

1. Background

Big Life Schools Multi Academy Trust have two primary schools Longsight Community Primary and Unity Community Primary – both in Manchester, England. Longsight is a single form entry school attached to a Children’s Centre and nursery provision. It opened in 2013. Unity is a two-form entry school with an integrated nursery provision and community facilities. It opened in 2015.

2. Pupil numbers

The tables below indicate number of pupils on roll: 523 (Unity 315, Longsight 213). Longsight were over the total pupil number allocations and Unity, who are still growing, had 20 fewer pupils than they could support across all year groups. Unity experienced their first two form classes in Year 3 with three more years of a two-form reception required to ensure that we reach closer to the 420 capacity.

Table one: Longsight pupil numbers 2021-2

	Autumn 2021		
	Actual	Capacity	Difference
Reception	31	30	1
Year one	30	30	0
Year two	29	30	-1
Year three	30	30	0
Year four	31	30	1
Year five	32	30	2
Year six	30	30	0
TOTAL	213	210	3

Table two: Unity pupil numbers 2021-2

	Autumn 2021		
	Actual	Capacity	Difference
Reception	51	60	-9
Year one	51	60	-9
Year two	55	60	-5
Year three	61	60	1
Year four	32	30	2
Year five	30	30	0
Year six	30	30	0
TOTAL	310	330	-20

Unity Nursery continued to experience a reduction in demand for childcare, which is still feeling the effects of the pandemic and the increase in parents adopting agile working practices. Additionally, we continue to face the challenge of local authority school led nursery providers offering 30 hours free childcare when Unity and other private providers are only funded for 15 hours. We have recently been informed that another local private day care is planning to close, which may increase the demand for our provision in 2022-23.

3. Transience

We were hoping to see transience figures steadily decrease in Unity, following a similar pattern to Longsight as they grew to capacity. However, this wasn't our experience this year. Unity experienced 35.8% transience across the whole school, which is the highest figure since 2018-19 and almost 8% above last years. The impact is spread across the school with all classes experiencing at least 30% transience levels with Year 5 experiencing 62.5% during the year, compared with a national mobility figure of 14%.

Longsight experienced a brief spike in transience at the start of the year with 10 movements in the first term representing 4.7%. Movements are becoming less common in Longsight, but both schools continue to experience leavers, mainly due to moving house or moving out of the local authority area.

4. Demographics

Both schools remain diverse and reflect the communities where they are located. Both are in wards which experience high levels of deprivation. Unity is in Cheetham Hill, which sits in the top 1% of deprived wards nationally, and Longsight in the top 11%. There are also many families who identify as having English as an additional language (EAL) with over 80% of families across both schools identify as having EAL compared with 44% across Manchester and 21% nationally. Among our family population the largest ethnic groups in Longsight are Pakistani (46.2%) and Bangladeshi (24.1%). Asian Pakistani is the largest ethnic group at Unity school and Nursery, with many Arab speaking families (20% and 9%).

	Unity Community Primary	Unity Nursery	Longsight Community Primary
	Proportion of cohort (%)	Proportion of cohort (%)	Proportion of cohort (%)
English as an additional language	85	87	84.9
Afghan	3.6	N/A	1.4
Arab	20	9	3.3
Asian: Indian	5.5	7	N/A
Asian: Pakistani	24.6	30	46.2
Bangladeshi	N/A	N/A	24.1
Black African	7.4	19	1.9
Black: Carribean	1.6	N/A	0.9
Black: Somali	N/A	N/A	3.3
Indian	N/A	N/A	2.4
Kurdish	5.8	4	N/A
Latin/Central/South American	1.3	1	N/A
White European – Italian, Romanian, Polish, Macedonian, Russian, Turkish	8.1	4	0.5
Roma	1.3	1	N/A
White British	3.6	9	1.9
White/Asian	2.9	1	N/A
White/Black African-Caribbean	4.9	N/A	N/A
Any other mixed background	4.2	9	0.5
Any other ethnicity – Bangladeshi, Chinese, Iranian, Iraqi, Korean, Malay, Kashmiri Pakistani, Mirpuri Pakistani, Nepali	5.5	3	13.7

A symptom of deprivation experienced by our families is the scale of eligibility for Free School Meals. At Longsight this was 33% of all families and Unity it was 36%. This compares to 41% across Manchester and 23% nationally. Unfortunately, these figures are increasing each year for both schools and are likely to be much higher at Unity as the new guidance includes an extension of FSM entitlement to International New Arrivals, which was previously ineligible.

We receive additional funding (Pupil Premium Funding) to support educational outcomes for children eligible for Free School Meals and each school has a specific plan detailing how this funding is to be spent during the year. This year the figures increased across schools from £66k to £79k in Longsight, and £97k to £134k in Unity. Unity's funding is expected to increase each year as they continue to grow, but the trend in Longsight is also on the increase.

The increase in funding at Unity was invested in additional teaching and support staff, creating a nurture provision for children who required more one to one support whilst retaining their connection in their mainstream classes. All funding was utilised in year.

5. Behaviour, attendance, wellbeing (Special Education Needs and Disabilities), safeguarding, accidents and incidents

Both schools are UNICEF Rights Respecting schools securing gold accreditation which is the highest level. This remains a golden thread across both schools ensuring children learn about rights by embedding it in all aspects of the school delivery, promoting and modelling rights respecting language, attitudes, and developing pupils to be ambassadors for the rights of others.

Linking into this is our approach to behaviour management across schools. Our new policy, Positive Behaviour and Relationships, incorporated rights and introduced zones of regulation across both schools. During the year Unity experience a spike in concerns with behaviours during key transition times. The school reviewed their approach and implemented a similar reward scheme to Longsight, which had an immediate positive impact on behaviours, escalation, and staff confidence in dealing with issues effectively. Next year behaviour incidents will be reported and monitored against new Key Performance Indicators to ensure close monitoring of the effectiveness of the system.

There were no permanent exclusions.

Attendance at both schools continued to be impacted by Covid illness and we have seen an increasing number of seasonal viruses such as flu and norovirus. We have also experienced an increase in term time holidays, which represented the largest impact on attendance across both schools excluding illness. Holidays taken during school term time also impacted on Persistent Absence figures, especially where families were delayed travelling back due to flight disruptions. Persistent absence figures this year were 23% across both schools.

The table below shows the comparison with local and national absence data, indicating attendance figures are slightly worse than the local and national picture, while persistent absence is above national average, but below Manchester's average, for both schools.

	Longsight	Unity	Manchester	National
Attendance	92.85%	92.8%	93.65%	93.8%
Persistent Absence	23.32%	23.13%	29.05%	18.3%

Both schools are experiencing an increase in children presenting with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). This is particularly the case at Unity Community Primary, where the school experienced an increase in children with an Early Help Care Plan (EHCP), from 6 at the start of the academic year, a further 9 applications submitted by May, and a further 6 children identified as concerns and pending applications, by the end of the year.

Of the six children identified as SEND at the start of the year, three were requiring special education needs provision, however the lack of availability of spaces locally resulted in the children remaining in Unity school until a space becomes available. The impact of this for the children, staffing and resources remains a challenge as the funding does not cover the costs of the one-to-one support required.

The increasing need is being experienced across the city. For the first time since opening at Unity we now have more children as a percentage of the school population with SEND support needs than the local authority.

This is likely to continue to increase, due to the number of children already identified as a concern with several applications for EHCPs in progress. We are in the process of recruiting a specific SEND teacher who will support and co-ordinate provision across both schools in the coming year, preparing and submitting applications for EHCPs.

Additionally, both schools and nursery support children who are in the care of the local authority (Looked After Children, LAC), on a Child Protection Plan (CP) with intervention from Children's Social Services or identified as a Child In Need (CIN). We also support children and families by developing Early Help Assessments (EHAs) with parents to help them access services facilitated by Family Support Workers.

The table below details these numbers experienced across both schools this year with a significant reduction in LAC at Unity due to children moving out of the area and transitioning to high school.

	Longsight Community Primary	Unity Community Primary	Total
Looked After Children	0	1	1
Child Protection	0	1	1
Child in Need	1	2	3
EHA	2	4	6

We use CPOMs to record all safeguarding concerns relating to children in our care. The schools both have trained Designated Safeguarding Leads and are supported by the group Safeguarding Lead. Safeguarding is monitored at different levels across the trust. Schools Designated Safeguarding leads deal with all concerns and incidents liaising with the relevant agencies and families as required, identifying a range of actions or interventions to support and address issues from escalating.

Governing committees receive regular reports on safeguarding concerns and incidents with a link governor in both schools who will visit and check on safeguarding compliance and practice, including a review of self-assessment Section 175 audits that are completed and submitted to the Local Authority annually.

Accidents and incidents

There was one accident at Unity Community Primary this year (which involved a staff member being hit on the head by a ball) and 177 minor bumps and grazes. This is in line with previous years reports. There was one Serious Incident Requiring Investigation (SIRI) at Unity this year, following an intoxicated parent who had a restraining order entering the school. The SIRI was undertaken by the schools Director and reviewed by the group Quality Committee. Following this incident new procedures were adopted to improve management of entrances during school opening and closing times. There were six other incidents which included an unknown person joining a class zoom, and a neighbour shouting abuse at parents. Appropriate action was taken, including a report to the police.

A further notable incident occurred in Unity Nursery. Operational arrangements for collection of children result in a gate leading into the car park remaining open for parents to walk into the play area to collect their child. Staff were instructed to only let children into the play area supervised one to one during this period. A member of staff had supervised a child into the play area but got distracted by a family who reside opposite, shouting to them to mention how well their child was doing who used to attend the nursery. The employee let go of the child's hand they were supervision who subsequently made their way into the staff car park area unsupervised for almost a minute, before realising and chasing after the child bringing them back in to the play area and closing the gate. An investigation concluded that the operational practice was not fit for purpose and was open to incidents such as this. The

practice was changed ensuring that parents are met at the gate and staff bring children out at pick up times. The employee was subsequently disciplined.

There were no incidents at Longsight.

6. Education

National assessments were revisited this year, the first since 2019. Key headline data nationally indicates that national outcomes showed a downward trend except in Reading, which increased by 1%. Comparing these national trends for KS2 was only possible with Longsight, as Unity didn't have any national assessments in 2019. Longsight experienced similar trends compared with national KS2 data in writing but further decreases in Maths and combined demonstrating the impact on our pupils.

End of Year Outcomes 2022

	Early Years Foundation Stage			
	Longsight	Unity	Manchester	National
Good level of development	57%	30%	53.1%	65%
Prime early learning goals	73.3%	32.7%	62.2%	74%
Specific learning goals	26.7%	27.3%	51.4%	65%

	Key Stage One			
	Longsight	Unity	Manchester	National
Year One phonics	60%	60%	68.4%	75%
Reading	50%	44.9%	58.5%	67%
Writing	50%	34.7%	48.5	58%
Maths	50%	65.3%	59.8%	68%
Phonics re-check	68%	68%		

	Key Stage Two			
	Longsight	Unity	Manchester	National
Reading	56.7%	54.8%	69.4%	76%
Writing	54.3%	48.4%	59.2%	70%
Maths	50%	54.8%	66.7%	73%
R/W/M combined	40%	38.7%	51.3%	59%

Early Years Foundation stage outcomes indicate Longsight were above Manchester in both Good Level of Development and Prime Early Learning Goals, but behind on specific learning goals. Unity performance figures are below in all areas. A new EYFS framework was introduced in September 2021, which required pupils to achieve higher points in all areas to be identified as making Good Level of Development (GLD). The impact of the pandemic is widely understood nationally to have led to a decline in outcomes and internal data indicates that both schools improved on performance from 2021.

Unity GLD levels were lower than any previous year. There were several additional factors contributing towards this. All children commencing reception this year were 0% progress on baseline assessed measures taken. These children were so far behind the expected levels at the start of the year, that it wasn't until term three that GLD figures started to increase.

Additionally, there was a high transience rate of 40% across the class throughout the year. Seven (13%) of children who were on track to achieve GLD, left reception classes towards the end of the year. This would have increased overall GLD to 44%. Almost 50% of pupils were summer born, which is an indicator for delayed progress in early years; in addition, there were a high number of children (35%) identified with Special Education Needs (SEN), compared to 14% in Manchester and 13% nationally. To address this, the EYFS curriculum will continue to be delivered to pupils in Y1 next year to support them to narrow the gap in education attainment and progress in future years.

We continued to invest in the development of the Big Life Curriculum, with a dedicated postholder working with senior leaders in both schools standardising 'Statements of Intent' for History and Geography, Art and DT, and delivering them for the first time. We will continue to refine these over the course of the next academic year, with an additional focus on developing RE and PSHE units, linked to the healthy school's framework in Manchester.

Our desire to grow as a Trust will require the Trust to develop an improvement strategy which will include key components of Teaching and Learning, in addition to the growth targets agreed with Trustees. This process will commence in the new academic year engaging with senior leaders across the trust to define the success criteria, gap analysis and identification of specific resources to support various growth scenarios.

7. Community

We continue to secure funding from the Local Authority, which enabled us to deliver for the first time a Christmas play scheme, an Easter and Summer provision across both schools. Access remains limited to children and families eligible for Free School Meals with flexibility applied at the discretion of the provider.

Play scheme attendance

	Longsight Community Primary	Unity Community Primary
Christmas	14	27
Easter	34	31
Summer	41	31

Breakfast and afterschool provision continues to be available at both schools, returning to pre-pandemic service and prioritising pupils eligible for pupil premium.

8. Capital improvements

We have commenced engagement with the Local Authority via Mcr Active, who have developed a partnership bid with the Football Association, identifying investment in specific wards of Manchester to develop sports fields to accommodate and open free of charge to the public. Our Unity School site has been put forward with a bidding process to take place in 2022. If successful, this may see the development of Unity playing fields to make them more fit for purpose for children in the school and the local community.

Additionally, we have met with the Department for Transport who are exploring pilot schemes where community assets and buildings could be used to store electric scooters that could be offered, initially free, to local families, encouraging them to access work or training. No firm plans have been established, but they will consider our sites for potential hubs in the community.

Unity have identified additional small capital improvements to nursery play areas for the academic year 2022/23. Given recent investment in Longsight's play area there are no plans for capital improvements soon.

9. Budget

This academic year would have seen the trust revert to a lagged census budget for Unity Community Primary. Because we haven't been able to grow as quickly as we would like this would have resulted in the Trust receiving approximately £100k less income for pupils that

were on roll. As such we submitted a business case to the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) requesting we remain on estimated pupil numbers for in year funding. This was approved with the recommendation that we engage with a School Resource Management Audit (SRMA, see below).

Management accounts for the year were in line with planned budget forecasts, with the Trust reporting in year losses of £59k. We have modelled the financial position of the Trust over a three-year period, which recognises the need to grow to sustain our existing central team costs in addition to demonstrating our influence and impact.

Within our budget setting process, we are required to seek approval from the ESFA any related party transactions over £20,000. We currently have an RPT with our sponsor, The Big Life Company. This contract has been in place since the inception of the Trust and provides the Trust with an at cost service to provide essential back-office functions including HR, payroll, finance, marketing and communications, health and safety and legal advice. The value of this is currently £134k.

We had been engaging with the ESFA regarding previous years submissions where it was agreed we would seek quotes for specific services and benchmark the remaining areas to ensure that we were continuing to receive value for money. The SLA in place has received feedback from the ESFA and the SRMA confirming value for money, however we were not compliant with the process determined in the ATH.

As such, the ESFA have recently written to us issuing a warning letter with several actions for the Trust to consider and respond to.

10. Audit and Compliance

We have undertaken several internal and external audits this year including: a School Resource Management Audit (SRMA) with the Education Skills Funding Agency, Cyber Security and a Governance Audit with Red Rambler.

Following the SRMA audit the Trust was provided with a list of areas to consider including elements where it was identified we were not complying with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) and our funding agreement.

This report identified 23 actions. Funding agreements have been updated by our legal team and approved by the ESFA. An action plan to address the actions raised has been progressing with 20 actions completed, demonstrating excellent progress. There are two main actions remaining: ensuring the finance handbook is separated from the BLC policy and ensuring that we present statutory accounts to the AGM.

The Red Rambler audit identified several cyber security actions which will be progressed this year ultimately securing cyber essentials accreditation. We have created a schedule of internal audits and commissioned Red Rambler to audit our website and risk management in the year ahead.

11. Growth

This year we submitted a Free School bid for a new single form primary school in Manchester. Unfortunately, we were not successful, with feedback from the Local Authority that the DFE were favouring a larger local Manchester MAT to take over this provision.

A Trustee strategy session was held to explore various options for growth, and Trustees agreed to pursue growth by exploring mergers with similar or smaller sized Trusts and conversions of existing Local Authority schools. We commissioned The Place Group to complete a desktop exercise identifying the potential list of Trusts and schools for us to approach and we have been developing our website content to promote the MAT offer to potential schools.

We will continue to explore growth with the aim of achieving one conversion next academic year and not growing to a large size to ensure that we can maintain our local influence.

12. Governance

This year Big Life Schools updated its Articles of Association to reflect changes in the Academies Trust Handbook and the latest model rules and these were adopted by resolution of the members on 22.12.22. The Trust also updated the Funding Agreements for both schools with the ESFA.

The MAT board met four times in the year, and the local governing committees' bodies (which are advisory committees) also met four times. The MAT previously worked with the Big Life Group sub-committees Audit and Risk and Quality committee. The Chair of the MAT attended the Big Life Group Board and two trustees chair the local governing committees.

Recent audits identified the Trust is required to have its own Finance, Risk and Audit committee. This was created in May 2022 and has met twice this year. It is chaired by a Trustee and was attended by another trustee. Another Trustee will be appointed in the new academic year to bring the total number of Trustees to three.

Attendance

Finance, Risk and Audit Committee

- Andrea Heffernan: Committee Chair 2/2
- Fay Selvan: Trustee and Accountable Officer 2/2

AGM roles and attendance

- Matt Wallis 1/1
- Liam McDaid 1/1
- Tayyaba Butt 1/1
- Edna Robinson: Big Life Chair and Member 1/1
- Nazia Parveen 0/1 (apologies due to sickness)

MAT Trustees' roles and attendance

Karina Carter: Chair	4/4	Stepped down 21 July 22
Andrea Heffernan: Risk and Audit Committee Chair	4/4	
Sandie Hayes: Safeguarding Lead	3/4	Stepped down 31 March 22
Emma Perry: LCP Chair	3/4	Appointed Chair 21 July 22
Fay Selvan: Accountable officer, interim UCP Chair	4/4	
Lisa Brookes: Secondary Education	3/4	
Phil Trohear: Primary Education	4/4	
Liam McDaid	0/0	Appointed 21 July 22
Colin Ralph	0/0	Appointed 12 May 22
Annette Joseph	0/0	Appointed 21 July 22
Sandra Sinclair	0/0	Appointed 21 July 22

Meetings continued to be hosted remotely, with governors' visits continuing as a mixture of online and in person.