

United Learning FAQs

Q. Who are United Learning?

We are a national group of over 100 schools. Our aim is simply to provide excellent education, preparing young people to make a success of their lives.

Since our foundation in the 1880s as part of a national movement to provide education for girls and young women we have been a values-led organisation. Asked at the start of the academies programme to become involved in solving the greatest modern social problem in education – poor schools for poor children – our trustees looked back to the founding principles of the charity and quickly decided to step forward.

As well as taking on schools in challenging circumstances we have a strong track record in supporting good and outstanding schools which join us to continue to prosper; all our schools contribute to and benefit from the significant breadth and depth of expertise evident within the group.

We consider United Learning to be a national group of local schools. Our schools reflect the needs of their local communities – context matters, and one size does not fit all. Our Heads run schools and make decisions in the interests of what is right for children and young people. We are united in putting children first and our scale gives us significant capacity to get behind schools and support them to succeed. We also develop capacity and collaboration through clustering activities at the local level, complementing national networks and CPD provided by the trust.

We have four strategic aims which are to be:

- **Great places to learn** – because of their educational quality, their development of the whole person and the preparation they offer for life, the pastoral care they offer and the quality of the environment and relationships.
- **Great places to work** – because they offer an excellent professional experience, high quality relationships with students and other colleagues, excellent professional growth and opportunities, and a high-quality working environment and resources.
- **A great Group to join** – because of the quality of support we offer schools with compliance, the ‘back office’, education and school improvement and the high-quality collaboration between schools.
- **A great contribution beyond the Group** – to local communities, the national education system and the wider world.

As part of being great places to learn and to work, our schools share a set of common principles which we call our **‘Framework for Excellence’**. These five principles are meaningful and common:

- **The best from everyone.** Our goal is to bring out the best in everyone – so we must expect the best from everyone.
- **Powerful knowledge.** We aim to empower young people to be the authors of their own life story, through giving them the knowledge and understanding they need.
- **Education with character.** We seek to develop the whole person – so that young people’s cognitive development is matched by their roundedness and maturity.
- **Leadership in every role.** Every adult in school is a leader – we want them to have agency and take responsibility – and for young people to do so too.
- **Continuous improvement.** However good we are, we can be better, and we take conscious steps to become so.

We believe this approach is well aligned with that of Sale High School and that we are well placed to support staff in delivering on the school’s vision and values.

Q. What central support is provided to schools?

Our secondary education team comprises experienced Regional Educational Directors – all of whom have led successful schools in a range of contexts – and a team of subject advisors who work directly with Heads of Department and teachers to develop excellence in their specialism. All our schools benefit from half-termly meetings with their Regional Director, with additional support provided according to the needs of each school. We place an emphasis on our leaders visiting other schools in the Group and beyond, and welcoming others into their school to observe and learn from existing strong practice.

This approach is reflected in support for staff at all levels – we support schools to develop their in-school CPD, supplemented by a high-quality central offer which encompasses support for trainees and early career teachers; leadership development for experienced teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders and headteachers; and programmes for support staff. We also encourage collaboration as a platform for school improvement.

Our overall approach is successful because it is underpinned by a collaborative focus on developing strong relationships: between the Regional Director and school leaders; between subject advisors and HoDs/subject specialists in school; between central management functions and school support staff; between staff in clusters at the local level. In this way we think schools have the best of both worlds – access to high quality support and challenge from expert practitioners, but who tailor their approach for each individual school, and recognise that it is staff in school who make decisions in the best interest of your students and communities at the local level.

Q. How does United Learning support the curriculum across its schools?

The United Curriculum has been developed collaboratively, with input from hundreds of teachers across the group, our central subject advisers and experts in curriculum and assessment. The United Curriculum includes:

- A common curriculum – a ‘specification’ – for each year group, which sets out the key knowledge and skills that students should be taught by the end of each year group.
- Common end-of-year (and mid-year) assessments, which help teachers understand the progress their students make in this common curriculum.
- Subject knowledge for teachers, which can support all teachers – but particularly newer teachers and those teaching outside their specialism – to deliver the curriculum with confidence.
- Adaptable teaching resources, such as schemes of work, lesson slides, printable resources, knowledge organisers and pre- and post-learning checks, that teachers can use to teach the common curriculum.

Q. How do students benefit from the school being part of United Learning?

Students benefit from all this support for leaders, staff, curriculum and teaching. We also support all our schools to offer a full range of extra-curricular activities through our ‘pupil charter’. Schools have opportunities to take part in many group-wide activities – including access to the Group’s Sports Ambassadors, Scholar’s Club lecture series, competitions and Group-wide performances – in the recent past we have worked in partnership with the Royal Opera House and held performances at the Lyceum Theatre, the Olympic Park and Southwark Cathedral in London and more locally at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester –we are planning a performance of the Magic Flute there in June 2025.

Q. Is there support for other aspects of managing the school?

Yes. Our central team includes finance, HR, estates, health and safety and IT professionals as well as the education teams. All these colleagues support schools to work effectively in the interests of students.

Q. What will happen to the name?

The school will continue to be called Sale High School.

Q. What will happen to the uniform?

There are no plans to change the uniform.

Q. Will the school retain local representation via a governing body?

Yes. While the trustees of United Learning are ultimately accountable for the educational and financial performance of our academies, at the local level, trustees delegate governance to Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) at each school, each of which has places for parent governors.

LGBs play an important role in our governance structure. We know that local governors have a strong understanding of their school communities; our LGBs have real powers to support and challenge what happens in their school.

We therefore expect the LGB to retain a strong presence in the day-to-day life of the school, helping to monitoring educational provision, financial planning and management, health and safety, parent / community engagement and so on.

Q. What will happen to those who are entitled to Free School Meals?

Eligibility for Free School Meals remains exactly the same as now.

Q. My child will be new to the school in September 2025 – how will the plan to join United Learning affect transition plans?

Transition plans for students joining the school in September 2025 remain unchanged. The transfer to United Learning affects this in no way.

Q. My child is supported by SEND experts at Sale High School - how will the plan to join United Learning affect arrangements?

Existing support will continue; we hope to help the school to further develop provision through access to strong practice within the group while also learning from practitioners in the school.

Q. My child is currently in Year 11. Will their progress towards their external exams at the end of 2025 be affected by the plan to join United Learning?

Progress towards external exams should be unaffected. Any support provided to the school in these areas will be managed to ensure as little disruption as possible, though in line with our shared commitment to support continuous improvement we hope the school will see improvements in provision where there is more that can be done to maximise learning for students.

Q. To what extent do teachers and curriculum areas have to follow the United Learning shared curriculum?

All students are entitled to powerful knowledge; it will enable them to think and act more powerfully in their lives. Schools should therefore endeavour to – eventually – teach the common curriculum (the content set out in the ‘specification’) each year, and students should sit the end-of-year assessments.

All other resources are designed to be ‘voluntary but irresistible’. We are really confident in the quality of what is available, we don’t compel teachers to use specific schemes of work, slides or resources. Teachers know best how to teach the content to the students in front of them, and schools should feel empowered to teach the entitlement in a way that works for them.

Q. How are students assessed in years 7-9?

All schools are required to do common end-year assessments in Y7-9. There are optional mid-year assessments.

Is there a uniform system for reporting to parents/carers and how does this work?

We don’t have a prescribed format for schools to report to parents and carers but make data available to schools in time for reporting towards the end of the summer term (the school will continue to provide reports at other times of the year as they do currently).

Q. Are there curriculum roadmaps for subjects beyond core/EBACC e.g. D&T, Food, IT, PSHE, or do schools have freedom on these?

We are currently developing a curriculum offer in new subjects. There are roadmaps available for Art & Design, Food and PSHE, and we plan to add wider D&T and Computing soon. These roadmaps are being resourced for Year 7 from September 2024, Year 8 from September 2025 and Year 9 from September 2026.

Q. Are there roadmaps for the curriculum in Years 10-11?

In most subjects, no. The reason for this is that we do not prescribe exam boards (although most of our schools do follow the same one in many subjects). Instead, a selection of teaching resources and assessments can be used to support schools with whichever specification they use. In some subjects, where there is more alignment in exam board (such as maths, science and MFL), there are more detailed suggested sequences and teaching resources.

Q. What is the United Learning approach to Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance? Do all Academies have their own Careers Advisor/Employability Manager?

We have a centrally employed Strategic Careers Lead who works with schools to support effective CEIAG. All schools are expected to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks (and to go beyond them where they already do so.) Provision and leadership for CEIAG is locally managed by schools and the cluster.

Q. Does United Learning have its own Alternative provision?

No. Schools make their own arrangements for alternative provision locally.

Q. Does United Learning have a specific approach to Flexible Learning?

No. Schools make their own arrangements for flexible learning to meet the needs of students locally.

Q. Will there be changes to the staffing structure in Sale High School?

There will be no changes as a direct result of the transfer itself. The Headteacher will be line managed by a Regional Education Director and it will be for local leaders to determine whether any changes are needed to staffing structures within the school.

Q. Will staff be forced to work in other United Learning schools?

No. Staff cannot be forced to undertake work in other schools on either a permanent or temporary basis. Staff are occasionally *asked* to provide support to other schools within the group, but will do so only by agreement and on a voluntary basis (they must also have the agreement of their home school). We find that staff do request opportunities to work in different schools for their own professional development, but this is never mandated.

Staff might occasionally be asked to attend network meetings (e.g. in leadership, subject or other specialist areas) that require them to visit other settings in the group or host colleagues from other schools (e.g. to facilitate the sharing of good practice or for specialist training). Again, we find staff usually enjoy the opportunity to visit other settings and meet peers as part of their work; we also conduct a lot of network activity online, minimising the need for travel.