

# Inspire and retain a diverse workforce using a community-based approach: case study

Help your staff champion the community they serve, with inspiration from the Chiltern Learning Trust. Find out how the trust's approach to training and local engagement helped it buck national recruitment and retention trends.

## About the trust

- [Chiltern Learning Trust](#) (CLT) is a multi-academy trust (MAT) of 17 schools, based in Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford
- It includes the Chiltern Training Group, an Ofsted 'outstanding' initial teacher training provider
- 4 of the trust's schools are graded 'outstanding' by Ofsted, and a large proportion are graded 'good'
- 25% of the trust's pupils are eligible for free school meals
- The trust serves a diverse local community, and many of the trust's pupils come from a disadvantaged background

## What's the approach?

Increase and maintain a diverse workforce with top-down staff training, community engagement and targeted recruitment from within the local community.

**Note:** this case study focuses on **racial** diversity, but you can also apply this approach to improve other types of diversity, such as gender, disability or socioeconomic background, for example.

## This could work for you if ...



- **You're committed to increasing staff diversity and understanding of the community they serve.** The approach is based on recruiting more staff from your local trust/school community
- **Your whole leadership team is willing to take responsibility.** They'll need to actively support and model diversity and inclusiveness throughout your trust or school
- **You're open to moving away from traditional recruitment methods.** Leaders and staff will need to actively participate in local community events to build strong connections and promote job opportunities at your trust or school
- **You're able to commit at least 3 years to this work.** It takes time to develop a deep level of engagement and understanding of your local community

## Why try this?

Since introducing this approach, CLT has:

- **Developed strong links with the local community.** CLT now has a well retained staff force that reflects the diverse population it serves, including at the leadership level
- **Made teaching a desirable profession for diverse local candidates.** Leaders network within the community, talking to everyone "...from potential physics teachers to midday supervisors," Sufian Sadiq, director of talent and teaching school, says. Similarly, staff get out into the community to promote teaching. "...They're the best ambassadors," says Sufian
- **Significantly increased staff's understanding of their local school community.** CLT has achieved this through anti-racism training for all staff and trustees/governors, a culturally informed approach to curriculum planning, and encouraging staff to attend lots of local community events (read more about these initiatives below)

Consider giving this a go if:



- You feel there's a disconnect between your staff and your local school/trust community
- You're struggling to get job applications from a diverse range of people
- You want to improve job retention

## Run anti-racism training for leaders, staff and trustees/governors

CLT spent 1 year training its staff, but the amount of time you'll need will depend on the size of your workforce and your trust/school's context and leadership/staffing structure.

Start by training your board members and top trust leaders (if you're in a trust), then move on to school leaders, teachers and support staff. See the table below for a suggested training schedule.

### Choose your training providers carefully

Picking the right training providers is crucial. Here's what to look for:

- **External and impartial training.** CLT felt that internal trainers might project an unintentional feeling of implied judgement upon staff, and may avoid certain topics because they feel that it doesn't apply to their school
- **Relevant, evidence-based content.** At CLT, training providers were chosen based on their content, rather than how well known they were. The trust didn't use motivational speakers "who might appeal to all", and instead used those that covered the uncomfortable topics around racism, including how to address it and call it out



- **Consider a wide range of providers, including local trainers.** CLT worked with local individuals who had the right contextual knowledge and who were available for training sessions throughout the whole year. It also worked with academic institutions including universities, and the training company [Diverse Educators](#)

## Use a top-down approach

Start from your trust/school leadership and trustees/governors before training the rest of your staff.

This is because your leaders will need to reinforce the importance of your initiative across your trust/school and the local community by being:

- Present when you roll out training to the rest of your staff
- Involved throughout the year so they can explain and reiterate why the training is happening

"For significant cultural change, like becoming a more inclusive employer, the training must start at the very top"

## Train your trustees/governors too

At CLT, trustees and local governors also took part in anti-racism training. This helped them to confidently reiterate the trust's [diversity goals and messages](#).

Here's a suggested overview of how the training could look like for MATs and for single schools not part of a MAT or federation:

Term	Training focus	Who to train
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First half of autumn term	Embedding diversity as a shared responsibility	<b>MATs:</b> trust leaders and trustees <b>Single schools:</b> school leaders and governors
Second half of autumn term	Reinforcing the importance of diversity	<b>MATs:</b> school leaders and local governors <b>Single schools:</b> middle leaders
Spring and summer term	Comprehensive training, including curriculum networking and sharing best practice	Rest of staff

## Keep your language open and approachable

### Shift from 'their' to 'our'

Emphasise the importance of using inclusive language in your trust or school.

"We don't let people say 'their families don't allow it' or 'they're not allowed in their culture'," says Sufian.

Instead, staff use 'our community' and 'our families', helping to build cohesion between the trust and its community, and reinforcing the message of inclusion and respect.

### Focus on problem-solving language

CLT recently challenged the lack of participation in PE by Muslim girls by asking, 'Can we look into sports hijabs?' rather than assuming that 'Muslim girls aren't allowed to do PE'.

This approach helps mitigate the unintentional exclusion of some groups of pupils by making adjustments that help pupils feel comfortable and included.



## Encourage a culturally informed approach to curriculum planning and safeguarding

Make sure you embed insight-sharing into your staff training.

At CLT, this looked like:

- **Putting together curriculum networks.** School leaders and staff worked together after school to improve their curriculum diversity – read more about this below
- **Sharing good practice across the trust.** Shared networks allowed staff to present and discuss their curriculum adaptations, helping schools to learn from each other's successful curriculum initiatives
- **Discussing cultural nuances.** This included understanding how the spoken form of some languages are different to the written form, which might impact how a pupil with English as an additional language (EAL) learns to write in English
- **Developing cultural awareness around safeguarding referrals.** Staff took the time to understand cultural practices and their link to safeguarding referrals – e.g. a pupil that returns from a pilgrimage wearing a hijab doesn't need a [Prevent](#) referral

## Look at the curriculum through your community's eyes

For CLT, this meant adapting 1 school's history curriculum to include the Mughal Empire because it was viewed as “...more important to our community than looking at Vikings, given that they're Indian and Pakistani,” says Sufian.

Another school built on the popularity of dramas set in the Ottoman Empire within its South Asian community by including this empire in the curriculum, because staff knew some of pupils' grandparents and parents had links to this period of time.

Use our step-by-step guide to [review your curriculum](#).



## Build relationships with your community

You'll need to develop strong links and increase your trust/school's visibility by getting involved in local community events – this is an essential first step before you can successfully tackle recruitment.

"We turn up to the opening of an envelope"

At CLT, this means:

- **Staying informed.** Leaders and staff listen to local radio and check local newspapers. Senior staff use social media to learn what's going on in the community
- **Understanding how its communities talk to each other.** CLT knows that each community uses social media differently, with some preferring messaging apps over social media sites
- **Going to as many events as possible, no matter how small.** Staff go to a range of events, including bonfire nights, Eid festivals and church fairs
- **Asking for invitations.** Leaders and staff ask for event invitations, such as to an Asian women awards ceremony
- **Leaders modelling community presence.** Leaders often attend events with their families after work, so that their community knows and recognises them

Learn more about [getting your community on board with your approach to anti-racism](#).



## Get your staff out into your community

### Consider staff walking tours

Many staff at CLT initially drove to and from their school without engaging with their local school community.

To address this issue, the trust now invites all staff to community walking tours.

"We encourage walking tours at the start of the year, particularly new staff, to walk around, go to the local supermarkets and grocery stores," says Sufian.

### Make leaders 'pillars' of the community

Encourage your leaders to mingle with their community, talking to people and staying present and visible.

CLT takes this visibility one step further by asking leaders to wear blue jackets so that they're easily recognisable – "If there's a problem on the street, somebody stops a blue jacket and says, 'I need a bit of help'," says Sufian.

## Stay visible during challenging times

Build support within your community by being consistently present, even during challenging situations.

"You can't be a fair weather leader and be there for the community in the good parts and go into hiding when it's bad"

For example, Sufian and CLT's CEO attended a family bereavement within their South Asian community as a mark of understanding and respect for local cultural practices.





"Those small moments are etched in peoples' memories forever," says Sufian.

## Promote your trust/school as the place to work

### Make social media work for you

Harnessing the power of social media and working with an influencer helped CLT get 10 times as many applicants compared to using job advertising websites.

The trust made social media advertising work by:

- **Collaborating with local influencers to promote teaching.** CLT worked across a variety of social media platforms to target as many people as possible
- **Vetting content carefully.** The trust made sure influencer content aligned with its values, specifically looking for 'clean content' that would work with an educational organisation
- **Being flexible with its approach to content.** The team worked with influencers to reframe recruitment content as a 'day in the life' or something that better suited the trust's brand, to maximise its reach

### Look for influencers who are open to work

It's usually an accepted practice to reach out to influencers about work as it's how they make their money, so have a look at their biographies for ways to get in touch with them.

"It's a humbling process...when you're trying to do business with a 19 year old you used to teach and who might now have 1.2 million followers"



### CLT created a promotional reel with a make-up artist influencer

“She wanted to do a sketch where she went into her old school and offered teachers free make-up,” Sufian explains.

Here’s how CLT collaborated with her:

- **The team discussed the influencer's preferred style.** Some influencers will upload an advert exactly as you want it, while others prefer to create unique content
- **Then built on this style.** The influencer suggested a teacher makeover reel. CLT built its recruitment message into this content by suggesting she interview teachers about why they chose to teach, with a job link at the end of the reel

The collaboration created significant interest in teaching by helping CLT reach a younger audience who were more likely to be influenced through social media.

### Look for local influencers

They'll likely have a strong following within their specific community, and can make an impact on them.

Trust is key – your community will likely trust and respond to messages from individuals they already know.

### Share your staff success stories

Encourage your community-recruited staff to go out and promote your school/trust.

The aim is to show your community that career progression in teaching is possible for them too.



"They're the best ambassadors. They can show 'If I can, you can' to the community"

### Showcase your diverse leaders

One of CLT's community-recruited staff members, who rapidly progressed to an assistant headteacher role, went back to their community to share their success.

The staff member was given time to meet local people, present their work and share their career progression on social media.

## How to make this approach a success

Here are Sufian's top tips for effectively implementing CLT's approach to diversity:

- **Get buy-in from senior leaders.** Make sure they take ownership of diversity, and actively and visibly promote it throughout your setting
- **Make training a priority.** Train your leaders first, and then build in ongoing comprehensive training for staff at all levels
- **Be open and honest.** Be prepared to discuss and confront difficult and sensitive issues, such as racism and systemic inequalities
- **Build strong relationships with your local community.** Get your staff involved in community events, and make your trust/school accessible and welcoming for everyone
- **Increase staff diversity and provide opportunities for development.** Pay particular attention to increasing diversity of staff in leadership roles. Take the time to invest in leadership development programmes to support the progression of staff from diverse backgrounds

## Sources



**Sufian Sadiq** is the director of talent and teaching school at the Chiltern Learning Trust.

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