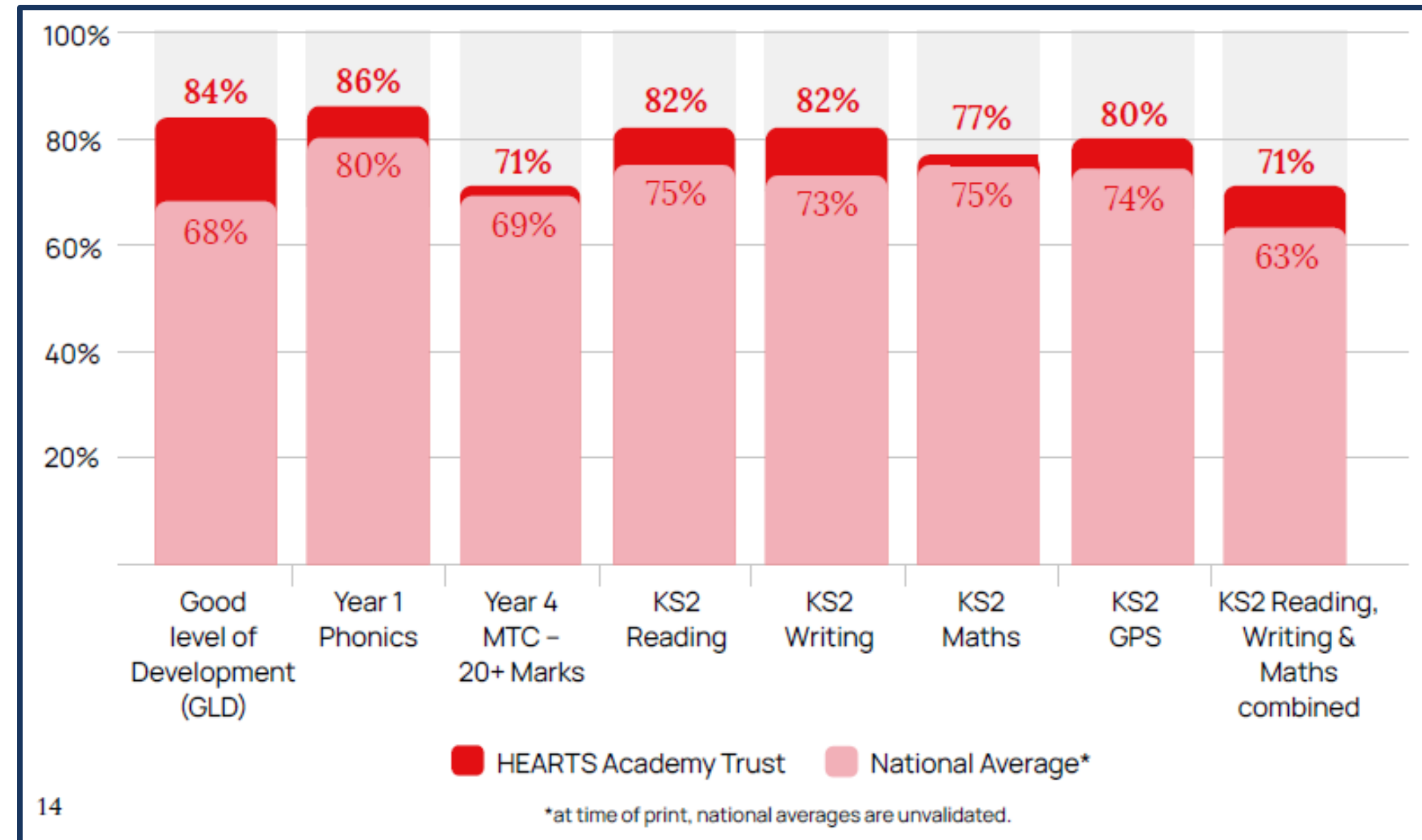
- Improved early years outcomes – 84% GLD, Trust-record
- Readiness for learning – N→R
- Sustained improvements over time
- Briscoe as example – KS2 outcomes: 80% combined (RWM), 91% Maths (2025-26 results)

Improved engagement:

- Attendance – BPS example: huge gains (94% → 96.5%), PA 28% → 14%
- Family participation and engagement – Ofsted parent view – 97% recommend
- Pupil Leadership
- Enrichment and community

Greater curriculum access:

- Representative of pupils and families in our communities
- Access for SEND and disadvantaged
- Knowledge and vocabulary
- Reduced variation between schools; raised expectations



What Have We Learned?

Marginal gains become system gains when we balance...

Consistency without conformity:

- Agree the pupil entitlement, expectations and quality standards that matter most, while protecting each school's identity, context and strengths

Ambition with access:

- Maintain the same ambition for every pupil, while adapting teaching, support and deployment so that all pupils can participate and succeed.

Trust direction, with local ownership:

- Set a clear Trust-wide purpose and direction, but involve schools, staff, pupils and communities in shaping how it is brought to life.

High expectations with high support:

- Expect strong implementation from every school and colleague, while providing the professional development, specialist expertise, capacity and challenge needed to achieve it.

The marginal gain is a better decision in one classroom or school.

➤ ***The system gain is making that better decision increasingly reliable across the Trust.***

Ask / Take Away

Your Marginal Gain

Take these four questions back to your school/Trust, and have a chat with your partner!

1. Define:

- What is your entitlement for every pupil?

2. Find:

- Where is that entitlement least reliable?

3. Hunt:

- What repeated friction is weakening it?

4. Improve:

- What is one important thing we will make more reliable next term?

60 seconds to engage with the Slido (or QR code if CST can help set it up).

Reflect and provide a response:

- *What marginal gain, made more reliable across your school or Trust, could create the greatest difference for pupils next term?*



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HEARTS ACADEMY TRUST



HEARTS established a **common pupil entitlement** built around **ambitious curriculum**, effective teaching, inclusion and **wider opportunity**. The Trust then strengthened the conditions required to deliver it: **professional expertise**, **high expectations**, belonging, **community knowledge** and **aligned leadership**. Through disciplined implementation, **HEARTS improved the small recurring details** that shape pupils' daily experience. These marginal gains, from curriculum sequencing and vocabulary to transitions, SEND deployment, enrichment and family relationships, accumulated over time. What began as better practice in individual moments became greater coherence across schools and, ultimately, system gains.





Audience Q&A

Thank you



Connecting