



Directors' Strategic Report **2024/25**

ANNUAL REPORT TO MEMBERS
LEARN SHEFFIELD AGM

THURSDAY 5TH FEBRUARY 2026

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This **Annual Report to Members** is the tenth such report produced by Learn Sheffield, coming at the end of the tenth year since incorporation on the 14th August 2015. 2024/25 was the final year of our fourth commission from Sheffield City Council (SCC) in relation to school improvement and the seventh year of our school subscription model. This report provides an overview of performance in the 2024/25 reporting period in relation to Board effectiveness, key developments, School Improvement Commission outcomes and financial outcomes. It has been prepared by the Chair of the Board, Antony Hughes, and the Chief Executive, Stephen Betts. It should be read in conjunction with the financial statements and other papers for the Annual General Meeting on Thursday 5th February 2026. Further information about Learn Sheffield can be found at www.learnsheffield.co.uk.

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Message from the Chair



ANTONY HUGHES
CHAIR – LEARN SHEFFIELD
BOARD

This is my fifth opportunity as Chair to report on the progress of Learn Sheffield in a year which ended with the tenth birthday of the organisation.

This has been another successful year for Learn Sheffield, building upon the strategic decisions of previous years to develop our support for our member settings and our city.

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On the financial side, Learn Sheffield achieved another small surplus in 2024/25. This builds the level of reserve a little further above £200k. Whilst this is at a lower than ideal level, it has been achieved despite undertaking a further restructure to grow and develop the team to meet the requirements of our ongoing and future challenges.

The board remain fully supportive of the strengthened strategic partnership with Sheffield City Council. This has continued to develop in 2024/25 and enable both partners to deliver positive impacts on the life chances of Sheffield children and young people.

We are, as an example of this, extremely proud of the work that Learn Sheffield have led in relation to SEND. Very few organisations could work across sectors to develop a proposal such as the SEND Manifesto, which has the potential to underpin a new and better approach to SEND in the city.

The board commends everyone in the team who has contributed to this and the many other successful activities this year.

If anything, the notable thing about 2024/25 was the wide range of areas from which we derived pride. The strong work of the LSIP team, the governance team winning a national award and the impressive range of published reports are just three examples.

National changes have made it harder to make comparisons relating to setting outcomes over time, but Sheffield's Ofsted performance has remained strong. We share the focus of the executive team on improving pupil outcomes, as they seek to put the learning from the Independent Evaluation and the work which has followed it into place.

I will, of course, conclude by thanking my colleagues on the Board for their contribution to Learn Sheffield and most importantly all of our member settings for their continued support.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'A. Hughes', written over a light, textured background.

Overview from the Chief Executive



STEPHEN BETTS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The direction set by the renewing of our purpose, vision and values, the publication of our Independent Evaluation and the reshaping of our subscription offer in 2023/24 was the platform for our work last year.

2024/25 was a year when the activity of Learn Sheffield continued to grow, building upon the direction that had been set over the previous eighteen months.

The twelve-month period covered by this report included the seventh year of our school subscription offer (but the first with a new structure), the final year of our fourth School Improvement Commission from Sheffield City Council (SCC) and the first year of our new SEND commission.

The direction set by the renewing of our purpose, vision and values, the publication of our Independent Evaluation and the reshaping of our subscription offer in 2023 and 2024 was the platform for our work last year. The shape of Learn Sheffield and the structure of the organisation has continued to evolve, as we have grown our resources to match the needs of our city.

These have been exciting but challenging times. The new subscription model has delivered greater flexibility to our members but, as we anticipated, has seen the number of engaging settings remain high but a reduction in the overall level of income from school improvement.

The increased strategic partnership with Sheffield City Council, especially in relation to SEND, has taken place in parallel with this. The publication of the SEND Manifesto in July 2025 represented the culmination of a significant endeavour for Learn Sheffield as an organisation, as well as for Sheffield's Local Area SEND Partnership. The work continues at pace in 2025/26, as it should and it must, but this was a milestone for Learn Sheffield.

I write this at an uncertain time in education, with some of the changes that will follow the change of government now known and others less certain. This will impact on the future direction of Learn Sheffield, but I remain confident that the quality and commitment of our team will enable us to respond with expertise in line with our values and in support of our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Betts', written over a faint, light blue circular watermark background.

Board Effectiveness

Board membership has continued to be stable during the 2024/25 school year. The changes between the last AGM and this one are below:

- Mike Westerdale was reappointed as a secondary sector nominated director until February 2028.
- Nicola Shipman was reappointed as a primary sector nominated director until February 2028.
- Paul Simpson was reappointed as a FE/Post-16 sector nominated director until February 2028.
- Chris Holder's current term of office as a primary sector nominated director ends in February 2026.
- Laura Gillespie's current term of office as a special sector nominated director ends in February 2026.

The process of nomination of directors and elections, where necessary, is underway and the results will be shared at the AGM.

Attendance at the Board and committee meetings continued to be strong. Overall attendance was 73% in 2024/25. The aggregate attendance of board members (i.e. the total numbers of board members attending full board meetings) in the year was 44, compared with 48 in 2023/24. Board attendance, including apologies, was 100% during 2024/25. The attendance, effectiveness and contribution at meetings of the directors are kept under review by the Chair.

Directors agree that the Board is effective in fulfilling its strategic duties and the reports and presentations provided by the executive continue to be of good quality, enabling the Board to carry out its functions efficiently.

The Learn Sheffield Board and committee meetings in 2024/25 have continued to take place online.

More information about the Learn Sheffield Board can be found below and online at www.learnsheffield.co.uk/About-Us/The-Board and profiles of the 2024/25 Board follow. The company public records are available at Companies House.



Stephen Betts *(Chief Executive)*

Stephen was appointed as the Interim Chief Executive of Learn Sheffield in late summer 2015, having previously chaired the working group that determined the approach that Sheffield would take to school improvement. Following a competitive recruitment process, he was appointed to the substantive Chief Executive role in May 2016. Before becoming involved with Learn Sheffield, Stephen was the Headteacher of Malin Bridge Primary School and had worked for 17 years in the primary sector. His previous schools were Ecclesfield Primary and Nook Lane Junior School.



Laura Gillespie *(Special School sector nominated)*

Laura was appointed as the Special School Director on the Board of Learn Sheffield in February 2023. She is currently the Chair of Governors at Bents Green Special School. Laura is a previous Special School representative on Sheffield Schools Forum and is also currently the Chair of Sheffield Parent Carer Forum, where she has a focus on inclusion and preparing children and young people for adulthood. She was a physiotherapist prior to having children, specialising in neurology.



Christopher Holder *(Primary School sector nominated)*

Chris has almost thirty years teaching experience working in multicultural inner city schools in both London and Sheffield. He has been the Headteacher of Lowfield Primary School since 2012 and is one of the two Primary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which he joined in December 2016. Chris has been a National Leader of Education and has been deployed as both an Executive Headteacher and an Associate Headteacher. He represents his locality partnership on the Primary Partnership Group.



Antony Hughes *(Chair of the Board – Co-opted Director)*

Antony was appointed as one of the co-opted non-executive Directors on the Board in February 2017. He became the Chair of the Board in September 2021. He is currently the Chief Executive of The Harmony Trust, which is a multi-academy trust containing schools in Oldham, Derby, Tameside and Rochdale. Antony was previously Commissioner for Children's Services and Director of the Inclusion and Learning Service at Sheffield City Council, in which roles he worked closely with Learn Sheffield. Antony worked for the Department for Education before coming to Sheffield.



Angela Lant *(Co-opted Director)*

Angela became a co-opted Director in September 2021. She had previously been one of the two Primary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield. Angela worked in Primary education for more than thirty years, in a variety of contexts, and led schools for more than twenty years. In her last role Angela was part of the Executive Team at Tapton School Academy Trust and, in her role as Director of Primaries, led a team of five Sheffield primary schools. Angela also represented her locality partnership on the Primary Improvement Board and supported a wide range of local education initiatives.



Bev Matthews *(Secondary School sector nominated)*

Bev is currently Chief Executive Officer of the Minerva Learning Trust in Sheffield and Chesterfield. It is a local academy trust comprising five secondary schools, four primary schools and a FE college. She is one of the two Secondary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which she joined in March 2020. Bev has over 18 years of experience in the education sector, including FE and secondary settings and LA roles. She returned to school leadership in Sheffield following a period of Headship in West Yorkshire.



Nicola Shipman *(Primary School sector nominated)*

Nicola has over 35 years of teaching and leadership experience. She is the Chief Executive Officer of Steel City Schools Partnership, an academy trust in Sheffield, providing education to over 3,500 pupils aged 2+ to 11+ and employment to over 550 staff in the area across ten schools. Nicola is a National Leader of Education and in this role works across the Yorkshire and Humber region. Nicola has led a number of schools as Executive Headteacher and has wide experience of successful system leadership.



Paul Simpson *(Further Education sector nominated)*

Paul is the Executive Director of People at The Sheffield College. He has more than 25 years' human resources experience in the public and private sector, the majority being in the further education sector. Paul was born in Rotherham and is a graduate of Sheffield Hallam University. Making a difference to Sheffield City Region is important to Paul and a key reason for his support for Learn Sheffield.



Mark Sheikh *(SCC nominated Director)*

Mark currently holds the position of Head of Service – Resourcing and Business Planning at Sheffield City Council. With 20 years of dedicated service to the council, Mark is an accomplished senior manager with extensive expertise in organisational planning, budgeting, business planning, business strategy, and financial management. Prior to his tenure with the council, he spent a decade working for an international charity based in Thailand.

Mark's academic qualifications include a bachelor's degree in economics, a master's degree in business administration, and he is a Fellow Member of the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants (FCCA).



Mai Mai Steele *(Co-opted Director)*

Mai Mai Steele is currently Director of Product Operations at Sheffield-based IntelliAM Ltd., a publicly listed technology company that specializes in providing AI and machine learning solutions for the manufacturing industry.

Prior to this, she was CCO at a Software Consultancy after gaining experience and insight into business operations, facilities, HR and technical project management during her 11 year tenure at a global software company. Mai also had the opportunity to work on a variety of local community projects including Laptops for Kids/Laptops for All (working closely with Learn Sheffield), as well as being heavily involved in the early stages of an ongoing project to address digital exclusion in the city. Mai has also been involved with various partnerships and projects alongside colleges and universities in Sheffield and enjoys being part of any initiative to enhance learning opportunities in the city.



Mike Westerdale *(Secondary School sector nominated)*

Mike is Chief Executive Officer of Brigantia Learning Trust in northeast Sheffield. It is a 2-19 local multi academy trust currently made up of 5 academies, a primary academy, a 2-16 all through academy, a secondary academy and a 16-19 academy. He is one of the two Secondary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which he joined in February 2019. Mike has been a secondary school leader since September 2000 and became Principal of Parkwood E-Act Academy in 2010. Subsequently, he has worked in a national role for a large multi academy trust and has worked in Liverpool, London, Manchester, and the West Midlands focussing on 2-19 education.



Sally Williams *(SCC nominated Director)*

Sally is the Director of Children and Families at Sheffield City Council, she is a registered social worker and has worked within Children's Services for over 25 years. She has extensive operational experience as a social worker alongside a wide breadth of experience as a manager and a senior leader in all areas of Children's Services including Provider Services, Early Help, Safeguarding and Innovative Services.

Sally has lots of experience of working within the Ofsted framework and a commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children in the city.

Financial Performance



Learn Sheffield re-appointed Hart Shaw as company auditors for the financial year 2024/25 and they will present the full set of audited accounts at the Annual General Meeting.

A presentation at the AGM will identify the key elements of financial performance from Learn Sheffield's tenth year of operation. The 2024/25 year was set to be another challenging year financially for the sector. Learn Sheffield responded to this by remodelling its subscription packages to allow greater choice and flexibility for customers resulting in a significant reduction to this vital revenue stream in 2024/25. The organisation's financial resilience, spread of expertise and reputation in the sector has ensured that it is able to successfully navigate through, with an increase in commissioned activity and growth in our education-based project portfolio.

The company financial position has remained stable with a small in-year trading surplus of £5,953 adding to the positive trading reserve position. The trading reserve now stands at £208,010 which represents two months of operating costs, however, this still falls short of the reserves target set.

The trading position excludes adjustments to the Pension Fund and we have also seen a stable year for this reserve balance. This account remains in a balanced position.

Therefore, the total reserves following the 2024/25 financial year is a surplus position of £208,010. This is the strongest balance sheet position seen by the company since the start of trading in September 2015 and provides an excellent platform to build on. Hart Shaw have issued a clean audit report and continue to have confidence in the financial management of the company, moving forward as a going concern. We will continue to develop our diversity of revenue in the forthcoming year as we work in partnership with SCC to deliver a broader range of commissions for the sector.

Significant Developments in 2024/25

The publications on the Learn Sheffield Insights Hub in 2024/25 reflected the development of the organisation and the work it was focussed on during the year.

Insights Hub

Learn Sheffield launched the [Learn Sheffield Insights Hub](#) in the summer of 2024, following the publication of the [Learn Sheffield Independent Evaluation 2015-2023](#) in February 2024 alongside the supporting documents.

Early publications had also included the [Sheffield SAFE Taskforce: Annual Report Year 1](#), which had been first published in February 2024, and the [DHA Sexual Harassment Report](#) published in March 2024.

We developed the Insights Hub to provide a home for the different analysis, reports and contributions to education policy discussions that we produce. These can often be found in the projects section of the website, linked to the specific piece of work which they relate to, but this section of the website gathers them together in one accessible place.

In 2024/25 the Insights Hub provides a good overview of the work of Learn Sheffield. We are a relatively small organisation, but we believe that being socially responsible and consistently seeking to contribute to system improvement is one of the ways that we can deliver on our purpose, vision and values.

[Learn Sheffield Future Shape](#) was published in January 2025 ahead of our last AGM on 6th February 2025. It supported the last Director's Strategic Report by providing an update on the way that the organisation has developed since the Independent Evaluation was published in February 2024.

This publication looked ahead to the future shape of the organisation in 2025 and beyond. We discussed the content in our last annual report, as we sought to inform the ongoing conversation about the role of Learn Sheffield in the city with our members and partners.



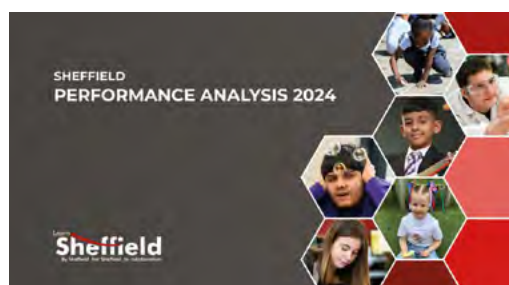
School Improvement

School improvement continues to be at the heart of Learn Sheffield's work, and the year began with two publications which reflected significant pieces of development work.

The [Good Practice in the improvement of pupils' attendance in Sheffield Settings](#) report was published in December 2024.

Learn Sheffield committed, following a working group in the city, to undertake a piece of work to look at strong practice in the city and produce a report on the learning from this to share across our partnership and more widely. Wide ranging contextual data supported the identification of a small group of schools who appeared to be outperforming their context with regards to pupils' attendance. Settings were visited to discuss attendance processes and practice and the learning from these conversations, with primary and secondary settings in Sheffield, informed the report.

[Developing a Sheffield Report Card](#) was published in January 2025 to share what we had learned that could be useful when considering a national report card approach. This document shared the content and learning from Learn Sheffield's work on report cards since September 2022. Our participation in the Local Ed 2025 pilot project had enabled us to develop and test two versions of a report card. As one of the only groups nationally to have spent significant time thinking about the challenges and opportunities around this, we felt this was a useful contribution to a national debate.



The [Sheffield Performance Analysis 2024](#) was published in March 2025. It provides a comprehensive analysis of attainment & progress, Ofsted judgements, attendance, exclusions, SEND and other pupil characteristics. It also identified trails for further investigation.

As in previous years, the 2025/26 education subscription offer was developed in the spring term and offered to settings in May. This new subscription offer is more flexible and supports settings to access the package of support that they need more precisely. As we anticipated last year, the proportion of settings who buy a package has remained at similar levels, the income generated by the subscription has been lower. More information can be found here: [Education Services Subscription 2025-26](#).



SEND

Learn Sheffield's work in relation to SEND has grown substantially in recent times and was a key feature of our activity in 2024/25.

We published the [Resourced Provision: Quality Standards in October 2024](#), to support colleagues leading different types of resourced provision by providing a basis for self-evaluation of provision. The standards were part of a package of support from Learn Sheffield to support improvement.

They were developed through work with colleagues in Integrated Resources over an 18-month period, to develop and test a set of quality standards as a basis from which to evaluate and seek to improve provision.

This work was part of a wider commission from Sheffield City Council.

This also included working with leaders from the Local Area Partnership (alongside colleagues from Sheffield City Council, the Integrated Care Board, Sheffield Children's Hospital and Sheffield Parent Carer Forum) to provide a starting point for the development of a long-term SEND strategy for Sheffield.



The Sheffield SEND Manifesto Proposal was published in July 2025, with a [Full Version](#) and an [Overview Version](#). The analysis in the manifesto was informed by a [SEND Enquiry](#) carried out in May 2025.

Feedback on the SEND Manifesto Proposal was collected in the autumn term of 2025, and this will be followed in early 2026 by the publication of the Sheffield SEND Strategy and the Sheffield SEND Delivery Plan.

Vulnerable Pupils

Work to support our member settings in relation to safeguarding and vulnerable pupils continued to grow in 2024/25.

The [Sheffield SAFE Taskforce: Annual Report Year 2](#) report was published in December 2024. It provided an overview of the DfE's SAFE programme in Sheffield and covered the period from September 2023 to September 2024.

The report included further information about the project and the Sheffield Taskforce, and the impact of the project on pupils who have received evidence-based interventions.

It also reflected on the findings from the first two years and how this learning will inform the final year of the project.

The programme was extended into an additional fourth year in March 2025 and this has enabled the existing work to continue alongside some new projects from September 2025.



Learn Sheffield worked alongside colleagues from the sector and LA to produce a report on [Alternative Provision in Sheffield 2025](#), which was published in March 2025.

This report revisited the [Alternative Provision in Sheffield Research Study Report](#) which Learn Sheffield led in December 2019, which was also commissioned by SCC.

This work sought to provide an accurate understanding of the current context in the city.

It has informed work to develop a new strategic approach to Alternative Provision, which will be led by SCC and be incorporated into the new SEND Strategy in January 2026.

As we look ahead into 2026, when basic safeguarding training will move to be co-ordinated by Learn Sheffield, work to support vulnerable pupils is becoming a key element in our work.

Projects & Programmes

We have reported on a wide range of projects in our last two annual reports. In 2024/25 we have continued to be involved in projects that were developed through commissions as well as others which were part of national pilots.

The funding related to these projects has continued to account for a significant proportion of Learn Sheffield's income and expenditure and this illustrates the impact of Learn Sheffield as a vehicle for the city.

As described over the proceeding pages, these projects often relate to the core activity of Learn Sheffield; school improvement, SEND or vulnerable pupils. The three reports published in the autumn of 2025 demonstrate the wider range of Learn Sheffield's work.

1. The Sheffield Poverty Truth Commission final report '[Finding the Root Cause](#)' was published in October 2025. Its recommendations will now be picked up by partners, including Learn Sheffield to inform future work.
2. Food for Life published a report on the Eat Smart programme ([Six years of successful partnership working in Sheffield](#)) in November 2025. This programme is funded by Public Health and has recently been extended until 2030.
3. Learn Sheffield is a founding member of the AEPA and their latest publication, [Belonging and Excellence: The Importance of Local Education Partnerships](#), was published in November 2025 including a case study on Learn Sheffield's SEND work.

More information about current projects can be found in the Projects section of the website.

Strategic Partnership with Sheffield City Council

Our last annual report described a positive reset in the relationship between SCC and Learn Sheffield, and this continues to be evident. The size and range of commissioned activity have increased, and this is demonstrated throughout this report.

The 2024/25 audited accounts also show that the proportion of Learn Sheffield's funding which came from Sheffield City Council (SCC) has increased from the low point of 2023/24.

This closer partnership ensures that our city can make the most of the opportunities that the Learn Sheffield vehicle provides, with the ability to work flexibly to focus resources on areas of need.

It is likely that the focus of the strategic partnership will continue to evolve as we look ahead towards 2026.

We would like to thank all members who have contributed to Learn Sheffield's activity in 2024/25.



Please contact us to find out more. We look forward to hearing from you.

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Learn Sheffield is a not for profit company limited by guarantee,
of which 80% is owned by schools and colleges and 20% by Sheffield City Council.