



CAT

Finance Handbook 2025

Introduction

This Finance Handbook sets out the financial policies, procedures, and delegated authorities that govern the operation of Cheshire Academies Trust (CAT) and its schools. Its purpose is to:

- Ensure that public funds are managed responsibly, transparently and in line with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH), the Trust's Funding Agreement, and statutory requirements.
- Provide a clear framework of roles, responsibilities and delegated authority for Trustees, Local Governing Bodies (LGBs), and all personnel with financial responsibilities.
- Support robust financial planning, control and risk management, helping the Trust to achieve value for money and deliver the best possible educational outcomes for pupils.
- Ensure that all staff involved in financial administration understand the processes and controls required to safeguard the Trust's resources and to prevent fraud, error or irregularity.

The handbook should be read alongside the Trust's Scheme of Delegation, Finance Framework, and relevant policies. It is designed to be a practical reference for those with financial responsibilities, ensuring that everyone works within a consistent and compliant financial framework. By following this handbook, CAT aims to demonstrate integrity, accountability and strong stewardship of public funds, supporting its vision of providing high-quality education across all academies.

Governance and Oversight

Cheshire Academies Trust (CAT) has a clear governance framework that complies with the Academy Trust Handbook. This ensures transparent decision-making, strong accountability and effective stewardship of public funds. Internal governance delegation structures are set out in CAT's Scheme of Delegation. The main financial responsibilities of the Trust are prescribed in CAT's Funding Agreement with the DfE. They are:

- ensuring that the General Annual Grant (GAG) is used only for the purposes intended;
- to receive and consider monthly management accounts and to consider information about financial performance at least six times per year;
- approval of a balanced annual budget;
- production and publication of an Annual Report and Accounts;
- to receive and consider 'Dear Accounting Officer' letters from the DfE
- appointment of the auditors;
- ensuring regularity, propriety and value for money in relation to the management of public funds.

CAT has '**Members**' who are guardians of the constitution. They are able to change the Articles if necessary, are responsible for ensuring the charitable object is fulfilled, have a strategic role in running the Academies and have control over the land and assets. The Members appoint and can remove Trustees. They are also responsible for appointing the Trust's Auditors and accepting the accounts at the Annual General Meeting. Members should ensure they remain informed about Trust business and must not be employees or occupy unpaid staff roles.

The '**Trustees**', known collectively as 'The Board', are company directors registered with Companies House. They are personally responsible for the actions of CAT and are accountable to the Members, the Secretary of State for Education and to the wider community for the quality of the education received by all pupils of the Academies and for the expenditure of public money. The Trustees are required to have systems in place through which they can assure themselves of the quality, safety and good practice of the affairs of CAT. Trustees have a responsibility to maintain the Trust as a going concern. According to the ATH the Trustees have three core functions:

- ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff
- overseeing and ensuring effective financial performance

The Trustees have delegated the following strategic financial responsibilities to **Local Governing Bodies (LGBs)**:

- Ensure that the LGB appoints a Finance Chair with appropriate financial expertise to provide effective oversight, contribute to financial assurance and engage with the governance role set out in the Financial Framework.
- Ensure all governors have the knowledge and skills to discharge their financial oversight responsibilities, with an expectation that governors participate in relevant CAT finance training.
- Scrutinise and recommend a balanced annual budget to the Trust Board, seeking assurance that spending decisions are sustainable and aligned to improvement priorities and outcomes. **In-year deficit budgets will only gain Board approval when accompanied by evidence of overspending linked to one-off investment of revenue reserves or a plan to operate the academy within the funds provided as soon as possible.**
- Seek assurance that budget-setting decisions reflect Strategic Quality Management (SQM) priorities and longer-term premises and IT development plans.
- Scrutinise and recommend a three-year financial forecast to the Trust Board, seeking assurance that the school remains financially viable. **Academies may not plan to operate revenue reserves of less than one month's average operating costs, less salary costs, across a three-year forecast budget.**
- Hold the Headteacher to account for financial decisions and ensure that resource allocation demonstrably supports pupil outcomes and school improvement.
- Hold the Headteacher to account for the delivery of the agreed budget.
- Receive and scrutinise termly pupil number projections, seeking assurance that these are realistic and underpin accurate budget planning. When numbers are forecast to reduce LGBs should scrutinise and challenge plans to address this.
- Maintain robust declarations of pecuniary interests for all governors and staff to ensure transparency and manage conflicts of interest.
- Scrutinise termly finance and business reports and hold the Headteacher to account for significant variances, ensuring that appropriate remedial action is in place.
- Provide assurance to the Trust Board that procurement, tendering, and asset disposals are conducted in line with CAT's policies and frameworks.
- Oversee the school's compliance with health and safety and site security responsibilities, seeking assurance that statutory duties are met and risks are appropriately managed.
- Monitor the implementation of audit recommendations and findings from internal and external assurance reviews, ensuring actions are completed within agreed timelines.

Executive Leadership

The Chief Executive Officer is also the **Accounting Officer (AO)**. In line with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH), this is a permanent, non-rotating appointment. The AO is an employee of the Trust and holds personal accountability to the Trustees for ensuring that CAT's financial management is lawful, transparent, and secures value for money. Specifically, the AO is responsible for:

- Regularity and propriety – ensuring that all income and expenditure comply with legislation, CAT's Funding Agreement, the ATH, and internal procedures, and that public money is spent only for its intended purposes.
- Prudent and economical administration – promoting efficient and effective use of resources, avoiding waste and extravagance.
- Value for money – securing the best possible educational and societal outcomes through sound financial management and effective stewardship of public funds.

As part of the Trustees' annual reporting obligations, the AO must complete and sign a Value for Money Statement, confirming how CAT has secured value for money. This statement must be submitted to the DfE by

31 December and published on the CAT website by 31 January, after which it is also made available on the DfE website.

The **Chief Finance and Operations Officer (CFOO)** is the Trust's formally appointed, appropriately qualified Chief Financial Officer, as required by the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH). The CFOO is accountable to the Accounting Officer (AO) and the Trust Board and provides strategic leadership and technical expertise across finance, operations, HR, and resource management. Specifically, the CFOO is responsible for:

- Ensure full compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) and all relevant statutory and regulatory frameworks.
- Provide advice and support to the AO in fulfilling their responsibilities for regularity, propriety, and value for money.
- Ensure the Trust meets all statutory and regulatory reporting requirements, including to DfE, HMRC, Companies House, Teachers' Pensions, and LGPS.
- Maintain robust financial governance systems, ensuring Trustees, Members, and Committees receive accurate, timely information.
- Lead on strategic resource management, ensuring resources are aligned to educational priorities and value for money principles.
- Develop and deliver the annual financial framework and the resource management training plan for key personnel.
- Lead on financial due diligence and modelling to support the Trust's growth and onboarding of new academies.
- Oversee benchmarking and financial analysis, supporting the AO with evidence-based decision-making.
- Establish, maintain, and operate robust accounting, payroll, HR, and budgetary systems for CAT.
- Oversee the budget-setting process, production of monthly management accounts, and preparation of annual statutory accounts.
- Exercise strategic oversight of the central budget and academy-level financial positions, monitoring in-year performance, reserves, and sustainability.
- Lead on cash flow forecasting, treasury management, and tax compliance, including VAT, PAYE, and NI.
- Maintain effective systems of internal control, ensuring compliance with financial policies and procedures.
- Lead the Trust's financial risk management process, including termly review and reporting of the Trust's risk register to the Board and LGBs.
- Respond to issues raised in the external audit management letter and internal scrutiny reports, ensuring actions are completed.
- Lead on the Trust-wide procurement strategy, ensuring compliance with the Finance Framework and that all tendering processes achieve value for money.
- Oversee all major contracts and commercial agreements, ensuring these support strategic priorities and efficiency.
- Manage and deploy the central finance, payroll and operations team, ensuring high performance and professional development.
- Participate in professional networks and sector groups to ensure best practice and continuous improvement.
- Provide regular reports and assurance to Members, Trustees, and Committees, in line with their Terms of Reference and the ATH.
- Represent CAT as an employer in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and ensure completion of all required returns.
- Ensure adequate insurance cover is in place for the Trust.

The **Governance Director** is responsible for ensuring the Trust and its academies maintain high standards of governance in line with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH). This role is central to supporting the Board, its Committees, and Local Governing Boards (LGBs) in exercising effective oversight and decision-making. The Governance Directors responsibilities include:

- Acting as the Trust's governance professional, ensuring compliance with company law, charity law and the ATH's governance requirements.

- Advising the Board and LGBs on governance, constitutional and procedural matters.
- Supporting the Board in ensuring its membership has the appropriate skills, experience, and training, including induction and ongoing development.
- Ensuring effective clerking services for the Trust Board, its Committees and LGBs, including the preparation of agendas, papers, and accurate minutes.
- Maintaining and updating the register of business and pecuniary interests for Members, Trustees, Governors, and relevant staff.
- Supporting the Board to ensure it meets its statutory and regulatory reporting requirements, including filings to Companies House and the DfE.
- Providing assurance to the Board that governance arrangements are effective, with appropriate structures, Terms of Reference, and schemes of delegation in place.
- Overseeing annual governance self-evaluations and skills audits, ensuring actions are followed up and improvements implemented.
- This role ensures that executive and non-executive governance structures operate in line with the ATH and that the Trust demonstrates transparency, accountability, and effective strategic leadership.

Financial Leadership

The **Headteacher** is responsible for the operational management of the school budget and resources, working within CAT's Financial Framework, the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) and the Scheme of Delegation. The Headteacher will:

- Work with the SBM to prepare a balanced annual budget and a three-year financial forecast, ensuring alignment with SQM priorities, and longer-term premises and IT development plans.
- Ensure financial sustainability by operating the school within its annually available funds and not less than one month's average operating costs, across a three-year forecast.
- Submit the draft budget and financial forecast to the LGB for scrutiny and recommendation to the Trust Board.
- Ensure the school operates within the agreed budget, and implement timely remedial action to address any variances.
- Ensure financial decisions demonstrably support pupil outcomes and school improvement, providing evidence of impact to the LGB.
- Provide accurate termly pupil number projections and prepare contingency plans when reductions in pupil numbers are forecast, ensuring these are endorsed by the LGB.
- Ensure the school operates in accordance with this Handbook, CAT's Financial Framework, Trust policies and delegated authority.
- Ensure compliance with health and safety and site security responsibilities, evidencing that statutory requirements are met and risks are effectively managed.
- Ensure that the SBM and relevant academy staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to discharge their financial responsibilities effectively, engaging with CAT training where appropriate.

Reporting to the CFOO, the **Trust Business Manager (TBM)** provides specialist support and oversight of resource management within their allocated academies. The TBM acts as a key link between the central team and individual academies, ensuring consistent application of CAT's financial framework and high standards of operational delivery. Their responsibilities include:

- Act as the primary point of contact for resource management within their nominated academies.
- Support academies in implementing and adhering to the annual CAT financial framework.
- Mentor and support School Business Managers (SBMs) to promote their professional development and wellbeing, in line with the Trust's people strategy.
- Support the CFOO in the delivery of the resource and operations SQM.
- Assist Headteachers and the CFOO in the appraisal, objective setting and development of SBMs.
- Guide SBMs in effective resource and operations management, including trading operations, capital projects and income generation opportunities.

- Quality-assure financial administration within nominated academies and providing timely support where issues or risks are identified.
- Leading weekly SBM network meetings, ensuring clear communication and dissemination of key messages between academies and the central team.
- Working with the CFOO to deliver resource management training for new academies and newly appointed staff.
- Identifying training and development needs for key personnel within nominated academies and delivering targeted support.
- Co-leading academy away days with the CFOO to support strategic planning and operational development.
- Supporting Headteachers and the CFOO with the recruitment and induction of SBMs.
- Providing technical and administrative financial support to both academies and the central Trust.
- Supporting the CFOO to monitor and evidence compliance with financial policies and procedures across the Trust.
- Maintaining collaborative relationships with central team colleagues and engaging in professional development to enhance knowledge and expertise.
- Delivering a responsive, solution-focused service to CAT academies and staff, reinforcing the Trust's commitment to high-quality support.

The **School Business Manager (SBM)** holds day-to-day responsibility for financial administration and internal controls within their academy. Working under the guidance and oversight of the Trust Business Manager (TBM), the SBM ensures compliance with CAT's financial policies and procedures and supports the Headteacher in the effective management of their schools' resources. Their responsibilities include:

- Operating internal control systems and financial transactions in full compliance with the CAT Finance Handbook, Financial Framework, Scheme of Delegation and relevant policies.
- Maintaining accurate and up-to-date financial records in line with Trust requirements and statutory obligations.
- Providing budget monitoring and outturn information in accordance with the framework, to support the Headteacher in financial decision-making.
- Preparing and submitting a termly finance and business report to governors.
- Adhering to the School Office Monthly Overview and Annual Finance Reporting Schedule to ensure timely reporting and compliance.
- Submitting monthly pay variations (e.g. supply, overtime) to the payroll officer.
- Maintaining accurate and current records in Civica HR, including payroll changes, sickness absence and other HR updates.
- Ensuring all ordering, invoicing, and authorisation processes comply with the CAT Finance Handbook and the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH).
- Actively working to minimise cash and banking income promptly and in full, with all receipts accurately recorded.
- Working with the Headteacher to prepare the three-year budget plan in line with the financial framework.
- Maintaining an accurate and up-to-date asset and contracts register, and ensuring inventories are independently verified annually.
- Recommending to governors the write-off or disposal of equipment, ensuring all disposals are fully documented, income is maximised, and records updated.
- Ensuring all financial transactions and associated returns are completed to agreed deadlines in line with the Monthly Overview and Annual Finance Reporting Schedule.
- Ensuring that all supporting documents for financial transactions are scanned and uploaded to Teams within set timescales with no reliance on paper records.

Delegated Financial Limits

Category	Delegated Authority / Requirements	Trust Board	CEO	CFOO	TBM	LGB	Headteacher	SBM
Liabilities & Write-offs	Board may approve within limits; DfE approval needed beyond	1% of total annual income or £45,000 (whichever is smaller) per transaction. - Cumulative annual limit: 5% of total annual income (max £250k)	£25,000	£25,000	£500	£10,000	£5,000	£25
Severance Payments	Legal justification; VFM; DfE approval for enhancements >£50k	Contractual, <£50,000 enhancement	Contractual, <£20,000 enhancement	Contractual	None	None	None	None
Compensation Payments	Based on legal advice and VFM; DfE approval >£50k	<£50,000	<£20,000	<£5,000	None	None	None	None
Asset Sales, Leases and Tenancy Agreements	SoS written approval approval for leases >5 yrs or disposals	Approval for leases >5 yrs or disposals	£100,000	£50,000		Approval for leases >5 yrs or disposals	£5,000	
Budget Virement	Changes to approved budgets	Unlimited	£100,000	£50,000	None	£10,000 – £100,000	£10,000	None
Journal Virement	Changes to account allocations	Unlimited	Unlimited	£100,000	£25,000	£50,000	£10,000	£2,000
Orders/Invoices	Approval for single purchase order or invoice	Unlimited	£500,000	£100,000	£50,000	£10,000 – £100,000	£10,000	£2,000
Charge Cards	Monthly card spend limit			Can adjust limits			£500/month	£500/month
Payroll	Maximum spend approval per role		Unlimited	Unlimited			£500	£100
Novel or Contentious Transactions		Require DfE approval						
Borrowing (Loans/Overdraft)		Require DfE approval						
Safe Cash Limits	Combined Cash & Cheque		£100					
Finance Leases	CAT can use supplier from DfE list		Approve within ATH					

Audit, Internal Scrutiny and Fraud Prevention

Members must appoint external auditors. The CFOO leads a tender process which allows the Board to recommend an audit firm to be appointed for three years, with renewal at the Member's discretion for up to a maximum of five years. Separate engagement letters are required for each service provided (e.g. year-end audit, Teachers' Pension audit). Their appointment may be reviewed at any time. Auditors must provide an opinion on whether:

- Financial statements comply with DfE reporting requirements;
- Proper accounting records have been maintained by CAT and its academies;
- Grants from the DfE and other bodies have been used for their intended purposes.

The Board will ensure there is ongoing monitoring of auditor performance to confirm effectiveness and independence. The Resources Committee, acting as CAT's Audit Committee, is responsible for ensuring an independent programme of internal scrutiny that reviews financial and non-financial controls, systems, transactions, and risks. Each year the Committee will:

- Review the key risks to internal control, including cyber security and the risk of cyber-enabled fraud.
- Approve an annual programme of work to address these risks and provide assurance to Trustees and external auditors.
- Decide who will deliver the programme, ensuring any external provider is independent of the external audit firm.

If the annual audit management letter identifies high-risk areas, an interim external audit will automatically be commissioned. Where no such risks are identified, the Committee will determine whether the programme is delivered internally or externally, taking into account:

- The annual management letter;
- Advice from the CEO and CFOO;
- Current risk analysis;
- Monthly management accounts;
- Representations from Local Governing Bodies (LGBs).

The CFOO is responsible for implementing recommendations from internal scrutiny reports. If concerns remain, the Committee may commission:

- A supplementary programme of work by the external auditors, or
- Additional peer review or investigation.
- The outcomes of the internal scrutiny programme must be reported in the year-end accounts.

The Accounting Officer (AO) has personal responsibility for **preventing fraud, theft and irregularity**. Trustees share this duty and must ensure robust internal controls to safeguard public funds. CAT recognises the growing risk of cyber-enabled fraud, such as phishing, invoice redirection and system breaches. Any suspected fraud will be addressed in line with the Fraud Policy. CAT must report to the DfE:

- All fraud or theft over £5,000, regardless of who is involved.
- Any unusual, novel, or systematic fraud, regardless of value.

Neither Cheshire Academies Trust or any of its schools will pay ransom demands received as a result of cyber fraud.

The DfE may undertake or commission its own investigation where required.

Procurement and Use of Credit Cards

Procurement Rules for CAT Schools

- All orders must be placed through **Planergy** which will ensure that all orders signpost to the Trust's terms and conditions and are approved within the agreed scheme of delegation
- Schools must be able to provide **relevant supporting documents** when required.
- In **emergencies** (e.g. urgent repairs), orders can be made using allocated credit cards
- Orders can only be used for school goods and services – not for private or external use.
- **Alcohol** must never be purchased using CAT/Academy funds (including PTA reimbursements).

Approval thresholds

Orders under £2,000 The SBM must check **Best Value** is achieved. Best Value can be shown by:

- Using pan-Trust purchasing deals.
- Bulk buying consumables.
- Negotiating discounts.
- Buying in sale periods.
- Getting alternative quotes where possible.

Orders £2,000 – £10,000

- Headteacher must ensure at least **2 quotes** are obtained (preferably 3).
- If the **lowest quote is used**, Headteacher approves and school retains evidence of quotes
- If the **lowest quote is not chosen**, the **LGB must approve** and record reasons in minutes

Orders £10,000 – £50,000

- At least **3 quotes** required.
- **LGB approval needed** before order is raised.
- Quotes and LGB approval minutes must be retained for audit files.
- If lowest quote not chosen, reasons must be recorded in LGB minutes.

Orders over £50,000

- Must follow the **tendering policy**.

Orders over £100,000

- Must be approved by the **Resources Committee**

Public Procurement Act (2023)

The tendering policy sets out how the Trust is compliant with the Public Procurement Act.

Novel and/or contentious transactions

Situations may arise where it may appear to CAT to make sense to enter into a transaction which is irregular, improper or does not provide value for money. In these circumstances CAT must seek prior, written permission from the DFE. Such transactions may additionally require HM Treasury approval dependent on the nature of the transaction involved.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are administered by the central team. They are issued to staff in the following roles at the request of the Headteacher: Headteacher, the School Business Manager, the Site Maintenance Officer, Catering Manager, Nursery Manager and Extended Schools Manager.

All charge cards are issued with a maximum spend limit of £500 per month. Charge cards are for emergency use or use when raising a purchase order is not a viable option (e.g. a purchase on a school visit). They should not be used as a way of circumnavigating the Trust's purchasing procedures set out in this document.

Card holders are responsible for ensuring all purchases are properly authorised, where possible in advance of the purchase being made. They must also provide a receipt for all transactions. Access to charge cards will be removed or restricted if holders are unable to fulfil these requirements.

The central team has the ability to lower or raise charge card limits. Requests for temporary changes to any card holders limit should be emailed to the Trust Business Manager by the Headteacher or SBM, setting out the required limit, timeframe and reason for the change, along with their approval.

Budgeting and Accounting Systems

Budgeting & Forecasting System – IMP

IMP is the Trust's chosen system for budgeting and forecasting and is a key tool for ensuring compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook. The CFOO is responsible for ensuring that Trust-wide financial data is accurate, maintained, and that financial updates are applied promptly. At school level, School Business Managers are responsible for maintaining accurate staffing information and forecasting updates in line with the timetable set out in the School Office Overview.

IMP underpins the production of management accounts for the Board and reporting packs for school leaders and Local Governing Bodies, providing assurance over financial performance, sustainability, and value for money. To meet the ATH requirement for robust financial planning and oversight, school-level data must be maintained in a timely and accurate manner. Failure to do so places the reliability of reports at risk and may result in inaccurate information being presented to decision-makers. Where schools cannot meet the required maintenance deadlines, the Trust reserves the right to withdraw financial control, ensuring that reporting to the Board and DfE remains accurate, transparent, and compliant with statutory expectations.

Accounting System – Xero for Education

Xero is the Trusts chosen accounting system. Access is limited to the central team with SBMs having limited access to school level data via the XfE app. The CFOO is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all financial transactions across the Trust must be processed through the approved accounting system to ensure accuracy, transparency, and compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook.

The system provides a complete and up-to-date record of income, expenditure, assets, and liabilities, and is the single point of entry for all financial data. Access is restricted and controlled through user permissions, ensuring segregation of duties and safeguarding against error or fraud. All transactions must be supported by appropriate documentation, authorised in line with the Scheme of Delegation, and uploaded to the system to maintain a clear audit trail. Regular reconciliations, monitoring, and reporting are carried out through the system to support effective financial management, financial control, and decision-making at school and Trust level.

Reserves and Financial Sustainability

It is important that school funds are spend sustainably in achieving the best possible outcomes for children. The DfE expects MATS to use their allocated funding for the full benefit of their current pupils. Academies are not permitted to operate in a deficit. However, it is important that if schools have reserves, they have a clear plan for how they will be used to benefit their pupils.

The DfE will verify unspent funds when it checks the Trust's accounts and highlight and report, to the relevant DfE Boards, any cases where it has serious concerns about a long-term substantial surplus with no clear plans for use. CAT's policy is to maintain total reserves no lower than 10% or greater than 20% of annual revenue.

To enable this, in-year deficit budgets will only gain Board approval when accompanied by evidence linked to one-off investment of revenue reserves or a plan to operate the academy within the funds provided as soon as possible. Operational deficits are not permitted. Schools must plan to operate revenue reserves at no less than one month's average operating costs, less salary costs, across a three-year forecast budget.

CAT's reserves policy details how the central Trust and academies should treat reserves from GAG and other funds.

Bank Accounts, Cash and Payments to Individuals

CAT operates one central bank account that is linked directly to its accounting system. Schools are required to operate this bank account only and may not operate supplementary bank accounts such as school funds.

CAT does not pool school funding. All schools retain their own funds that are separately accounted for and reported via the Trusts accounting system.

Schools must operate on a cashless basis, unless expressly agreed with the CFOO. Cash left on the premises must be kept in a locked safe or secure cabinet. Cash holdings must not exceed £100 unless prior approval has been granted by the CFOO (e.g. after fundraising events). Losses from theft must be reported promptly to the Police, Headteacher, CFOO, and LGB. All payments banked shall be by means of an official bank paying-in book, separately identifying cash and cheques.

CAT operates an in-house payroll function that ensures all payments to individuals are subject to tax and national insurance deductions, where appropriate. In order to achieve this, the following guidelines should be followed:

Travel and expense claims are processed and paid via the payroll system only, in line with the agreed travel policy. Expenses may be paid to Trustees/Governors as detailed in the CAT Trustee & Governors Allowance Policy.

Annual Trust Investment

The Trust provides a Core Services package to its schools. The cost of these services and any other central costs are recouped via an Annual Trust Investment (ATI) from each school. This is a shared annual investment that every school makes in order to unlock the full potential of the Trust. Through this joint commitment, each school secures expert support in school improvement, safeguarding, professional learning, finance, payroll and pensions, HR and legal advice, governance guidance and health-and-safety compliance.

The investment is calculated through a transparent per-pupil rate, so every school contributes equitably and can plan confidently. By investing our resources into central services, we create the capacity to:

- Accelerate unique school improvement.
- Strengthen collective efficacy.
- Invest together for everyone's future.

Through this annual investment, we sustain a virtuous cycle of support and improvement: stronger central services empower better schools; better schools create stronger outcomes; stronger outcomes reinforce the collective strength of the Trust.

Assets and Depreciation

The Local Governing Body (LGB) is responsible for maintaining proper security for all buildings, assets, equipment, and stock under its control. In reality the day-to-day responsibility of assets is delegated to the Headteacher, supported by the SBM. Each school must maintain an asset register, in the format supplied by the Trust, which records all land, buildings, plant, machinery, vehicles, furniture, fittings and equipment with a value above the following de-minimis levels:

Asset Type	De-minimis Value
Land and Buildings	£5,000
Vehicles, Plant & Machinery, Other Equipment	£3,000
Furniture & Fittings	£500
IT Equipment	£250

The Headteacher may dispose of items valued under £500, informing governors at the next meeting. Items above £500 (including lost or stolen items) require written approval or acknowledgement by governors. All disposal proceeds must be credited to the school budget and must seek to achieve best value, through:

- Reasonable advertising of the asset.
- Inviting bids (including online platforms such as eBay).
- Negotiating with potential purchasers.

Non-current assets are depreciated to reflect their recoverable amount over their useful life. Depreciation is calculated monthly by the CFOO and reported in management accounts.

Asset Group	Depreciation Method
Leasehold Land	0.8% (125 yrs) straight line
Buildings (inc. modifications and additions)	2.0% (50 yrs) straight line
Plant & Machinery	20% (5 yrs) straight line, nil residual
Furniture & Equipment	10% (10 yrs) straight line, nil residual
Computer Equipment & Software	25% (4 yrs) straight line, nil residual
Motor Vehicles / Minibuses	20% (5 yrs) straight line, nil residual
Assets Under Construction	Not depreciated until in use

The Trust undertakes an annual, on-site review of assets at each school, reporting the outcome to leaders and governors.

Insurance

The CFOO is responsible for enrolling CAT schools in the DfE's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) and the Hyman Roberts Ill Health Insurance Scheme (for LGPS staff). The Trust also purchases business use insurance for all staff travelling on Trust business who meet insurance requirements.

The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring all other necessary insurance is in place including, absence/maternity, vehicle insurance or other areas not covered by the RPA. Schools may choose to offset the

cost of staff absence instead of entering into an insurance policy. This decision should be regularly risk assessed and appropriate funding ring-fenced within the budget.

School Charges and Lettings

CAT is committed to the principles and ethos of free education, but recognise the value of enrichment activities such as visits, residentials, and clubs. These will be promoted where possible as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. CAT schools will make charges for these as follows:

- Residential activities during school hours: A charge may be made for board and lodging only.
- Activities outside normal school hours: Charges may be made unless the activity is part of a public examination syllabus, National Curriculum, or religious education requirement (though board and lodging can still be charged).
- Materials/ingredients: A charge may be made if parents wish to own the finished product (e.g. in Cooking or Design Technology).

Charges will only cover the actual cost per pupil and may include travel, board/lodging, materials, entrance fees, insurance, and non-teaching staff costs.

The LGB will cover the cost of board and lodging for residential activities if parents receive Pupil Premium, Income Support, or Universal Credit, where the activity takes place during normal school hours or is part of the curriculum or a public examination syllabus. Other remissions are at the discretion of the LGB. LGBs can invite parents to make voluntary contributions for activities. Pupils will not be treated differently if contributions are not made.

Schools may choose to charge parents if their child deliberately breaks or damages school property.

Governors may approve the letting of school premises. All lettings should be entered into in writing and a charge, which includes a reasonable amount for caretaking and energy costs must be applied. School premises may not be let at a cost to the school. Consideration must be given to effective security arrangements and the Letting must provide public liability insurance with a minimum cover of £5m. Lettings must be reviewed on a regular basis by the governing body.

Purchase of Gifts & Alcohol

All expenditure incurred by schools must be for the purpose of advancing the education of the pupils. Gifts including congratulations or get well soon flowers, Christmas gifts or leaving presents are deemed examples of inappropriate expenditure. **Alcohol may not be purchased with Trust funds for any reason whatsoever.** This includes alcohol purchases to be reimbursed by PTA or other groups.

Related Policies & Documents

The following policies and documents must be adhered to by all individuals with financial responsibilities:

CAT Trustees and Governors Expenses Policy
CAT Tendering Policy
CAT Anti-Fraud Policy & Procedure
CAT Charging & Remissions Policy
CAT Travel & Subsistence Policy
CAT Reserves Policy
CAT Whistleblowing Policy
CAT Fixed Asset Policy
CAT Gifts & Hospitality Policy
CAT Bad Debt Policy
CAT Scheme of Delegation

CAT Financial Framework
CAT School Office Overview
CAT Best Value Statement for Local Governing Bodies