

Big Life Schools annual report: 2023-2024

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. Longsight were over the total pupil number allocations and Unity, who are still growing, had 31 vacancies spread across all year groups. Unity is still a growing school with their first two form classes in years 5 and 6 to be experienced in the 23-24 and 24-25 academic years.

In 2023, for the first time since opening, Longsight had less pupils confirmed for reception places, than places available. This is a similar experience across all primary schools in Longsight and we believe it to reflect a temporary drop in birth rate. UCP had the highest number of confirmed reception places ahead of the school year, showing an improving trend.

Unity Nursery occupancy has started to increase to levels we were hoping before the pandemic. The setting continues to be impacted by 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.

Table one: Longsight pupil numbers (3 year period)

	Pupil Numbers			
	Capacity	21-22	22-23	23-24
Reception	30	31	29	29
Year one	30	30	29	30
Year two	30	29	31	30
Year three	30	30	30	30
Year four	30	31	31	30
Year five	30	32	30	31

Year six	30	30	31	31
TOTAL	210	213	211	211

Table two: Unity pupil numbers (3-year period)

	Pupil Numbers			
	Capacity	21-22	22-23	23-24
Reception	60	51	44	53
Year one	60	51	49	50
Year two	60	55	58	55
Year three	60	61	53	62
Year four	30 in 21-22 60 in 22-23	32	58	58
Year five	30	30	34	58
Year six	30	30	33	32
TOTAL	330 in 21-22 360 in 22-23	310	329	367

3. Transience

	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24
Longsight	10%	16%	13%	13.8%
Unity	30%	36%	30%	33.8%

The table above demonstrates the ongoing impact to schools and pupils due to pupils moving to another school or joining our school mid-year. Trends over the four-year period are consistent, with Longsight experiencing almost the same number of pupils moving to a new school as those joining. This is the same split across at Unity with the same number of pupils leaving as those joining.

Most, if not all, leavers are due to a change in family circumstances. National mobility figures are averaging 14%.

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 (47.9%) and Bangladeshi (22.5%) largely unchanged year on year. Asian Pakistani (29.4%) is the largest ethnic group at Unity school and Nursery, with many Arab speaking families (19.1%). We are starting to see an increase in Black African families moving from the nursery to the school whereas some of these families were previously choosing to select a faith-based school.

	Unity Community Primary	Unity Nursery	Longsight Community Primary
	Proportion of cohort (%)	Proportion of cohort (%)	Proportion of cohort (%)
English as an additional language	80	78.4	77.3
Free School Meal (FSM)	43		40.3
Afghan	3.8	7.5	1.9
Arab	21.7	16.4+2.5	1.4
Asian: Indian	4.3	5	
Asian: Pakistani	20.6	24	56.3
Bangladeshi			22.3
Black African	4.3	11.4	1.4
Black: Caribbean	0.8		1.4
Black: Somali			0.9
Indian			1.9
Kurdish	3.2	3.7	
White European – Italian, Romanian, Polish, Macedonian, Russian, Turkish	5.7	2.5	0.5
White British	4.3	8.9	2.4
White/Asian	2.7	1.2	1.4
White/Black African-Caribbean	4.3	4	1

Any other mixed background		7.6	
Any other ethnicity – Bangladeshi, Chinese, Iranian, Iraqi, Korean, Malay, Kashmiri Pakistani, Mirpuri Pakistani, Nepali, Roma, Black Other, Asian other	22.71	3.7	5.1

A measure of deprivation experienced by our families is a pupil's eligibility for Free School Meals. At Longsight we have experienced an increase from 33% to 40%. This is the equivalent of 14 additional pupils. At Unity there is a similar increase from 36.4% to 43%, representing 157 pupils.

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. Longsight received £110k a slight increase on the previous year, whilst Unity received £192k, which is 40k more than the previous year. As Unity is a growing school the increase compared to Longsight will always be greater given there are more than 40 new pupils each year until we reach two form entry.

The increase in funding at Unity was invested in additional teaching and support staff, supporting continuation of the nurture provision, whilst continuing to support 100% of pupils in year 6 to attend the residential to Ghyll Head. 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, with Longsight securing gold re-accreditation which is the highest level. Unity will revisit this in 2024-25. Whilst we don't have the re-accreditation the ethos remains the same across both schools, promoting to pupils their rights, embedding in all aspects of the school delivery.

Behaviour: This year both schools enhanced their recording and monitoring of ticks and crosses, in line with the positive relationship and behaviour policy. The application of the system was monitored by both schools SLT including a visit from an SLT to another school to assess and feedback on the application of the policy, which was positive.

Data from the system was monitored for trends, reporting to the Local Governing Committees. The recording system identified inconsistencies early in the year, supporting SLTs to improve application to avoid the system losing value amongst pupils. The system will be monitored for impact into the next academic year.

Unity school has an additional system to record racist, homophobic and discriminatory behaviours across the school. This has reduced from the previous year but continues to be an area of concern that is being monitored and addressed rigorously.

Attendance: The table below shows the comparison with local and national absence data, indicating attendance figures, including persistent absence, are worse than the local and

national picture. Persistent absence is an area that continues to remain high with most pupils' absences relating to family holidays in school term times. Despite the local authority fining process being followed there is little deterrent. There is a greater focus on attendance nationally which will result in a new policy and process to be adopted by schools to continue to monitor and drive-up attendance figures.

	Longsight			Unity			Manchester			National		
	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24	21-22	22-23	23-24
Attendance	92.85	92.1	93.3	92.8	92.4	93.62	93.65	93.19	94.19	93.8	NA	94.1
Persistent Absence	23.32	22.11	22.28	23.13	18.8	23.4	29.05	22.41	16.56	18.3	NA	16.2

SEND: We continue to see a rise in children presenting to both schools with additional special educational needs. Pupils in Longsight where an Early Help and care plan is in place has risen from 1.4% to 2.4%. At Unity this has increased from 3.4% to 4%, compared to Manchester at 3.8% and National at 3%.

Pupils identified as requiring SEN support are recorded on the SEND register and can often be an indicator that a possible EHCP will be explored. At Longsight this was 10.4% of the pupil population, whereas at Unity this was 18.2%. This is in comparison to 14.7% across Manchester and 14.1% nationally.

Comparing this data to national is a bit misleading as the national percentages include over 50% of pupils with a physical disability, whereas our schools and Manchester schools, in general, experience a higher number of pupils with speech, language and communication need followed by social, emotional mental health, and moderate learning difficulties.

Of these pupils there is an increasing need for pupils requiring special education needs provision, mainly experienced in Unity with children being supported whilst they await a space locally. This continues to present ongoing challenges due to the high level of resources required for these children to remain at school.

Following the SEND review completed by the local authority, a re-visit was completed in June 2024, reporting positively on the progress of actions. An area to continue to develop is how we enhance engagement with families where pupils are identified as having an individual education plan. This is more challenging where families do not speak English.

We continue to invest resources in supporting pupils with SEND, outlined in the table below. This demonstrates that both schools are maximising the use of the funding mainly on staff resources.

School	Longsight	Unity	Total
Income (Notional SEND)	£135,186	£221,947	3£57,133
EHCP	£31,200	£76,000	£107,200
Total Income	£166,386	£297,947	£464,333
Staff Costs (SENDCO, SLT, support staff, Family Support Worker)	£158,745	£280,444	£439,189
Resources	£7,540	£20,000	£27,540
Total Costs	£166,285	£300,444	£466,729

Safeguarding: We use CPOMs to record all safeguarding concerns and incidents relating to children in our care. Both schools have trained Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) 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.

Local 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 both schools this academic year. In Longsight an employee slipped on a children's whiteboard, which was left on the floor, causing the employee to fall and break their ankle in three places. This was RIDDOR reportable due to the length of time the employee had off.

At Unity a child fell during play time injuring their wrist. The break wasn't identified until their parents went to A&E at the end of the day. This isn't reportable to RIDDOR as pupils in schools are exempt from this reporting.

There were no significant incidents to report.

6. Education

Reception GLD: GLD in Longsight increased by 15.2% from the previous year to 60% overall, which was just above Manchester average. Both Prime and Specific learning goals also Improved on the previous years, including pupils with SEND. Unity GLD decreased by 11% to 48.1% with prime and specific learning goals also experiencing the same decrease, however pupils with SEND improved on previous years.

KS1 Phonics: Both schools experienced a decrease in year 1 phonics results falling just below Manchester averages. Both schools were impacted due to higher numbers of international new arrivals arriving mid-year. increase from 2022 with Longsight achieving 82.8% and UCP at 75%. The improvements were positively impacted by the new phonics scheme implemented. Both schools achieved higher than Manchester (73.9%) and either the same or better than national (75%).

KS1: Statutory reporting of KS1 progress data has ceased, instead only reporting on Ks1/KS2/Phonics and multiplication checks.

KS2: Both schools SATS results are showing an upward trajectory in most areas. Longsight were above Manchester averages in all areas except reading, where they were 0.4% behind. Compared to national Longsight were at national for combined but just below for reading (6%), writing (1%) and maths (2%), demonstrating progress in closing the gap. Grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) experienced a decrease to 57% which was unexpected.

Unity was above Manchester averages for maths and reading but just below in writing (3.4%). Compared to national Unity performed better in maths (+2%) but just behind for reading (3%), writing (7.6%), and combined (15%). Areas for continued development are writing and combined in the coming year.

Pupils with SEND demonstrated improved progress in comparison to the previous years, including being closer to Manchester and National averages, in some areas better, where we have the data. This represents our inclusive approaches across both schools.

Statutory Reporting: End of Year Outcomes (Comparison over 4 years)

	Early Years Foundation Stage									
	Longsight 2019	Longsight 2022	Longsight 2023	Longsight 2024	Unity 2019	Unity 2022	Unity 2023	Unity 2024	Manchester 2024	National 2024
Good level of development (all)	60.7%	56.7% -4%	44.8% -11.9%	60% +15.2%	62%	27.3% -34.7%	59.1% +31.8	48.1% -11%	59.6%	67.7%
Good level of development (SEND)	0%	0%	0%	25% +25%	0%	0%	0%	14.3% +14.3%	N/A	24.4% +1.4%
Prime early learning goals	64.3%	73.3% +9%	48.3% -25%	60% +11.7%	32.7%	32.7%	59.1% +26.4%	48.1% -10%	65.9%	74.9%
Prime early learning goals (SEND)	0%	0%	0%	25% +25%	0%	0%	0%	14.3% +14.3%	N/A	N/A
Specific learning goals (all)	60.7%	26.7% -34%	41.4% +14.7%	43.3% +1.9%	62%	27.3% -34.7%	59.1% +31.8%	48.1 -10%	58%	67.5%
Specific learning goals (SEND)	0%	0%	0%	25% +25%	0%	0%	0%	14.3 +14.3%	N/A	24.4%

	Key Stage One									
	Longsight 2019	Longsight 2022	Longsight 2023	Longsight 2024	Unity 2019	Unity 2022	Unity 2023	Unity 2024	Manchester 2024	National 2024
Year One phonics (All)	76.7%	60% -16.7%	82.8% +22.8%	70% -12.8%	69%	58.9% -10.1%	75% +16.1%	69.4% -5.6%	73.9%	80.2%
Year One phonics (SEND)	100%	0% -100%	0%	50% +50%	100%	33.3% -66.7%	62.5% +29.2%	44.4% -18.1%	49.5%	51.5%
Phonics re-check	N/A	60%	96.7% +36.7%	100% +3.3%	N/A	58.9%	58.4% -0.5%	23.5% -34.9%	48.2%	54.6%

	Key Stage Two									
	Longsight 2019	Longsight 2022	Longsight 2023	Longsight 2024	Unity 2019	Unity 2022	Unity 2023	Unity 2024	Manchester 2024	National 2024
Y6 Reading (all)	67.9%	56.7% -11.2%	61.3% +5.6%	67.2% +5.9%	N/A	54.8%	56.3% +1.5%	71.4% +15.1%	70%	75%
Y6 Reading (SEND)	50%	0% -50%	50% +50%	50%	N/A	25%	16.7% -2.3%	25% +8.3%	40.9%	48%
Y6 Writing (All)	64.3%	53.3% -11%	61.3% +9.7%	71.4% +10.1%	N/A	48.4%	56.3% +7.9%	60.7% +4.4%	65.8%	72%
Y6 Writing (SEND)	33.3%	0% -33%	37.5% +37.5%	50% +12.5%	N/A	0%	16.7% +16.7%	75% +58.3%	29.8%	36%
Y6 Maths (All)	92.9%	50% -42.9%	64.5% +17%	71.4% +6.5%	N/A	54.8%	62.5% +7.7%	75% +12.5%	69.9%	74%
Y6 Maths (SEND)	83.3%	0% -83.3%	50% +50%	50%	N/A	20%	16.7% -2.3%	50% +33.3%	38.7%	44%
GPS	NA	60%	64.5% +4.5%	57% -7.5%	N/A	67.7	59.4% -8.3%	79% +19.6%	N/A	N/A
Y6 R/W/M combined (All)	53.6%	40% -13.6%	48.4% +10%	60.7% +12.6%	N/A	38.7%	40.6% +1.9%	46.4% +5.8%	55.7%	61%
Y6 R/W/M/ combined (SEND)	33.3%	0% -33.3%	37.5% +37.5%	50% +12.5%	N/A	0%	16.7% +16.7%	25% +8.3%	21%	26%
Y6 Science		76.7%	74.2% -2.5%	70% -4.2%	N/A	64.5	59.4 -5.1%	62.5 +3.1%	75%	81%

7. Ofsted

Longsight continues to be graded Good following their last inspection in 2018. We are due an inspection in the first term of 2024-25, with a range of external quality assurance and school improvement partners providing positive feedback on all aspects of the school.

Unity remains in requires improvement, although the overall grading will change in the future. Their next inspection is due after Easter 2025, but before Autumn 2025, which is in line with the 30month re-visit due for schools who are identified as requires improvement. We continue to support Unity with Local authority quality assurance once per term, including an externally procured quality assurance provider termly in addition to brokered support from an outstanding primary. The new EYFS curriculum is due to be launched in September 24.

8. Community

Play Schemes: We continue to receive funding from Manchester Active under the Holiday Activity Fund. This enables us to offer 1 week's provision during Easter and three weeks over the summer period. The table below details the average attendance numbers across both schools.

Play scheme attendance (daily average)

	Longsight Community Primary	Unity Community Primary
Easter	15	30
Summer	26	28

Breakfast and afterschool provision continues to be available at both schools.

Both schools increased their cultural capital events with schools ensuring that all year groups were able to take part.

Trips and visits in Longsight included, for example; Picnic in the park, Manchester museum of toys and artefacts, MOSI trip, imperial war museum VR Day, Benin museum, UNICEF soccer aid, theatre performance, sea-life, farm visit, visit to the Halle orchestra, including the year 6 residential to Ghyll Head.

In Unity there were similar events to Longsight with the addition of the following; Northern Powerhouse meeting, meeting the author, visits to Martin Mere, Crocky Trail, Jewish Museum, Bridgewater Hall, travelling farm, trip to the cinema.

After-School Clubs

	Autumn 2023	Spring 2024	Summer 2024
Number of clubs offered	10 clubs	7 clubs	11 clubs
Number of children attending	124	117	140
SEN attending	34 (27%) incl 4 x EHCP	25 (21%) incl 2 x EHCP	32 (23%) incl 2 x EHCP
Pupil Premium attending	51 (41%)	52 (44%)	71 (51%)
Gender split			75 boys (54%) 65 girls (46%)

Extra-Curricular Activities Analysis

Attended at least one club this year				
Year group	Number of children	% of class who attended	% of attendees who were Pupil Premium	% of attendees who were SEND
Reception	7	33	33	0
1	14	47	43	14
2	6	0	0	0
3	9	22	0	0
4	11	36	36	0
5	9	30	44	11
6	18	60	33	11

	Longsight Community Primary	Unity Community Primary
Cultural visits and events	30	32
After School Clubs	22 (180)	Not available

After school clubs were available at both schools. Longsight offered the following clubs:

- Glockenspiel
- Board Games
- Eco and environmental
- Lego
- Sports
- Homework
- Spanish
- Steel pans
- Junior Jam
- Outdoor activities
- Tutoring

9. Capital improvements

We continue to engage with the Local Authority and Manchester Active in the installation of a MUGA pitch at Unity Community Primary. Part funding has been secured through the football foundation and match funding required by the Local Authority. Topography surveys have been completed, feeding into the designs and planning application, which are to be submitted by Manchester Active in 2024.

At the end of the academic year both schools completed capital refurbishment works. At Longsight this was to enhance the outdoor play area in Early Years to support the delivery of the EYFS curriculum.

Unity refurbished part of the ground floor to relocate the library and move the nurture provision, which was occupying a classroom, to the old library space. In doing this the school had to relocate the family support, relocating them nearer the school office, supporting them to meet with parents more promptly.

10. Budget

This was the first year we were operating a lagged census. The pupil numbers taken at October Census indicated the funding we were to receive at Unity. This would result in the school not receiving funding based on estimated pupil numbers. As such the school was supporting 367 pupils on a budget for 329 pupils.

Considering this challenge the school still performed better than budget, making a positive contribution for the year of 67k against a budget of -6k. Longsight also performed better than budget making an overall contribution of 13k compared to a budget of 3.8k.

Unity Nursery also performed better than budget making an overall contribution of 47k against a budget of 9.7k. This can be attributed to several factors, including an increase in rates received per hour per child and increasing pupil numbers. It is important to note the nursery only contributes 5% mgmt. fee and doesn't contribute towards utilities, however as the budgets are combined this shouldn't matter and overall, the school and nursery made a positive contribution of over 100k.

Budget performance for the year were better than forecast with additional income of 140k. Whilst additional costs amounted to £88k the additional income was mainly linked to the increased income for staff pay awards. This resulted in the Trust achieving a surplus operating budget of 140k or minus 55k after depreciation. 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 £40,000. 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 a below cost service to provide essential back-office functions including HR, payroll, finance, marketing and communications, health and safety and legal advice. A recent procurement of these services was completed, awarding the contract to The Big Life Company for a period of three years, which has been approved by the Related Party Transaction team at the ESFA.

11. Audit and Compliance

We have undertaken three internal audits during the year, conducted by Red Rambler. This included GDPR compliance, premises management, and website compliance. All actions identified are either completed or in progress with some outstanding as advisory only.

Additional self-assessments are completed annually, including the academy trust handbook, School resource management advisor (SRMA), and the development of an estates strategy to inform the self-assessment submission to the ESFA.

12. Growth

Our bid to deliver the Manchester Sensory Service has been successful. We are still negotiating the details and budgets for this service with a planned transfer into the Trust for December 2024.

Conversions of schools remains unlikely until we achieve Good in all areas during our next inspection at Unity.

13. Governance

The MAT board met five times in the year, and the local governing committees' (which are advisory committees) met four times. The Trust Finance, Risk and Audit committee met five times this year. An AGM was held in January 23, reporting to the members of the Trust.

Attendance

AGM roles and attendance

- Dolly Bedi 1/1
- Richard Scorer 0/1
- Tayyaba Javed 1/1
- Edna Robinson: Big Life Chair and Member 1/1
- Karina Carter 1/1
- Sayeeda Chowdhury 0/1

MAT Trustees' roles and attendance

- Emma Perry: Chair of MAT 4/5
- Andrea Heffernan: Risk and Audit Committee Chair 4/5
- Fay Selvan: Trustee 5/5
- Lisa Brookes: Trustee 2/5
- Phil Trohear: Trustee 3/5
- Liam McDaid: Trustee 5/5
- Colin Ralph: Trustee 4/5
- Sandra Sinclair: Trustee 5/5
- Matt Wallis: Trustee 5/5

In attendance

- Keith Smith: CEO 5/5
- Phil Alty: CFO (Retired April 2024) 3/3

- Rebecca Gibbons: CFO April 2024 5/5
- Rukhsana Ahmed; Headteacher 4/5
- Jude Lee: Headteacher

Finance, Risk and Audit Committee

- Andrea Heffernan: Committee Chair 5/5
- Colin Ralph: Trustee 4/5
- Liam McDaid: Trustee 5/5
- Fay Selvan: Trustee 5/5

In attendance

- Keith Smith: CEO 5/5
- Phil Alty: CFO (Retired April 2024) 3/3
- Rebecca Gibbons: CFO April 2024 5/5

Longsight Community Primary Local Governing Committee

- Liam McDaid: Chair and Trustee 2/4
- Alia Ali-Beag: Governor 3/4
- Charmaine Alman: Staff Governor (term ended Dec23) 1/1
- David Grimes; Vice Chair and Governor 4/4
- Priscilla Nkewenti: Governor (Resigned 23/11/23) 0/1
- Sandra Saleh: Governor 3/4
- Jenna Saide: Parent Governor 2/4
- Natale Dunn: Staff Governor 3/3

In attendance

- Keith Smith: CEO 4/4
- Rukhsana Ahmed: Executive Headteacher 4/4
- Susan Parker-Stone: Head of School 4/4
- Phil Alty: CFO (Retired April 2024) 2/2
- Rebecca Gibbons: CFO April 2024 4/4

Unity Community Primary Local Governing Committee

- Matt Wallis: Chair and Trustee 4/4
- Ben Cook: Staff Governor 4/4
- Iqra Akhtar: Parent Governor Resigned 28/9/23 0/0
- Katy Burton: Teacher Governor 3/4
- Luana Cheng: Parent Governor 0/4
- Nia Simpson: Governor 3/4
- Shaun Jackson: Governor 3/4
- Sundus Salam: Governor resigned 16/11/23 1/1
- Olayemi Sola-Oluleye: Parent Governor: 3/3
- Dr Ehab Gusbi: Parent Governor 3/3

In attendance

- Keith Smith: CEO 4/4

- Jude Lee: Headteacher 4/4
- Katy Burton: EYFS lead 4/4
- Phil Alty: CFO (Retired April 2024) 2/2
- Rebecca Gibbons: CFO April 2024 4/4

Meetings were a mixture of online and in person.