



Recruitment Guide

Head of HR

Contract: Permanent, full-time (37-Hours), All-Year round.

Location: Hybrid with weekly site visits to all trust academies.

Salary: Competitive senior package, commensurate with experience

Start: Negotiable





WELCOME TO THE GREAT SCHOOLS TRUST

“Excellence is not a destination – it is who we are, every day.”

Welcome to Great Schools Trust, where belief in every child’s potential meets the daily habits that make success inevitable. In our schools, excellence is not left to chance. It is embedded through clear routines, ambitious teaching, compassionate leadership and a culture where character matters.



Our Mission:

To develop in every student the academic skills, intellectual habits, qualities of character, and leadership traits necessary to become a successful, healthy citizen in the global community.



Our Vision:

To build a family of outstanding academies where all students, irrespective of their starting points, flourish, are happy and achieve their full potential.



Our Values – ASPIRE

- Aspiration
- Self-awareness
- Professionalism
- Integrity
- Respect
- Endeavour

Our Pillars of Excellence:



People & Leadership –

Growing exceptional leaders who inspire, empower and deliver.



Character & Leadership –

Building resilience, integrity and aspiration through values-led education.



Educational Transformation –

Relentlessly improving teaching and learning for every child.



AI & Future Learning –

Harnessing innovation and technology to personalise and future-proof learning.



System Leadership –

Driving improvement across schools with trust-wide accountability and collaboration.



Educational Partnerships –

Working with families, communities and global partners to extend opportunity.

National Recognition:

- National Behaviour Hub Lead MAT
- Edurio Top 10 for Staff Satisfaction (2024)
- Most Improved MAT in the Northwest for Progress 8 (2023–24)
- Home to the IPCL: The Institute of People, Character & Leadership

WELCOME FROM THE CEO

Shane Ierston
Chief Executive Officer



Thank you for your interest in joining Great Schools Trust as our Head of Human Resources.

This is a significant appointment for the Trust. Our People function is ready for its next stage of development and we are looking for someone who can help us build a model that is technically strong, culturally intelligent and genuinely empowering for leaders and staff.

People decisions are among the most important decisions we make. They affect staff confidence, leadership credibility, organisational risk and most importantly, the quality of education our pupils receive. We are looking for someone who brings deep expertise, professional judgement and a clear commitment to strengthening agency across our family of academies.

This is not a role for someone who wants to process issues once they have already become difficult. It is for someone who can help leaders act proactively, see the bigger picture and make more strategic decisions. You will build on our strong employee relations practice, transform the quality of HR advice, develop sharper workforce intelligence and help us use technology innovatively in ways that strengthen, rather than weaken, the importance of emotional intelligence.

At Great Schools Trust, culture is strategy. We are growing a Trust where professional autonomy sits alongside high expectations, where our staff are taught to be professionally candid, supported to grow and expected to lead. Our next Head of HR will play an important role in strengthening our approach towards a culture of greater agency and ownership of what matters.

You will work closely with academy leaders and Trust colleagues to simplify systems, reduce noise, improve consistency and strengthen confidence in People practice across the Trust. You will bring challenge. The phrase, "It can't be done because..." will not be part of your vocabulary. You will provide support where needed and clarity where ambiguity has been allowed to breed paperwork. Nobody needs more forms breeding quietly in cupboards. We need sophisticated thinking.

We are looking for someone who is credible with leaders, self-secure and able to evidence demonstrable impact. You will be highly trustworthy, balanced and strong in areas of change. You will be a problem-solver, not someone who adds fog to the room. You will understand that strong People practice is not about choosing between kindness and standards but holding both together with compassion.

If you share our belief that excellent HR practice should be values-led, people-centred and research-informed, we would love to receive your application and your vision for People at GST.

Thank you again for your interest. I wish you every success in the recruitment process.

Regards,

Shane Ierston

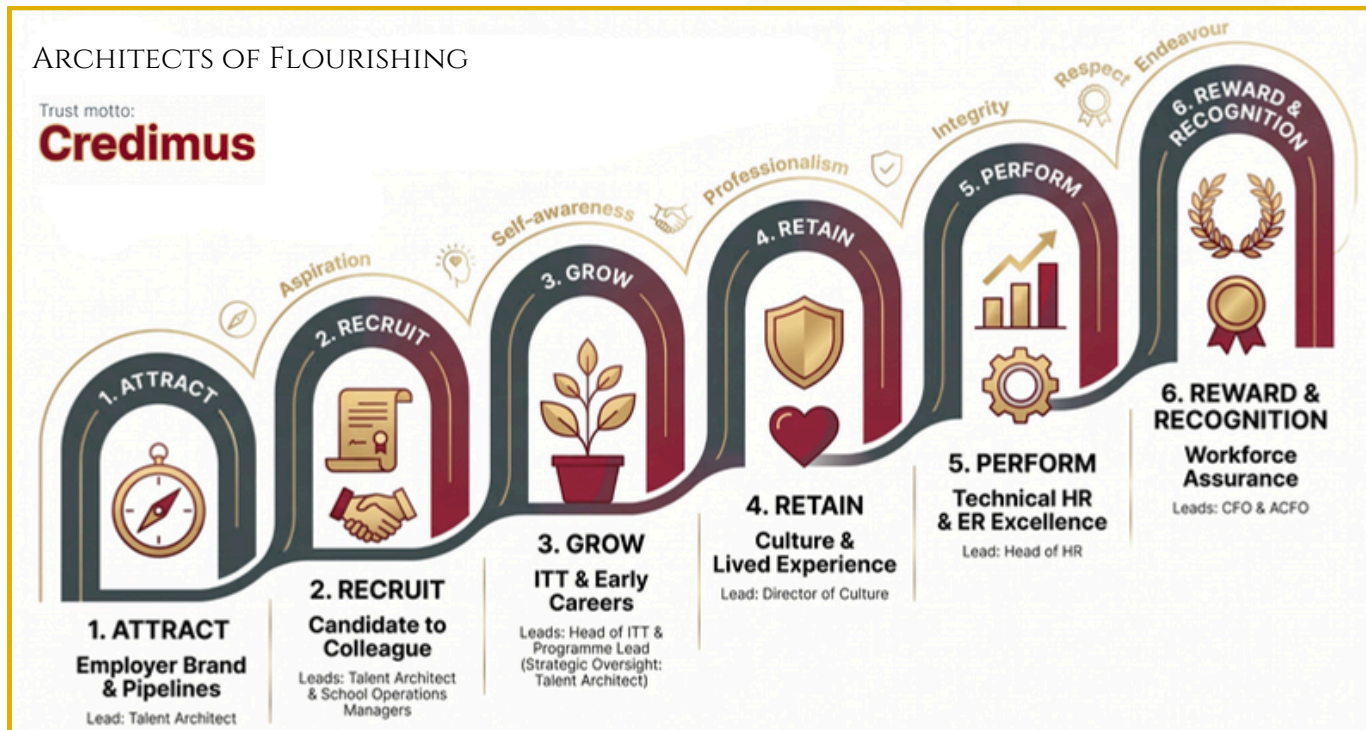


GREAT SCHOOLS
TRUST

OUR PEOPLE VISION

People work isn't a polite add-on at GST; it's the engine of a great school. We believe adults flourish when they are trusted, challenged, supported and clear about what matters, and when adults flourish, pupils thrive. Our *Architects of Flourishing* model shows how we attract, recruit, grow, retain, support performance and recognise the people who make our academies succeed.

As Head of HR, you'll strengthen this model by leading employee relations, HR advice, workforce intelligence, staff attendance, people risk and process assurance, balancing technical rigour with cultural leadership and the courage to simplify what's become over-engineered.





About the Role

Contract: Permanent, full-time 37 hours, all year round

Location: Hybrid with weekly site visits

Salary: Competitive senior package, commensurate with experience

Reports to: Director of Culture

Start Date: Negotiable

Working Title: The final title may be shaped with the successful candidate to reflect the authority, credibility and future-facing nature of the role.

Great Schools Trust is seeking an exceptional HR leader to help shape the next stage of our People function.

This is a senior role for someone who understands that good HR is not simply about policies, processes and casework. Those things matter, obviously. So do brakes on a car. But nobody ever bought a car because the brakes were the most exciting bit.

The real value of this role is in helping leaders make better decisions sooner. You will lead and strengthen employee relations, HR advice, workforce intelligence, staff attendance practice, people systems and HR assurance across the Trust. You will help leaders act with clarity, confidence and consistency, while making sure our approach remains legally sound, values-led and deeply human.

The successful candidate will sit close to the heart of Trust-wide People decision-making. They will support leaders to manage complex matters well, build confidence in difficult conversations and ensure that our HR systems help people do better work, rather than simply generate better-looking paperwork.

This role will help us move from reactive HR support to a more proactive, intelligent and technology-enabled People model. It will combine technical rigour with emotional intelligence, using data, professional judgement and practical innovation to improve how people experience HR across the Trust. We are open-minded about the final title of the role. What matters most is that the successful candidate helps define how HR should be understood at GST: credible, courageous, enabling and serious about culture.

Nuts and Bolts for the first 12 months

The first phase of this role will not be judged by the volume of issues resolved. It will be judged by whether GST becomes more consistent, more confident and more human in how it leads people.

1. Build trust quickly across academies by listening carefully, understanding context and identifying where HR practice helps or hinders leaders.
2. Review live employee relations cases and current case management processes, identifying immediate risk, repeated themes and opportunities for earlier resolution.
3. Develop the central employee relations case tracker that improves visibility, confidentiality, consistency, documentation and strategic reporting.
4. Map current HR workflows across academies and central teams, clarifying what is owned locally, what is owned centrally and what currently lives in the swamp marked “everyone thought someone else was doing it”.
5. Review absence management, occupational health pathways and staff attendance reporting so leaders can act earlier and support staff more effectively.
6. Audit key HR policies, templates and documentation, ensuring they are legally compliant, values-aligned, clear and proportionate.
7. Strengthen the HR and payroll interface, improving accuracy, handover, contractual changes, starters, leavers and the quality of employment records.
8. Develop an initial People intelligence dashboard covering the measures that matter most, including ER themes, absence, turnover, retention, case resolution, manager confidence and employee experience.
9. Improve onboarding handover from recruitment into employment practice, ensuring the candidate-to-employee journey is clear, compliant and positive.
10. Build manager confidence through practical mentoring, scripts, guidance and coaching on difficult conversations, documentation, policy application and early intervention.
11. Recommend the future direction of HR operations and employee relations across GST, including what should be centralised, simplified, digitised or stopped.
12. Review the working title of the role with the Director of Culture and Chief Executive Officer, ensuring it properly reflects the authority, credibility and future direction of the post.



Job Description

1) Employee Relations & People Risk

- Act as GST's lead adviser on employee relations and people risk.
- Provide expert advice on disciplinary matters, grievances, conduct concerns, capability and performance concerns, sickness absence, occupational health, flexible working, family leave, probation, investigations, hearings, appeals, workplace conflict, consultation and organisational change.
- Support leaders to distinguish between conduct, capability, absence, wellbeing and performance matters, ensuring the right route is followed from the outset.
- Help leaders resolve matters early and informally where appropriate, reducing unnecessary escalation whilst maintaining rigour and fairness.
- Ensure casework is managed consistently, confidentially, lawfully and in line with GST values.
- Identify when external legal advice is required and when matters can be managed internally through strong HR expertise and professional judgement.

2) HR Advisory & Manager Confidence

- Provide trusted, practical and timely advice to headteachers, senior leaders, operations managers and central leaders.
- Coach leaders to hold difficult conversations well, document concerns properly, and make confident people decisions.
- Support managers to apply policy with judgement rather than relying on process as a substitute for leadership.
- Build the confidence of leaders to act early, communicate clearly and balance candour with care.
- Develop practical tools, scripts, guidance and briefing materials that make good people leadership easier to enact.
- Strengthen leadership capability in line with GST's People-Centred Leadership approach.

3) People Operations & Process Assurance

- Provide leadership and assurance across core people operations, including contracts, employment documentation, starters, leavers, contractual changes, absence processes, occupational health referrals, HR records and data quality.
- Strengthen onboarding handover from Talent into employment practice.
- Improve exit processes and exit interview insight.
- Clarify the relationship between central People functions, academy operations and local implementation.
- Support safer recruitment assurance from an HR compliance perspective, including the interface with Single Central Record responsibilities where relevant.
- Improve HR process quality so that systems are clear, accessible and reliable for staff and leaders.

4) Policy, Compliance & Professional Standards

- Review and improve HR policies, templates and processes so that they are clear, legally compliant, values-aligned and easy to use.
- Ensure policies support good judgement rather than creating unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Maintain strong standards of documentation, confidentiality, professional advice and record keeping.
- Support statutory and Trust reporting requirements relating to employment practice, compliance and workforce information.
- Monitor themes in policy application and recommend improvements where processes create delay, confusion or inconsistency.

5) Workforce Insight & Performance Management

- Develop meaningful workforce measures that help GST understand the health, effectiveness and direction of its People function.
- Track and interpret employee relations case volume and themes, absence trends, turnover and retention, time to resolve cases, manager confidence, staff experience, onboarding quality, exit themes, policy application, compliance, workforce risks and the impact of HR interventions.
- Prepare clear reports and recommendations for the Director of Culture and senior leaders.
- Help the Trust answer practical strategic questions: Are people issues being resolved early enough? Where are managers least confident? Which policies help and which slow people down? Where is absence or turnover increasing? Which processes create avoidable friction?
- Use data to support better decisions, not to reduce people to a spreadsheet with shoes.

6) HR Technology, Automation & Innovation

- Review how GST uses HR technology and identify where systems could improve the experience of employees, managers and central teams.
- Develop or recommend approaches for digital case tracking, absence reporting, people dashboards, onboarding workflows, leaver processes, data quality and self-service support.
- Explore opportunities to reduce duplication across academies and automate routine HR processes where this is safe, ethical and genuinely useful.
- Support the intelligent use of AI and digital tools in HR, ensuring that human judgement remains central to decisions affecting people.
- Focus innovation on better systems, better decisions, better employee experience and better use of time, rather than technology for its own sake.

Job Description Cont.

7) People Function Collaboration

- Work closely with the Director of Culture, who provides the strategic direction for culture, values, engagement, staff experience and the wider People vision.
- Partner with the Talent Architect on retention and attrition monitoring, onboarding, contracts, safer recruitment assurance, workforce planning and the transition from candidate to employee.
- Work with the Head of ITT and ITT Programme Lead where initial teacher training connects with employment practice, including trainee-to-employee transition, onboarding, contracts, safer recruitment checks and early career retention insight.
- Support Operations Managers with clear advice, practical tools and agreed processes, whilst recognising that they should not be expected to act as technical employee relations specialists.
- Advise on the future growth of a broader ER and HR operations team, using workforce data, casework demand and the needs of our academies.

8) Leadership of Culture, Values & Employee Experience

- Champion GST's ASPIRE values in all people advice, decisions and processes.
- Create a culture in which HR is experienced as supportive, fair, accessible, practical and trusted.
- Contribute to a People function that is human-centred and professionally rigorous.
- Model discretion, integrity, professional loyalty and calm judgement in complex or sensitive situations.
- Support a culture of accountability in which leaders own people decisions and are supported to make them well.

Other Responsibilities

The postholder will:

- Promote the Trust's vision and the mission of its academies.
- Champion the Trust's ASPIRE values and contribute to Trust-wide initiatives and community life.
- Undertake additional duties reasonably required by the Trust.
- Ensure that all records created or used as part of the role are managed appropriately and in accordance with Trust policies and procedures.

Safeguarding Children & Young People

- Share responsibility for safeguarding and be aware of confidentiality requirements.
- Comply with policies and procedures on child protection and report concerns appropriately.
- Act in accordance with the Code of Conduct and all key Trust policies.
- Engage in continuous professional development and support the Trust's People Leadership Strategy.
- Attend Trust and academy events as required and contribute positively to the wider community.



Person Specification

Category	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications & professional standing	CIPD qualification or equivalent professional experience. Strong understanding of employment law, fair process, HR risk and professional standards. Evidence of ongoing professional development in HR, employee relations or people operations.	CIPD Level 7 or MCIPD. Additional training in employment law, mediation, coaching, investigation or organisational change.
HR generalist & employee relations experience	Significant HR generalist experience. Strong employee relations casework expertise. Experience managing disciplinary, grievance, absence, conduct, capability, probation and performance matters. Confidence advising senior leaders and managers. Experience working in a unionised environment.	Experience in schools, multi-academy trusts, local authorities, education or the public sector. Knowledge of teachers' and support staff terms and conditions. Experience supporting restructures, consultation or organisational change.
Employment law, policy & compliance	Ability to interpret, apply and improve HR policies. Strong written advice, record-keeping, and documentation skills. Ability to manage risk without creating unnecessary bureaucracy. Understanding of confidentiality, safer recruitment expectations and employment compliance.	Experience with safer recruitment compliance and Single Central Record interfaces. Experience working with external legal advisers, occupational health providers or professional HR networks.
People operations & systems	Experience improving HR processes, workflows and employment documentation. Understanding of starters, leavers, contractual changes, absence processes, occupational health referrals, HR records and the HR/payroll interface. Ability to create clarity around ownership, process quality and service standards.	Experience managing or improving HR systems, digital workflows, self-service tools or automation. Experience developing HR operations capacity across a multi-site organisation.
Workforce insight, data & reporting	Ability to use data to identify themes and make recommendations. Confidence developing measures relating to employee relations, absence, retention, turnover, case resolution, manager confidence and employee experience. Ability to turn workforce information into practical insight and action.	Experience developing dashboards or workforce reports. Experience using HR analytics to support strategic workforce planning, retention or organisational improvement.
Leadership & behaviours	Calm, pragmatic and credible in complex or sensitive situations. Strong emotional intelligence, discretion and judgement. Able to coach and mentor managers, not simply advise them. Confident challenging established systems where they no longer serve staff or the Trust. Able to build trust across academies and central teams.	Experience building central functions, coaching leaders and embedding new ways of working. Experience leading change across a dispersed or multi-site organisation.
Values & personal qualities	Unquestionable integrity and a commitment to fairness, transparency and trust. Values-led and committed to the Trust's mission, vision and ASPIRE values. A strong service ethic and belief that excellent HR should be both human and rigorous. Resilient, organised and calm under pressure.	Visible commitment to sector learning, benchmarking, innovation and external collaboration. Interest in the ethical use of technology and AI in People practice.



What We Offer

A Trust That Prioritises Staff Wellbeing

- A culture where staff wellbeing is central to decision-making
- Strong pastoral support and leadership that genuinely listens
- A collaborative, family-like environment across all academies

Professional Benefits & Career Development

- Highly competitive salaries that reward excellence
- 30 days of annual leave for support staff plus bank holidays
- Access to CredimusAI, saving hundreds of hours each year and reducing workload
- A personal device provided to all applicable staff to enhance professional practice
- Weekly leadership link meetings to support your growth and leadership development
- Career progression opportunities, with rapid promotion for the right candidates
- Trust-wide collaboration, sharing expertise and supporting other schools
- Strategic input into our brand-new building, shaping facilities for future generations

Health, Wellbeing & Personal Support

Benenden Health membership (optional £15.50 per month), including day 1 access to:

- 24/7 GP and Mental Health Helplines
- Specialist advice lines for adult care, neurodiversity and disability
- Fast access to diagnostics, physiotherapy, mental health support and cancer advice
- Help for Tuberculosis and selected surgical procedures (subject to eligibility)
- No medical checks, excess fees or age-related pricing
- Option to add family members at additional cost

BUPA Employee Assistance Programme (Trust-funded), offering:

- Counselling and emotional well-being support
- Legal, financial and family care advice
- 24/7 confidential assistance

Good occupational sick pay, maternity/paternity schemes and family-friendly policies supporting life's key moments

Financial, Lifestyle & Community Benefits

- Cycle to Work salary sacrifice scheme
- Membership of either the Teachers' Pension Scheme or Local Government Pension Scheme
- Opportunities to work with the local community on fundraising and charity projects
- The chance to contribute to trust-wide culture, innovation and school improvement



How To Apply

Submit your application via [MyNewTerm](#)

For an informal conversation about the role or to arrange a tour of one of our academies, please contact: h.fenlon@greatschoolstrust.com

Appointment, Compliance & Safeguarding

Appointment, Terms & Compliance

The Job Description forms part of the contract of employment and may be reviewed as the role or organisational needs change, following consultation. The Trust will make reasonable adjustments to support applicants and employees with disabilities. The Trust is a licensed Skilled Worker Visa sponsor and may offer sponsorship subject to eligibility and the requirements of the role.

Safeguarding & Pre-employment Checks

Great Schools Trust is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. All staff must share this commitment. As part of safer recruitment, interviews will explore motivation to work with children, ability to maintain professional boundaries, emotional resilience and attitudes to authority and behaviour management.

Pre-Employment Checks

Any offer of employment is conditional upon the successful completion of the following:

- Proof of identity, address and right to work in the UK
- Two satisfactory references, including the most recent employer
- Verification of relevant qualifications
- Enhanced DBS check with barred list check
- Prohibition from teaching check (if applicable)
- Section 128 check (for management roles)
- Overseas police checks (where applicable)
- Occupational health clearance
- Satisfactory completion of the probationary period

Ongoing Compliance

The postholder must comply with Trust policies, including the Staff Code of Conduct, Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, and Staff Communication and Social Media Policy. Responsibilities may be reviewed periodically in line with Trust and academy priorities.



GREAT SCHOOLS
TRUST

