



Growing Great People 2026-27: Our Policy for Professional Growth



The Stour Federation

'Growing great people' is The Stour Federation's professional growth policy. It is a cornerstone of our 2030 Strategy, designed to cultivate a thriving environment where every staff member can flourish and contribute to our North Star: **human flourishing for all**. This policy puts establishing, improving, and maintaining the very highest standards in teaching and learning at its heart.

Our aim is to maximise the value that employees create and maintain and improve employee's performance in line with an organisation's objectives. It is not a single activity but a group of practices that should be approached holistically.

1. INTRODUCTION

The challenge to all staff within our Academy Trust is to always improve and continually grow as great professionals. We see our people as our greatest asset and view our staff as learners; empowered to make decisions, to be collaborative, to lead, and to grow. **Our professional growth processes exist to ensure that all our staff can be the very best they can be, enabling every child to reach the highest possible standards.** This policy sets out our high expectations and a clear framework for a consistent approach to professional growth so that our staff may grow and succeed as trusted and valued professionals. It is guided by the principles of continuous improvement, ensuring we are always seeking to 'sharpen the saw' and refine our practices.

This policy assumes that all staff within our Trust are meeting the appropriate professional standards (e.g., Teachers' Standards, Teaching Assistants' Standards, Headteachers' Standards, job descriptions) unless evidence suggests otherwise. It aligns directly with Our People Strategy's aim to foster an environment where everyone feels valued, supported, and empowered to do the best work of their lives

2. PURPOSE

Our purpose is to help and support all our staff and school leaders to become the very best version of themselves so that our children benefit from the best possible provision. We aim to create a culture within our Trust that encourages staff to stay and grow with us, making the next steps in their career here. Professional growth within The Stour Federation has several purposes:

- To build and enhance expertise, securing continuous growth and improvement.
- To enable reflection on strengths and successes, and identify areas for further growth.
- To recognise and promote a culture of professionalism, relational trust, and psychological safety where staff feel valued and supported.
- To empower staff to take ownership of their professional journeys through autonomy, choice, and a shared commitment to collaboration.

We regard 'Growing Great People' as impetus not only for staff development and school improvement but also for recruitment, retention, and wellbeing. This policy is designed to change the way we view accountability and professional development; professional growth is 'done by' our staff, not 'done to' them.

3. CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Effective and genuinely continuous professional growth is central to achieving our 2030 vision. It:

- Focuses on improving pupil and organisation outcomes.
- Has a narrow, yet significant, focus.
- Recognises that one size does not fit all.
- Focuses on what works and is evidence-informed.
- Involves collaboration with colleagues through our Communities of Practice and coaching culture.
- Is sustained over time and includes frequent opportunities for learning, experimentation, reflection, feedback, and solutions-focused coaching.

Staff are accountable for achieving the highest standards in their daily work. The appropriate professional standards define the minimum level of practice expected and set out expectations for professional growth and development, which are inherent in this policy. All staff should:

- Keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date and be self-critical and reflective.
- Take responsibility for improving their craft through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues.
- Demonstrate a secure knowledge of relevant subjects, curriculum areas, and how children learn.
- Reflect systematically on the effectiveness of their work and know how to assess relevant curriculum areas.

4. EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

Professional growth involves effective reflection. As a solutions-focused organisation, we focus on solutions, not problems, and help staff build on their strengths first. We are committed to developing a professional culture that drives quality assurance from within—an enabling process rather than an imposed one.

Crucially, we value the importance of autonomy and choice. Providing staff with opportunities to substantially affect and direct their own goals, practice, and inquiry is a powerful motivator. Our professional learning is driven by an individual's motivation to become even better. Those who set and monitor their own goals are those who will continue to grow as professionals. We will therefore provide effective training, opportunities, and time for staff to work on a focus of their choosing that positively affects the children they teach.

5. EVALUATING YOUR PROGRESS

We encourage a culture in which all staff take personal responsibility for improving their own practice. Professional growth is linked to school improvement priorities, the Trust's strategic goals, professional development needs, and the needs of the children. As long as staff continue to meet the appropriate professional standards and engage fully in this process, pay progression will be automatic and not linked to traditional 'performance management'. We expect our staff to progress up the pay scale as the norm.

For this process to be successful, the following steps are required:

1. Each staff member will reflect on their current practice using the appropriate

- professional standards or job description as a guide. **(Appendix A)**
2. Following this reflection, each staff member will create a draft 'professional growth plan'. **(Appendix B)**
 3. In a meeting (usually in October), this focus will be discussed, developed, and agreed with their line manager. **(Appendix C)**
 4. Each staff member then creates a final version of their 'professional growth plan'. **(Appendix B)**
 5. This focus is sustained over time, with staff required to engage in opportunities for learning, experimentation, reflection, feedback, and coaching.
 6. Progress will be discussed in regular group coaching 'check-ins'.
 7. This sustained development work will be presented to team colleagues at the end of the cycle for reflection, accountability, and the sharing of effective practice. **(Appendix D)**
 8. All staff are also required to engage fully with any whole school or subject priorities.

6. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLAN

Each staff member formulates a 'professional growth plan' to take control of their own professional learning. This plan is a 'live' document that identifies what you hope to learn or do differently and how you will achieve this. While it is recognised that the impact on pupils' outcomes can be difficult to directly correlate, this policy is built on the assumption that changing staff practice will change children's learning experiences and impact their outcomes.

Staff are encouraged to purposefully practise—to design lessons that force them out of autopilot and ensure a deliberate focus on experimentation. Early Career Teachers (ECTs) are not required to undertake this task as they have a separate programme of support and development.

7. PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT: COACHING AND FEEDBACK

Professional support is available for all staff so they can continue to grow. This support can take many forms, including dialogue, co-planning, mentoring, and coaching. As outlined in our 2030 Strategy, coaching is a crucial enabler of continuous improvement, fostering a culture of empowerment and collective growth.

Feedback is an essential part of the improvement process. All staff are encouraged to seek and receive frequent feedback on their professional growth focus to build expertise and secure continuous improvement. Any observations of practice will be carried out in a supportive and developmental manner. They will NOT be graded and will NOT be used as a single indicator of performance. The purpose of observation is twofold:

- To help the staff member being observed become even better.
- To learn from the staff member being observed.

8. CHECK- INS

Progress 'check-ins' will take place at frequent and regular intervals (half-termly) within teams. These sessions will be structured as group coaching opportunities, designed to foster a strong collaborative culture and enhance professional expertise.

During these check-ins, successes, strengths, barriers, and developments related to the 'Professional Growth Plan' will be shared with colleagues. This is not a reporting exercise but a

powerful system of peer-to-peer accountability, built on mutual trust and respect. The purpose of these sessions is to:

- Provide a dedicated space for staff to examine their practice, set goals, and independently develop solutions, building resourcefulness.
- Push and challenge thinking so that each person becomes an adaptive expert capable of continually reflecting on their expertise.
- Build teacher confidence to share effective strategies and foster strong collaboration.
- Pool collective intelligence and accelerate the spread of effective practices across our schools.

9. THEMES FOR 2026-27 GROWING GREAT PEOPLE GROWTH PROJECTS

To align with our collective journey towards our 2030 North Star, the themes for this year's Growth Projects can be drawn from any area that supports our 2030 Strategy and Blueprint. Crucially, every growth project must focus on at least one of our four core 2030 Drivers to ensure direct contribution to our strategic goals. These drivers are:

Wellbeing & Learning	Social Intelligence & Artificial Intelligence	Equity-Equality Investments	Systemness
			
This driver emphasises that happy, healthy children learn best, particularly when staff are flourishing, and promotes a supportive environment and an exciting curriculum.	This driver focuses on leveraging technology to enhance learning while developing essential human skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication.	This driver commits to providing an equitable education for all pupils, making strategic investments to address individual needs and close achievement gaps.	This driver recognises the strength in collaboration across schools, sharing best practices, and fostering continuous improvement within a powerful and effective educational system.

Projects should be linked at least one of the following areas:

- **Aspects of our key strategies:** Inclusion Strategy; People Strategy; Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Policy; or the Thrive approach.
- **Aspects linked to our Enablers:** Communities of Practice; Coaching; Digital Champions; or Culture Champions.
- **School Improvement Planning:** Whole school Wildly Important Goals (WIGs), school improvement priorities that are 'flying' or 'landing' and aspects on a school's live list.
- **Subject Leadership:** curriculum subject wildly important goals approved by the Headteacher.