

## The Aspirations Academies Trust approach to school improvement

### BACKGROUND

School improvement in England is officially measured by attainment and achievement, particularly the levels of progress made by students. This essential measure is only one of the elements at the core of the Aspirations Academies Trust strategic approach to school improvement. Aspirations has a duty to prepare our young people for success in this future world. As a result Aspirations' school improvement measures are designed to ensure all Aspirations Academies develop their teaching and learning in order to ensure:

- All students achieve at least **expected academic progress** and **high levels of attainment** in national qualifications
- All students acquire knowledge to be remembered and constantly built upon to **deepen their understanding**
- All students develop **high level 21st century skills**
- All students enter **skilled employment or higher levels of study**
- All students develop **high levels of self-worth** and self-confidence
- Learning is **challenging and engaging**
- Learning is highly **relevant to the world today** and in the future
- Each Aspirations academy reflects the unique nature of its local area, with specific attention given to the employability requirements of the local and regional area
- Schools motivate, develop, recruit and retain high quality teachers.

To be successful in the next decade, individuals will need to demonstrate foresight in navigating a rapidly shifting landscape of organisational forms and skill requirements. People will increasingly be called upon to continually reassess the skills they need, and quickly put together the right resources to develop and update these. Workers in the future will need to be adaptable lifelong learners. The task for schools is to prepare our young people for success in this future world.

The key elements to school improvement:

This document will outline the Aspirations systematic approach to school improvement. There are several key elements to school improvement which need to be considered at all times:

- **Systems and structures:** These are essential in order to ensure there are clear accountabilities and effective operations in a school.
- **Culture:** Culture needs to be challenged and developed into one with the core moral purpose of providing the young people in the school with the best possible education.
- **Leadership:** Inspirational, strategic and brave leadership is needed to ensure the systems and structures are fully and effectively implemented.
- **Governance:** Strong governance is needed to monitor, support and to hold to account. However, governance needs to be stream-lined and time effective.
- **Teaching and learning:** Students need to be challenged and engaged and taught the knowledge and skills required to make more than the expected progress.
- **Curriculum:** The curriculum design needs to be imaginative in order to deliver the outcomes and skills required by students today.
- **Assessment:** Everything needs to be monitored and assessed, and if needed further improved.

- Safeguarding: There needs to be full compliance with regulations relating to the safety of young people.

### **The importance of the curriculum:**

All the above elements are important, however, it is the curriculum which lies at the centre of the purpose of a school. Central to the Aspirations curriculum is the delivery of high levels of academic performance, academic progress, the acquisition of a depth of knowledge and the development of the skills required for success in the 21st century workplace. To drive this curriculum Aspirations have developed nine core principles as the Aspirations framework. These core principles are closely linked to the four guiding principles of self-worth, engagement, purpose and aspirations:

- **Self-worth:**

- **High Expectations:** Being the very best you can be in your school and community.

- **Engagement:**

- **Opportunity:** Matching your interests with activities that will help you to leave school well-rounded and confident.
- **Challenge:** Making your learning exciting and relevant to the real world.
- **Talent Development:** Enhancing your natural strengths and abilities so you thrive in school and beyond.
- **Innovation and Enterprise:** Supporting your creativity by encouraging you to ask 'Why?' and 'Why not?'

- **Purpose:**

- **Makers and Creators:** Being a creator, not just a consumer, of technology in our digital world.
- **Global:** Having the cultural awareness needed to communicate in our interconnected world.
- **Employability:** Equipping you with the skills and abilities you'll need to excel in our ever-changing world.

- **Aspirations:**

- **With Big Dreams and Hard Work Anything is Possible:** Aspirations means to dream about the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams.

The curriculum of an Aspirations academy requires three elements:

1. Intent: A framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education, including the knowledge, understanding and skills to be gained at each stage.
2. Implementation: Translating the framework over time into a structure and narrative, within an institutional context
3. Impact: Evaluating what knowledge, understanding and skills pupils have gained against expectations.

The Aspirations Academies Trust (Aspirations) expects the curriculum in each academy to adhere to the above three elements and to additionally value ingenuity, creativity and risk-taking. Aspirations recognise that, as well as knowledge, students need to develop their ability and skills to apply and repurpose knowledge in order to survive in a rapidly changing world. In applying knowledge to real-world contexts and allowing young learners to take the lead in using this knowledge to find solutions and answers, learning is deepened.

# OUR CORE PRINCIPLES

AN ASPIRATIONS EDUCATION IS BUILT ON THESE VALUES



## HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Being the very best you can be in your school and community.



## OPPORTUNITY

Matching your interests with activities that will help you to leave school well-rounded and confident.



## CHALLENGE

Making your learning exciting and relevant to the real world.



## TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Enhancing your natural strengths and abilities so you thrive in school and beyond.



## INNOVATION & ENTERPRISE

Supporting your creativity by encouraging you to ask 'Why?' and 'Why not?'.



## MAKERS & CREATORS

Being a creator, not just a consumer, of technology in our digital world.



## GLOBAL

Having the cultural awareness needed to communicate in our interconnected world.



## EMPLOYABILITY

Equipping you with the skills and abilities you'll need to excel in our ever-changing world.



## WITH BIG DREAMS AND HARD WORK, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Aspirations means to dream about the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams.



ASPIRATIONS

Aspirations considers the greatest impact of an effective curriculum to be high rates of pupil progress. Progress in:

- A. Development of knowledge: Progress in knowing more and remembering more. The future requires the acquisition and application of a wide range of knowledge.**
- B. The ability to apply knowledge: Progress in knowledge being applied in more challenging, relevant and more engaging ways.**
- C. The acquisition of 21st century skills to translate knowledge into actions for success:**

**A. The importance of developing a focus on knowledge to help improve the rate of progress**

Students from a wide range of backgrounds naturally arrive in school with different levels of knowledge acquisition, hence a well-rounded, knowledge-specific curriculum is required to overcome inequality of opportunity. This knowledge-rich curriculum requires careful consideration of the sequence of knowledge so that it is pedagogically coherent and reflects the specific ideas and language in each discipline being taught. It emphasises knowledge to be remembered and constantly built upon, not merely encountered and fleetingly experienced. This systematic and cumulative knowledge includes:

- Knowledge of vocabulary (and literacy in general)
- Knowledge of events, people and places..
- Knowledge of **ideas and concepts** drawn from subjects.
- Knowledge of procedures.
- Knowledge of interconnected webs of concepts (or 'schemata').

The importance of knowledge acquisition for progress has been highlighted by HMCI *'Twelve years of education should give children a lot more than a disposition to learn and some ill-defined skills. Yet the evidence from the first stage of our research this year is that **the focus on substance, on the knowledge that we want young people to acquire, is often lost.....If their entire school experience has been designed to push them through mark-scheme hoops, rather than developing a deep body of knowledge, they will struggle in later study.'***

Aspirations understand the need for a deep, layered approach to knowledge acquisition in which all age related expected knowledge is carefully mapped out, delivered, monitored and applied. Aspirations recognise that students suffer in the following ways when pupils do not have the knowledge they need:

- Knowledge deficits accumulate when layered on top of one another in a curriculum sequence.
- This accumulation of dysfluency (gaps) limits and may even prevent acquisition of complex skills that depends on their prior knowledge.
- This problem is called 'cumulative dysfluency'.

**B. The importance of applying knowledge in increasingly more challenging, relevant and more engaging ways.**

Students naturally compartmentalise what they learn according to the specific context in which that learning occurred. This makes it difficult for students who haven't fully mastered the material to:

1. Recognise when they have applicable knowledge that they could use in the current situation.
2. Recall and apply that knowledge accurately and appropriately.

To help students appreciate that their knowledge and skills can be effectively applied in multiple contexts, this needs to be a conscious part of the teaching process. Situations and issues need to be used for students to draw on the knowledge and skills they have already learned, and then identify it and apply it to the issue or situation.

This "Transfer" of knowledge and skills is a cognitive practice whereby a learner's mastery of knowledge or skills in one context enables them to apply that knowledge or skill in a different context. Because transfer signals that a learner's comprehension allows them to recognise how their knowledge can be relevant and to apply it effectively outside original learning conditions, transfer is often considered a hallmark of true learning (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). Learning theory suggests that a variety of teaching strategies can help students reach the intellectual maturity to transfer their knowledge, including practice with conceptual understanding, comparative scenarios, and clear road maps for learning (NRC, 2000).

Aspirations work extensively with local and national employers to provide real life experiences of the world of work for students whilst at the same time providing real-life issues and problems for students to apply their knowledge and skills. These experiences are embedded throughout the curriculum particularly in the Applied Trans-discipline Learning assignments.

### C. The importance of the acquisition of 21st century skills

*'Deloitte recently analysed 350 careers and found that the numbers of jobs available in 160 of them is declining. A PWC report has suggested that more than a third of jobs in the UK are at high risk of automation by the early 2030's. The computer giant Dell survey saw business leaders predicting that 85% of the jobs students today will be doing in the 2030's do not yet exist. So what subjects should our children be learning at primary school, GCSE and university, if they go to university at all? To face up to the wildly uncertain future our children will need not just academic qualifications but above all emotional and mental flexibility and resilience.'* The Telegraph 28/7/18

There are a range of 'Drivers of change' which are influencing the way we work and learn, alongside the 'Future skills' which are the future of working and learning.

**Aspirations**

## THE DRIVERS OF CHANGE

THESE BIG, DISRUPTIVE SHIFTS ARE CHANGING HOW WE WORK AND LEARN

- EXTREME LONGEVITY**  
People are living longer.
- RISE OF SMART MACHINES AND SYSTEMS**  
Technology allows us to enhance our own capabilities.
- COMPUTATIONAL WORLD**  
Data enables us to see patterns and systems on a scale never before possible.
- NEW MEDIA ECOLOGY**  
New communication tools require media literacies beyond text.
- SUPERSTRUCTURED ORGANISATIONS**  
Social technologies allow us the scale and reach formerly dominated by large organisations.
- GLOBALLY CONNECTED WORLD**  
Global interconnectivity requires organisations to diversify and be adaptable.

**Aspirations**

## THE FUTURE SKILLS

THIS IS THE FUTURE OF WORKING AND LEARNING

- PERSONAL SKILLS**  
**RESILIENCE**  
Can you overcome setbacks and challenges? Are you flexible with change and stable in demanding situations?
- PEOPLE SKILLS**
  - CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCY**  
Can you operate in different cultural settings?
  - COMMUNICATION**  
Can you connect with others effectively? Can you sense and stimulate reactions and interactions?
  - COLLABORATION**  
Can you work productively, drive engagement and demonstrate presence as a team member?
- APPLIED KNOWLEDGE**
  - CREATIVE & ADAPTIVE THINKING**  
Can you think of ideas and develop solutions - skills that aren't easily automated?
  - COGNITIVE LOAD MANAGEMENT**  
Can you discriminate and filter information for importance, using perception, thinking, reasoning and remembering?
  - SENSE-MAKING**  
Can you think clearly and rationally? Do you understand how and why ideas connect?
- WORKPLACE SKILLS**
  - MEDIA LITERACY**  
Can you use and develop content across media forms - video, simulations, models and images?
  - ENTREPRENEURIALISM**  
Can you meet an unsatisfied demand or radically improve the performance of something?
  - TRANSDISCIPLINARITY**  
Can you access and understand data across several subjects? Are you willing to continually learn?
  - PRODUCTIVITY & ACCOUNTABILITY**  
Can you create a product and take responsibility for its performance?

BASED ON THE WORK OF THE INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE

To be successful in the future, individuals will need to demonstrate foresight in navigating a rapidly shifting landscape of organisational forms and skill requirements. People will be called upon to continually reassess and develop the skills they need, alongside the acquisition and application of a wide range of knowledge. Workers in the future will need to be adaptable lifelong learners.

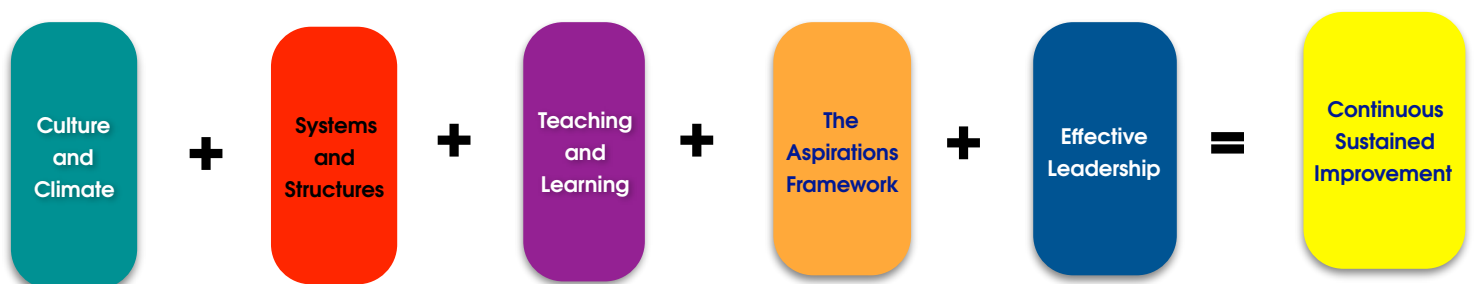
## Aspirations Approach to School Improvement

The Aspirations Academies Trust has developed an approach and a model that enables long-term sustainable educational school improvement. This model cannot be simply taken off the shelf and applied easily to any school in need of improvement, it is not as easy as that. Sustainable school improvement, particularly in England, is often a highly complex and difficult task. Short-term improvements in attainment can be achieved rapidly, whereas longer term success is harder to achieve.

Education in England, and in many other parts of the world, requires an upgrade, a new operating system, perhaps OS21, designed to provide relevance to the 21st century. In an era where the English education system produces over 1 million unemployed under 21 year olds at a time when companies cannot find the highly skilled workers they require, strategically thinking educational entrepreneurs are required to stimulate and develop sustainable school improvement. The gap between the impact of technological change on society and educational outcomes is widening. The challenge is to improve schools through finding entrepreneurial approaches to education that result in the high quality outcomes that not only satisfy the requirements of the rigid examination system but also develops in young people the skills required for success in the world today. The Aspirations Academies Trust school improvement model aims to achieve these combined outcomes.

### The Aspirations Academies Trust formula for continuous sustained school improvement

The Aspirations Academies Trust believes that school improvement needs to involve cultural, structural and systematic processes. The educational provision of a school needs to be built on strong foundations in order to provide an effective platform for teaching and learning. To achieve this a school often needs to be culturally and systematically re-built before this can happen. For sustainable, highly effective school improvement the starting point needs to be a thorough and deep analysis of the whole school in order to identify, in particular, the issues that are possibly restricting development, before then prescribing the way forward. Following this in-depth analysis the Aspirations Academies Trust formula for continuous sustained school improvement is applied:



The formula involves a clear focus on the development, and, subsequently, the effective combination, of **five elements**:

1. The Aspirations Academies Trust believe that **culture** is a key part of long-term success in any business, including education. In many businesses, culture is analysed, reviewed, and adjusted with the involvement of all key players through an ongoing process. This essential procedure,

however, is often missing, is overlooked, or faces a lack of emphasis, in many school improvement strategies.

Research shows that an educational community imbued with a positive culture is more likely to foster innovation and excellence. School culture, according to the Change Leadership Group at Harvard, is the “invisible but powerful meanings and mindsets” that shape the learning environment. One of the clearest definitions of school culture is from Gary Phillips, Center for Improving School Culture (1993, n.d.). Phillips characterises school culture as the *“beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that characterise a school in terms of: how people treat and feel about each other, the extent to which people feel included and appreciated, and rituals and traditions reflecting collaboration and collegiality.”*

Most schools do not focus on these characteristics. School culture is rarely discussed because the many demands and challenges that exist on a daily basis create a reactive, time consuming approach to school management. This is very different in Aspirations Academies where all staff are actively encouraged to work together in an atmosphere of trust to develop a pro-active, innovative and engaging learning environment. Similarly, the voices of students are also paramount to the development of learning.

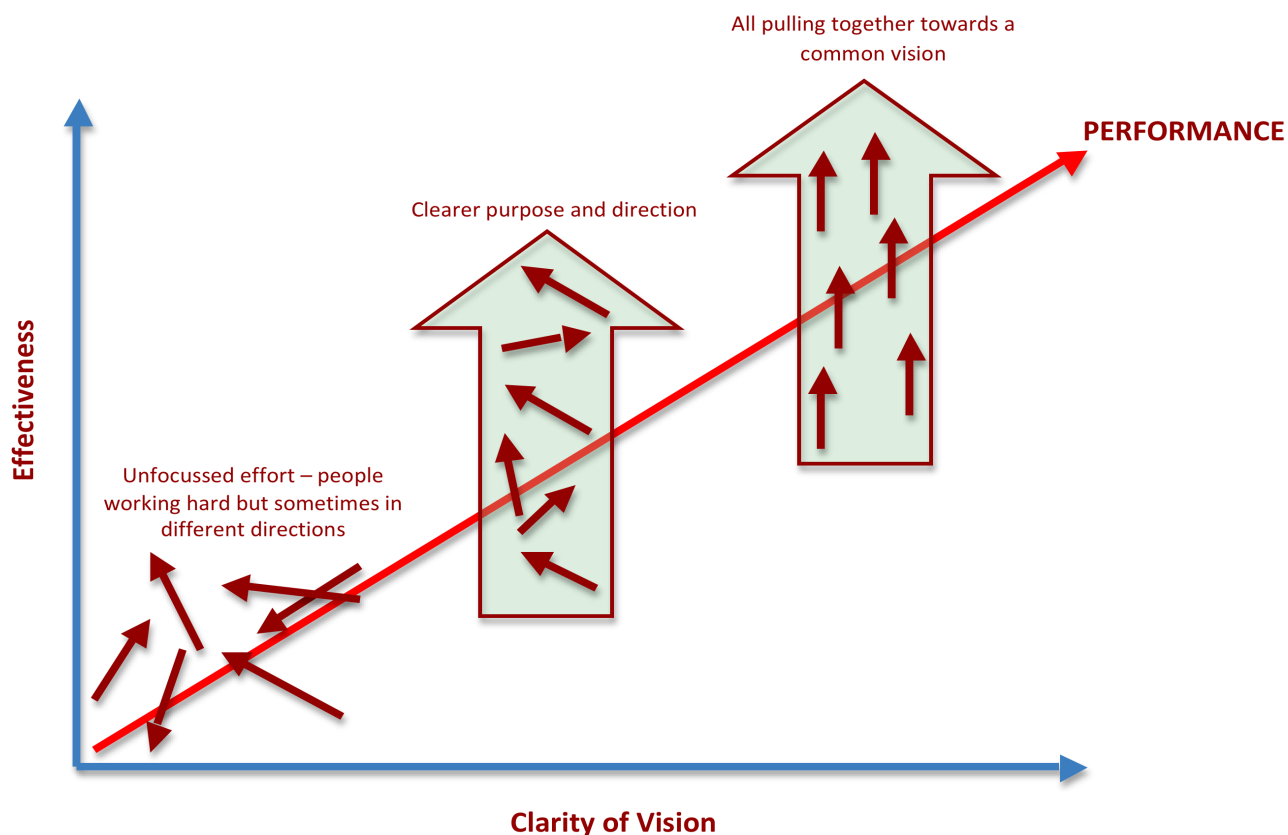
As a result of this belief in the vital importance of culture in a school, The Aspirations Academies Trust, when it takes on a new school, takes great care to understand the existing culture of the school in order to know what needs to be done to develop the required positive, innovative and creative aspirations culture. The culture of a school can be restrictive and embedded. The habits and attitudes that restrict progress need to be challenged and a culture with positive attitudes, high standards and clear direction established. This, unique emphasis on the development of the school culture as the foundation for long term, sustainable improvement, is one of the reasons for Aspirations Academies being very different to other schools.

The original conceptual thinking behind the development of Aspirations Academies was to create schools with a distinctive culture based on the Aspirations Framework that was ‘people proof’, in other words strong enough to provide an on-going educational and cultural framework that enabled the philosophy to endure regardless of staff changes. The Aspirations Framework is embodied by the Aspirations core principles .

2. With the focus on cultural change well underway and the cultural foundations laid, the next stage of the improvement process is to address the **systems and structures** that provide a platform for effective teaching and learning. The systems and structures that underpin the operation of the school need to be stripped back, simplified and made effective. Existing systems and structures need to be reviewed and judged if they are ‘fit for purpose’, easily understood and simple to operate. Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities also need to be revised in order to ensure that structures and systems work effectively and that people are held to account. Schools need to constantly monitor and review their systems and structures. Leaders need to ask themselves if the school systems are easy to understand, have clear lines of accountability, and do they work. The danger is that systems and structures are tinkered with and gradually incrementally change, resulting in confusion and ineffectiveness. The ‘Arrows Diagram’ is well-known by all leaders in Aspirations academies as it is used to highlight the importance of the combination of the clarity of the vision or sense of purpose of the school along with the effectiveness of the organisation in achieving top level performance. Each arrow represents a member of staff, in under-performing schools many staff are working hard but as the vision is not clear and the systems are ineffective

then staff are often working against each other unwittingly. The leaders role is to get every member of staff working towards a clear vision using effective systems and processes.

## Raising Achievement

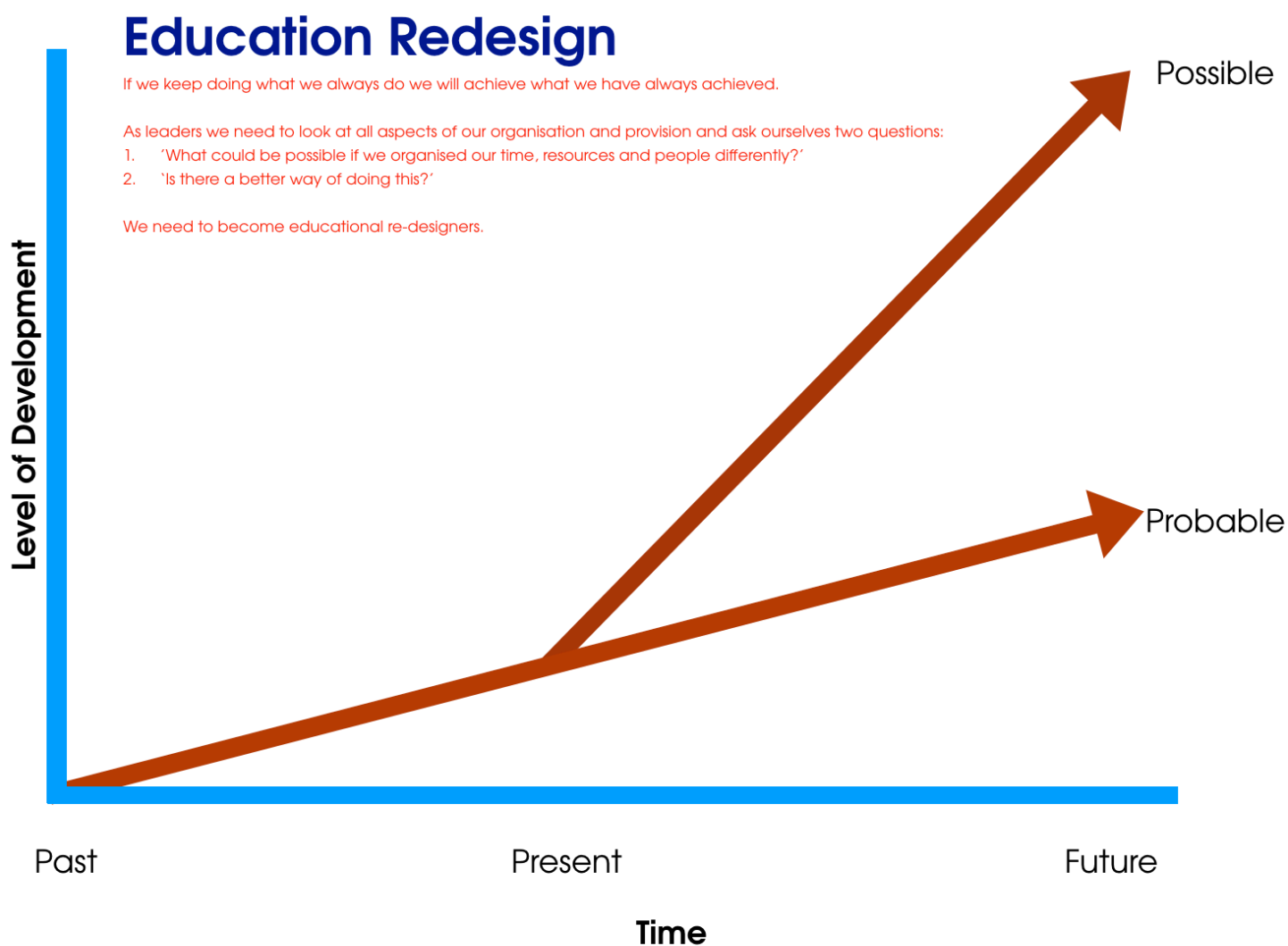


- Everything that happens in a school should be about **supporting the teaching and learning process**. When the required culture is in place with effective systems and structures in operation, the platform for highly effective teaching and learning is built. To maximise effectiveness there needs to be a relentless quest to improve teaching and learning. Such an approach requires maximum student engagement in the learning process and enables high levels of progress. Only when the teaching and learning process is fully supported will educational innovations and ideas work really effectively, developing 'next practice'.
- The **Aspirations Framework** is the basis of the culture in an Aspirations Academy. It outlines how to recognise and develop students' aspirations, while trusting in the professional judgment of educators to determine the specific actions that are best for their school. The Framework, serving as the foundation for the Aspirations Academies Trust's philosophy, is centred on the guiding and core principles outlined earlier in this document. The Aspirations Academies Trust believes that for all students to have high aspirations, they must believe in themselves, be actively engaged in their learning, and see the connection between what they learn today and who they want to become tomorrow. The Aspirations Framework should also should influence the operation of the systems and structures at work in the school, as well as being a critical element in the teaching and learning process. The Guiding Principles and Core Principles should be fully embedded into every aspect of the school - in the culture, the systems and structures and in the teaching and learning. This can only be achieved if all leaders fully understand the Aspirations Framework and



model it at all times. The Aspirations Framework is not an 'add on', it is a way of being for the whole organisation, it forms the culture of the school.

5. As a multi-academy trust, Aspirations, has an admirable record of school improvement. However, there have been occasions where the Aspirations formula for continuous and sustained school improvement has not worked initially. In each case where this has happened it has been due to ineffective leadership. Leaders need to believe in the vision of the organisation, model and live the Aspirations Framework, and be brave and strong in their leadership. Effective Leadership is central to the success of school improvement. As a result aspirations runs 'Leadership Incubator' training programmes for leaders at all levels. Aspirations believe that leaders need to constantly review their work.

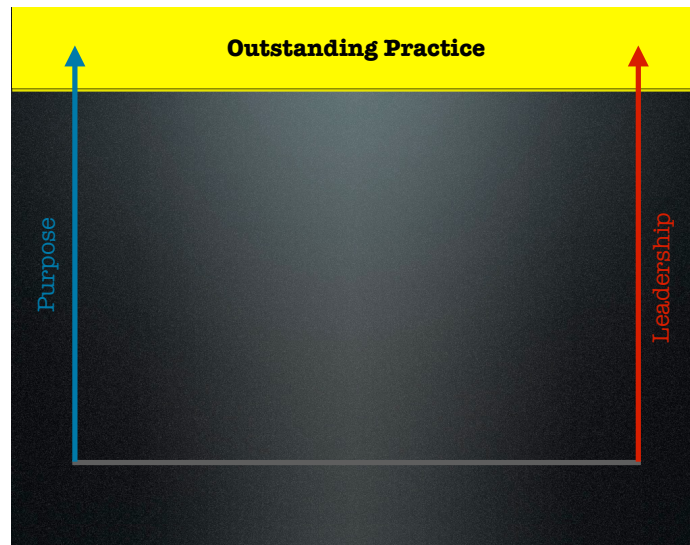


### **Achieving Outstanding Educational Practice through the Aspirations Academies Trust model for continuous sustained school improvement**

The Aspirations Academies Trust is committed to raising students' aspirations so that all young people reach their fullest potential and achieve the success they desire. This is our 'Sense of purpose', our aim, and the basis of our philosophy. As a result the Aspirations Framework forms the centrepiece of our schools' culture.

To achieve our aim each Aspirations Academy needs to achieve 'Outstanding Practice'. This is achieved by having a very strong 'Purpose' driven by highly effective 'Leadership'. When 'purpose' and 'leadership' are both highly focused and effective, then outstanding educational practice can be achieved.

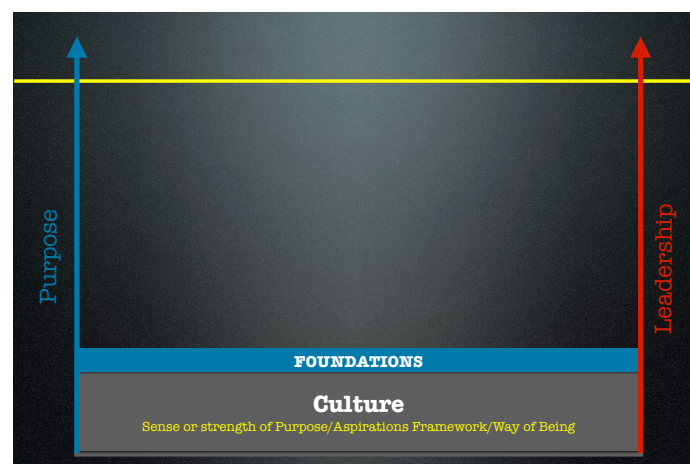
### Stage 1: Understanding the importance of the parallel drivers of purpose and leadership



To reach 'Outstanding Practice' in a school, the purpose, centred on the Aspirations Framework, must be clearly understood by all, with all leaders ensuring that everyone is fully focussed and committed to the effectiveness of the school in achieving the vision, or sense of purpose.

This is not an easy task and requires leadership that is both unconsciously immersed in and actively applying the Aspirations Framework. The parallel drivers of purpose and leadership must be equally in-tune and focussed, utilising the Aspirations Framework for this purpose. These drivers can be aligned through the conscious laying of the necessary cultural foundations of a school.

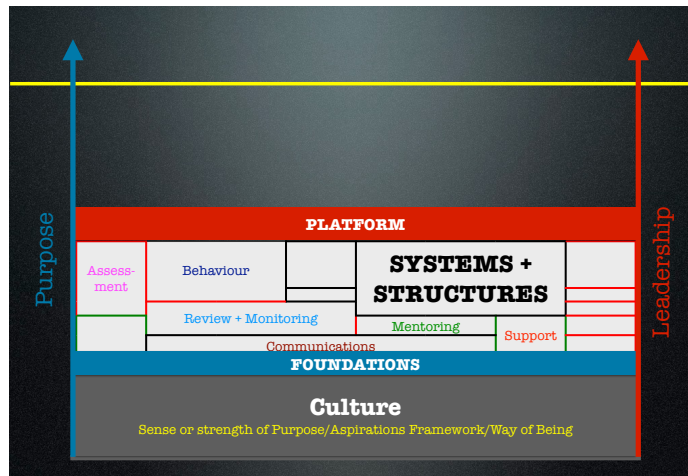
### Stage 2: Laying the Foundations



Through experience, the Aspirations Academies Trust discovered that the introduction of the Aspirations Framework into a school without first adjusting the culture of the school, simply led to a short-term impact on outcomes. The culture of a school must drive the purpose of the school and needs to be manipulated or changed before long-term school improvement can be assured. The culture must hold a strong and clear sense of purpose, the Aspirations Framework should be

understood by all and fully embedded in the school, and the way of being of the school needs everyone to hold the desire to move coherently forward towards the achievement of the purpose or vision. The establishment of the appropriate culture can take time to develop and may require a wide range of techniques and strategies. The culture is continually developing although the foundations will be ready as soon as the 'tipping point' from the old culture towards the new culture has been reached. At all times the leadership needs to be clear and focussed on delivering the clear purpose if the cultural foundations are to be well laid.

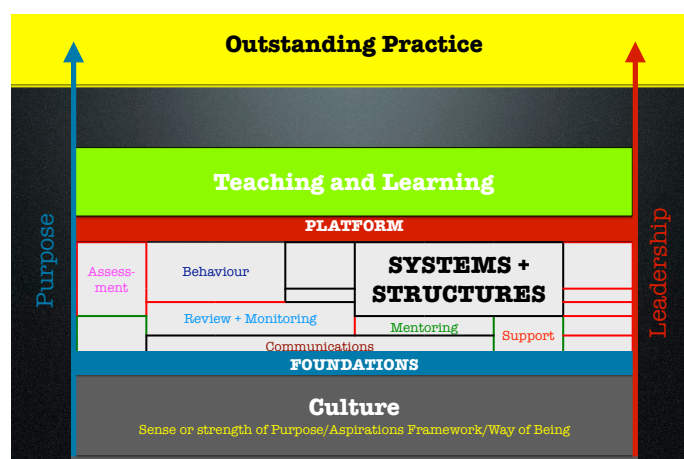
### Stage 3: Constructing the Platform for Teaching and Learning



With the culture developing in the right direction, providing a sound base of foundations, the next stage is to review, renovate, streamline and possibly replace the systems and structures that make the school work. The simple guidance for constructing an effective platform for teaching and learning is ensure that the structures and systems have clarity, simplicity and accountability. People need to know and understand their roles and responsibilities, they need to be able to understand and use simple and effective systems, and there needs to be a clear process of reviewing systems and structures, and of holding the people to account who do not perform as expected.

Sometimes leaders can be afraid to change systems and structures which have apparently worked well at some point in time. In reality, in many schools, good systems are often tinkered with over time, adding improvements here and there, until they become ineffective. Often the only answer is to strip a system down and start again, and then continually review its effectiveness. Once again, leadership needs to ensure the systems and structures effectively support the achievement of the purpose.

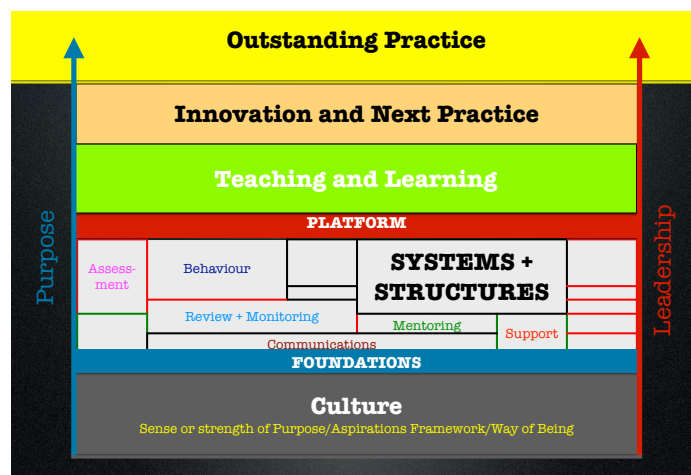
### Stage 4: Delivering Effective teaching and Learning



Schools that display consistently high quality teaching and learning are built on a strong culture with clear and effective systems and structures. These provide the foundations and platform to enable the school to focus on the main task of teaching and learning. For example, if the behaviour systems are effective then learning is not disrupted, if teacher review and CPD systems are effective the quality of teaching regularly improves, if the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of all students then they will be more keenly engaged, and if there are continuous systems of review and improvement then there will be sustainable good quality teaching. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to be enough to get a school to the promised land of outstanding and to fully achieve its purpose. Such schools tend to develop by borrowing 'best' practice and moulding it into their existing operations rather than changing structures, systems and practices to take them to another level. Eventually if all schools simply share the 'best' practice between themselves then 'best' practice becomes 'usual' practice. The task of leadership is to be brave enough to move to the next stage.

Some schools, particularly those moving out of 'special measures' or 'requires improvement' positions, deliver highly effective teacher led instruction, guiding and supporting students to the achievement of high levels of progress and attainment in line with the requirements of the English knowledge based examination system. Teachers instruct often to get short-term acquisition of knowledge into students and to ensure effective behaviour. However, with this type of education delivery students do not deliver the 21st century skills they require for success in University or the work place. Such schools cannot rightly claim to be 'outstanding' as students are inevitably not fully engaged or challenged by their learning. The real challenge for leaders of such schools is to take the school to the 'Next' practice.

### Stage 5: Using Innovation to create 'Next' Practice



When schools get to the stage where their performance results have improved and they achieve positive inspection reports, they tend to do one of two things:

1. The school continues to do more of the same, picking up some new small-scale improvement ideas from 'better' schools. This eventually leads to a level of complacency and stagnation over time.
2. The school tries to introduce very new teaching and learning ideas and practices without the appropriate new systems and structures in place. Inevitably the new initiatives do not work making further change very difficult. There are a myriad of reasons behind the failure of initiatives, perhaps the culture of the school is not willing to change, perhaps behaviour is wrong, perhaps, perhaps.....Only when there is really effective and good quality teaching and learning should particularly innovative teaching and learning initiatives be implemented. However, the systems and structures required to support further change need to be well-planned.

'Next' practice is where a school develops innovative practice that is 'unique'. This may be based on ideas developed from other schools or even ideas trialled and tested over recent years. This is the stage every school should aim to get to as it not only creates a highly positive culture for staff and students, it also creates excellent levels of progress and performance as students are highly engaged and challenged in their learning.

**A truly outstanding school is one that has a driving focus of continually trying to evolve the quality of its teaching and learning, to relentlessly look for ways of achieving total engagement of students in the learning process, and which has a strong, driving purpose, and pro-active, far-sighted leadership. Such schools continually change, they develop a culture of continuous progress where complacency is non-existent. This type of school can focus almost exclusively on teaching and learning because the culture is clear and strong, the structures and systems are effective and closely monitored and the leadership is consistently effective.**

Some schools are regarded to be a truly outstanding school, the word 'truly' is very important as there are very many 'outstanding' schools who do not share all of the characteristics mentioned in the previous paragraph, has the capacity to move its good teaching and learning to outstanding by using 'next' practice. 'Next' practice is where an idea is used to transform a school, it does not simply fit into the existing school, it fundamentally changes some part of the operation of the school. Continually, new ideas and approaches are sought out and implemented developing an incremental and sustained improvement in teaching and learning as the school evolves into a continuously improving school. This takes brave leadership and a very strong moral purpose. It also requires innovative thinking and problem-solving skills.

### **Stage 6: Continuous Review, Relentless Monitoring, and Incremental Change**

*'People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode. They never 'arrive'.'*  
Peter Senge - *The Fifth Discipline*.

The words of Peter Senge can just as easily be applied to schools, as truly outstanding schools never become complacent, they know they can always get better and have developed a culture that is continually looking 'outside' both for guidance on what is needed, as well as for the 'next' practice. These schools look at their very best systems and structures and continually look to improve or change them, they fully understand their culture and know exactly what works in the school and what doesn't. A culture of openness, trust and ideas generation exists making further change and development inevitable. In such a school, students receive high quality teaching and learning, delivered by teachers on top of their game who are also modelling the skills the students will need in the 21st century for success:

- Resilience
- Cross-cultural competency
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creative and adaptive thinking
- Cognitive load management
- Sense-making
- Media literacy
- Entrepreneurialism
- Transdisciplinarity
- Productivity and accountability.

## The Cultural Framework of an Aspirations Academy

The diagram on the following page is based on the 'Mental Models' diagram produced by Peter Senge. This diagram can be used to more easily understand the importance of culture on a school and in particular the impact of the Aspirations Framework on the educational provision of the school. The 'Iceberg' shape is used to amplify the fact that when looking for school improvement, school leaders, governors and other educationalists, often do not look at what lies beneath the surface. When a school is in trouble it is natural to look at the 'current reality', what is happening on the surface. It is also often essential that some immediate action is taken to address particular issues. Unfortunately, the concentration on the 'now' often means that the reaction to events leads to the putting into place short term improvement strategies. This is like putting a plaster and lotion on an open sore. The sore may heal but the problem will most likely recur unless the deeper root cause behind the sore is discovered.

From day one of operation an Aspirations Academy is driven to continuously develop a positive school culture. When this is fully in place, there will be high levels of student engagement, collaboration, target setting, action planning, the regular assessment of attitudes, and openness. The Aspirations Framework provides a very powerful scaffold for developing a clear sense of purpose and for fully establishing the 'new' mental models needed by a school requiring improvement. Built with strong mental models and 'fit for purpose' structures and systems, a school can then analyse the trends and patterns that emerge over time in order to establish what longer-term effective action needs to be taken and which strategies are likely to be most effective in achieving sustainable school improvement. As a result, improvement action is taken built on a strong culture, effective systems and through informed analysis. The daily and regular events that happen in schools can then be fully understood in a more rational manner, and in many cases, as a result of the pro-activity this approach encourages, many of these common events simply do not occur.

### The Aspirations Iceberg Model: How the Aspirations Framework can Impact on a School

Based on the work of Peter Senge

*The best way to change performance in any organisation is to work with mental models. They are foundational to everything else.*

