

Learn
Sheffield



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Directors' Strategic Report **2023/24**

ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS
LEARN SHEFFIELD AGM

THURSDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2025



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This **Annual Report to Members** is the ninth such report produced by Learn Sheffield, coming at the end of the ninth year since incorporation on the 14th August 2015. 2023/24 was the first year of our fourth commission from Sheffield City Council (SCC) in relation to school improvement and the sixth year of our school subscription model. This report provides an overview of performance in the 2023/24 reporting period in relation to Board effectiveness, key developments, School Improvement Commission outcomes and financial outcomes. It has been prepared by the Chair of the Board, Antony Hughes, and the Chief Executive, Stephen Betts. It should be read in conjunction with the financial statements and other papers for the Annual General Meeting on Thursday 6 February 2025. Further information about Learn Sheffield can be found at www.learnsheffield.co.uk.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



This is my fourth opportunity as Chair to report on the progress of Learn Sheffield in this, our ninth Annual Report to Shareholders. I am delighted to be able to reflect on another strong and significant year for the organisation in 2023/24.

If 2022/23 was notable because Learn Sheffield successfully navigated a very challenging financial position, then 2023/24 has seen the organisation build on this. This was informed by our Independent Evaluation, which set the direction for the next phase of our values-led Schools Company in closer partnership with Sheffield City Council.

The autumn term of 2023 saw Learn Sheffield reset its purpose, vision and values. This process involved the team, board and wider stakeholders to ensure that outcome would be fit for purpose as the basis for our more sustainable future shape.

The insight and credibility of the team which carried out our Independent Evaluation ensured that this significant piece of enquiry provided the right learning for the organisation. We were, as a board, extremely proud of their findings, not least that Learn Sheffield delivers so strongly on its ethos of being by Sheffield, for Sheffield and in collaboration.

Learn Sheffield achieved a small surplus in 2023/24, which moves the level of reserve above £200k for the first time. This was achieved despite undertaking a restructure to grow and develop the team ahead of new challenges in September 2024. The board commends the executive team on managing to deliver a solid year financially whilst positioning the organisation for a more sustainable future shape.

The school improvement foundations of Learn Sheffield have also continued to see strong performance, with the high level of subscription maintained and another record high Ofsted position for the city. The Board continues to share the focus of the executive team on improving pupil outcomes but recognises the high quality of the team and the many strengths identified in the evaluation.

The strategic partnership with Sheffield City Council has also continued to develop. The board are delighted to see the range and scope of the relationship start to expand again in 2024 and look forward to this having positive impacts on the life chances of Sheffield children and young people.

I will, as previously, conclude by thanking three important groups of people. I will start by thanking my colleagues on the Board for their contribution to Learn Sheffield's continued progress. I must, of course, also thank Stephen, Sam and the team for their ongoing commitment and skill, without whom the above would not be possible. Finally, my sincere thanks to all of our member settings for their continued collaboration and support.

ANTONY HUGHES CHAIR – LEARN SHEFFIELD BOARD

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A. Hughes', written over a light grey background.

OVERVIEW FROM THE THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE



I suspect that 2023/24 will come to be seen as a very significant year in the development of Learn Sheffield. The Independent Evaluation provided a strong picture of our impact across our first eight years. This provided the learning upon which to base the future shape of a more sustainable and resilient Learn Sheffield as it heads towards its tenth birthday.

The twelve-month period covered by this report included the sixth year of our school subscription offer and the first year of two in our fourth School Improvement Commission from Sheffield City Council (SCC). It was notable for the renewing of our purpose, vision and values (which was mentioned in our last annual report) and the publication of our Independent Evaluation (which coincided with our last AGM).

The quality of education in Sheffield, measured through Ofsted judgements, continued to improve in 2023/24. The proportion of Sheffield settings judged to be good or better exceeded 90% for the first time and ended the year at 92.1%. Learn Sheffield is proud to have contributed to this success and will continue to strive, alongside the sector to make similar progress in relation to pupil outcomes.

2023/24 also saw two highly significant developments for the organisation, to the structure of the school improvement subscription and to the extent of the strategic partnership with Sheffield City Council. These changes will be crucial to the future of Learn Sheffield beyond the year itself.

A new subscription model was launched in May (for September 2024). It is more flexible and supports our members, and settings beyond the city, to access the package of support that they need more precisely. We anticipate that, whilst the proportion of settings who buy a package will be similar, the income generated by the subscription will be less predictable than previously.

We reported that the strategic partnership with SCC had reset positively and was once again productive in our last annual report. This continued to strengthen in 2023/24 and we have developed our capacity in order to begin to deliver a significant and long term SEND commission from September 2024.

The importance of 2023/24 in the development of Learn Sheffield is underlined by our decision to publish an additional paper, about the future shape of the organisation, alongside this Directors' Annual Report. More information about this can be found in the final section of this report. Learn Sheffield is your company, and it is extremely important to us that you are able to contribute to the discussion about its future direction.

I would, of course, like to finish by paying tribute to the fantastic Learn Sheffield team. Their expertise and dedication drives the culture of our organisation and the ever-increasing contribution that it can make to our city.

STEPHEN BETTS CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

Board membership has continued to be stable during the 2023/24 school year. The changes between the last AGM and this one are below:

- Mark Sheikh and Sally Williams were confirmed as SCC nominated directors at the AGM in February 2024 and have served on the Board during the 2023/24 year. Mark has been elected as chair of the board Finance, Audit and Operations Committee.
- Mai Mai Steele, Chief Commercial Officer at The Curve, a local Technology Innovation company, was appointed for a three-year term as a co-opted director at the Learn Sheffield board meeting on 8th February 2024.
- Angela Lant was re-appointed as a co-opted director for a three-year term from 1st September 2024.
- Mike Westerdale's term as a secondary sector nominated director ends in February 2025.
- Nicola Shipman's term as a primary sector nominated director ends in February 2025.
- Paul Simpson's term as a FE/Post-16 sector nominated director ends in February 2025.

The process of nomination of directors and elections, where necessary, is underway and the results will be shared at the AGM.

Attendance at the Board and committee meetings continued to be strong. Overall attendance was 77% in 2023/24. The aggregate attendance of board members (i.e. the total numbers of board members attending full board meetings) in the year was 48, compared with 46 in 2022/23. Board attendance, including apologies, was 100% during 2023/24. The attendance, effectiveness and contribution at meetings of the directors are kept under review by the Chair.

Directors agree that the Board is effective in fulfilling its strategic duties and the reports and presentations provided by the executive continue to be of good quality, enabling the Board to carry out its functions efficiently.

The format of the Learn Sheffield Board and committee meetings in 2023/24 have continued to take place online and Sir David Carter continues to act as Strategic Advisor to the Board, as he has since September 2020.

More information about the Learn Sheffield Board can be found below and online at www.learnsheffield.co.uk/About-Us/The-Board and profiles of the 2023/24 Board follow. Board profiles are also now found on the Learn Sheffield website. The company public records are available at Companies House.

THE BOARD



Stephen Betts

Chief Executive

Stephen was appointed as the Interim Chief Executive of Learn Sheffield in late summer 2015, having previously chaired the working group that determined the approach that Sheffield would take to school improvement. Following a competitive recruitment process, he was appointed to the substantive Chief Executive role in May 2016. Before becoming involved with Learn Sheffield, Stephen was the Headteacher of Malin Bridge Primary School and had worked for 17 years in the primary sector. His previous schools were Ecclesfield Primary and Nook Lane Junior School.



Laura Gillespie

Special School sector nominated

Laura was appointed as the Special School Director on the Board of Learn Sheffield in February 2023. She is currently the Chair of Governors at Bents Green Special School. Laura is a previous Special School representative on Sheffield Schools Forum and is also currently the Chair of Sheffield Parent Carer Forum, where she has a focus on inclusion and preparing children and young people for adulthood. She was a physiotherapist prior to having children, specialising in neurology.



Christopher Holder

Primary School sector nominated

Chris has almost thirty years teaching experience working in multicultural inner city schools in both London and Sheffield. He has been the Headteacher of Lowfield Primary School since 2012 and is one of the two Primary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which he joined in December 2016. Chris has been a National Leader of Education and has been deployed as both an Executive Headteacher and an Associate Headteacher. He represents his locality partnership on the Primary Partnership Group.



Antony Hughes

Chair of the Board – Co-opted Director

Antony was appointed as one of the co-opted non-executive Directors on the Board in February 2017. He became the Chair of the Board in September 2021. He is currently the Chief Executive of The Harmony Trust, which is a multi-academy trust containing schools in Oldham and Derby. Antony was previously Commissioner for Children's Services and Director of the Inclusion and Learning Service at Sheffield City Council, in which roles he worked closely with Learn Sheffield. Antony worked for the Department for Education before coming to Sheffield.



Angela Lant

Co-opted Director

Angela became a co-opted Director in September 2021. She had previously been one of the two Primary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield. Angela worked in Primary education for more than thirty years, in a variety of contexts, and led schools for more than twenty years. In her last role Angela was part of the Executive Team at Tipton School Academy Trust and, in her role as Director of Primaries, led a team of five Sheffield primary schools. Angela also represented her locality partnership on the Primary Improvement Board and supported a wide range of local education initiatives.



Bev Matthews

Secondary School sector nominated

Bev is currently Chief Executive Officer of the Minerva Learning Trust in Sheffield. It is a local academy trust comprising four secondary schools, one primary school and a FE college. She is one of the two Secondary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which she joined in March 2020. Bev has over 18 years of experience in the education sector, including FE and secondary settings and LA roles. She returned to school leadership in Sheffield following a period of Headship in West Yorkshire.



Nicola Shipman

Primary School sector nominated

Nicola has over 35 years of teaching and leadership experience. She is the Chief Executive Officer of Steel City Schools Partnership, an academy trust in Sheffield, providing education to over 3,500 pupils aged +2 to +11 and employment to over 550 staff in the area across ten schools. Nicola is a National Leader of Education and in this role works across the Yorkshire and Humber region. Nicola has led a number of schools as Executive Headteacher and has wide experience of successful system leadership.



Paul Simpson

Further Education sector nominated

Paul is the Executive Director of People at The Sheffield College. He has more than 25 years' human resources experience in the public and private sector, the majority being in the further education sector. Paul was born in Rotherham and is a graduate of Sheffield Hallam University. Making a difference to Sheffield City Region is important to Paul and a key reason for his support for Learn Sheffield.



Mark Sheikh

SCC nominated Director

Mark currently holds the position of Head of Service – Resourcing and Business Planning at Sheffield City Council. With 20 years of dedicated service to the council, Mark is an accomplished senior manager with extensive expertise in organisational planning, budgeting, business planning, business strategy, and financial management. Prior to his tenure with the council, he spent a decade working for an international charity based in Thailand.

Mark's academic qualifications include a bachelor's degree in economics, a master's degree in business administration, and he is a Fellow Member of the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (FCCA).

Beyond his professional commitments, Mark enjoys engaging in various sports, with a particular passion for squash, table tennis, and cricket.



Mai Mai Steele

Co-opted Director

Mai Mai Steele is the newly appointed CCO at Sheffield-based Software Consultancy The Curve. Prior to this, she was fortunate in gaining experience and insight into business operations, facilities, HR and technical project management during her 11 year tenure at a global software company. Mai also had the opportunity to work on a variety of local community projects including Laptops for Kids/Laptops for All (working closely with Learn Sheffield), as well as being heavily involved in the early stages of an ongoing project to address digital exclusion in the city. Mai has also been involved with various partnerships and projects alongside colleges and universities in Sheffield and enjoys being part of any initiative to enhance learning opportunities in the city.



Mike Westerdale

Secondary School sector nominated

Mike is Chief Executive Officer of Brigantia Learning Trust in northeast Sheffield. It is a 2-19 local multi academy trust currently made up of 5 academies, an infant academy, a junior academy, a 2-16 all through academy, a secondary academy and a 16-19 academy. He is one of the two Secondary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which he joined in February 2019. Mike has been a secondary school leader since September 2000 and became Principal of Parkwood E-Act Academy in 2010. Subsequently, he has worked in a national role for a large multi academy trust and has worked in Liverpool, London, Manchester, and the West Midlands focussing on 2-19 education.



Sally Williams

SCC nominated Director

Sally is the Director of Children and Families at Sheffield City Council, she is a registered social worker and has worked within Children's Services for over 25 years. She has extensive operational experience as a social worker alongside a wide breadth of experience as a manager and a senior leader in all areas of Children's Services including Provider Services, Early Help, Safeguarding and Innovative Services.

Sally has lots of experience of working within the Ofsted framework and a commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children in the city.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Learn Sheffield re-appointed Hart Shaw as company auditors for the financial year 2023/24 and they will present the full set of audited accounts at the Annual General Meeting.

A presentation at the AGM will identify the key elements of financial performance from Learn Sheffield's ninth year of operation. The 2023/24 year was set to be a challenging year financially for the organisation following a significant reduction to the SCC School Improvement Commission from September 2023. The organisation's financial resilience, spread of expertise and reputation in the sector has ensured that it has been able to successfully navigate through this period, with further development of subscription services and growth in our education based project portfolio.

The company financial position has remained stable with a small in-year trading surplus of £3,029 adding to the positive trading reserve position. The trading

reserve now stands at £202,057 which represents two months of operating costs, however, this still falls short of the reserves target set.

The trading position excludes adjustments to the Pension Fund and we have also seen a stable year for this reserve balance. This account remains in a balanced position.

Therefore, the total reserves following the 2023/24 financial year is a surplus position of £202,057. This is the strongest balance sheet position seen by the company since the start of trading in September 2015 and provides an excellent platform to build on. Hart Shaw have issued a clean audit report and continue to have confidence in the financial management of the company, moving forward as a going concern. We will continue to develop our diversity of revenue in the forthcoming year as we work in partnership with SCC to deliver a broader range of commissions for the sector.



SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PERFORMANCE

Learn Sheffield's [Independent Evaluation](#) included a review of school improvement performance. It was informed by the [Sheffield Performance Analysis 2023](#) and a series of Insight Reports into areas of interest ([SEND](#), [attendance](#) and [outcomes](#)).

The Sheffield Performance Analysis 2024 will be available (online via the Insights Hub) in January 2025, ahead of the AGM. It will include:

- Ofsted inspection judgments, benchmarking and trends
- Pupil characteristics and SEND
- Attendance
- Exclusions
- Attainment and progress

School Outcomes

Sheffield's Ofsted position has continued to improve and Sheffield finished the 2023/24 school year above national (% of all schools good or better) for the third consecutive year with another record high performance. Sheffield is now 1.6% points above national and also remains above both core cities and statistical neighbours.

% of ALL schools good or outstanding				
Area	30/09/21	30/09/22	30/09/23	30/09/24
Core cities	84.8	87.2	89.0	89.9
National	86.5	88.1	88.9	90.5
Sheffield	85.7	88.6	89.8	92.1
Stat. neighbours	82.3	84.9	86.0	87.9

At the end of last year, 92.1% of Sheffield settings were judged to be good or outstanding and this is the first time that this figure has been above 90%. This significant improvement (11.4% point improvement relative to national) has largely been driven by the primary sector, 96.2% of which are now good or better (4% points above national).

Pupil Outcomes

Whilst Ofsted outcomes for all Sheffield settings are above national, pupil outcomes at each key stage remain below national. The Sheffield Performance analysis 2023 document explored this data in detail. The 2024 analysis will be available shortly (once the final national data has been published for all phases) and we will use this in the AGM itself.

In Key Stage 4 both Attainment 8 (43.6 compared to 46.1) and Progress 8 (-0.16 compared to -0.03) continue to be below national. In Key Stage 2 the combined measure (reading, writing and maths at national standard) also continues to be below national (56% compared to 60%) with a widening gap from the previous year. In Early Years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development dropped slightly to 64.5% resulting in another widening gap to national (which was 67.7% in 2024).

SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN 2023/24

The developments identified below summarise some of the key work that has been undertaken by Learn Sheffield in its ninth year of operation. It is intended to provide a context to support shareholders in evaluating the performance of the organisation.

An additional document, called Learn Sheffield Future Shape, will also be produced to accompany the AGM papers and be read in conjunction with this Directors' Report. More information about this document can be found on [page 16](#).

School Improvement Commission

Learn Sheffield continued to deliver a School Improvement Commission from SCC in 2023/24. This was the first of two years delivering a reduced commission, as described in the last annual report, from September 2023 to August 2025.

The current commission covers four specific activities; SATs and phonics monitoring, statutory primary moderation, support for maintained school headteacher recruitment & speaking to inspectors at the Ofsted inspections of maintained schools.

The renewed strategic relationship between Sheffield City Council and Learn Sheffield has seen an expanded commission from September 2024, with some additional funding provided to support improvement in primary writing outcomes. We will report on this in the next annual report.



Subscription Update

2023/24 was the sixth year of the Learn Sheffield subscription model. As noted in the last annual report, the proportion of subscribing settings fell back slightly to 87.5%. This was in line with previous years (see below) and means that the proportion of settings who subscribe has ranged from 87.4-91.2% across the six years that the subscription has been in place.

More information about the 2023/24 subscription can be found here: <https://www.learnsheffield.co.uk/Subscriptions/Subscription-Offer/Subscription-Offer-2324>



	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Primary (inc. nursery)	88.3%	87.6%	87.9%	90.5%	89.1%
Secondary (inc. FE)	83.9%	81.8%	88.3%	90.6%	75.8%
Special	100%	100%	83.3%	100%	100%
OVERALL	88.3%	87.4%	87.9%	91.2%	87.5%

As in previous years, the 2024/25 subscription offer was developed in the spring term and offered to settings in May. We will report on this in more detail in the next annual report, but it will be more difficult to provide direct comparison as the offer has changed significantly. The new subscription offer is more flexible and supports settings to access the package of support that they need more precisely. We anticipate that, whilst the proportion of settings who buy a package will be similar, the income generated by the subscription will be less predictable than previously.

More information about the 2024/25 subscription can be found here: <https://www.learnsheffield.co.uk/Subscriptions/Subscription-Offer/>

Strategic Partnership with Sheffield City Council

The 2023/24 audited accounts will show that the proportion of Learn Sheffield's funding which came from Sheffield City Council (SCC) reached its lowest level since the organisation began. As noted in the last annual report, SCC funding accounted for almost 96% of Learn Sheffield income in 2015 but was less than 7% in 2024.

Previous annual reports have described the changes in the nature of the strategic partnership, including the Position Statement which accompanied the 2021/22 report. The funding relationship in 2023/24 was the consequence of these changes but does not describe the nature of the relationship in the period covered by this report.

The reset in the relationship between SCC and Learn Sheffield, which has been noted throughout this report, will ensure that our city can make the most of the opportunities that the Learn Sheffield vehicle provides. Significant new and additional commissions, including the commission relating to SEND, begin in September 2024 but were developed and agreed in 2023/24.

The financial impact, which will reverse the decline in the proportion of Learn Sheffield income derived from SCC funding, will be seen in the 2024/25 audited accounts and reported on in the 2024/25 annual report.

Key Projects

We reported on a wide range of projects in our last annual report. This included projects that were developed through commissions as well as others which were part of national pilots.

In 2023/24 Learn Sheffield made a small surplus whilst income and expenditure was over £3m for the first time. Around half of this income related to projects, rather than our traditional school improvement work, and this underlines the impact of Learn Sheffield as a vehicle for the city.

In addition to the four projects highlighted in the last annual report (Eat Smart Sheffield, Developing Healthy Attitudes, SAFE Taskforce & Educating for the Future), a number of other projects continued or commenced in 2023/24.

This included local partnerships to work on civic priorities, for example attendance or the pipeline of colleagues involved in governance in the city. More information about current projects can be found in the Projects section of the website.

Learn Sheffield Future Planning

Learn Sheffield Future Shape has been developed as an additional paper for the 2025 Learn Sheffield AGM. It should be read in conjunction with this annual report.

It provides an update on the way that the organisation has developed since the Independent Evaluation was published in February 2024, accompanying our last AGM.

This publication describes the learning from the evaluation and our response to its recommendations. It outlines the twelve themes that we are using to inform our future planning.

Learn Sheffield has sought to build on the strong foundations and culture described in the evaluation in the second half of 2023/24 to become the more sustainable and resilient organisation that will be required to meet the next stage of our evolution.

Learn Sheffield Future Shape also describes the reset civic role of Learn Sheffield and potential future shape of the organisation. It seeks to provide some horizon scanning for the next five years as Learn Sheffield approaches its tenth birthday in August 2025.





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**By Sheffield.
For Sheffield.
In Collaboration.**



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Learn Sheffield is a not for profit company limited by guarantee,
of which 80% is owned by schools and colleges and 20% by Sheffield City Council.