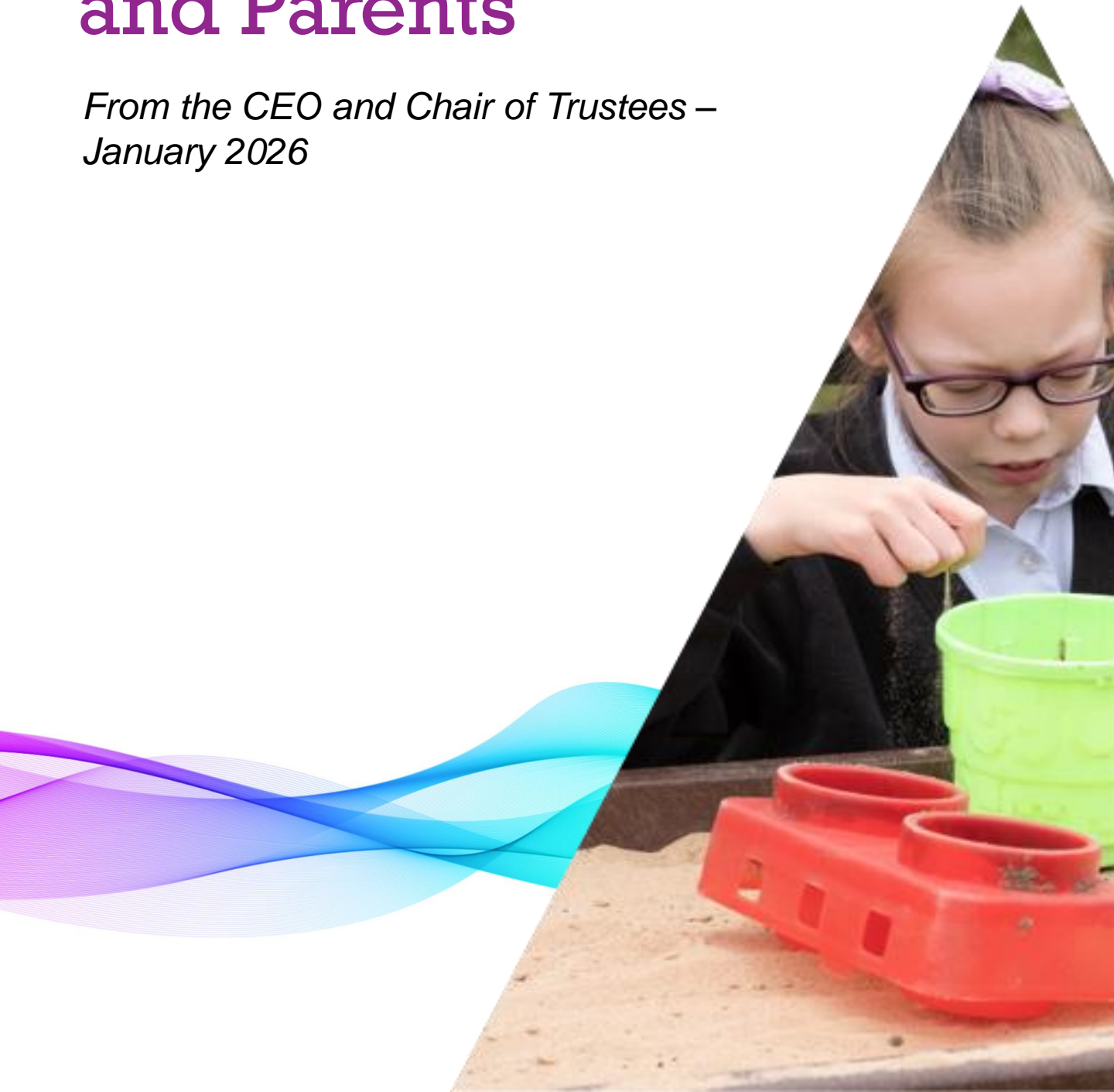




Ascendancy  
Partnership  
Trust

# APT Newsletter for Staff and Parents

*From the CEO and Chair of Trustees –  
January 2026*



# Contents

1. [Our Vision](#)
2. [Our Values](#)
3. [Our Priorities](#)
4. [A message from the CEO and Chair of Trustees](#)
5. [A Strong, Unqualified Audit Opinion](#)
6. [Governance](#)
7. [Therapy Hub](#)
8. [Wokingham Free Schools](#)
9. [Ofsted](#)
10. [New Staff, Family and Friends Mortgage Benefit](#)

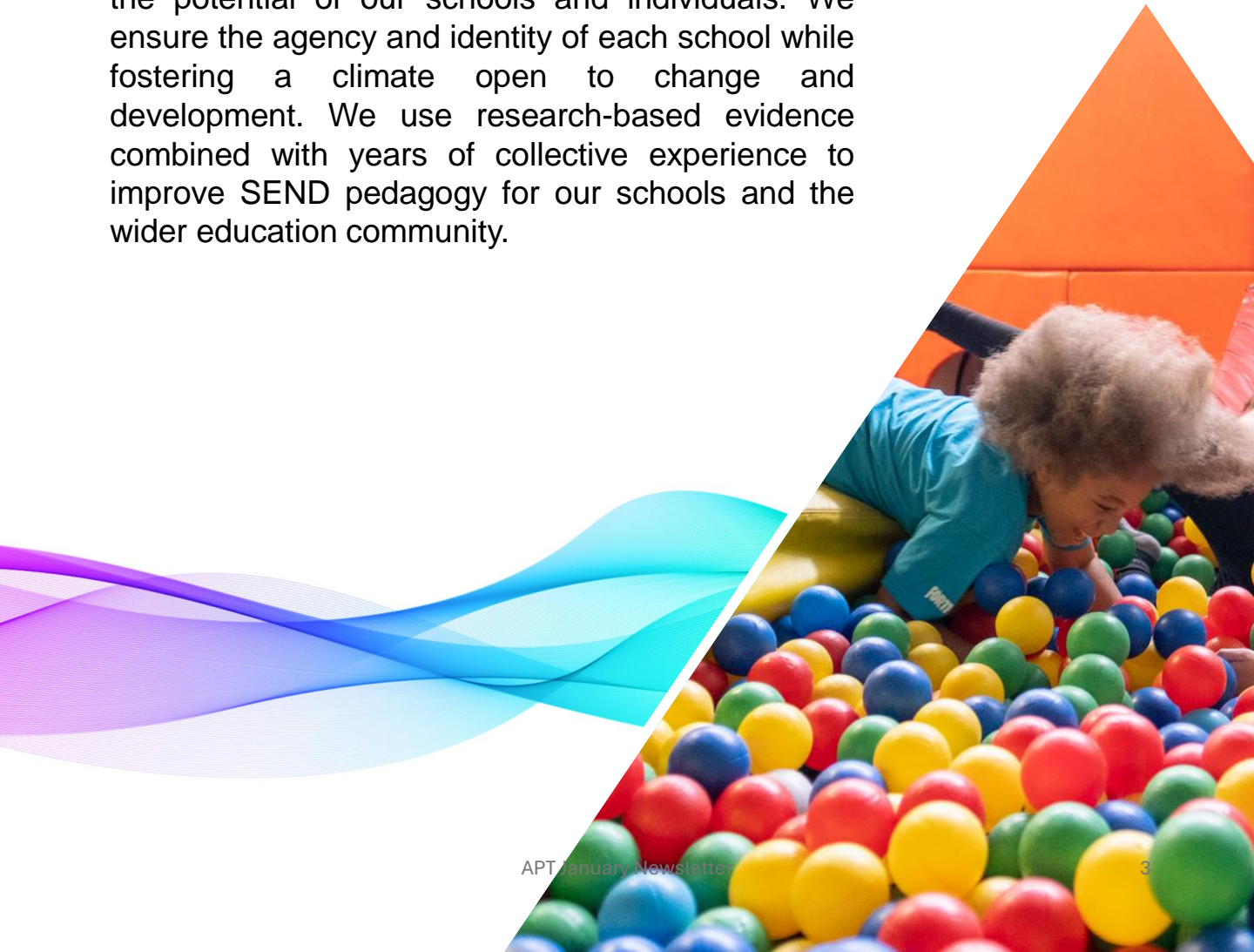


Ascendancy  
Partnership  
Trust

# Stronger and Better Together

## Our Vision

Through collaboration, we challenge and maximise the potential of our schools and individuals. We ensure the agency and identity of each school while fostering a climate open to change and development. We use research-based evidence combined with years of collective experience to improve SEND pedagogy for our schools and the wider education community.





## Our Values

- **Bravery:** We have the courage to innovate, embrace challenges with boldness and creativity, pioneering new approaches to education that ensure no child is left behind.
- **Ownership and Accountability:** We take responsibility for our actions and outcomes, ensuring that every decision we make positively impacts our students, staff, and communities
- **Selfless Service:** We prioritise the needs of others above our own, dedicating ourselves to the success and well-being of every child, family, and school we serve.
- **Uncompromising Integrity:** We act with honesty, transparency and fairness, building trust through every interaction and decision.



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## APT Priorities

1. Ensure short term financial viability while planning for long term sustainability.
2. Align approach to school business support services and staff terms & conditions of employment.
3. Agree educational common language, curriculum and pedagogy to enable school improvement at scale.
4. Develop core and mandatory CPD offer across the trust including the Therapy Hub

# 25/26

# Newsletter January 2026

## Dear Parents, Carers, and Staff

As we start the new calendar year, we are pleased to provide some updates on how our new trust is developing now we are officially a year old.

In this edition of our Newsletter, we say goodbye to Mark Trepte, Chair of Trustees whose hard work and dedication has helped us reach this very positive point one year in. We are always on the lookout for new Trustees to join us in shaping the direction of our Trust, please contact us if this is of interest to you or someone you know.

We wish to update you with a few highlights of our excellent foundational position demonstrated in the highly positive audit on the financial health and governance of Ascendancy Partnership Trust (APT). As an educational charity, our sole purpose is to advance education for the public benefit. It is important to have a strong financial position to do this from and we are delighted to have had such positive external validation after only one year.

We also introduce the Therapy Hub, a key concept in our initial rationale for forming the Trust, along with our desire to be eligible to bid on Free School projects run by the Department for Education. For those of you who are new to our schools, we were successful in winning the bids to run two new Free Schools in Wokingham, however, the projects were put on hold with the change of Government. We do now have some idea of what is going to happen with these schools and have included a joint statement from Wokingham Borough Council and ourselves later in this edition.

Finally, we would like to give you a brief outline of the national changes in the education sector, particularly OFSTED and what the significant changes to the inspection framework might mean for our schools. There is a White Paper expected by the end of January, with significant changes anticipated for Education, particularly SEND. Analysis of the implications of this for APT will be communicated once we have concrete information.

We hope this Newsletter is informative and allows us to reaffirming our commitment to being **Stronger and Better Together**.



Richard Pelly  
Chair of Trustees



Joolz Scarlett  
CEO

## A Strong Start: Unqualified Audit Opinion

We are delighted to report the successful conclusion of our inaugural statutory external audit for the financial year ending 31 August 2025.

Our independent auditors, Crowe U.K. LLP, issued an **unqualified and unmodified audit opinion** on our financial statements. This is the highest level of assurance an audit can provide, confirming that our accounts accurately reflect a true and fair view of the Trust's financial affairs and that the auditors are satisfied with our internal controls.

In practical terms, this means:

- **Sound Financial Management:** The audit confirms that the Trust has been cash generative throughout the period and that the continued operation of the Trust is secure, agreeing that the going concern basis of preparation is appropriate.
- **High Standards of Compliance:** We successfully navigated the stringent financial reporting requirements for the first time as a new Multi-Academy Trust. Our Accounting Officer has confirmed that no instances of material irregularity, impropriety, or non-compliance have been identified during this critical start-up period.
- **Building Stability:** Despite the significant operational challenge of bringing three large schools into the Trust across a staggered timeline, APT achieved a small operational surplus for the period. This success has ensured we are operating with an appropriate level of financial security.

This excellent outcome is a testament to the hard work across all our school teams and the dedication of our new central services team in laying strong foundations for robust systems, procedures, and financial management, which was one of our key priorities for 2024/25.

## Governance - A Message from Richard Pelly, Chair of Trustees

At the December meeting of the Board of Trustees, Mark Trepte stepped down as both Chair of Trustees and as a Trustee. This was not a decision he took lightly. After many years of dedicated service in governance at Addington and, later, as part of the Trust from its very beginning, Mark has been deeply committed to our SEND schools and the journey we are all on together. He has chosen to step back so that he can focus on his family.

Mark's leadership, vision, and wise guidance have been instrumental during the Trust's formation and early development. On behalf of all Trustees, I would like to record our sincere thanks for his significant contribution. He has achieved a great deal in a short time, and every one of us has benefited from his calm, committed, and forward-looking approach. We wish him and his family the very best.

## Governance (cont.)

I have been elected to succeed Mark as Chair of Trustees with effect from 11th December. Having served as Vice Chair, and previously as Chair of Governors in multiple schools, I am very aware that Mark's example will be a tough act to follow. Nonetheless, I am honoured to take on this role and remain fully committed to supporting each of our schools, their leaders, and the communities they serve.

Trustees remain firmly focused on their governance responsibilities as we continue to develop and consolidate the Ascendancy Partnership Trust. There is still much to do, but we are building on strong foundations thanks to the collective dedication of so many across our three schools. You can view short bios of each of the Trustees on the [Trust's website](#). If you could be interested in becoming a Trustee, please do get in touch: [r.pelly@aptmat.co.uk](mailto:r.pelly@aptmat.co.uk)

## Therapy Hub – An Introduction

At the Ascendancy Partnership Trust, we know that every child's journey is unique—and that the right support can make all the difference. The Therapy Hub is here to engage with families, schools, and communities, providing compassionate, specialist support that helps young people flourish both in learning and in life.

Our mission is simple: to enable access to learning and promote emotional wellbeing for each individual student.

The hub isn't a physical place, but a group of clinical professionals who will work across the schools to ensure that every young person has access to the tools and strategies they need, creating an environment where every learner feels supported, understood, and ready to achieve their full potential

We believe that therapy is about building confidence and independence, creating a safe space where students feel understood, valued and able to interact effectively.

As a growing team we currently offer both speech and language therapy and occupational therapy support. Our strength lies in the people who make the hub, and we are looking forward to creating and developing our team over the next year, bringing together a group of dedicated professionals who provide specialist therapy services across our schools. Together, we aim to create strong partnerships that will make a difference to the students in our schools.

## Therapy Hub (cont.)

Here's a little about the professionals we currently have working in the hub:

### **Miriam Gulliford – Head of Therapy Hub**

Passionate about creating inclusive environments where every child can thrive, Miriam leads the Hub with a focus on collaboration and innovation. Her initial priorities are to recruit to the team and ensure we have a strong team of professionals to support our schools and families.

### **Victoria Axler – Occupational Therapist**

Keen to help people build the everyday skills they need to feel confident and independent, Victoria provides support for the staff working in the schools to ensure every opportunity is used to help students thrive. Her support helps create classrooms where students can grow, learn, and succeed in their own unique way.

### **Libby Cooper – Speech and Language Therapist (temporary contract to cover the vacancy)**

Libby is passionate about helping children find their voice and communicate with confidence. She has played a key role in creating the Therapy Hub and continues to guide our work, ensuring therapists can support each school with training, advice, and resources. Thanks to Libby's leadership, we're building more opportunities for students to communicate and helping every student develop the skills they need to express themselves.

We're excited and looking forward to playing our part in enabling access to learning and promoting emotional wellbeing for all our students.

## Wokingham Free Schools – Joint statement from APT and Wokingham Borough Council

Following the [recent announcement from the Department for Education](#) regarding investment in SEND provision and local reform plans, we want to share what this means for our community.

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and the Ascendancy Partnership Trust (APT) are working together, and with the wider Wokingham Borough Education Partnership, to address the current shortage of specialist places for children and young people with SEND

To see if places can be provided more quickly, plans for Wokingham Borough are being reviewed following the Government's announcement.

All options are now being looked at, including expanding existing specialist schools and creating specialist units in existing mainstream schools, as well as the plans to open new schools.

## Wokingham Free Schools (cont.)

The council will provide its response by the end of February, and updates will be provided.

APT and WBC remain fully committed to working in collaboration to help provide more spaces for SEND pupils.

The shared focus is to give every child access to the right support, in the right setting, as quickly as possible, making sure young people in our area get the school place they need closer to home.

While these decisions may lead to changes in how future places are provided, please be assured that there will be continuity of support for all current students.

We will be playing an active role in shaping and delivering high-quality SEND provision for our community. Both APT and the Council will keep you informed as plans develop and decisions are made.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding as we work through this important process together.

## Ofsted

As reported extensively in the media, Ofsted introduced a new framework in September 2025 after consultation with schools and Trusts. Its main premise for reform was to remove the one-word judgement that schools were awarded after an inspection, with the aim of providing a more rounded view of the school and its areas for development.

The new framework now awards 5 grades across 8/9 areas and is **not comparable**, nor can be mapped across to the previous 1-word judgements. Previous Outstanding schools **will not** equate to the new 'exceptional' grade as schools will receive a variety of grades across the new framework.

It is important to note that when our schools are inspected, the reports may contain grades such as 'expected standard' does not mean that the standard of education is lower, just that the parameters have changed.

We will communicate further with staff and parents regarding the implications for special schools once the new Ofsted framework is more fully embedded.

## New Staff, Family and Friends Mortgage Benefit

We are pleased to partner with Radcliffe & Newlands mortgage advisers to provide **free mortgage advice** and support to staff, family and friends of Ascendancy Partnership Trust, just mention the Trust when you make contact with the friendly team at Radcliffe & Newlands. Whether you're planning to get on the property ladder in the next few years, ready to buy or remortgage, buy-to-let, or downsize, advice is available to help you plan ahead and find the best mortgage.

You can find out more about this new benefit [here](#) and can visit the Radcliffe & Newlands website [here](#).

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