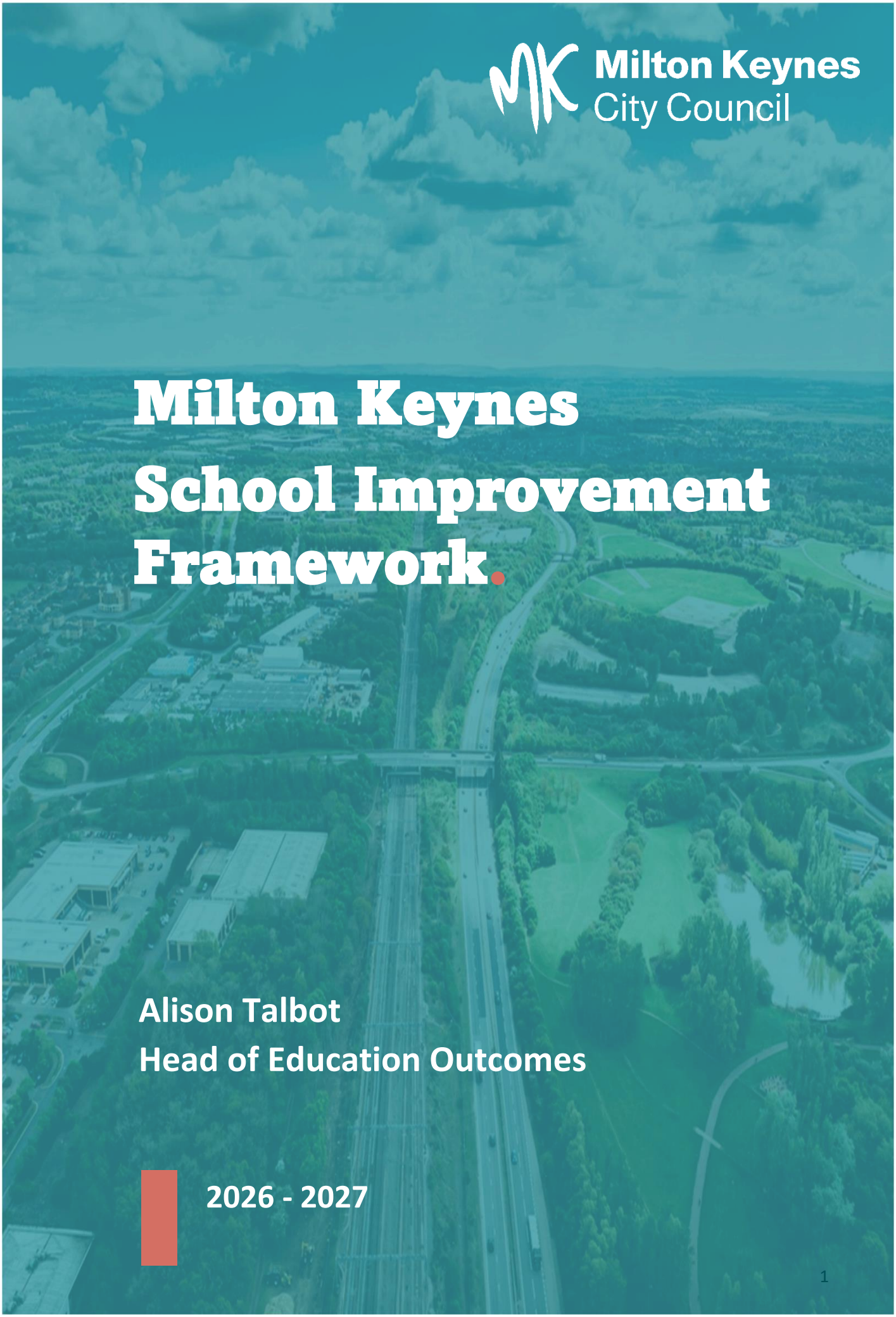


Milton Keynes City Council

Milton Keynes School Improvement Framework.

Alison Talbot
Head of Education Outcomes

2026 - 2027

Contents

Page 1	Cover page
Page 2	Contents
Page 3	Introduction
Page 4	Rationale
Page 4	Principles
Page 5	**Part 1: Specific duties in Maintained Schools**
Page 5	Background and context
Page 5	Using data
Page 6	Maintained special schools and nursery schools
Page 6	Grades A and B
Page 7	Grade F
Page 8	Procedures
Page 9	Local Authority grade descriptions (Grades A, F, and B)
Page 11	**Part 2: Supporting School Effectiveness**
Page 11	The school improvement services traded offer
Page 11	Wider partnership working
Page 12	The MK Education Toolkit

Introduction

Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) believes that all children and young people should have access to the highest quality education. Whatever form of governance our schools choose, we regard them as our partners; central to our core work to improve educational outcomes.

We take our system leadership responsibility very seriously and are determined to hold all schools to account for their performance (including academies) acting as a strong local champion for children, young people, and their families. We therefore aim to promote strong partnership working with schools and national agencies – focussed on co-producing strategies which result in a cohesive, safe community with high aspirations for all.

However, as the 'local authority,' we also have specific duties and powers to monitor and intervene in maintained schools. These 'core' school improvement duties are set out in the Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance: Support and Intervention in Schools.

This School Improvement Framework document therefore has two parts:

- **Part 1**: outlines how we carry out our **specific statutory duties in maintained schools,** including processes and arrangements for targeted challenge and intervention where necessary.
- **Part 2**: outlines the wider work we do to **support school effectiveness**, working with school leaders, governors, and wider sector partners.

We hope that you find the information below helpful and look forward to working with you.

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Head of Education Outcomes

Rationale

In its entirety, the school improvement framework aims to:

- Keep a focus on the overall effectiveness of the Milton Keynes school system, supporting an ambition that all schools in Milton Keynes provide excellent education.
- Deliver a robust evaluation tool to identify strengths and weakness across the maintained sector.
- Clarify for schools, and the council along with wider stakeholders, the procedures and interventions that will be taken if concerns and/or risks are identified.
- Ensure a collaborative, co-produced response where schools require additional support or challenge to improve.
- Provide a high-quality, traded offer to schools: ensuring that gains in educational quality over recent years are not lost.

Principles

We believe that certain conditions support the effective establishment and maintenance of an effective local school improvement system. They underpin all our work:

- Having a clear vision for the local school improvement system that is known and understood.
- Having an accurate and up to date understanding of potential risk and working quickly to mitigate that risk.
- Fostering strong, trusting relationships: between schools, the local authority and wider sector partners.
- Securing the engagement of Milton Keynes schools and academies.
- Setting up structures that enable partnership activity and the co-production of local solutions to local problems.
- Working with a range of other system leaders: to promote and facilitate school to school collaboration and the sharing of best practice.
- Utilising the skills, expertise, and resources of local, regional, and national sector partners.

Part 1:
Specific duties in Maintained Schools

Background and context

In April 2022, central government cut the Schools Monitoring and Brokerage Grant, used to employ the MKCC school improvement team, by 50%. This put strain on the team in terms of delivering what had historically been 'funded' statutory duties to the maintained sector and fulfilling our ambition to work more closely with the academy sector. The grant was removed entirely at the end of March 2023.

In January 2023, having discussed the way forward with school leaders, we announced a fully traded service for 2023-2024. We were delighted to provide this valuable service, continuing to work with the sector to secure educational excellence for the children and young people of Milton Keynes.

The fully traded service worked, to a degree, in 2023-2024. However, it quickly became apparent that some maintained schools were not buying back enough for MKCC to fully mitigate risk or fulfil their statutory duties. Others were not buying back at all.

The issue became even more pronounced in 2024-2025, to the extent that MKCC was unable to fully fulfil its statutory duties. This meant that that potential risks were not always being identified, and robustly underwritten, in all maintained schools.

Following consultation by Schools Forum, a decision was made in November 2024 (and subsequently in October 2025) to de-delegate funds for 'core' school improvement activity from maintained primary and secondary school budget shares. This meant that MKCC could undertake work required in Milton Keynes maintained schools in the 2025- 2026 and 2026-2027 financial years: underwriting risk and fulfilling our statutory monitoring and improvement duties.

Using data

As part of the de-delegated offer, every maintained school will have an Annual Evaluation. This will include a desk top analysis of headline performance data. *(*Special schools and maintained nursery schools see below)***.** The desk top analysis will always be considered in the light of wider information the local authority has about strengths and risks in maintained schools – especially, but not exclusively, recent Annual Evaluations, Safeguarding Audits, financial audits, health and safety surveys, or Ofsted inspections.

Having reflected on all the information available, the Head of Education Outcomes will contact any schools at risk of being Grade B. (Grades are defined on Page 9.)

Maintained special schools and maintained nursery schools

It is acknowledged that a desk top analysis of headline performance data will not always work as a starting point for special schools or maintained nursery schools.

Instead, where needed, discussions in these schools will focus on pupil outcomes over time and the impact of the curriculum/pathways on learners.

All other parts of the process outlined above will apply to maintained special schools and maintained nursery schools.

Grades A and B

Most maintained schools in Milton Keynes are likely to be Grade A schools. This assertion is based on analysis of work undertaken in schools from September 2024 – Summer 2026.

A few maintained schools in Milton Keynes will be Grade B schools. Where Grade B is considered a potential outcome:

- The Head of Education Outcomes and Assistant Director of Education and Learning, with input from the Improvement Partner, will assess each school on a case-by-case basis before confirming the grade.
- The assessment will consider any representations that leaders and governors choose to make.
- An opportunity to discuss the representations, at a face to face or virtual meeting, will be offered before a final decision is made.

If, after considering all the evidence, the local authority decide that a maintained school requires additional support and/or challenge to improve several aspects of provision (because it is confirmed as Grade B and leaders need help to drive the required changes), a School Performance Board (SPB) will be put in place.

- Membership of a SPB will be established based on need. SPBs will always include; senior leaders, some governors, The Head of Education Outcomes and/or the Assistant Director of Education and Learning and the Improvement Partner/Key Education Contact. Colleagues from the MKCC Children's Sufficiency and Access to Education, Employment and Training and/or SEND teams will be included where appropriate. Membership may also include colleagues from MKCC's finance, human resources, or health and safety teams.
- Decisions regarding interventions and milestones will be proposed by the SPB and agreed at the Education Performance Board (EPB).
- Review of the effectiveness of the interventions, and the decision to close a SPB, will be formally agreed by the Education Performance Board (EPB).

If school leaders are unable to ensure appropriate school improvement, despite ongoing support and intervention, and do not have capacity to take this forward quickly enough, the following will be considered:

- Interim leadership arrangements
- Pre-warning notices and/or warning notices
- Discussions with/ involvement of Regions Group (RG).

If a school governing board is unable to ensure appropriate school improvement, despite ongoing support and intervention, and does not have capacity to take this forward quickly enough, an Interim Executive Board (IEB) will be considered.

Leaders and/or governors of maintained schools can contact the Head of Education Outcomes if they become concerned about the quality of provision at their school. The Head of Education Outcomes and Assistant Director of Education and Learning will consider any such contacts on a case-by-case basis: focussing on whether a School Performance Board (SPB) could be appropriate or whether a different model of support and challenge should be considered.

Grade F

Some maintained schools will be identified as Grade F schools (Grade F is defined on Page 9).

These will be schools that the MKCC Finance Team have identified as being cause for concern (commonly called 'High Risk'). Being identified as cause for concern from a financial perspective will limit the judgement of an Annual Evaluation. So, these schools will have a separate grade: one that ensures clarity around the significance of the financial concern (meaning they are not Grade A) at the same time as recognising that they do not have several/wider risks (Grade B).

In Grade F schools, the MKCC finance team will be clear about the additional monitoring and reporting requirements placed on cause for concern schools. The Schools Causing Concern Board may issue a Warning Notice and/or a Notice of Concern where schools fail to effectively address deficit positions resulting in growing deficits.

The Schools Causing Concern Board may withdraw the delegated budget, and an Interim Executive Board (IEB) will be considered, if a school governing board fails to comply with a Warning Notice and/or a Notice of Concern, or is unable to address deficit positions (despite ongoing support and intervention from MKCC), or does not have capacity to take this forward quickly enough.

Procedures

All maintained schools:

- All maintained schools will receive an annual evaluation.
- All maintained schools will receive an annual safeguarding audit.
- These will include on-site visits and meetings with leaders but may also make use of MS Teams meeting by mutual agreement and where appropriate.
- At the end of the visits, draft summary evaluations will be made, which will be quality assured through moderation activity and shared with the Head of Education Outcomes.
- MKCC will also act as the external advisor during Headteacher Performance Management (HTPM) in all maintained schools.

Grade B Maintained schools:

- If a school requires additional support or challenge, to improve several aspects of provision, a School Performance Board (SPB) will be put in place.
- Decisions regarding interventions will be agreed at the School Performance Board (SPB).
- Review of the effectiveness of the interventions, and the decision to close a School Performance Board, will be agreed at the Education Performance Board (EPB).
- If a school governing board is unable to ensure appropriate school improvement, despite ongoing support and intervention, and does not have capacity to take this forward quickly enough an Interim Executive Board (IEB) will be considered.

Grade F maintained schools:

- If a school requires additional financial support or challenge, having been identified as being cause for concern ('high risk') it will be subject to additional monitoring and scrutiny. It will also have enhanced reporting requirements.
- Decisions regarding actions required by schools will be agreed by the Schools Causing Concern Board.
- Review of the effectiveness of those actions will also be undertaken by the Schools Causing Concern Board and the board may issue a warning notice and/or notice of concern where schools fail to effectively address deficit positions resulting in growing deficits.
- If a school governing board is unable to ensure appropriate progress, despite ongoing support and intervention, and does not have capacity to take this forward quickly enough, The Schools Causing Concern Board may withdraw the delegated budget, and an Interim Executive Board (IEB) will be considered.

Maintained schools judged to be in a category of concern by Ofsted

- If a maintained school is inspected and judged to 'require significant improvement' or 'special measures' (as defined in Support and Intervention in Schools) a Project Board will be put in place.
- If a maintained school is identified as a 'stuck' school (as defined in Support and Intervention in Schools), and has been notified by the Secretary of State that it has been identified as such, a Project Board will be put in place.

- If a maintained school has failed to comply with a non financial warning notice, a Project Board will be put in place.
- The Project Board will undertake to:
    - Review and agree a local authority statement of action.
    - Ensure that enough interventions are in place to improve the quality of educational provision, working with RISE teams as appropriate/relevant.
    - Work with Regions Group (RG) to bring about swift academisation, if this is the decision made by the Secretary of State.
    - Check that legal 'due diligence' procedures are being followed and completed in a robust and timely manner, where academisation is the route decided on by the Secretary of State.
    - Use the powers of intervention set out in Support and Intervention in Schools as needed.

Local Authority Grades

Grade	Description
Grade A	All the following apply: • Pupil outcomes are (broadly) secure and/or are (strongly) improving. • There are few, if any, areas of concern. Where minor risks exist, evidence suggests that they are understood and are being strongly mitigated. • Leaders demonstrate capacity for self-improvement.
Grade F	All the following apply: • Pupil outcomes are (broadly) secure and/or are (strongly) improving. • There are few, if any, areas of concern. Where minor risks exist, evidence suggests that they are understood and are being strongly mitigated. • Leaders demonstrate capacity for self-improvement. **However, one or more of the following apply:** • A year-end deficit balance is predicted. • Concerns have been raised about the school through an internal audit review. • Reporting deadlines have not been complied with. A school that is predicting an in-year deficit will not automatically be identified as a high risk school but additional information will be requested. Schools will need to provide additional commentary on their budget plan. MKCC understand that an in-year deficit may be because of a one-off issue or an unexpected cost – it is expected that the school will already have a plan in place to recover this in future years. However, if additional commentary is not provided on the budget plan, there are concerns about the commentary, or the school does not already have a

	<u>plan to address the in-year deficit, the school may be identified as a high risk school. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis.</u> *In some circumstances the following may also apply. In these situations, the school will be subject to additional monitoring - but may not always be identified as a high risk school so may not be identified as Grade F.* • *The school is converting to become a sponsored academy.* • *The school is undergoing significant organisational change.* • *The school has a significant reduction in pupil numbers.* • *Concerns raised from school improvement colleagues.*
Grade B	One or more of the following apply: • There are safeguarding concerns. • Pupil outcomes are weak. They are declining and/or historically low and are not improving. • Several wider risks/ issues have been identified. For example: quality of education, teaching and learning, behaviour and relationships, stability and/or effectiveness of leadership, high pupil mobility, financial difficulties (as listed above in Grade F), rapid growth, governance. These are more serious and/or evidence suggests that they are not being tackled and/or mitigated. • Leaders demonstrate limited capacity for self-improvement. • There is a clear risk of a decline in standards at the next inspection. • There is a clear risk of being judged to be in a category of concern by Ofsted.

LA officers are clear that data is only a starting point. They know that data is not always comparable with that from earlier years and understand that the uneven impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still felt by some pupils and schools. They also understand that it is important to consider a school's context. They will therefore be sensitive in their use of data and will not make decisions based on one piece of information alone.

Part 2:
Supporting School Effectiveness

The school improvement services traded offer – maintained schools and academies

The school improvement service traded offer can be found on the Milton Keynes Professional Development Portal (MKPDP).

Services, to maintained schools and academies, that are specifically related to school improvement, include:

- Annual Evaluations (for academies only – maintained schools already have this)
- Safeguarding audits (for academies only – maintained schools already have this)
- Headteacher appraisal (for academies only – all maintained schools already have this)
- Bespoke consultancy
- Interim senior leader recruitment
- Senior leader recruitment

Improvement Partners continue to offer bespoke consultancy, tailor made to meet the needs of individual schools and/or groups of schools. They also continue to support training for governors, trustees, and governing/trust boards.

Where purchased, bespoke consultancy helps leaders to gain an external view of school effectiveness: supporting leaders to reflect on the accuracy of their self-evaluation and the rigour of their school improvement planning. Reports from bespoke consultancy can be shared with external partners such as Ofsted, Regions Group and/or wider colleagues at the Department for Education (DfE). They can also be used to support conversations between MKCC and school leaders, if overall education quality is ever called into question.

Wider partnership working

MKCC continue to be committed to ensuring that all work with schools reflects national and local priorities. We proactively respond to these with effective strategies and collegiately work with national and local partners and agencies.

Some examples of partnership working include:

- Our MK: Our City, Our Children, Our Responsibility
- Quadrant meetings
- Meetings for leaders of schools in the maintained sector
- Meetings for Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Multi Academy Trusts
- Meetings for chairs of governing/trust boards
- Heads Half Hour – regular online briefings for school leaders
- Heads Up – Fortnightly e-newsletter for schools

- Early Years Essentials – Fortnightly e-newsletter for settings
- EMA Network Bulletin
- Conferences for headteachers and governors
- Engagement with secondary and special school headteacher groups
- Engagement with local safeguarding partners
- SENDCo Quadrant meetings
- SEND newsletters
- SEND Reform working groups
- MK Inclusion Partnership
- Primary/Secondary/SEND Place Planning Groups
- Engagement with Designated Safeguarding Lead forums
- Work with the MKCC early years team
- Work with the Virtual School and Designated Teacher forums
- Work with the Milton Keynes Music Service
- Work with the EMA Network, SACRE and supplementary schools
- Liaison with Chiltern Teaching School Hub and local English and maths hubs
- Liaison with Milton Keynes Education Partnership (MKEP)
- Liaison with relevant diocesan representatives
- Statutory assessment and moderation

MK Education Toolkit

The MK Education Toolkit provides additional information about the education community in Milton Keynes.

It outlines the services and support provided by both MKCC and our valued sector led partners: helping to secure strong partnership working across the city.


Milton Keynes
City Council